

Remember

Joshua 4:4-7

Memorial Day Weekend, May 29, 2022

It's Memorial Day weekend, the first three day weekend of the summer, the Indy 500, family picnics, cookouts and vacations. Some places will have Memorial Day parades and events. But I think most Americans won't spend a lot of time thinking about what Memorial Day means. They will be busy doing other things. Memorial Day is set aside to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice to defend our nation and protect our freedoms.

There are others who made sacrifices for us who need our help and support, our Veterans. We have collected items this month for the men and women at the Veterans Hospital, to thank them for their service to our country. Thanks to all of you who donated and to all who served.

After the Israelites crossed the Jordan River and entered the Promised Land, Joshua told them to remember. The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for long time. God answered their prayer for deliverance and sent Moses to set them free and lead them to the Promised Land. But Moses did not lead them into their new homeland. God chose Joshua to do that. When it came time to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promise Land, Joshua told the people to line up behind the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's presence among His people. The priests carried the Ark of the Covenant into the Jordan River when it was flooding. The waters stopped flowing and the people crossed on dry ground.

Crossing the Jordan River marked the end of their 40-year journey from Egypt and the beginning of the nation of Israel. Joshua told the people to select twelve men, one from each tribe. They were told to pick up one of the big rocks in the area where the priests were standing in the river with the Ark of the Covenant and stack them up where the people would camp that night. Joshua told them when their children asked about the pile of rocks, they could tell them, **"They remind us that the Jordan River stopped flowing when the Ark of the Lord's Covenant went across. These stones will stand as a memorial among the people of Israel forever."** (Joshua 4:7) (The picture is a replica, not the actual stone monument.)

The national monuments in Washington DC, the national cemeteries, and the tomb of the Unknown Soldier remind us of the men and women who died in service to our country. Even though we have been involved in a number of declared and undeclared wars, four stand out in my mind, the War for Independence, the Civil War, and WWI and II. The war of Independence earned the freedom we enjoy as Americans. The preamble to the Declaration of Independence states, **"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of happiness."**

Unfortunately, not everyone in the United States were given these freedoms. One of the greatest stains on our nation's history is slavery. A major reason for the Civil War was to extend freedoms to the slaves. President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation declared **"that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free."** This was the start that led to the end of slavery in the United States. It was not the perfect solution, but it was the beginning.

The United States entered the first and second World Wars to protect our national freedoms and the freedoms of people in other parts of the world. The end of Jim Crow laws and the Civil Rights Movement of the 60's and 70's were part of the ongoing challenge to extend Liberty and Justice to all Americans. The struggle continues.

When asked about paying taxes, Jesus said to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and give to God what belongs to God. Jesus told Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor who sentenced Him to death, that His Kingdom was not of this world. Jesus teaches us in the Lord's Prayer to pray that His Kingdom would come and that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Christians live in two places. We live in but are not of the world. We live in a Spiritual Kingdom in our relationship with God. God gives us forgiveness, grace, and love. He fills us with His Holy Spirit to help us grow in faith and become the people He wants us to be. God's Kingdom lasts forever.

The second Kingdom is temporary. It is the Kingdom of Man, most often represented by the government. The primary role of this kingdom is to preserve human life and right relationships with one another. Nations and governments come and go. They do not last.

In an ideal world the two kingdoms work together to fulfill God's purposes of protecting the lives and liberty of all people. But we don't live in that ideal world. We live in a world that has been broken by sin and all its consequences. We see that in the war in Ukraine, the shooting at the grade school in Texas, the hopelessness so many people are facing.

How should we respond to the brokenness in our nation? Christians may be tempted to withdraw from the world and prevent the light of God's love from bringing help and hope to the people around us. But that doesn't make things better. Christians may be tempted to attack those with opposing views, but that only makes things worse. Jesus said that we are the light of the world. Christians need to engage the world, letting God's love shine through us. Jesus said we are the salt of the earth. Our world desperately needs to be seasoned with God's help and love.

How does that happen? God's people live by a different standard. We have been called to a new life in Christ. We are not conformist. Our lives have been transformed by Christ. Our new life in Christ shows in some very specific ways. We can love others because Jesus loves us. We can even love our enemies and those who have a different worldview because God loves them and gives them life. Loving them means following the example of Jesus to serve our neighbors, helping them instead of ignoring or avoiding them.

We can work to protect and defend all human life. It is not enough to be against abortion, we need to help those who chose to give birth to their unborn children. We can speak up for those who have no voice, listen to the lonely, provide for those who need some extra help, especially in these tough economic times.

Jesus teaches us to ask the Father to forgive us as we forgive each other. God forgives us. We can forgive one another instead of trying to get even or seek revenge. We can respect everyone because they are important to God and should be to us. God gives life to all people. Jesus died on the cross to forgive and restore all people.

We will never be able to do these things perfectly. We will never live in a perfect world. God works through imperfect people like you and me. Jesus said there will always be wars and rumors of war. Don't forget that Jesus has won the ultimate victory. He defeated sin, death, and the devil on the cross and the empty tomb.

Today we thank God for the freedoms we have as Americans, and work to extend those freedoms to all Americans. We also remember the Ultimate Sacrifice Jesus made for us all and hold onto the truth that when Jesus, the Son of God, sets us free, we are really free.