

Memorial Day 2021 — Authority under faith

Sadly, for many people, Memorial Day has become just a holiday weekend to mark the beginning of the summer season. It is filled with barbecues, days at the beach and holiday shopping to take advantage of holiday sales. And though I would never tell anyone not to celebrate the weekend, it is important that we truly understand what we are celebrating. To do just that, a brief history lesson recounting Memorial Day is in order. This lesson is from the Library of Congress.

In 1868, Commander in Chief John A. Logan of the Grand Army of the Republic issued General Order Number 11 designating **May 30** as a memorial day *“for the purpose of strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion, and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village, and hamlet churchyard in the land.”*

The first national celebration of the holiday took place **May 30**, 1868, at Arlington National Cemetery, where both Confederate and Union soldiers were buried. Originally known as Decoration Day, at the turn of the century it was designated as Memorial Day. In many American towns, the day is celebrated with a parade.

In 1971, federal law changed the observance of the holiday to the last Monday in May and extended the honor to all soldiers who died in American wars. A few states continue to celebrate Memorial Day on May 30.

Today, national observance of the holiday still takes place at Arlington National Cemetery with the placing of a wreath on the [Tomb of the Unknown Soldier](#) and the decoration of each grave with a small American flag. Protocol for flying the American flag on Memorial Day includes raising it quickly to the top of the pole at sunrise, immediately lowering it to half-staff until noon, and displaying it at full staff from noon until sunset.

Truly the military of most countries has played a major role in shaping its history, culture, and future, and this was no less true at the time of Jesus. The Roman soldier played a prominent role in society before, during, and after the ministry of Jesus and therefore, not surprisingly, they appear time and time again in scripture.

1. The character and nature of the military centurion's faith.

Matthew and Luke record an interesting interaction between one such centurion and Jesus. Turn in your Bibles to Luke 7:2-5. We pick up the action in verse 2:

Matt 7:2-5 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure

ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

3And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

4Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam *is* in thine own eye?

5Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

Now, turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 8 where we get some further details.

Matt 8:5-13 And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,

6And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

7And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

8The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

9For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this *man*, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth *it*.

10When Jesus heard *it*, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

11And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

12But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

13And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, *so* be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

This centurion was a Roman soldier. The Jews harbored a great antipathy and hatred for that religiously unclean occupying force. However, this Roman soldier was a man whom the Jews did have an appreciation for because of his work on their behalf, but this is not what Jesus took note of.

What did Jesus see? He saw the character and nature of the military centurion's faith. The centurion was not commended for his sense of God consciousness, nor his desire for God, nor his passionate expression of love or devotion heaving and sighing, turning and thrashing in some religious frenzy,

psyching himself up, nor his sense of other worldliness or separation from this life nor his boldness and assurance

Ok, so what did Christ focus on? Christ remarked about the understanding of authority that accompanied the military centurion's faith. It is as though He said to the people, "Did you see that? It passed right over your heads, didn't it? Do you realize what just happened?" And I am afraid that we too might have missed what happened. Faith and understanding authority go hand in hand. You cannot say that you understand faith or have faith if it is not accompanied by a sense of duty.

John 14:15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.

John 14:23-24 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

24He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.

John 3:36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Rom 10:8-13 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, *even* in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

9That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

12For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

13For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

2. Obedience to the faith, not works for salvation.

I run the risk of implying a works-based salvation. That we are not saved by our works is clear. The Scriptures declare that we are saved by faith and that it is not of works lest any man should boast in Eph. 2:8,9. However, obedience and faith run concurrently and are inseparable.

James 2:17-18 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being

alone.

18Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

As we consider the military centurion's faith, we come to better appreciate the role of our faith. There is something about military service that induces one to think of faith. Faith in a higher cause. Faith in those who guide us. Their faith is put to the test. Those who have had no challenge to their faith become self-centered and indolent. Because their faith is untested, it doesn't come to face the fact that they are insufficient. And therein lies the work of the soul winner, to challenge the faith of those who are asleep spiritually. In the persecution that accompanied the Protestant Reformation, people flocked to the Protestant churches not just because the Bible was being preached, but also because their faith was challenged to the point of death. The same Protestant churches began to lose their vitality here in America because they presumed people's Christianity based upon their infant baptism. The genius of Baptists in America and other like groups has been the challenge of confrontational evangelism. There is no assumption that just because someone had a start in church in infancy, or anyone else for that matter, is a Christian. Faith must be put to a test.

In 2 Corinthians 13:5 the Apostle Paul exhorts us to,

2Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

And what faith is the Apostle Paul talking about? Well, the outline of that faith can be found in 1Corinthians 15:1-4, where Paul writes,

1Corinthians 15:1-4 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

2By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

3For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

4And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

As we read through the rest of the scriptures, we see that we are saved by

turning away from our sin and trusting the finished work of Christ on the cross alone for our salvation. Faith in anything or anyone else elevates that person or object or entity to the level of God and reduces the efficacy of Jesus' sacrifice. In short, whether we realize it or not, it is blasphemy. On the cross Jesus cried it is finished, and by that He meant everything necessary for salvation, the full price for sin – (past, present and future), was nailed to that cross and paid in full by Jesus. And for that, we should be eternally thankful to Him and I do mean that literally.

3. Thanks for those who have sacrificed so much for our freedom.

Speaking of thanks, we also express our thankfulness each Memorial Day for those who have sacrificed so much for our freedom. We cannot directly thank those whom we memorialize. The whole reason we somberly and soberly celebrate this day is because they have paid the ultimate price for our freedom. We can thank them by using it. We can thank God for them.

Rom 13:1-7 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

2Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

3For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

4For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil.

5Wherefore *ye* must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

6For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

7Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

It is interesting that this passage appears in the order that it does. In chapter 12 we are told of our Christian duty and responsibility. This passage is now introduced because it is given to government to maintain order if the people fail in their Christianity. Those who do not yield to God will yield to the authority of government that He has placed according to what we deserve on this earth. We therefore take it upon us to

render honor to whom honor is due. As I mentioned earlier in the sermon, it is not just a day of leisure but a day to remember. A poor memory, a poor consciousness of history will lead to poor results and ultimately a poor future not only economically, but also spiritually.

Lewis Carroll said, "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backward."

Martin Tupper said, "Memory is not wisdom; idiots can by rote repeat volumes. Yet what is wisdom without memory?"

And, in a passionate farewell address to West Point, here are some of the highlights of what Douglass MacArthur had to say:

Duty, honor, country: Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be. They are your rallying point to build courage when courage seems to fail, to regain faith when there seems to be little cause for faith, to create hope when hope becomes forlorn. Unhappily, I possess neither that eloquence of diction, that poetry of imagination, nor that brilliance of metaphor to tell you all that they mean. The unbelievers will say they are but words, but a slogan, but a flamboyant phrase. Every pedant, every demagogue, every cynic, every hypocrite, every troublemaker, and, I am sorry to say, some others of an entirely different character, will try to downgrade them even to the extent of mockery and ridicule. But these are some of the things they do. They build your basic character. They mold you for your future roles as the custodians of the Nation's defense. They make you strong enough to know when you are weak, and brave enough to face yourself when you are afraid. Yours is the profession of arms, the will to win, the sure knowledge that in war there is no substitute for victory, that if you lose, the Nation will be destroyed, that the very obsession of your public service must be Duty, Honor, Country. Others will debate the controversial issues, national and international, which divide men's minds. But serene, calm, aloof, you stand as the Nation's war guardian, as its lifeguard from the raging tides of international conflict, as its gladiator in the arena of battle. For a century and a half you have defended, guarded, and protected its hallowed

traditions of liberty and freedom, of right and justice. Let civilian voices argue the merits or demerits of our processes of government: Whether our strength is being sapped by deficit financing indulged in too long, by Federal paternalism grown too mighty, by power groups grown too arrogant, by politics grown too corrupt, by crime grown too rampant, by morals grown too low, by taxes grown too high, by extremists grown too violent, whether our personal liberties are as thorough and complete as they should be. These **great national problems are not for your professional participation or military solution.** Your guidepost stands out like a ten-fold beacon in the night: **Duty, Honor, Country.** You are the leaven which binds together the entire fabric of our national system of defense. From your ranks come the great Captains who hold the Nation's destiny in their hands the moment the war tocsin sounds. The long, gray line has never failed us. Were you to do so, a million ghosts in olive drab, in brown khaki, in blue and gray, would rise from their white crosses, thundering those magic words: **Duty, Honor, Country.** This does not mean that you are warmongers. On the contrary, the soldier above all other people prays for peace, for he must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war. **But always in our ears ring the ominous words of Plato,** that wisest of all philosophers: **"Only the dead have seen the end of war"** The shadows are lengthening for me. The twilight is here. My days of old have vanished, tone and tint. They have gone glimmering through the dreams of things that were. Their memory is one of wondrous beauty, watered by tears, and coaxed and caressed by the smiles of yesterday. I listen vainly, but with thirsty ear, for the witching melody of faint bugles blowing reveille, of far drums beating the long roll. **In my dreams I hear again the crash of guns, the rattle of musketry, the strange, mournful mutter of the battlefield.** But in the evening of my memory always I come back to West Point. Always there echoes and re-echoes: **Duty, Honor, Country.** Today marks my final roll call with you. But I want you to know that when I cross the river, my last conscious thoughts will be of the corps, and the corps, and

the corps. I bid you farewell.

Resounding words that can certainly inspire. As we look ahead to Memorial Day tomorrow, we need to realize that we do indeed have much to be grateful for. At some point before the day is over, think about the sacrifices that the many brave men and women have made over the years. Think of the blood, sweat and tears of not only those brave soldiers, but also their families who also sacrificed so much so that you could be sitting in this church or listening to this sermon some other way today to worship the God you love freely.

And speaking of God, let us remember the sacrifice Jesus made for us to pay the full price of sin because there was never anything we could do to pay for it ourselves. Good works don't save anyone. Neither can a preacher or priest. Not Mary nor any so-called saints. Not baptism. Not going to church. Not any of these or anything else under the sun was nailed to the cross to pay your punishment for sin. Only faith in Jesus, God the Son, can save you.

Now, before we close, perhaps there is someone here in the auditorium or listening online who has never trusted Jesus alone for their salvation. There has never been a time in your life where you came to the realization that you are a sinner in need of a Savior. Not religion or ritual, but a born again experience where you recognize your sin before a holy and righteous God and ask the only one who could ever forgive you of all your sins, past, present, and future to do just that. If that someone is you, please come forward and I or someone can show you how you can ask God to forgive you of all your sins so you can begin a right relationship with the Creator God who loved you enough to become your redeemer. If you are online and find yourself in that same situation, please call the church and Pastor or someone will also explain how you can get into a right relationship with God and have heaven as your eternal home.

Before we go to the closing hymn, let me leave us with one final scripture, John 15:13, where Jesus says,

John 15:13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

As we get ready for the invitation and the close of the service, please don't lose sight of that fact. Many great men and women died so that we could be free to live as we please, but Jesus went a huge step further – He died so we could be free to live as God pleases. Let's pray.

1. The character and nature of the military centurion's faith. Matt 7:2-5, 8:5-13, John 14:15, 14:23-24, 3:36 , Rom 10:8-13
2. Obedience to the faith, not works for salvation. James 2:17-18 , 2:26, 2Co 13:5, 1Cor 15:1-4,
3. Thanks for those who have sacrificed

so much for our freedom. Rom 13:1-7, John 15:13