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**REMEMBERING**

An elderly man was talking with a friend:  "My wife and I tried a new Chinese restaurant the other night.  It was really good.  I think you and your wife would enjoy it."

Friend:  "Really.  We'll have to try it.  What was the name of the Restaurant?"

Elderly man:  "Oh, let's see, what WAS the name....I just can't quite think of it.....hmmmm.......................uhh, what's the name of a flower.....real popular..... long-stemmed.....thorns....?"

Friend:  Rose??

Elderly man:  Yes!  That's it!  ......Rose, hey Rose, what was the name of that new restaurant we went to the other night?

Remembering; what an important asset to have. What a tragic one to lose through medical or age related afflictions. Even more tragic is to be neglectful with it and ignore what should be remembered. As stated by 19th century philosopher, George Santayana, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” And, as said in Proverbs 22:28, “Remove not the ancient landmarks which thy fathers have set.”

The Bible has many accounts of memorials and rituals designed to evoke in God’s people memories of certain events and, more importantly, the Biblical principle underlying those events that God thought it important for us to know. As an example, the ritual of the Jewish Passover found in Exodus Chapter 12 where God established a ritual to be performed by the Children of Israel “forever” that would remind them of how God freed them from the slavery of Egypt and, more importantly, gave a preview of the coming events that the promised Messiah would fulfill.

In the Book of Joshua, Chapters 3 and 4, an account is given of the children of Israel, after wandering 40 years in the desert, being instructed by God to cross the flooded Jordan river and begin the conquest of the Promised Land. This was the second miracle of the parting of the waters and the people crossing on dry land.

As part of that miraculous crossing, Joshua was instructed to direct 12 men, one from each tribe, to pick up a large stone from the bottom of the dry river bed and carry it to the other side where it would be stacked and used “as a memorial to the children of Israel forever”; Jos 4:6,7. It would be used to remind the children, whenever asked by their elders what the stacks of stones were for, to tell them of the miracles performed by God to lead their people out of slavery in the land of Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land.

Tomorrow is Memorial Day. It was intended to be a day set aside in order to remember and pay tribute to those who sacrificed their lives in the defense of this country. When I was a child it was celebrated with more fanfare and ceremony. Now, its meaning seems to be lost to most and has become just another three day weekend marking the unofficial beginning of summer. We have forgotten to tell our children what it was all about to the point that many do not remember the slain or their sacrifice for our freedom at all.

Ronald Reagan once famously said:

“Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States where men were free.”

How can our posterity understand how to maintain their freedom if they do not understand just how precious and fragile it really is? We have been neglectful in teaching them about the actual price of freedom and that we can learn from the past instead of treating it like a castoff pair of old, worn-out shoes. If you do not know from whence you came, it is easy to lose your way. Those who focus only on the here and now run the risk of trusting in their own wisdom and power and losing their way while forgetting that we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us and that our freedom and liberty is a gift from God through those who made the ultimate sacrifice and not as the result of just our own hard work and wisdom. Let’s begin by reviewing the history of Memorial Day.

Where and when the roots of Memorial Day began is in dispute. But what we do know is that just after the end of the Civil War, people began a tradition of decorating the graves of the fallen Civil War veterans. On May 5th, 1868, General John Logan, national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR; a group of union Civil War veterans), in general order 11, designated May 30, 1868 a day of remembrance and to decorate the graves of fallen comrades who fell in common defense of their country during the Civil War.

On that first “Decoration Day” as it was originally called, General James Garfield gave a speech at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington D.C. and, with about 5,000 in attendance, Approximately 20,000 graves of both Union and Confederate soldiers buried there were decorated with flowers.

The first state to recognize the holiday was New York in 1873. By the 1890’s all the northern states had followed suit. The southern states celebrated a separate decoration day in various states on various dates and some continue to do so to this day. Most states began to recognize the last Monday in May as an official national holiday after World War I, at which time the day became one of recognition of all war dead, not just those of the Civil War.

In 1915, Moina Michael, inspired by the poem “IN Flanders Fields” wrote her own poem where she referenced “we cherish too the poppy red”, a symbol of the shed blood of the war dead. She began wearing a red poppy flower and selling them to others. She used the proceeds to help disabled veterans. In 1922 the Veterans Of Foreign Wars (V.F.W.) organization got involved in the project and expanded it to a national movement to sell poppies on what was called “Poppy Day”.

In 1971, the United States Congress passed the “National Holiday Act” which designated the last Monday in May to be the official “Memorial Day”; thereby creating the federal three day weekend we know today which pays tribute to our war dead and expanded to include all those who have gone before us.

In 2000, the U.S. Congress passed the “National Moment of Reembrace” which designated that everyone should take a moment of silence at 3 p.m. on each Memorial Day and honor in their own way the fallen veterans.

Unfortunately, other than in isolated instances, especially among the young, there now seems to be little attention paid to the day. The poppies are gone. The sense of a day marking something special is gone. The caring about the sacrifices of previous generations seems to be gone. And, again especially among the young, knowledge of the past and what it means to them today seems to be nonexistent. Few can explain who fought in our previous wars and why.

Just what was the cost of freedom in blood and sacrifice that brought us from the American Revolutionary War to the Iraqi and Afghanistan Wars of today. As seen below, the cost was extremely high to provide the political freedoms we enjoy today. We have fought in twelve major conflicts and many other lesser battles and skirmishes. The following is a list of some of the more well-known conflicts that have occurred over the history of the United States. It is also important to consider from a population size perspective the fact that over the time period covered by these conflicts the population of the United States was ever growing; with the population at the time of the Revolutionary War being many times smaller than the nearly 310,000,000 population of today:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| American Civil War | |  | 750,000 | |
| World War II | |  | 405,399 | |
| World War I | |  | 116,516 | |
| Vietnam | |  | 58,151 | |
| Korean War | |  | 36,516 | |
| American Revolutionary War | |  | 25,000 | |
| War of 1812 | |  | 15,000 | |
| Mexican American War | |  | 13,283 | |
| Iraq/Afghanistan Wars\* present | |  | 6,717 | |
| Philippine–American War | |  | 4,196 | |
| Operation Desert Storm (The First Gulf War) | |  | 383 | |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Rank** | **War** | **Years** | **Deaths** |  |
| 1 | [World War II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II) | 1941–45 | 291,557 |  |
| 2 | [American Civil War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Civil_War) | 1861–65 | 212,938 |  |
| 3 | [World War I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I) | 1917–18 | 53,402 |  |
| 4 | [Vietnam War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War) | 1955–75 | 47,424 |  |
| 5 | [Korean War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_War) | 1950–53 | 33,746 |  |
| 6 | [American Revolutionary War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Revolutionary_War) | 1775–83 | 8,000 |  |
| 7 | [Iraq War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq_War)/[Afghanistan Wars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_in_Afghanistan_(2001%E2%80%9314)) | 2001–present | 5,281 [[90]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_military_casualties_of_war#cite_note-90) |  |
| 8 | [War of 1812](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_of_1812) | 1812–15 | 2,260 |  |
| 9 | [Mexican–American War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexican%E2%80%93American_War) | 1846–48 | 1,733 |  |
| 10 | [Northwest Indian War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northwest_Indian_War) | 1785–95 | 1,221+ |  |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **American Combat Deaths by War** | | | | |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| World War II | |  | 291,557 | |
| American Civil War | |  | 212,938 | |
| World War I | |  | 53,402 | |
| Vietnam | |  | 47,424 | |
| Korean War | |  | 33,746 | |
| American Revolutionary War | |  | 8,000 | |
| Iraq/Afghanistan Wars\* | |  | 5,281 | |
| War of 1812 | |  | 2,260 | |
| Mexican American War | |  | 1,733 | |
| Northwest Indian War | |  | 1,221+ | |
| Kosovo War | |  | 18+ | |

The bible puts it this way:

John 15:13, “ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.”

Abraham Lincoln said it this way when he gave his famous Gettysburg Address at a ceremony dedicating the newly created Gettysburg cemetery at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania after the Civil War battle at Gettysburg on July 1-3, 1863 (an estimated 46,000 to 51,000 casualties in the three day battle) on Nov. 9, 1863. He said in part that “through their deeds, the dead had spoken more eloquently for themselves than any of the living ever could, and that we living could only honor them by rededicating ourselves to the cause for which they so willingly gave a last full measure of devotion.”

Over 1.4 million honored dead have spoken eloquently and selflessly demonstrated their great friendship for those who came after them. Can we do anything less than honor them and the cause of freedom for which they made the ultimate sacrifice?

As we reflect on the events that have transpired in the United States over the last several decades, one would have to ask one’s self; “would those honored dead be proud of what we have done as a nation with the freedom they have given us?” I think maybe not.

Over the years we have watched the moral and political decline of this nation to the point of disbelief as just how fast it has all fallen. The family unit has been virtually destroyed to the point that more couples simply cohabitate than marry. The birth of our children into single-parent families has risen from 25% among the African-American community when President Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society policy was put into effect in the 1960’s to 75% today and over 30% among the Caucasian community. We have spent an estimated $22 trillion and an estimated $48 trillion in unfunded liabilities on the War ON Poverty programs and the rate of poverty is higher today than when the policy began. A smaller percentage of adults work today than they did 30 years ago. The number of food stamp recipients has doubled in the last decade. The real income of the middle class, the backbone of this nation has fallen and led our children to the point they no longer believe in the American Dream that will lead to their prosperity being greater than that of their parents. And, although our schools rank below 20th place in math and reading in comparison with other developed countries, our schizophrenic country seems to be more concerned with focusing on who gets to use which bathroom/locker room. Some college admissions forms now recognize as many as six and seven gender choices. While our military focuses on social engineering our defense capacity in regards to military assets has fallen to pre-W.W.II readiness levels while our enemies mock us. Illegals who blatantly flaunt our immigration laws and compete with us for limited resources with the full blessing of our government while that same government does not seem to be able or willing to fix the continuing problems of providing proper medical care for our veterans through the broken Veterans Administration. An America where you are encouraged to openly and vigorously criticize God, country, motherhood, military service, and apple pie but our threatened by the government with legal action if you disagree with climate change, evolution, transgenderism, or the proposition that there is a constitutional right to same-sex marriage.

If we were just left to reflect on those statistics, our celebration of this Memorial Day would be depressing. Fortunately, as Christians, that is not the end of the story. Although Memorial Day is a secular holiday, it should be seen by the Christian community as an opportunity to celebrate both our past and our future with great hope.

As already pointed out, the Bible tells us we can have no greater friend than one who is willing to lay down his life for us. In our past wars there are many examples of soldiers who laid down their lives for their comrades in arms. Many of our Medal of Honor winners are such examples; throwing themselves on live grenades, charging gun in placements, or fighting rear guard actions, all to save their comrades at the risk or actual cost of their lives. All soldiers have sacrificed all or part of themselves for the greater good and political freedom of their fellow citizens. Those soldiers are worthy of our highest praise and admiration.

However, in Rom 5:7, Paul points out that one would hardly die for a righteous man let alone an unrighteous one. As admirable as it is to reflect upon those who gave their lives for their comrades, we could probably safely say that it is doubtful if they would have made the same willing sacrifice for their enemy combatants. It would be human nature not to do so. Yet, there is One Who did make such a choice.

The Bible points out in many places that to sin against God is to become His enemy; Rom 5:6-10; Col 1:21. All mankind has sinned and become the enemies of God; Rom 3:23. The wages of those actions is death; Rom 6:23. There was no hope for us. But then there was Christ.

Stepping down from His exalted position as a member of the Holy Trinity, not subject to time and space, He volunteered, as Creator of the universe, to become like one of His created; flesh and blood. And with full knowledge of what it would cost Him, He sacrificed Himself on the cross for all of the sinners of the world, you and me, His enemies, so that we might live. Rare enough to find one who would sacrifice himself for a righteous man let alone an unrighteous one; but that is exactly what He did!

In 1 Corinthians Chapter 11, Paul describes to us the process of the Memorial we call “Communion” or “The Lord’s Supper”. In that description, he refers to the words of Jesus Himself spoken by Him during that final meal He shared with His Apostles; “do this in remembrance of Me”.

We are called upon to remember not just that He went through the motions of breaking bread and sharing a cup with His friends, but what that symbolized. He knew full well that sin could not be forgiven without the shedding of blood; Hebrews 9:22. He knew that all men had sinned and become the enemy of God and were slated for destruction as a result. He knew that, although God was a God of absolute mercy, He was also a God of absolute justice. Therefore, the sin debt had to be paid. He became flesh and blood so that His own body could be broken and His own blood shed on the cross and pay the price on behalf of every sinner who believed in Him; John 3:16. It is that that He wanted us to remember; I am sacrificing Myself so that you may live. Praise God!

As we prepare to celebrate this coming Memorial Day tomorrow, it is right and proper that we remember and honor our war dead and our loved ones who have gone before us. But let’s not stop there. Remember the past and what it means for our future. Remember the debt we owe to those who sacrificed for us and honor them by what we do today and tomorrow. And, most of all, remember the wonders of our Lord and what He has done for us and rejoice in what we can anticipate Him doing for us in the future! Indeed; we should celebrate each and every day the wonders of our past and the hope we have in our future In The Lord!