“Lest We Forget”

Joshua 4:1-7

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Someone said there are three signs of getting old: 1. Forgetfulness, 2. Weakness in the legs and 3. ....... Hmmm. Let’s see ..... 1. Forgetfulness, 2. Weakness in the legs and 3. – 3. – 3. well I can’t remember that one.

A humorous poem expresses the forgetting dilemma:

My forgetter's getting better
But my rememberer is broke
To you that may seem funny
But, to me, that is no joke
For when I'm "here" I'm wondering
If I really should be "there"
And, when I try to think it through,
I haven't got a prayer!

The God Who forgets only forgiven sin, recognizes that weakness and made provision against it when He instituted memorials for the Israelites.

God told Joshua, “Now then, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man for each tribe. It shall come about when the soles of the feet of the priests who carry the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan will be cut off, and the waters which are flowing down from above will stand in one heap.” So when the feet of the priests carrying the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, the waters which were flowing down from above stood and rose up in one heap, a great distance away and those which were flowing down toward the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the priests stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while all Israel crossed on dry ground, until all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan.” Joshua 3:12-17 (NASB).

“Now when all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying, ‘Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from each tribe, and command them, saying, “Take up for yourselves twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet are standing firm, and carry them over with you and lay them down in the lodging place where you will lodge tonight.” So Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the sons of Israel, one man from each tribe; and Joshua said to them, ‘Cross again to the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel.’ Let this be a sign among you, so that when your
children ask later, saying, “What do these stones mean to you?” then you shall say to them, “Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.” So these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever.” Joshua 4:1-7 (NASB).

This is the time of year we call Memorial Day. As we think of memorials, high among them are the memorials erected to honor our military heroes who died to keep us free. But there are other meaningful memorials, too. You see them in the crosses by the highways; you see them in celebration of special days like wedding anniversaries; you see them in your own minds as you reminisce about happy bygone days and departed loved ones.

This morning I want to share some values of memorials.

I. MEMORIALS EVOKE MEMORIES:
   A. With new data, facts, news, information and experiences we gain on a daily basis, it’s no wonder that former things are shoved to the back of our mental card catalog.
   B. So, that being true, God told Joshua to have 12 stones piled up on the river bed “So these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever.”
   C. When we see a cross by the side of the road, or pass a cemetery, or visit a war memorial, we remember
      1. That we are fortunate to be alive.
      2. That we are fortunate to be alive in a free nation.
      3. That our good fortune rests on the sacrifice of America’s finest young men and women.
      4. That we owe a great debt to those who purchased liberty.
      5. That the debt is only in part paid by remembering them, and doing our part to preserve our freedom. Our part includes:
         a. Being law abiding citizens.
         b. Voting our conscience, not our pocketbooks.
         c. Thanking military personnel when we see them.
         d. Praying for our nation, our president, our military and especially for the church in the world.
   D. Let us remember that
      1. This is the land of the free because it is the home of the brave,
      2. But the real credit goes to the Lord because all blessings come from Him.
      3. That “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD.” Psalm 33:12 (NASB).
   E. We are often quick to forget so we need memorials. Paul Harvey told the story. “It is gratitude that prompted an old man to visit an old broken pier on the eastern seacoast of Florida. Every Friday night, until his death in 1973, he would return, walking slowly and slightly stooped with a large bucket of shrimp. The sea gulls would flock to this old man, and he would feed them from his bucket.”

The story began in October, 1942, when Captain Eddie Rickenbacker was on a mission in a B-17. Somewhere over the South Pacific the Flying Fortress became lost beyond the reach of radio. Fuel ran dangerously low, so the men ditched their plane in the
ocean. For uncounted days Captain Eddie and his companions fought the water, and the weather, and the scorching sun. They spent many sleepless nights recoiling as giant sharks rammed their rafts. But of all their enemies at sea, one proved most formidable: starvation. Eight days out, their rations were long gone or destroyed by the salt water.

The pilot, Captain William Cherry, read the Bible one afternoon, and they finished with a prayer and a hymn of praise. They hoped for a miracle and they got one!

A sea gull landed on Eddie’s head. No one said a word, but they were staring at that gull. The gull meant food...if he could catch it.

Captain Eddie caught the gull. Its flesh was eaten. Its intestines were used for bait to catch fish. The survivors were sustained and their hopes renewed because a lone sea gull landed on his head.

He never forgot, so every Friday evening, about sunset an old man would be seen carrying his bucket filled with shrimp to feed the gulls...to remember that one which, on a day long past, gave itself without a struggle.

Yes, we are a forgetful people. Holidays like this help us remember those who served and especially those who lost limb or life –but even more let’s remember Jesus Christ Who gave His life for us. But there is more:

II. MEMORIALS EXPRESS HONOR:
A. They mutely say,
   1. “You are worth remembering; you are out of sight, but not out of mind.”
   2. “We want others to know that you lived and died and are remembered with honor.”
B. In context the memorial of stones was to honor God Who led them out of slavery in Egypt and twice parted bodies of water to allow passage on dry ground.
   1. Only God could make that happen with a command for the river to cease flowing.
   2. Even the Army Corps of Engineers couldn’t do it like that!
   3. We remember and honor the Lord for His miracles.
C. Today, we also thankfully honor and remember our national veterans.
   1. We remember and commend their courage.
   2. We remember and salute their sacrifice.
   3. We remember and laud their loyalty.
   4. We remember and applaud their accomplishments!
D. The Bible says, “Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.” Romans 13:7 (NASB).
   1. We honor God, the Author of Liberty, above all others.
   2. But on a different level we also honor our veterans for giving us 3 precious gifts:
      a. Freedom.
      b. Protection.
      c. An example of unselfish courage.
E. As someone wrote:
It is the VETERAN, not the preacher, who has given us freedom of religion.
It is the VETERAN, not the reporter, who has given us freedom of the press.
It is the VETERAN, not the poet, who has given us freedom of speech.
It is the VETERAN, not the campus organizer, who has given us freedom to assemble.
It is the VETERAN, not the lawyer, who has given us the right to a fair trial.
It is the VETERAN, not the politician, Who has given us the right to vote.

Today we want to honor all our armed service veterans. And lastly:

III. MEMORIALS EDUCATE OTHERS
A. The Lord told Joshua, “Let this be a sign among you, so that when your children ask later, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ then you shall say to them, ‘Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.’”

B. We have some young people and some not so young, here who are learning about Jesus dying for us when they hear the meditations and observe us taking the memorial we call communion.
   1. So if they ask “What does this mean? What is it for?” You answer, “The bread reminds me of Jesus’ body and the cup reminds me of Jesus blood. So I remember Him dying so I can be forgiven.”
   2. And hopefully that will open other questions especially about the cross.

C. We don’t come to church or take communion as isolated individuals; with no interpersonal connect. We do it as a family and as examples of faith and faithfulness.
   1. The Hebrew letter says, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” Hebrews 10:23-25 (NASB).
   2. It’s not just all about what we get out of church, it’s also about what we can give. We gather to encourage others, we come to share, we remember in order to teach.

D. We can learn lessons of courage, duty, sacrifice and honor from our veterans and we seek to pass those lessons to following generations, lest we, and they, forget.

E. I want to sum it all up in this true story: Three Coast Guardsmen tethered themselves together to rescue three brothers who had made their way down the Duluth ship canal's north pier in the midst of gale force winds and gigantic waves.
Eric, 17, and twins Nathan and Arthur Halverson, 16, were on the pier on that stormy night 50 years ago.

Two of the brothers made it to the pier's end, but witnesses saw the third brother clinging briefly to a light pole on the pier before disappearing. The other two retreated down the pier to help him but waves swept them away.

The Coast Guardsmen found no trace of them on the pier and halfway back to shore, the lake would claim Boatswain Mate 1st Class Edgar A. Culbertson as its fourth victim that night.

Fifty years after the events of April 30, 1967, a plaque sits on a stone along the north pier in Canal Park to honor Culbertson, noting that "his great sacrifice is an enduring example of his devotion to duty and compassion for his fellow man."

The Halverson’s' older brother Phil said, "We will never forget his bravery and ultimate sacrifice in volunteering to venture into the storm in an attempt to save our brothers.” He is remembered, honored and an example for us all to follow. But even more, let us remember and Honor Jesus Christ and teach and help others to do so by the life you live.

Jesus did not fail in His rescue mission and “Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them.” Hebrews 7:25 (NIV).

He is able to rescue you and died to do it – so then let us live for Him. PRAY / INVITE