“Memorial Day and Hope”

May 28, 2017

Genesis 9:1-14

Tomorrow, as you know, is a Federal Holiday. Do you know how many Federal Holidays we celebrate annually in our United States? You’ve probably see this list before.

New Year's Day Jan. 1

MLK, Jr. Day 3rd Mon. in Jan.

Washington’s B’day 3rd Mon. in Feb.

Memorial Day Last Mon. in May

Independ. Day July 4

Labor Day 1st Mon. in Sept.

Columbus Day 2nd Mon. in Oct.

Veterans Day Nov. 11

Thanksgiving 4th Thurs. in Nov.

Christmas Day Dec. 25

Tomorrow we celebrate Memorial Day. And if you’ve been wondering why we are celebrating it this year on the last Monday in May, it’s because the U.S. Congress voted on it and set it on this day back on June 28, 1968.

The history of Memorial Day has been and still is debated. Originally it was Decoration Day. And many historians agree that it was first held on May 30, 1868. That day had been set aside to celebrate, to remember, to commemorate, and to honor our U.S. Civil War wounded and casualties. And wives and children then decorated the graves of those soldiers with flowers and wreathes.

So, today, along with millions of U.S. citizens we also pause to remember both those who have died as well as those who are presently serving in our U.S. military services.

But, I’d like to do something a little different. I’d like to turn you to your Bible to show you that memorials not only look back. They look forward as well. They even provide hope.

So today I’ve titled my sermon “Memorial Day and Hope.” Shall we pray?

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to teach and preach God’s Word. If you would, go with me to the third chapter of the Book of Exodus and discover with me what the LORD says about memorials and hope.

C. S. Lewis once wrote “There are far better things ahead than any we leave behind.”

First, though, a memorial is a reminder.

Please look with me at Exodus 3:15 *“And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.”*

The Hebrew word for memorial is “to remember.” We all have a tendency to forget.

 You may have heard about a man named John who had a really horrible memory. One day John ran into a friend whom he hadn’t seen in a long time. He greeted him and said, “Bill, do you remember what a bad memory I had?” Bill answered, “Yes, I certainly do.” “Well, it’s not bad any more. I went to a seminar that taught us how to remember things. It was a great seminar, and now I have a wonderful memory.”

Bill answered, “That’s great! What was the name of the seminar?” “Well,” John said, “Wait a minute, my wife went with me. I’ll ask her.” He turned and saw his wife nearby. Then he turned back to Bill and said, “What’s the name of that flower with a long stem and thorns and a red bloom?” “Do you mean a rose?” Bill answered, “Yeah, thanks,” John said, “Hey, Rose, what’s the name of that seminar we attended?”

Everyone celebrates his or her birthday and the birthdays of their loved ones and their wedding anniversaries or the day of the home-going of a loved one, or their favorite holidays and sometimes the day they started their present job and so on and so forth. And pictures? Who doesn’t have at least a million pictures in their home? So, for every single one of us, memories and memorials are extremely important.

First, a memorial is a reminder.

Second, memorials began with the LORD.

And the very first memorial is found in the Book of Genesis. Please find with me to Genesis chapter nine.

Please look with me at Genesis 9:8 and as I read, notice that the LORD Himself sets up this memorial - verse 8. Genesis 9:8 *“And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, (9) And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; (10) And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth.*

*(11) And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there anymore be a flood to destroy the earth. (12) And God said, this is the token [the sign] of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:*

*(13) I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token [a sign] of a covenant between me and the earth. (14) And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: (15) And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.*

*(16) And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. (17) And God said unto Noah, This is the token [the sign] of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.”*

Now why are there memorials and why celebrate Memorial Day? Why have a holiday to remember the past? And why did the LORD initiate feasts to remember the past? Why celebrate a birthday? Why remember your anniversary? Aren’t we just looking backwards? Aren’t we just looking at the past? Isn’t there a NT verse telling us to forget the things that are behind and to reach forward to the things that are ahead? Shouldn’t we be looking at the future?

As you are about to see from the Scripture, memorials and memories are a way we have to identify with the past. The past isn’t really just gone. And, practically speaking, if it wasn’t for some people and some events in our past, we wouldn’t have what we have today. We wouldn’t be where we are today.

We are where we are and we are what we are partly because of what other people have done. A big part of the reason we celebrate is because we feel a *need* to remember the past. We call it nostalgia. We *want* to remember things. We want to remember people. And we want to remember events that are no longer present? And, in some cases, it might not even be important or memorable to anybody else. But it *is* important to us. So when something or someone is very significant to *us*, we want a way to remind ourselves of them.

And, beyond that, the Bible says that the LORD Himself created this first memorial.

What do we see here in Genesis 9? We see the LORD placing a memorial in the sky; verse thirteen. Genesis 9:13 *“I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token [a sign] of a covenant between me and the earth. (14) And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud:*

*(15) And* ***I will remember*** *my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.”*

This word “remember” is the exact same Hebrew word as “for a memorial” found elsewhere in the Bible.

Exodus 12:14 *“And this day shall be unto you* ***for a memorial****;…”*

Exodus 13:9 *“And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and* ***for a memorial*** *between thine eyes, that the Lord's law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath the Lord brought thee out of Egypt.”*

Exodus 17:14 *“And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this* ***for a memorial*** *in a book, and rehearse it…”*

Later on when the Jews crossed the Jordan River on dry ground the LORD commanded Joshua to set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan. Why? As a memorial.

But this first one is still in existence today. Right after the worldwide flood, God placed a bow in the sky.

And He tells us why He did it. Genesis 9:14*“And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: (15) And* ***I will remember*** *my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.”*

Now, who’s doing the remembering here? The Bible says that the LORD, *He* will remember something. He calls it a token in verse twelve. A token is a sign. It points to something else; something that remind Him of something else. And what is it that the LORD will remember whenever the rainbow appears in the sky?

He will remember His promise; a promise He made way back in the days of Noah. He promised to never again flood the entire world and destroy it.

The LORD had flooded the earth because of the human race has grown, not only careless and indifferent. It had become grossly wicked. Yet, when the rainbow appears, the LORD recalled with pleasure that promise He made to you and me; that He will never again flood the world to destroy it. When the rainbow shows up, the LORD recalls *“the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature…”* verse 16.

Genesis 9:16 *“And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.”*

First, a memorial is a reminder.

Second, memorials began with the LORD.

Third, you and I have been created in God’s image. Here’s how God has made you. He made you with an ability to look into the past and recall things.

And the LORD, of course, is omniscient. That means He knows everything there is to know; and He knows it all at the very same moment. But, your having the ability to remember is crucial to your being able to function in the present.

Now, think for just a moment how difficult it would be for you if you couldn’t remember anything from the past. Memory is the only way we can exist. We couldn’t even speak to each other if God hadn’t made us with the ability to memorize. That’s just the way He’s made us. So, memorials and memories are as ordinary as remembering your name or your birthday.

You see, just as the LORD uses the memorial of a rainbow, it’s good for you to use memorials to identify things that happened in the past. That’s how He’s made you. He created you with the unique ability to remember and recall and to do it with great pleasure. And when you look back, you can do at least two things: one, see the things other people did; and two, you can see how God worked. And what a memorial does is to cause you to look *back*.

You can do that because God made you in His image.

First, a memorial is a reminder.

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Third, you and I have been created in God’s image.

And fourth, memorials carry inside them hope.

For another example, let’s day that you are looking back at the Civil War. You can read and learn about the events of the Civil War and then, you look back with the one thing that distinguishes you from all the other creatures God made. You can look back with hope.

You see, the reason for memorials is hope. They are hope-filled. They engender hope. You see, even God can’t change what happened in the flood. But what He can do and what He did was to promise to never again destroy the world with a flood. And what does He does after each rain when the rainbow appears on the earth? He remembers His promise. And in that promise inspires hope.

And what do we do when we look back on the efforts and the lives and the work of those who gave their best in the Civil War or in any subsequent war? We can all agree that they did what they did out of hope.

Why else would men go to war if it wasn’t in hope of a better world?

In his Gettysburg Address, President Lincoln said this as he and those with him that day consecrated the ground at Gettysburg? And why did he say it. It was to inspire hope. Here’s a portion of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.

*“But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate -- we cannot consecrate -- we cannot hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.*

*It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion –*

*that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth. So today we look back on things that matter because today things are far better than in the past.”*

Can you not hear the HOPE in Lincoln’s heart? And in his words? Why? Because even he while he stood at the graves of those 6,000 men who had given their lives in the three days of fighting at the Battle of Gettysburg; he shared his hope for a better day.

Now, what is Memorial Day is really designed for? It’s designed as a reminder to us that lots of people gave their lives so that you and I could enjoy all we do today. And we shouldn’t forget their sacrifice because it was on our behalf that they died.

Memorial Day, then, is really a day of HOPE. And today, we hope for an even better world in days to come.

You see, that’s how God has made us. We’ve been made in His image. We can look both ways; back and ahead.

So, when you look back, you can look back in gratitude. You look back at the great loss of human life. Yet, you can’t look back without hope. Each soul that gave his at that time in history was a life not given in vain.

Now, it’s true that when we look back, we sometimes feel regret. But, didn’t the LORD feel the same way when He had to send the flood in Noah’s day?

So, we can legitimately regret what has happened. Yet, didn’t also the LORD set a bow in the sky to remind Himself of something better? And it’s true that you regret things that have happened in the past. Yet, it’s not to your benefit to dwell on them, is it? Rather, we remember with appreciation what they did and hope as we look ahead to something far better.

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Fourth, memorials carry inside them hope.

And last, there’s a fifth reason for memorials.

Go with me mentally to the fourth chapter of the Book of Joshua and watch as the Jews placed twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan River.

The fifth reason for memorials is so that we discover a bigger God than we now see.

Joshua 4:5 says this. “And Joshua said unto them, Joshua 4:5 *“Pass over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of Jordan, and take you up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder, according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel: (6) That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, what mean ye by these stones?*

The LORD had commanded Joshua to set these stones up as a memorial. And why? What difference would a pile of large stones taken out of the Jordan River mean to people who saw them? Would they have any significance at all?

Joshua 4:7 *“Then ye shall answer them, that the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be* ***for a memorial*** *unto the children of Israel forever.*

*(8) And the children of Israel did so as Joshua comman-ded, and took up twelve stones out of the midst of Jordan, as the LORD spake unto Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and carried them over with them unto the place where they lodged, and laid them down there.”*

*(9) And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests which bare the ark of the covenant stood: and they are there unto this day.”*

You may sometimes feel as though you serve a very small God. Well on any day you feel that way; go back to Joshua chapter four and see what God did for Israel?

Imagine, for just moment, that you came to the Jordan and intended to cross it and you came upon this memorial. Wouldn’t you ask *“Why are these stones here?”* I know I would. And when I heard the answer, I’d respond with *“That’s the kind of God that I serve.”*

This whole idea of a memorial is your reminder God is not only great; He’s omnipotent. He can do anything.

Has He not provided your every need this week? Has he not intervened on your behalf when it looked like it might never work out? Has He not given you wisdom when you didn’t know what to do? Has He not enabled you to stand for what was right when you were put on the spot?

So, a memorial is designed to move your heart towards God and to appreciate Him and to see how worthy He is of your praise.

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And fifth, God is bigger than we know.

In the early months and years of the First World War, many people said that this would be the end of the world. It was certainly a very fearful time in the hearts of mankind. Yet, that war is over.

When our nation was fighting the Civil War, many were convinced that this will surely lead to the end of the United States of America. Yet, here we are today. America is still the home of the brave and the land of the free. We still live in the greatest nation on earth.

And today, we have men and women in our US military fighting terrorists across the globe so that we don’t experience another Nine Eleven here on our American soil.

Shouldn’t we celebrate Memorial Day with the realization that we’re here because someone else has given his or her life today so that you can live in peace and safety?

The good hand of God continues upon us. When you consider all that our nation has been through by way of wars and trials and serious problems; we have only One Person to thank. And that One is the LORD of Heaven and Earth.

Folks, every Memorial Day should point you to the fact that our largest need is the need in every heart; for a bigger God; not that God is small. Rather, we need to see Him as He truly is.

Now, by way of application, here’s my exhortation to you. Say “Thank you” to someone who is right now serving in our US Military? Just a brief word saying “Thank you for service to our nation.” We all know someone serving in the military. These men and women will know that they are not forgotten.

Now, as we close, let me remind you of the main message of the Scriptures.

1. We are all sinners and the wages for sin is death.
2. God provided a Savior in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ. He died for your sins.
3. When you repent of my sins and receive Jesus Christ as your LORD and Savior, you are completely forgiven and guaranteed a place in Heaven.
4. Will you trust His Son as your Savior?

This is certainly the greatest passage of Scripture Bible. It’s John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (17) For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”*

Will you put your trust in the One Who paid the penalty for all your sins 2000 years ago when He died on a Cross on the hill called Calvary?

Will you admit you are a sinner and not deserving of His Love? Will you admit you are a sinner and deserving of His Judgment? Then, tell God that you believe He sent His Son to die as your Substitute and that you want to be forgiven of all your sins. He will certainly receive you and grant you per-mission to enter into His Kingdom someday.

To “repent” means “to change your mind about God, Christ, your sin, and God’s free gift of salvation.”

To “believe” means “to simply trust Jesus Christ alone as the One Who paid the entire penalty for your sins.”

Today is the Day of Salvation. Today you can repent (change your mind) about God, Christ, Sin, and Salvation and find eternal life. Today is your day to trust Christ alone for His free salvation. Will you trust Him?

The sinner’s prayer is this. “LORD, I admit that I am a sinner and in need of your grace. I believe that You sent Your Son to the Cross to die for me. Please forgive me of all my sins and make me Your child. Thank you.”

And, for each Christian, celebrate Memorial Day this year with a renewed appreciation for all that God has given you because of the lives of those who have gone before you. And take just five minutes this week to express a word of thanks to someone serving in our US Military.

Closing hymn: Hymn # 799. “America, The Beautiful”