

May 24, 2015  
Memorial Day 2015  
*Why is Memorial Day Important?*  
Joshua 4:1-9

**Opening words:** We are in the fourth chapter of Joshua. The journey that began in Egypt was finally over. Forty years in the wilderness is a long time. The people had finally crossed the Jordan and entered the Promised Land. They must have dreamed of that moment for years. I wonder if the reality was close to what they expected. Everyone reacted in a different way. Some must have cried. Some must have cheered. Some must have appreciated that moment and just soaked in the sights. Others must have missed the big picture because they were preoccupied with some detail of life. It was an historical moment, it was a moment that should never be forgotten. God saw the big picture, so he ordered Joshua to have a memorial built. Let us just be honest. It was a low budget memorial - twelve stones, representing each tribe, were taken from the middle of the Jordan (Verse 2). God makes the job easier by stopping the river's flow (Verse 7). (It is easy to stop a river after you have divided a sea.) The stones are taken to dry ground and piled up. That pile of stones was to act as a memorial to future generations (Verses 6-7). God wants future generations to never forget. You know it is true. Memorials are important. Our scripture lesson for today is Joshua 4:1-9.

**Joshua 4:1-9** <sup>1</sup>When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, <sup>2</sup>"Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, <sup>3</sup>and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight." <sup>4</sup>So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, <sup>5</sup>and said to them, "Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, <sup>6</sup>to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' <sup>7</sup>tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever." <sup>8</sup>So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the LORD had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down. <sup>9</sup>Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant had stood. And they are there to this day.

You know the story. I have told you in the past. His name was John Logan. His name is not considered one of the great names in American history. However, he was the national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic during the 1860's. It was Logan who declared May 30, 1868 a "Memorial Day." That date was selected because the

flowers would be in full bloom. The observance was held at the former home of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Lee's home was confiscated by the government and turned into a cemetery, Arlington National Cemetery. Ulysses and Julia Grant presided over the day. Soldiers from the Grand Army of the Republic and orphans from the Soldiers and Sailors Orphanage placed flowers on both Union and Confederate graves. They prayed and sang as they went.

This is the truth. Logan's idea of a memorial day was not original. By 1868, communities who had lost men in the Civil War had been decorating the graves of their lost for several years. History tells us New York became the first state to make Memorial Day a state holiday in 1873. By 1890, all northern states observed a Memorial Day. However, southern states had separate Memorial Days until the close of the First World War. Since 1971, Memorial Day has been observed on the last Monday of May, ensuring a three day holiday weekend. How do you remember those who have died in service to our country? If that makes you think, then say, "**Amen!**"

It must have been Memorial Day, 1970. It is the only Memorial Day that holds any memories for me. When I was thirteen years old, Memorial Day meant the beginning of the summer season. That meant the local swimming pools opened for the first time. I remember I was out at Willow Lake in Cortland with a friend. We were excited because the school year was coming to an end and we were ready for an adventure. We decided to jump into the water and swim to the wooden raft in the middle of the lake. The wooden raft was more like an island. We could see others on that wooden raft enjoying the sun. On three, we jumped in and swam to our destination. We swam as fast as we could because the water was freezing. It was like it had just been melted off a glacier. After all, it was Memorial Day in Ohio. Only the air had warmed up. When we got to the raft, we jumped out of the water. We joined the others who were warming themselves in the sun. We swore we would never do that again. Then, it hit us. If we wanted to go home, we had to do it again. The only way back to the shore was to jump into the water again and swim. I must have, because I am here today. That is my only memory of Memorial Day. When I was thirteen years old Memorial Day meant one thing, summer! I am not thirteen anymore. Memorial Day means so much more.

Memorial Day is important for the reason all memorials are important. Memorials challenge us to remember the most important things in life. Our past is filled with people and events who (and which) need to be remembered. That is why we are constantly being challenged to remember them. Those past events and people have influenced our contemporary world. They have influenced our individual lives. That is why Memorial Day is important. Today, I want to challenge you to examine your past and discover the things that make you unique. You were not just created in a test tube. You are a product of your environment. There is no one else exactly like you. Answer this question. How has your past influenced your present? You have a spiritual heritage. You have a national heritage. You have a personal heritage. The three do not stand completely independent of each other. The three act in concert. Each one played a role

in creating you. Today, I want you to examine your heritage. So if you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen"**

### **Spiritual Heritage**

On Memorial Day, remember your spiritual heritage. The Bible is filled with memorials. Joshua's memorial is just one. The New Testament holds the most famous memorial in the Bible. You know the scene. The end of Jesus's earthly ministry is near. Judas Iscariot has already agreed to betray him for thirty pieces of silver. It is Thursday of Holy Week and there is only time left for one more meal with the disciples, the Seder. That meal itself was a memorial. Everything on the menu reminded them of something that happened in their nation's history. Jesus takes that scripted meal and changes everything. You remember. Jesus picked up a piece of bread and gave it to the twelve. He said the bread was his body. Later, he picked up a glass of wine and shared it with them. He said it was his blood. Do you remember the last words the Master spoke? He presented the bread and the cup with the same line, "Do this, in remembrance of me." (1 Corinthians 11:24-25) It is impossible to come to the Communion table and not remember Jesus. Memorials are important. Biblical memorials remind us of how God wants to have a relationship with us. God wants to have a relationship with you! Because of the resurrection of Jesus, your relationship with God will never end. Our faith in Jesus makes us unique. Did you know 88% of our world has some form of faith? Did you know only 32% of our world is Christian? That means we are a minority. Your spiritual heritage is important. You are a disciple of Jesus Christ! If you are thankful for what Jesus has done for you, say, **"Amen!"**

### **National**

On this Memorial Day, remember your national heritage. You are a citizen of the United States of America. That makes you unique in our world. Did you know there are 30 national memorials owned and operated by the National Park Service? Five more are administered to by other organizations, but receive assistance from the NPS. The oldest national memorial is the Washington Memorial, built in 1884. The newest is the World War One memorial, designated in 2014. National memorials are found in fourteen states and the District of Columbia. Nine national memorials commemorate U.S. Presidents, six commemorate historical figures, and five commemorate wars. The only national memorial in Ohio is at Put-In-Bay, the Perry Memorial. Don't ignore those memorials. Did you know the population of the United States is approximately 319 million? Did you know the world population is approximately 7 billion? Do the math. That means Americans only make up 4.5% of the world's population. Your American citizenship makes you very unique. With all the challenges facing America today, only a fool would give up their American citizenship. We are still the land of opportunity. Your national heritage makes you different from the rest of the world. If you are glad you are a citizen of the United States of America, say, **"Amen!"**

## Personal

On this Memorial Day remember your personal heritage. One of my prized possessions is a copy of an old family photograph that sits on my dresser. I have told you about it in the past. The picture is faded, but I can still make out the images. I pick it up every day and look at it. My Aunt Phyllis, the matriarch of the family, told me it is a photograph of an Adams family reunion. The year must be about 1900. The picture is not unique. You may have one of your own family photograph. Everyone is sitting in front of a farm house. All the men have beards; all the women are wearing long dresses. The oldest are sitting on chairs in the middle. The youngest are sitting on the ground. There is a young boy sitting in front of the oldest man. That young boy is my grandfather, Roger Adams. He was the only one in that picture I ever met. Everyone else in that picture has been gone for years. However, I look at that old faded photograph every day because they are family. The blood that flowed in their veins is still flowing through my veins. Those strangers are my family.

I like to think the core values of the generation in that picture are my core values. Let me just speak the truth. Not a single person in that old photograph is extremely handsome or rich. Not a single Adams ever invented something that changed the world or wrote a book that made a single individual think. I came from a long line of hard-working farmers. However, that does not mean being an Adams is not important. Being an Adams means certain things. First, it means you are a good person. In other words, your word means something. Second, it means you are honest. Third, it means you are loyal. Loyal to your spouse, children, friends and country. Fourth, it means you are a Christian. Adams have always been strong churchmen and believers. We understand Jesus is our only hope of salvation. We always have and I pray we always will. I am proud of my personal heritage, but that is not true for everyone. Sometimes our families inspire us, sometimes our families challenge us to do better. How will you be remembered when you are gone? Martial artist Bruce Lee (1940-1973) once said, "*The key to immortality is living a life worth remembering.*" I don't really have an opinion about Bruce Lee, but I do like that quote. If that quote makes you think, say, "**Amen!**"

The other night was David Letterman's last show. He made the top ten list famous. This is the top ten list of things we are most likely to forget:

1. Forget what you went into a room for
2. Misplacing keys
3. Forgetting things on your grocery shop
4. People's names when you're introducing them
5. Where you put your pen
6. Taking meat out to defrost
7. Forgetting to respond to an email
8. Forgetting to post something
9. Forgetting what you're searching for online or on the computer
10. Forgetting where you parked your car

That is only ten of the fifty things Society Magazine says we forget. They also say we forget three or four facts, items or events per day. That means we forget 1460 things a year!

Some of those forgotten things are just bumps in the road. There are some things in life you should never forget. There are two things you should never forget on Memorial Day weekend. First, never forget the people who died in service to our country. More than 1.3 million Americans have died in service to our country. How will you remember them? Second, never forget your heritage. There is your spiritual heritage. There is your national heritage. There is your personal heritage. Your heritage has modeled you into the person you are today. James Bryce once said, "*Patriotism consists not in waving the flag, but in striving that our country shall be righteous as well as strong.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"