

May 26, 2019

Memorial Day 2019

*Why is Memorial Day Important?*

Joshua 4:1-9

**Opening words:** 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 you will admit Memorial Day is important because it is important to remember those who have died serving our country, say, "**Amen!**" Our scripture reading for today is Joshua 4:1-9. Let me call this message *Why is Memorial Day Important?*

**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.

-----  
Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) was an American Baptist minister and activist. He once said, *"In the end, we will not remember the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."* That quote speaks to me. If that quote speaks to you, say, **"Amen!"**

We are in the fourth chapter of Joshua. After forty years in the wilderness, the people have just crossed the Jordan and entered the Promised Land. It must have been a great day. It was a day they had dreamed of for decades. Do you remember the first thing they did in their new home? No, they didn't have a party. Instead, they built a memorial. God told Joshua to instruct the people to take twelve stones, one representing each tribe, from the middle of the Jordan (verse 2). The tribes do so, and God stops the water from flowing to make their task easier (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). There was nothing unique about that memorial. It is just a pile of rocks, but it served the purpose. It forced the people to remember what God had done for his people. Let me state the obvious. Memorials are important.

Memorial Day is important for that reason. It forces us to remember what is important. Our past is filled with people and events who (and which) need to be remembered. The past has shaped our present and will influence our future. This is the question you must answer today: Why is Memorial Day important? If you are ready to answer that question, say, **"Amen!"**

### **Spiritual Heritage**

Memorial Day is important because it forces us to remember our 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 84% of our world has some form of faith? Did you know only 31.5% 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**

Memorial Day is important because it forces us to remember our 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 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, designed 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 325 million? Did you know the world population is approximately 7.7 billion? Do the math. That means Americans only make up 4.2% of the world's population. Your American citizenship makes you 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**

Memorial Day is important because it is important to 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 photographs. Everyone is sitting in front of a farmhouse. 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 Adams 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's 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!**"

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 Northeast Ohio. Only the air had warmed up, not the water. 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 about remembering the most important things in life, your national, spiritual, and family heritage. I am convinced Martin Luther King Jr. was right. He once said, "*In the end, we will not remember the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"