REMEMBERING THE PAST FOR FREEDOM IN THE FUTURE

Joshua 4:1-7

INTRODUCTION

Scott Kircher, a pastor in Illinois, made a statement that very well fits for our thought on this Memorial Day Sunday. He said that remembering the past is essential for freedom in the future. This is part of what Memorial Day is all about. We are to remember the past for the freedom in the future.

Having memorials and having memorial days is something we see in the Bible. One such occasion was when the children of Israel under the command of Joshua crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land. Joshua 4 tells us about it.

Joshua 4:1-7 NIV When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, (2) "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, (3) 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." (4) So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, (5) 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, (6) to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' (7) 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."

After finally bringing Israel to the brink of entering the Promised Land, Joshua has them set up a memorial to the occasion to help the people of Israel remember this event and to help them keep focused on what God had done to bring them to this place.

Why does he do that? Because he knows they are forgetful.
Forty years earlier, it did not take long for the previous generation to forget what God had done in bringing them out of Egypt and having them cross the Red Sea on dry ground and swallow up the Egyptian army.

They saw these unbelievable miracles and yet they quickly forgot and wanted to go back to Egypt. Because they forgot God and did not remember and continue to follow, the nation suffered.

So, now God has them establish something to help them remember.

WE NEED TO REMEMBER OUR PAST

We need things to help us remember our past as a nation. We too often forget how we got here as a nation and how God was with us in the establishing of this great nation of ours.

This is why Memorial Day is such a great occasion for us to reflect and remember; not only to remember those who gave their all for our nation, but to remember how God’s hand was in the forming and protection of our nation. If we are going to have freedom in the future, it is important that we remember our past.

Now, it is important to realize that America is not God’s chosen people like Israel, nor is it a Christian nation. But it is also important to realize that this nation was founded on Christian principles and it was founded by many who sensed God’s hand in leading them.

Living in this day and age, it is easy to forget that the founding of this country was not so that people could have freedom from religion, but that people could pursue their Christian faith freely.

SOME WITNESSES FROM THE PAST

Let’s listen to the statements of some leaders of America’s past.

William Bradford was one of the men who came over on the Mayflower. He became the second Governor of this colony of people and was one of the authors of what came to be known as the Mayflower Compact, the first governing document of the Plymouth colony and what John Adams called a foundation of our constitution.

Let me read part of this compact to you that was composed in 1620.
Having undertaken, for the Glory of God, and advancements of the Christian faith and honor of our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the Northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents, solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God, and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic.

The main purpose in coming here, according to William Bradford, was the glory of God and to advance the Christian faith. Not the faith of the Church of England or Catholicism or any other denomination, but the Christian faith in general. Men and families came here not to be free from religion, but to freely pursue their Christian faith.

Some 150 years later, when the colonies were seceding from England, there was a continued recognition of the Lord and His Sovereignty over men and this land.

Some of the words from the Declaration of Independence reflect that.

...We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...

...We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these united Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States

...And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

We see that from the time the first inhabitants came over here on the Mayflower to the actual formal founding of our nation, there has been a focus and reliance on the true God of the universe for protection and guidance and purpose.
GOD HAS BEEN THE FOCUS OF THE FOUNDING DOCUMENTS OF OUR NATION

From our founding documents, to the moto on our money, “In God we Trust,” the God of the Bible has been a central focus of this nation’s history. While America is not a Christian nation, in the sense that you have to be a Christian to live here nor should it be, it is a nation that was founded upon Biblical principles and with a focus on a holy God, and reliance on Him for guidance.

I believe that is largely why America has prospered like no other nation on the earth since the time of Christ. And I believe it is imperative that we remember some of the foundational principles of this nation if we are to continue to be a nation that prospers and maintains liberty – which can be defined as freedom with responsibility.

When our country moves away from these foundational principles, it is not liberty that is being maintained, but more of a license, a freedom without responsibility and that cannot last very long indeed.

If we continue to fail to remember how this nation was founded and fail to keep our focus upon the God who has blessed this nation and fail to seek to live in ways that will honor Him and follow Him, we will find that our liberty, will continue to erode and the freedoms that we have come to cherish will continue to evaporate.

OUR FREEDOMS DEPENDS UPON FOLLOWING GOD’S PRINCIPLES

The freedoms of America cannot be maintained apart from a people and laws that follow the principles set down by the God of the universe.

Now, you may think that is my opinion, and it is. But it is not only mine. Many great men from our history would agree.

“It is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor.”
– George Washington

John Adams, our second President, stated it well in an address to the military on October 11, 1798.
He said, “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”


Alexis de Tocqueville, a French philosopher who came to America to see what made America so great in the 1830’s, is credited with saying

I sought for the key to the greatness and genius of America in her harbors...; in her fertile fields and boundless forests; in her rich mines and vast world commerce; in her public school system and institutions of learning. I sought for it in her democratic Congress and in her matchless Constitution.

Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power.

America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.

As quoted in America’s God and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations, p. 205

It is important that Christians remember our foundation and continue to live to the glory of God and set that example of godly living to those who live in this great nation and help others come to Christ, because it is only in relationship with the living God, the only God, that we are going to seek to be good.

CONCLUSION

So, we must remember our past for freedom in the future. If we as Christians, forget our foundations, forget the God whose hand has been upon this nation, then,

the freedoms we have in this country,

the opportunities we have as individuals,

the life we have experienced ourselves in this country,

will not be available to our children.
So on Memorial Day, we remember those who have fought and died for the freedoms we have in this country, but let us also remember that the freedoms we have in this country would not have been possible apart from God’s work in the lives of many of our founders and defenders of this nation. Let us remember that our freedoms will not remain unless God continues His work in our lives and in the lives of our leaders. So let’s pray for our country, our leaders, and let us recommit ourselves to following God’s principles which lead to freedom.

Amen? Amen!