

Text: Heb. 11:30-40

Title: "Memorials of the faithful"

Time: 5/29/2016 am

Place: NBBC

Intro - You may know that Kent, Maureen, and I recently enjoyed a week in Washington D.C. together. As I look back on that week, I have to say that the day we spent visiting Arlington National Cemetery and the memorials and monuments on the national mall was my favorite day. Those places exist to honor the heroes of our nation. I was impressed at how often the God of the Bible was mentioned in those places of remembrance.

The Lincoln Memorial's massive panels included his Gettysburg Address, which we remember especially this weekend in our celebration of Memorial Day. Lincoln explained the importance of that occasion: "We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live."

A second panel in the Lincoln Memorial presents the immortal words of his Second Inaugural Address. The Civil War was in its final days by that time, and Lincoln used the occasion to reflect on the meaning of that conflict. Here is how he described the two sides: "Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. 'Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.' If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His ap-

pointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him?"

As Americans this Memorial Day, we are the beneficiaries of the faithfulness and sacrifice of many great Americans who came before us. We are truly blessed in that sense. But I want us from this passage in Hebrews also to remember a second blessing today. As members of New Boston Baptist Church, we are the beneficiaries of the faithfulness and sacrifice of the men and women in this passage. Just as it is fitting and proper that we remember those who gave their lives that our nation might live, so it is fitting and proper that we remember those who gave their lives to be faithful to the work of the Lord in their day.

We need that remembrance to be faithful to the calling of our day. Note 4 remembrances found in these memorials of the faithful.

I. Remember Rahab - She had faith in a grace that saves (vv. 30-31).

III: On February 22, 1990, *The New York Times* published an article titled, "Believers Score in Battle Over [sic] the Battle of Jericho." The article reported on findings published in *Biblical Archeology Review* from Dr. Bryant Wood, an archeologist from the University of Toronto. Since excavation work done in the 1950's by British archeologists, Jericho had been something of a posterchild in those scientific circles for why the biblical account of Joshua's conquest of Canaan was historically unreliable. This recent work, however, corrected many dating mistakes made by previous researchers.

We now know that Jericho and its walls existed during the time of Joshua's invasion (1400 B.C.); we know that it had a double-walled defense that included housing on the outside wall; we know that the walls were destroyed, except for a small section on the north wall thought to be a slum area where a harlot might live; we know that the city was burned with fire after the wall came down; and we know that much that might have been plundered by the invaders of that time was actually left behind.

Appl: Any of that ring a bell? Well, what *The New York Times* figured out in 1990 God's people have known since the days of Joshua, including the author of our text this morning. We share the faith of the author of this epistle. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they were compassed about seven days" (v. 30).

Our author is not trying to expose the foolishness of scientific conclusions that contradict Scripture, however. He is simply getting to the last example of honorable faithfulness that he is going to deal with in detail. This one is a woman, and she bears an ignominious title, "Rahab the harlot" (v. 31). We are reminded of who and what Rahab was because it is important for us to understand that she had faith in a grace that saves from sin. She perished not because she disbelieved not. She affirmed her faith to the spies in these words: "the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath." She had by faith accepted Yahweh as her God and as the One who could save her from the coming judgment upon her sin and her city.

Why must we remember her faith? Because we need the same salvation. We too have a title - "Kevin, the sinner." We too deserve the judgment of God for our sins. But we also can trust the saving grace of a Savior. Yahweh became a man. His name is Jesus, meaning *Yahweh saves*, for He (Yahweh/the ba-

by Jesus) would save His people from their sins. Have you trusted Jesus to save you from your sin?

II. Remember the victorious – They had faith in a grace that wins (vv. 32-35).

III: This afternoon we will enjoy our fellowship meal and hymn sing together. One of my favorite times of the hymn sing is the testimony time. It is a tremendous blessing to remember the blessings, the times of victory, and the ways in which God helped us win over the attack of our enemy. That is always encouraging.

Appl: Well, it is testimony time in Hebrews 11 in these verses. Think of the kingdoms conquered by the heroes listed here. Think of the way works of righteousness were done, like in the days of the young king Josiah who tried to recover his nation from the devastation of Manasseh before him. Daniel shut the mouths of lions. His friends quenched the power if not the flame of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. Women were blessed to receive children back by resurrection. That would make for a great testimony. Then the author speaks of something even better – the tortured refused to accept release in the hope of a better resurrection.

What do they have in common as those who were victorious for the Lord? They experienced that victory by grace through faith. Though their experiences differed in many respects, they all had in common that phrase in verse 34, "out of weakness were made strong." What must we be to enjoy this victory in the Lord? We must be made strong out of weakness.

Remember the weaknesses of the men listed in verse 32? Like our author mentions there, time fails us too, but let's just take a little time to remember the weakness of Gideon (Jud. 6:12-16; 7:1-7). God's victories are always victories of grace, and that means that they come to the weak. What must we be to have

that victory? We must be made strong out of weakness. We must be made weak and dependent upon the Lord before we are willing to trust Him for the free gift of His victorious strength. In regard to that battle that troubles you, are you weak and dependent upon the Lord, or trusting in your own arm of flesh? Remember the victorious. They had faith in a grace that wins.

III. Remember the fallen – They had faith in a grace that promises (vv. 36-39).

III: A first century work called the *Ascension of Isaiah* includes an earlier Jewish section that deals with a tradition concerning the prophet's martyrdom. Scripture tells us that Manasseh was a brutal king (2 Kings 21:16, "Moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another"). Isaiah would have seen those days at the end of his ministry.

The traditional account tells us of a false prophet Balchlra, who accused Isaiah of contradictions and blasphemy. The story tells us that Isaiah was sawn in two with a wooden saw, and then it continues this way:

"And when Isaiah was being sawn in sunder Balchlra stood up, accusing him, and all the false prophets stood up, laughing and rejoicing because of Isaiah. And Balchlra, with the aid of Mechembechus, stood up before Isaiah, deriding. And Balchlra said to Isaiah: 'Say: "I have lied in all that I have spoken, and likewise the ways of Manasseh are good and right. And the ways also of Balchlra and of his associates are good."' And this he said to him when he began to be sawn in sunder. But Isaiah was (absorbed) in a vision of the Lord . . . . And Balchlra spake thus to Isaiah: 'Say what I say unto thee and I will turn their heart, and I will compel Manasseh and the princes of Judah and the people and all Jerusalem to reverence thee.' And Isaiah answered and said: 'So far as I have utterance, I

say: "Damned and accursed be thou and all thy powers and all thy house. For thou canst not take from me aught save the skin of my body."""

Appl: Verse 36 begins with the words *and others*. In the Greek the word is *heteroi*, and it indicates that our author is beginning to describe a category of faithful heroes that is in some respect different from the victorious heroes he had just described. We see that difference especially clearly in what this paragraph says about their experience with the sword (v. 37, they were slain with the sword vs. v. 34, they escaped the edge of the sword).

In our New Testaments, we remember from the Book of Acts that shortly before Peter miraculously escaped the sword of Herod in answer to the fervent prayers of the Jerusalem church, the apostle James, the Son of Thunder and brother of the apostle John, had been beheaded by that same sword. Here we are called to remember the faith of the fallen, like James and Isaiah.

And in addition to remembering their courage and their worth, our author tells us to remember something else (v. 39). They had not yet received what God had promised. They had faith in a grace that only promises. In Hebrews, this is the Christian faith – the power to live for what in this life has only been promised (Heb. 10:36, "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise"; Heb. 10:13, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth"). Is that our faith? Will we live for things merely promised for the future life to come this week? Or is our focus on the treasures and joys of this life?

IV. Remember our duty – We must have faith in a grace that continues (v. 40).

III: Lincoln applied his memorial of Gettysburg to those who heard him that day: “We do here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain.” Our author does the same with the memorials of the faithful.

Appl: Our author finishes his tour of this great hall of faith with this verse, and as we come down the very last corridor and into the last room of the last exhibit, we find that it is an exhibit all about New Boston Baptist Church. It is as though the museum of faith is not complete without us.

The word *provide* in this verse comes from two Latin words, one meaning *to see* (cp. *video*) and the other meaning *before* (*pro-*). We get our word *providence* from this idea – God’s ability to see before what happens in the future because of His omniscient plan. So what is described here is not really a museum tour, but rather a divine plan through time. Three things are especially important about this plan. (1) It is a plan that is better than our own plan for our lives (*some better thing for us*). (2) It is a plan that calls us to the same faith these others lived with (*that they without us should not be made perfect* [i.e. complete]). And perhaps most importantly of all, it is God’s plan – it is for His glory (*God having provided* [middle voice]).

Conclusion: Because of this, without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). We have studied many lives together in this chapter over the past weeks that were faithful and that pleased God. Now it is our turn. Will we please God or please ourselves? Will we love Him or this present world? Will we faithfully trust the grace that saves in spite of our sin, the grace that wins in spite of our weakness, the grace that promises in spite of our suffering, and the grace that still calls us to duty in Christ today? Will we be faithful?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*