

This morning I wanted to wait until next week to pick up in our study on the spiritual armor. I thought we were going to continue on with a teaching on faith but I feel we should wait. Next week we will look at the sword of the spirit.

I wanted to share with you the video I showed last year. It shows pictures of the American cemeteries around the world where the men and women who gave their lives so that we could enjoy the freedoms we do were laid to rest.

As you watch this see if you can identify what most of the graves have in common.

VIDEO – The Hymn of the Fallen by John Williams showing the cemeteries.

Moving...what did almost all the graves of our fallen service men and women have in common? Crosses. Crosses which are the symbol of Christ's sacrifice and the main symbol of the Christian religion.

As I watched through this video a few times I began to realize that the sacrifices these soldiers made in service of the United States was, so we can worship the God of the Bible in freedom, expressing our faith without fear of persecution.

How could it be any other way? Why would each of the resting places of almost every soldier be marked by a cross if this wasn't the case? What a testimony to the belief of America in Christ and God. Thousands upon thousands of crosses dot the landscapes of foreign countries and in our own country.

It is good that we have Memorial Day, Memorial Weekend isn't it? It is good that we stop and remember and celebrate our country's roots and the sacrifices of those who have won our freedom. It is good that we remember where we were as a nation 70 years ago when most of these soldiers died.

It is good that we remember that for over 200 years it was okay to pray in school, in fact, it was expected. It was okay that a cross was publicly displayed in fact it was encouraged.

It was okay that each and every monument and building that celebrates the founding of our country has in God in trust or something similar on it. It was okay that our court houses displayed copies of the Ten Commandments or something else from God's Holy Word.

It is good that we remember these days and those who fought for these beliefs. It is so very important that as we move into the future we remember the past. Memorial Day helps us stay tuned in to the part of the journey that got us to the place of blessing where we are now.

This morning we do honor and remember those who sacrificially gave us their lives so we can have the pursuit of religion, of happiness, of our way of life.

But in the church this morning I wanted us to also honor a few of those individuals who have given, in the mission of the gospel, their lives so that we can experience salvation and eternal life with God in heaven.

Of course we need to begin with the sacrifice of Jesus, the Son of God.

Look with me at Peter's sermon in **Acts 2:22-24**, "**Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know – this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.**"

Let's look at the prophetic writings of Isaiah written 700 years before Jesus was born.

Isaiah 53...Markoe, I will have someone stand and read this but please put it up on the screen.

This last part of the last verse is what we celebrate isn't it? We celebrate all of Isaiah 53 but to know and experience the fact that He bore the sins of many and interceded for the transgressors. This means the world to us doesn't? It is because of Jesus' sacrifice that we have the blessed life we live and the eternal life that we look for.

As we move on thinking about the individuals who sacrificed their lives for us there was John the Baptist who was beheaded. Then there were the apostles and disciples of Jesus. These men and women accepted the fact that Jesus was the Son of God and that He brought salvation to each man, woman and child that would accept His sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin.

Because they believed so strongly in Jesus and the salvation that was available to the people, they were willing to have their lives spent and sacrificed sharing the message of Jesus.

Most of the apostles died as martyrs, killed by crucifixion, stoning or by other means. There was Stephen in Acts 7 who was preaching and teaching but then was stoned.

There were Christians who were thrown into the coliseum where they were killed by lions, bears and other wild beasts who were starved then released into the arena. By their deaths they were part of the movement of Christianity moving from generation to generation.

Then there was Paul. Look with me at some of the things Paul went through to share the Good News of Jesus. He was speaking to the church in Corinth about some of the things he went through in comparison to some of the other people who were sharing the gospel.

2 Corinthians 11:23-27, “²³I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,

²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.”

All these things Paul endured so he could share the good news of Jesus Christ. In the end he was beheaded by Nero.

There is a book called the Fox book of Martyrs. It traces the persecution of Christians and a number of the individuals who died making sure the gospel reached as many people as possible.

Down throughout the history of the church there have been numerous men and women who stood up for Jesus and the good news of salvation and were killed for it. And down throughout your history there are men and women who shared the love of Jesus from generation.

I am thankful for a man, a preacher I never met. Bob Hannah. He was a pastor in my home town and he called on my parents when they were young, led them to the Lord and my parents starting attending church. When I came along I was raised in the knowledge and love of Christ through them and the local church. I am thankful for the faithful attendance of many men and women who kept the doors of the church open so I could be introduced to Jesus.

How about in your life? Who is there that you can be thankful for? What parent, grandparent, Sunday School teacher, preacher was faithful to the Lord, sharing Jesus with you?

This morning, I wanted to give thanks for those men and women who sacrificed their lives so we could have the freedoms we have but I also I us to take a moment of prayer, giving thanks for Jesus, the apostles and all those God used throughout the last couple thousand years to make sure you had the opportunity to receive the salvation Jesus is offering.

Let's pray