

NEITHER COUNT I MY LIFE DEAR UNTO MYSELF

INTRODUCTION: Here we are—the day before **Memorial Day!** Just like Mother’s Day...and Father’s Day...and the Fourth of July...and Labor Day...and Veterans Day; “Memorial Day” is **not** a “**holiday**” that revolves around a **Biblical event**. And because of that, some pastors choose **not to “switch gears”** from what they are preaching on to specifically talk about Memorial Day.

I seriously considered doing the same thing and going back to Colossians 1 again this morning but really felt led to have a Memorial Day themed message. Why? **Three** reasons:

1) First, my friend Tom Theama had given me a heads up that he was going to be here today. Even though I didn’t ask him, my guess is that he is probably **expecting to hear** something military-related today 😊!

2) Second, because it is easy for us to overlook the fact that **the reason we can gather** in the Lord’s **house** on the Lord’s **Day** with God’s Word in **our hand** is because we are a **free nation**.

And one of the reasons we are a **free nation** is because there have been **men and women throughout** the history of our nation who have been willing to not only **serve** their country but have also been willing to **give up their lives**—if necessary—to keep us free. **Memorial Day** is meant to honor those who made **that sacrifice**—and it is obviously good for us to remember that.

3) Third, just as there are those that are willing to lay down their lives for **their country**, God’s Word teaches us that we should be willing to lay down our lives **for the cause of Christ!** In fact, Jesus told His disciples in John 16:2 “They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that **whosoever killeth you** will think that he doeth God service.” And that happened, didn’t it?

--John the Baptist literally lost his head (Mt 14 and Mark 6).

--Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7).

--And James—brother to John and one of the original 12—was killed with a sword (Acts 12).

But even though **we know**—in our heads—that **we should be as committed to serving Christ** as soldiers are to **serving our country**, we need to be reminded of that, don’t we? And so today I felt led to point out some comparisons between **a service member** who is willing to die for their country—and a **child of God** who is willing to die for Christ.

Please take your Bibles and turn to Acts 20. Before we look at some comparisons between service members and servants of God, I want to first point out... **1. The context**

Notice what it says in vs 16. If we were to study the 19 chapters before this, we would learn that this is Paul’s **third** missionary journey. He is obviously traveling by ship and is in a hurry because he wants to get to Jerusalem before the day of Pentecost. According to Dr. Eckhard Schnabel’s commentary, the Pentecost referred to in vs 16 would have occurred on May 29th, AD 57.

Now vs 17. Paul lands at Miletus and sends a message to Ephesus—via a messenger—to have the **elders of the church** come to where he is. The “elders” of the church were **the leaders**—the pastors—and the distance from Miletus to Ephesus—on the route they would have traveled—was approximately 62 miles and would have taken roughly 4 days each way. (Schnabel’s Commentary on Acts, footnote 27 on page 838).

And then—in verses 18-38—we have this wonderful **farewell address** that Paul gives to these pastors. I’m not going to go through it verse by verse, but we are going to look at some of it as we make our comparison between service members and servants of God.

Drop down to **vs 20** and follow along as I read verses 20 and 21. **What** does Paul say he had been doing when he was with them? He had **preached** the gospel, right? **Where?** Both publicly—and privately.

Why? Because that is what Christians are **supposed to do!**

So...like a good service member, servants of God are to... **2. Carry out their Commander’s commands**

We obviously don't have time to elaborate on all the **commands** given to men and women *in the Armed Forces*. And we certainly don't have time to look at all the **commands** given to us as *God's children* in the Bible!

Instead, we are going to focus just on the one that Paul mentions here: **proclaiming the message** of "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

--Is that the message our Commander **wants us to share**? Yes; it is!

--How do **we know**? Because **Jesus gives us** what is commonly referred to as "The Marching Orders of the Church" **five** different times! Rather than having you turn to each one, I have them for you on your outline.

A. The command to share the gospel

Mt 28:18-20 was spoken by Jesus to the 11 after He had risen from the dead. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power [authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth. ¹⁹**Go ye therefore, and teach [make disciples of] all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰**Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you**: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

The command was for the disciples to **share** God's Word with the unsaved, **disciple** new believers in the ways of Christ after they became believers, then **teach them** to do what **they had done**—share the message and disciple (train) other new believers!

Mark 16:15. Again, this was spoken to the disciples after He had risen from the dead. "And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and **preach the gospel** to every creature."

Luke 24:46-47. Once again, these words were spoken by Jesus **after He had risen** from the dead. Why do I **keep bringing that up**—and why is it important? Because that means it would have been some of the **last things** Jesus told them! It would have been new...and **fresh in their minds**...and not easily forgotten!

"And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: ⁴⁷And that **repentance and remission of sins should be preached** in His name among all nations,"

John 20:21 "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as **my Father hath sent me, even so send I you**." And—like in Matthew, Mark, and Luke—Jesus **spoke this after He rose** from the dead.

The same is true of **Acts 1:8** "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: **and ye shall be witnesses unto me** both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." It is impossible to miss the fact that one of the **main commands** of our Commander is to share the message of who Jesus is...and why He came...and that people need to **repent of their sins and trust Jesus alone** for the forgiveness of their sins!

B. Obedience to the command to share the gospel

Not only was the command given, we see **multiple people** carrying out that command in the book of Acts. **Peter did** in Acts 2:38 "**Repent**, and be baptized..."

--And in Acts 3:19 "**Repent** ye therefore, and be converted..."

--And in Acts 5:20-21 "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people **all the words of this life**. ²¹And when they heard that, they **entered into** the temple early in the morning, **and taught**."

But Peter wasn't the only one! Please mark your spot and turn to Acts 8.

--Acts 8:1 "And Saul was consenting unto his [Stephen's] death. There was great persecution...and the believers were scattered because of the persecution—except the apostles.

--Acts 8:4 "Therefore **they that were scattered abroad** went every where **preaching the word**."

Who went everywhere preaching the word? **The new believers!**

--Acts 8:5 "Then **Philip** went down to the city of Samaria, and **preached Christ** unto them."

--Acts 8:35 "Then **Philip** opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, **and preached unto him Jesus**."

To recap, the command to preach the message of salvation was given by Jesus to the 11 (Judas was dead). The 11 **obeyed the command** to share that message and taught Philip—and new believers—how to share the same message. Those that heard the message did the same thing: they shared it with others and taught them how to share it with others.

What about **us**? We are to be **doing the same thing**—sharing the message with others, then **teaching them** how to share the message with others! We know we are **supposed to be doing it**—but are we doing it?

Am I—as your Pastor—**equipping you** for the work of the ministry like Ephesians 4:12 says I’m supposed to?

In one sense, I could say that when you hear me **explain God’s Word**, you are learning how to **study** it and **understand** it. I can also make the argument that every time you hear me **preach the gospel** in a sermon, you are learning how to share it with others.

But...**public proclamation** and **private conversations** are different, aren’t they? Paul did both—publicly and from house to house. So I have to admit that as your Pastor, I need to improve in the area of helping you **know how** to share the gospel with others.

But what about **you**? Are you **willing** to learn—and **wanting** to learn? If we’re honest, we have to admit that we are so **easily distracted** from what God declares is important—and so **quickly satisfied** with that which is **not important!**

So in comparison 1, we see that just as a good soldier **carries out the commands** of their Commander, we as servants of God should be carrying out the commands **of our Commander**.

Not only that, we also need to be... **3. Convinced of the cause**

Once again, time does not allow me to discuss the **military side** of this and whether or not we should be involved in this or that conflict. But I can say this: If a service member is willing to die for their **country**—and/or a **fellow soldier**—it’s pretty safe to say that they have to be **convinced of the cause!**

What about us as believers? **Are we convinced** of the cause? In other words, are we persuaded **of the necessity** of sharing the good news—not just because we are **commanded** to—but because the unsaved **desperately need to hear it?** The disciples were convinced of that need—and we should be, too!

We’re in Acts 8; turn back to Acts 4.

We know from Acts 4:8 that **Peter** is talking—and we know from vs 10 that he is talking about **Jesus**. Notice what he says about Jesus in **Acts 4:12** “Neither is there salvation **in any other**: for there is **none other name** under heaven given among men, whereby **we must** be saved.”

--Can we be saved from the penalty of our sins **apart from** Jesus? **No!** Salvation is not in **any other person!** That means salvation cannot be brought about **by Mary**—or by **a priest**, right? But it also means salvation cannot be brought about **by you and your efforts!** **None other name means none other name!**

How convinced **were the disciples** of this truth? So convinced that when **commanded** by the authorities to **stop sharing** the message, they disobeyed the authorities! We see that in verses 18-20.

--Now Acts 5. Their **refusal to obey lands them in prison**; we see that in vs 18. But in vs 19, the angel of the Lord **breaks them out** of prison! Notice now vs 20. What were they **told to do?** Go speak in the temple.

--What **did they do?** Vs 21 “...they entered into the temple early in the morning, **and taught**.”

--**What** did they **teach?** Vs 20 says “all the words of this life”—meaning the way to have eternal life!

--**When** did they teach this message? It wasn’t until the next morning, but it was basically **right after they got out of prison** for preaching the message that got them thrown into prison!

--**What** happens next? Notice what it says in vss 27-29. Peter’s response—in essence—was saying, ‘Our “boss” outranks **you**—and we are going to obey **Him** rather than you!’

--Now Acts 10. Peter is sharing the message of Jesus to a group of people at the home of Cornelius. We know it’s about Jesus because vs 40 says “Him God raised up the third day...”

--Notice what Peter says about Jesus in vss 42. “And He [Jesus] commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify [declare earnestly] that it is He [Jesus] which God has ordained to be the Judge of the quick [the living] and the dead.”

In other words, Jesus commanded us to share the message that **God has made Jesus the Judge** over everyone!

--Now vs 43. "To Him [Jesus] give all the prophets witness, that through His name [the name of Jesus] whosoever believeth in Him [Jesus] shall receive [be given; **not earn**] remission [forgiveness] of sins." So Jesus is not only **the Judge**—He is also **the One through whom forgiveness comes!** The disciples were convinced of the message that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life—and that no one comes to the Father but through Him! What about us? Are we as convinced as they were?

We have the wonderful promise of **Romans 10:13** "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." But we also have the **solemn reminder** of Romans 10:14!

Romans 10:14 "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have **not believed?** and how shall they believe in Him of whom they **have not heard?** and how shall they **hear without a preacher?**"

We need to get the message out, don't we?

Back to where we started, Acts 20. Just like military service members, servants of Christ need to carry out the commands of our Commander—and be convinced of His cause.

We also need to be... **4. Conscious of the conflict**

Do military members sometimes **forget** they are in a war? Usually **not during** the heat of the battle, right? **But...**sometimes when **things are quiet**, they "let their guard down"—which can lead to disastrous results!

The same is true for us—and that's why God warns us through Peter in **I Peter 5:8** "Be sober, be vigilant; because your **adversary the devil, as a roaring lion**, walketh about, seeking **whom he may devour:**"

Paul was obviously **conscious of the opposition** he faced. Notice what it says in vss 22-23 (read).

--To be "bound in the Spirit" in this context means to be **constrained** and **compelled**. He was "driven from within" to go to Jerusalem; he was convinced that that is what he needed to do.

--And even though Paul didn't know exactly **what would happen to him** once he got to Jerusalem, he knew that in every city along the way, "bonds" [imprisonments] and "afflictions" [hardships] abide [await] me.

Insanity is sometimes defined as doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results. Is Paul insane for traveling from city to city with the same message, knowing that nothing but trouble awaited him? No; he's not insane!

But he is definitely... **5. Committed until the completion of their course**

Countless stories have been told—and written—about the bravery some military personnel have demonstrated in **completing their mission**. The same can certainly be said of the Apostle Paul!

We see that in vs 24. "But none of these things move me..." **What things?** Imprisonments and hardships. Paul was no stranger to being thrown in prison—and being treated poorly.

--According to Acts 14:19, Paul was stoned—presumably to death—and drug out of the city.

--According to Acts 16:23, Paul was severely whipped—then cast into prison.

--And in chapter 18, he is arrested and brought before the governor of Achaia.

"But none of these things move me..." The hardship and suffering that he had faced in the past—and the certainty of more trouble ahead—did not **get him off track**. He did not **"throw in the towel;"** he did not "put in his paperwork" **for retirement!**

How could Paul do that? How could he not be **knocked off course** by all the suffering? How could he "keep on keeping on" in spite of all the hardships? Because he didn't count his life "dear" unto himself!

Living was not Paul's number one priority—**living for Christ** was! And if **living for Christ** meant **dying for Christ**, then so be it! His life **was not his**—it belonged to the One that loved him and gave Himself for him!

And he didn't want to **just finish** his course—**the path and plan that God had for him**—he wanted to finish it **with joy!** He wanted to "leave it all on the field," so to speak.

And he did, didn't he? Roughly 9 years later—**alone in a prison** in Rome and knowing he will soon **be executed**—Paul writes a letter to Timothy. Notice part of what it says: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my ... [ask] **what's the next word... course**, I have kept the faith: ⁸Henceforth there is laid up for me a

crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, **but unto all them also that love His appearing.**" (II Timothy 4:7-8)

Paul did not count his life dear unto himself. What about **us**? Is that our **mindset**? Is that our **heartbeat**? How we **finish** matters, doesn't it?

A soldier who willingly gives up his or her life for their country is how we are supposed to be as servants of Christ!

- We need to follow the commands of our Commander
- We need to be convinced of Christ's cause
- We need to be conscious of the conflict
- And we need to be committed until the completion of our course

Are you? Am I?

So what would God have us do with what we've heard this morning?

1. First, have you received the message of salvation for **yourself**? Jesus is the Judge—and you will stand before Him some day. But He is not only the Judge—He is also the One **who can save you** from the penalty of your sins! Have you come to Him in repentance—and faith?

--Jesus is the way to be forgiven—and the way to the Father.

--"Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved!"

2. Second, are you carrying out the command of your Commander to share the good news?

--Ask God to burden you for souls

--Ask God to give you boldness

--And ask God to help your life be dear **unto Him**—not unto you!