

Remember the Fallen

Sermon by Andy Sochor

Text: Matthew 24:9

Memorial Day is a time to remember those who died while serving in the armed forces. It is good to appreciate the sacrifices that helped make it possible for us to live a quiet and peaceful life (1 Timothy 2:2). The New Testament also tells of some who died, not for a country, but for the kingdom of Christ. In this lesson, we are going to remember these martyrs and consider some lessons from their deaths.

Stephen (Acts 7:54-60)

- Direct result of his preaching – he presented a history of the Jewish nation; in doing so, he condemned the leaders and their fathers (Acts 7:51-53); if we suffer, it must be for the cause of Christ (1 Peter 4:15-16); no other reason to target Stephen (Acts 6:3, 5)
- A future convert participated – his killers laid their robes at Saul’s feet (Acts 7:58; 8:1); Saul was later converted (Acts 9:1-6, 17-18); anyone can be saved (1 Timothy 1:12-16)
- Attitude of forgiveness – shown in his last words (Acts 7:60); same attitude of Jesus (Luke 23:34); if we want God to forgive us, we must be willing to forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15)

James (Acts 12:1-3)

- Civil authorities may target the church in general (cf. Acts 8:1, 3) – if this happened, would they identify us? is there evidence? (Acts 2:42, 46; Hebrews 10:25)
- Death can come quickly – persecution may include long imprisonment, but it seems James died quickly; life is uncertain (James 4:14); we must always be ready (Hebrews 10:35-36)
- Persecution may be viewed favorably by the public – this pleased the Jews (Acts 12:3); we should strive to be at peace with others (Romans 12:18), but this is not always “possible”; do not be surprised if the world hates you (John 15:18-19)

Antipas (Revelation 2:12-13)

- Hold fast to the Lord’s name – be willing to confess Christ before others (Matthew 10:32-33); hold fast to His word in a wicked world (Philippians 2:15-16), even if it means suffering (2 Timothy 1:8)
- Be faithful until death (Revelation 2:10) – Smyrna was warned about persecution, but it was already in Pergamum; have the attitude of Paul, ready to die for Christ if necessary (Acts 20:24; 21:13)
- Persecution does not remove the guilt of sin – despite persecution, the church needed to repent (Revelation 2:14-16); not to ignore NT rules of fellowship (Ephesians 5:11), even if we have a common adversary (persecutors)

Unnamed Martyrs (Revelation 6:9-11)

- We do not endure persecution so others will remember us – most martyrs are forgotten (unnamed); we are not seeking the praise of men (Galatians 1:10); even if no one knows, God knows (Revelation 14:13; Psalm 116:15)
- Desire for justice to be done – it is just for God to punish our persecutors (2 Thessalonians 1:6); “spirits of just men made perfect” (Hebrews 12:23, KJV), having a perfect sense of justice (what is right)
- God will punish the wicked in His time – martyrs were eager to be avenged (Revelation 6:10); “a little while longer” (Revelation 6:11); we look forward to God’s appointed day (Acts 17:31)

Conclusion

- We must be willing to take up our cross and follow Christ (Luke 9:23) – for some, this has meant giving up their lives for Christ; it could mean the same for us someday
- No matter what is in store for our future, we must be willing to surrender our lives for the Lord – if we will do this, we will have something far better in the next life