

THEY BEING DEAD YET SPEAK

INTRODUCTION: In April 1863, in Columbus, Mississippi, after decorating graves of her two sons who died representing their beloved south, an elderly woman walked to two mounds of dirt at the corner of the cemetery to place memorial flowers there also. "**What are you doing?**" friends shouted, "Those are the graves **of two Union soldiers.**" Softly that compassionate mother said, "*I know. I also know that somewhere in the North, a mother or a young wife mourns **for them as we do for ours.***"

Some suggest that that loving deed set in motion our celebration which was first known as Decoration Day, later changed to Memorial Day. We honor those who have died in service to their country once a year, but their sacrifice is evident every single Sunday of the year! Why do I say that? Because their willingness to serve—to the point of even giving up their very lives—has allowed us to remain a free nation. With that freedom comes the right to meet together with other believers on the Lord's Day with God's Word in our hand. That is not true of every nation and, truth be told, we aren't guaranteed that that right will be preserved here in America.

I want us to look at this morning a passage of Scripture where two men who lost their lives in service for their country were honored. Please turn to II Samuel 1:17-27. The Bible says of Abel in Hebrews 11:4 that "he being dead yet speaketh." That does not mean that Abel literally speaks to us from the grave in a voice we can hear. It does mean, however, that what is recorded of Abel teaches us things. The same can be said of Saul and Jonathan—they being dead yet speak. As we look at this passage in more detail, there are reminders from the life and death of these two men that apply to all of us—whether we have served in the military or not.

1. We will be remembered here

Notice again verse 17. David gives us here a lamentation—a poem or song to express his deep grief and sorrow over the loss of these two men. Although what is said in particular about them does not apply specifically to us, the fact remains that **all of us** will be **remembered by someone**.

I've mentioned a couple of times that I have a news "app" on my phone. Late last week an actor by the name of Keanu Reeves was on Stephen Colbert's *The Late Show*. I didn't watch the show—nor any of the late-night talk shows, for that matter—but the next day a headline came up on my phone that said something to the effect of "Keanu Reeve's Perspective on Life and Death is an Inspiration to Us All." I'm not a movie buff and don't know much about the guy, but was curious enough as to what he had to say that I clicked on the article.

Reeves was asked by Colbert "What do you think happens when we die?" Here was what is hailed as his "deep and profound" response: "I know the ones who love us will miss us." Colbert, I guess, was speechless and the crowd is said to have given a collective "awwhhhh..." I shared this with my wife and said, "I'm not sure if Graham would come up with that at 3, but I'm pretty sure Sophia would at 5!" Now maybe I'm too dumb to understand how "deep" that statement is, but he does illustrate the point I'm making—all of us will be remembered by someone. **What** will be remembered?

A. How we lived

David rehearsed in this song some things about the life of both Saul and Jonathan. Notice verse 23—"Saul and Jonathan were **lovely and pleasant in their lives...**"

--They were both mighty warriors

--v 19 "how are the mighty fallen"

--v 22 "...the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty."

--v 23 "...they were stronger than lions."

--v 25 "How are the mighty fallen in the midst of battle!"

--v 27 "How are the mighty fallen..."

--Saul as a king had also provided fine things for many of the women of Israel

--v 24 "...clothed you with scarlet...other delights...ornaments of gold upon your apparel
--In verse 26, we see Jonathan was remembered for being a great and loyal friend

Just as Saul and Jonathan will be remembered, you and I will also be remembered. What will people remember about **you**?

--Saul and Jonathan were remembered because of what kind of warriors they were; some of us will be remembered by how we did our jobs

--Saul was remembered for what he provided; some of us will be remembered for what we provided—or failed to provide

--Jonathan was remembered for being a great friend; some of us will be remembered for being a good friend—or a not-so-good friend

--What will people remember about you as a son or daughter...husband or wife...dad or mom...grandpa or grandma? More importantly than all these—at least in my opinion—is what will people remember about your **relationship with God**. Will they remember you as being committed and faithful—or someone who “halted between two opinions” like the children of Israel with Elijah on Mount Carmel?

Not only will we be remembered by how we lived, some of us will be remembered for...

B. How we died

V 23 says “Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided...” I realize this is rather morbid—and may possibly bring up some unpleasant memories—but the truth is that we sometimes remember more about how a person died rather than how they lived. Some of you have lost loved ones in horrible accidents. My step-sister married quite young and her husband was killed not long after they were married. I don’t remember anything about his life, but I know he died in a car accident.

I had a close co-worker who was killed by her husband—and he had the audacity to come to my office the next day to tell me she was missing and ask me if I had seen her! I did not know that he had killed her when he came to my office, but it is still kind of weird to think about. A different co-worker’s husband died while driving drunk.

Not sure if you are aware of this or not, but the number of people who are dying at National Parks is on the rise. Why? Because of people falling while taking selfies with their phones! Although we don’t know when we will die—or how we will die—we can certainly make sure it does not happen because we have alcohol or drugs in our bodies or because we fell off a cliff while taking a picture!

We will be remembered here for how we lived—and we may be remembered for how we died. It is also safe to say that we will be remembered...

C. Inaccurately

V 23 says “Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives...”

“Lovely” usually means “beautiful, pretty, attractive, good-looking, appealing, handsome...” That is not the idea here, however. “Lovely” here means “loved/beloved.” In other words, David was reminding the people of Israel through this lamentation that Saul and Jonathan were loved; they were beloved.

Were Saul and Jonathan loved by the people? They most certainly were!

Shortly after Saul became king, the Ammonites surrounded Jabesh-Gilead. The men of Jabesh said unto the commander of the Ammonites that they would make an agreement with them and serve them instead of being killed in battle by them. The Ammonites said “Deal—under one condition: we are going to “thrust out all your right eyes.” The men of Jabesh sent word to Saul; Saul gathered up an army of 330,000 men and routed the Ammonites. (I Sam 11:1-5, 11). Did the men of Jabesh love Saul? They certainly did!

Was Saul loved by David, though? Probably not!

--In I Samuel 18 and 19, we see Saul—or servants sent by Saul—trying to kill David at least 12 times! (I Sam 18:11 (2); 13, 17, 20-25; I Sam 19:1, 10, 11, 20, 21 (2), 23)

--Why was David not in this battle? Because Saul was constantly hunting for him to take his life! Had David been in this battle, would the outcome have been different? We don't know, do we?

Another thing we don't know is if David was "playing politics" by heaping praise on Saul so he could win the people over to himself now that Saul was dead. I don't think he was. Instead, David was reminding the people of the good Saul had done for them as a nation—even though he wasn't good toward David.

We have the correct memory of Saul and Jonathan because it is recorded in God's Word. Will people always have the correct memory of us? Probably not because people are forgetful.

We will be remembered here for how we lived—and it is possible we may be remembered for how we died. More than likely we will be remembered inaccurately and, lastly, we will be remembered here....

D. Temporarily

We have a permanent memory of Saul and Jonathan—and they being dead yet speak—because God recorded their lives in His Word. That won't happen to any of us because God's Word is complete—He won't be adding a chapter—or even a few verses—about you or I! Even if we became famous enough to have a building or a road named after us, the memory of us will be temporary here on this earth—it will someday be forgotten.

Joseph was famous in Egypt—God used him to spare the entire nation from starvation—yet we are reminded in Exodus 1:8 that "...there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph."

To sum it all up, people will **remember** things about you that you wish they wouldn't, they will **forget** things about you that you wish they'd remember, and as the people who remember you **die off** one by one, so will the memory of you! Wow, Pastor—thanks a lot for the depressing reminders!

It **would be** depressing if there was only *this* life. There is a *next* life, though, and whereas memories are inaccurate and temporary **here**, they are perfectly accurate and eternal **there**. That is both the good news—and the bad news—depending on "where" we spend the next life!

Just as we are remembered here,

2. We will be remembered there

But where is **there**? There are two places of eternal destiny—heaven and hell. Do I believe in a literal hell? Yes, I do, because Jesus taught about a literal hell!

Matthew 25:41 "Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into **everlasting fire**, prepared for the devil and his angels:" First, there is an...

A. Eternal remembrance of sin

Although this verse doesn't say there is an eternal **remembrance of sin**, it does say there is an **eternal punishment** for it. It is *everlasting* fire—not *temporary* fire. For the punishment to be everlasting, the sin has to be remembered for the same length of time—forever. If the sin was forgotten—or somehow paid for after spending a certain amount of time in hell—there would be no need for an everlasting punishment.

Someone might argue and say, 'It says the **fire** is everlasting—not that people will be in it forever.' Here's my response; please **turn** to Revelation 20:10. How long will the devil and beast and false prophet be tormented in the lake of fire? FOR EVER AND EVER! If the devil is tormented forever in the lake of fire, it only makes sense that the people cast into the same place will also be there forever!

Not only is there an eternal remembrance of sin in the next life, there is also an...

B. Accurate remembrance of sin

David in his tribute to Saul and Jonathan left out a lot about Saul, didn't he? God will not leave anything out when it comes to remembering sin. We're in Revelation 20; notice verses 11-12 "...and the books were opened...and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." God is perfect and infinite—we are not. The books were opened not to help God remember, but to *show us* what God knew—and what we had forgotten!

Think of what is written down: every curse word....and hurtful word...and every word of gossip
--every envious thought...and lustful thought...and proud thought...and unkind thought
--every evil act you ever did—and every kind act you should have done but failed to do....
--every instance of disobeying God's commandments

No wonder the writer of Hebrews wrote in Hebrews 10:31: "It is a fearful thing—a terrible thing—to fall into the hands of the living God."

Time does not permit us to look at being remembered in heaven—we will look at that this afternoon. What I want to consider in the time we have left is this:

3. We can rewrite—now—what will be remembered about us

What can we re-write? First, we can re-write...

A. What men will remember about us in this life

We noted that last week when we talked about John Mark. Paul gave up on him and didn't want to take him on the 2nd missionary journey but Barnabas did. Their disagreement was so intense that they split up—Barnabas took Mark; Paul took Silas. John Mark changed what Paul thought of him, however, by becoming a committed, faithful servant of God. Seventeen years later Paul said, 'Bring Mark, he is profitable to me for the ministry.'

Paul himself rewrote, so to speak, what people would remember about his life. In Acts 9:1-2 we see Saul—who was also known as Paul (Acts 13:9)—was as anti-Christian as you could be. "Breathing out threatenings and slaughter" is a desire to have them killed—just like Stephen was in Acts 7. In verses 13 and 14 we see that Paul's reputation against Christians was well known.

Galatians 1:23 "But they heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which he once destroyed."

Let's pause here for a moment. I asked this earlier, but I want to ask it again: If you died tonight, what will people remember about your life—especially your relationship with God. Are you pleased with what they will remember? If not, you can change that—you can rewrite it—starting today. John Mark did, so did Paul.

Not only can we rewrite what men will remember of us from **this life**, we can also rewrite...

B. What God will remember about us in the next life

What will God remember about you in your next life? He will remember your sin—accurately and eternally like we already talked about—or He will remember your Savior. We're still here in Acts 9, let's consider the life of Saul. If he would have died in verse 1 or 2 or 3, God would have remembered his sin and he would have been separated from God forever in hell.

But in Acts 9:3 there is a light from heaven; in verse 4 he is confronted by Christ and asked, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" In verse 5, Saul asks who is speaking, "And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.'"

Just as an ox finds it painful to kick against sharp sticks, Paul was finding it painful to fight against God convicting him of his sin. And so he gives up and bows both his knees and his heart to Christ and says, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Paul met Jesus and was born again; verse 20 says “straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.” What did Paul believe about Christ?

We could literally turn to dozens of verses, here is one:

Galatians 2:16 “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

How is a person justified—declared righteous in God’s sight? **Not** by the works of the law—not by things that we do. Paul states that 3 different times in one verse! He doesn’t just give us the “not;” he also gives us the “here’s how”—by putting our faith in Christ. Have you done that? Is Christ your Savior—or are you yet in your sin?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

1. Child of God, are you happy with how people will remember you? If not, start rewriting—today—what will be remembered about you.
2. More important than what people will remember about you, what will **God** remember about you? The question is not if you are **good or bad**—we are all bad; we are all sinful; we all need to be forgiven. The question is “What are you counting on to **get forgiveness** from God?” Jesus is our only hope. Do you have Him? If not, why not put your faith and trust in Him today?