

THE GRAVITY OF GRAVE CONSIDERATION (LESSONS FROM THE GRAVE)

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**. Instead, it pertains to the **history of our nation**—specifically the remembrance of those who **lost their** lives while **servicing our country** during a time of war.

It was first known as **Decoration Day** and began after the Civil War. According to historian Jay Winik, Americans revived a tradition dating back to the ancient Greeks and Romans when they brought **bouquets of flowers** currently in bloom to **Abraham Lincoln’s** grave in Springfield, Illinois. Soon after, it included **placing flowers** on the graves of Soldiers who died fighting the **Civil War**, then gradually expanded to recognize all those who died in **all our nation’s conflicts**. (WIARNG Memorial Day Speech, 2021).

As I thought about **decorating graves** for those who died serving our country, I was struck by 3 thoughts:

First, to the best of my knowledge, decorating military graves is not something that **I personally have done**. I’ve visited some of the more famous military cemeteries in the U.S.—Arlington National Cemetery and Gettysburg National Cemetery—but not during Memorial Day or a similar military holiday.

My second thought was this: not everyone who has lost their life in the service of our country **has a grave to be decorated** or visited. Why? Because their body was never found!

That led to a **third** thought, although kind of a **strange** one: I began to think about **graves** that are spoken about in the Bible! As I parked on that for a while, I was struck by two more thoughts:

1) How many different **types of graves**—and/or deaths—are referred to in the Bible.

2) How similar the graves of some **service members** are with graves mentioned in the Bible!

About now, some of you are thinking “Pastor has gone off the deep end.”

On a more serious note, **graves**—and death—are not something we enjoy **thinking** about or **talking** about; yet they are **mentioned quite often** in the Bible—probably more than we realize. And **because** they are mentioned often, it is obviously something God **wants us to think about**. The title of my message this morning: “*The Gravity of Grave Consideration.*”

What I want to do this morning is to tie the national holiday we are commemorating this weekend—Memorial Day—with some of the graves mentioned in the Bible.

Let’s consider first... **1. General truths about military graves**

A. Soldiers on both sides have graves

The sad reality of war is that “Soldiers”—I’m using the word in the **generic** sense—on both sides are killed. There are some notable exceptions in the Bible—none of God’s people were killed when Pharaoh’s army was drowned in the Red Sea, and we don’t read of any deaths of God’s people in connection with the battle of Jericho.

Generally speaking, though, there are deaths **on both sides**—regardless of how “right” one side might be compared to the other. That is true in **post-Bible history**—think **Civil War** and the **two World Wars**—and it is true in **history** as recorded in the **Bible**.

Please turn to II Samuel 11, beginning with verse 17 (read). Notice “and there fell some of the people **of the servants of David...**” In other words, some of God’s people died in this battle.

In vs 18-21, we see General Joab’s **instruction** to the messenger that was to bring the news of the battle to King David and in vs 22-24 we see the **messenger** delivering that message. Now v 25...

II Samuel 11:25 “Then David said unto the messenger, Thus shalt thou say unto Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, **for the sword devoureth one as well as another**: make thy battle more strong against the city, and overthrow it: and encourage thou him.”

David **spoke truth** regarding the reality of war—the sword “devours” on one side as well as the other. I can’t help but think that David would have answered **differently, though**, if **Uriah**—one of his faithful men—**had not been killed** because that is what David wanted!

Yes, you **heard** right! David **wanted Uriah killed** to hide the adulterous affair David had with Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba—and so that David could **take her** to be **his** wife!

It is noteworthy that David wanted to **encourage** Joab—“Let not this thing **displease** thee”—but we see in the end of **v 27** “But the thing that David had done **displeased** the LORD” (same Hebrew word). David didn’t want **Joab** displeased—but he didn’t seem overly concerned that **God was displeased**.

Sin—and our own hearts—are **so deceptive**! Here is the one God calls “a man after mine own heart” who is more concerned about **what men think of him** than what God thinks of him! And if it happened to David, we must be honest about the fact that it can happen to any of us. Oh, how we need to guard our heart!

General truth #1? **Soldiers on both sides die.**

General truth #2? B. Some bodies are never found

Again, not something that is pleasant to think about, but we know it is true. It happens in **war**—but that is **not the only** time it happens. There are unsolved **murder** mysteries—or at least **missing persons** mysteries—where family members are never quite sure **what happened** to their loves ones and their **remains** are **never found**.

Not sure if you know this, but that happened in the Bible, too, to a man whose name most—if **not all**—of us will recognize. His name? **Moses**! Turn to Deut 34:1. From the top of mount Pisgah, God shows Moses the land God has promised to His people.

--Now v 4. Here God mentions that promise, with the added solemn reminder that Moses would **not be** going in.

--Now vs 5-6. “And He [God] buried him [Moses]...but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.” Moses had an unmarked—and unknown—grave!

--It was only unknown **to men**, however. God, of course, **knows where it is**—just as He knows where **every** “missing” body is!

C. Not all graves are marked the same

You don’t have to spend a lot of time at a cemetery to know that to be true. Even in the cemeteries here in Necedah, there are **large** headstones—and **small** ones. What stuck in my mind the most from my visit at **Gettysburg National Cemetery** was the “plainness” of many of the headstones.

--Some were level with the ground so I don’t even know if you would technically call them a headstone

--Others had just numbers on them: 573, 574, 575, etc...

--Still others were markers for **multiple bodies**, where only the state was named: Indiana, 80 bodies; Ohio, 131 bodies; Pennsylvania, 534 bodies...

But not all the headstones were the same. There were larger headstones—and monuments and statues—for high-ranking military leaders who died in those battles. James Gettys, the founder of the town itself, also had a special headstone and monument.

We see that in the Bible, too, don’t we? Kings and queens were usually buried in **special**, well-marked graves—unless they were **especially wicked**! King Ahab’s wife **Jezebel** was an evil, wicked woman. **I Kings 18:4** “For it was so, when Jezebel **cut off the prophets of the Lord**, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.” Jezebel killed God’s prophets—and wanted to kill **Elijah**, too! **How** was she buried when she died? She **wasn’t**! She was **thrown** out of a tower and trampled by horses. Without being too graphic, when it was time to bury her there wasn’t much left of her to bury!

Not very uplifting, is it? Soldiers on both sides die...some bodies are never found...and not all graves get “equal” treatment. What I want to do now is move away from the deaths and graves of **military members**—and **kings and queens** in the Bible—to the most well-known **grave** in the history of humanity: the **empty** grave of Jesus Christ!

2. The Glorious truths of Jesus’ grave!

So... what are the glorious truths of Jesus’ grave? Where do we start, right?

A. The reality of the empty grave

There are obviously a number of places we can turn, but let’s look at Luke 23, beginning with v 55. “...and beheld the sepulchre, and how His body was laid.” They—the women—marked in their mind the spot where Jesus’ body was placed. We know from Mk 16:1 that two of the women were Mary Magdalene (Mag-da-lene) and Mary the mother of James and Salome (Solo-me).

--Now Lk 24:1. We see here the women come to the grave with a desire to **anoint** the body of Jesus. They were **unable to**, though, because in v 3 we see they “found not the body of the Lord Jesus.”

--In v 5, the angels ask, “Why seek ye the living among the dead?”

Now v 6. “He is not here, but **is risen**: remember how He spake unto you when He was yet in Galilee,”

--In John 20, we see Peter and John checking out the grave and finding it **empty**.

--And in Mt 28, when the chief priests learn the body is gone, we see them **bribing** the soldiers:

Mt 28:12-13 “And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, ¹³ Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept.”

Let’s consider next... B. The reason for the empty grave

Why was the grave empty? Not because they went to the **wrong** grave...or the disciples came and **stole** the body away! The grave was empty because the Person who had been in it **was now alive**—and **seen**—by multiple people! Again, a number of places we can turn, but let’s go to I Cor 15, beginning with v 3.

--Read v 3 and 4.

--Notice v 5 “seen of Cephas” [Peter], then the twelve as a group.

--V 6. “Seen of above”—meaning **more than**—500 brethren at the same time! And then Paul adds this—“of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.”

What does that mean? Paul, writing to the church of Corinth in AD 55—roughly **25 years after** the resurrection of Jesus—said, ‘Some of the people in that group of over 500 that saw Jesus alive are dead—but **most** of them are still alive today!’ Although Paul didn’t say it, he could have just as easily added—‘Since they **are** still alive, why not **ask them** about the day they saw Jesus alive!’

C. The result of the empty grave

So what is the result of the empty grave; what did it accomplish?

i. It fulfilled Scripture

We have part of the answer right here in this chapter. Look at the end of v 3 “...how that Christ died for our sins **according to the Scriptures.**” Vs 4 ends the same way: “...**according to the Scriptures.**” In other words, Jesus’ death...and burial...and resurrection on the 3rd day...were all according to what God had previously said.

ii. It is the foundation of the gospel

We see that in this chapter, too. Notice verse 16 (read).

--Now v 17 “And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.”

--Your faith would be vain—worthless—if Christ did not rise again, because He would have been found **a liar!**

--And if Christ was a liar, **God would not accept** what Jesus did as your substitute.

--And if God **did not accept** what Christ did on our behalf, we are **yet in our sins**—unforgiven!

--Paul repeats that thought in v 18 “Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.”

What does it mean to **perish**? It means more than just **bodily death**. It means to be condemned...damned...eternally separated from God forever in hell!

But then we have the **wonderful truth** of verse 20—"But **now** is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." I love how God gives us the **fact**—"But now is Christ risen from the dead," as well as **a result**—a ramification—"and become the **firstfruits** of them that slept."

--Just as the firstfruits—the first sheaf of the harvest—was an indicator that there was **more to follow**, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was just that—the **promise and proof** that more resurrections will follow!

D. Our responsibility in light of the empty grave

What is our responsibility in light of the empty grave? We need to **receive—and believe**—the gospel!

Back to v 1 "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the **gospel** which I preached unto you, **which also ye have received**, and wherein ye stand;"

We need to **receive** the gospel—the good news—that **Christ died for our sins** (v 3) and although buried; He **rose again—conquering death**—and became the **only satisfactory payment** for our sin.

V 11 "Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye **believed**."

Acts 16:31 "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...."

Have **you** received the gospel? Have **you** believed on the Lord Jesus Christ?

We looked at **military** graves...and the **empty grave** of Jesus. There is one more grave I want us to consider; one you should be **very interested** in...**your** grave! I'm not claiming to **know** the future, but I do know this—**death** is in the future of **every one of us**! **Hebrews 9:27** "And as it is **appointed** unto men one to die, but after this the judgment:" Each of us has an **unescapable** appointment—set up by God—with **death**!

Are there any **exceptions**? Yes; there actually is! Paul teaches the truth of the **Rapture**—the removal of God's children **from the earth** prior to Him pouring out judgment **on the earth**—here in this chapter.

V 51 "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed," We know from **v 50**, that Paul is speaking to **brethren**—meaning believers—so "all" **believers**—not all people—will be changed when Christ comes for His church.

When will that occur? We don't know—but it could occur at **any time**—meaning **right now**...or 5 **minutes** from now...or 5 **hours** from now...or 5 **years** from now...or 5 **decades** from now. But since we **don't know when** it will occur, part of my responsibility as a Pastor is to **prepare you for death**.

How do I do that? One way is to remind you of....**3. The grave truth about your grave**

What can I tell **you** about **your** grave? On one hand, maybe **not much**! In fact, many of **you** might have to tell **me** about **your** grave—**where** you want to be buried or even **if you want** to be buried!

On the other hand, it is my responsibility to remind you that you will meet God someday. And so, here are some reminders from God's Word.

A. Life is short

James 4:14 "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." **Psalm 90:10** "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is **soon cut off**, and we fly away."

B. Life will end

Ecc 3:1-2 "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ²A time to be born, **and a time to die**..."

Ecc 3:19a, 20 "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: **as the one dieth, so dieth the other**....²⁰ **All go unto one place**; all are of the dust, and **all turn to dust again**."

C. We don't know when

Ecc 9:12 "For man also **knoweth not his time**:"

Prov 27:1 "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou **knowest not what a day may bring forth**."

Life is short.... life will end...and we don't know when! There will come a time when this "poor lisping, stammering tongue" will "lie silent in the grave." And then we will meet God! Are you ready?

So, what is it that God wants you **to do today**?

1. First and foremost, I want to again ask the question I asked a moment ago—Are you ready to meet God? If you have not received the gospel and believed on Christ, you are ***not ready***—you are ***yet*** in your sins. And if you ***die*** in your sins, that's it—you will be ***forever separated*** from God in hell. Don't let that be you!
2. For those of us that are God's children, we need to be more diligent in asking God to give us more of a burden for the lost. The certainty and gravity of death—as well as our joy of being forgiven and our love for God—should motivate us to be sharers of the gospel—the good news!