

No Greater Love

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The Memorial Day* Weekend is often relegated to nothing more than yet another three-day weekend, the realization of an extra day to engage in recreational activities, or an excuse to party with family and friends. Memorial Day, previously known as Decoration Day, is a day whose origin can be traced to the post-Civil-War era. In remembrance of the men and women who gave their lives in service to their country, earliest observances of the day were largely limited to decorating the graves of war veterans. While today there are scattered official observances at the local, state, and federal levels, it can be argued that most Americans appreciate it only as a day of leisure, oblivious to its original meaning or its significance to the liberties they enjoy.

Hours before His betrayal and arrest, Jesus shared with the disciples, His closest followers, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13, NIV). While those words are typically interpreted to refer to Jesus' impending death and the relationship He shared with those disciples, I believe they also point to the sacrifice they would face in faithfulness to His teachings and example. As they spread the Gospel of the Kingdom of God throughout the known world, they too would be expected to lay down their lives for those whom God had entrusted to their care and their witness.

Likewise, I believe the teachings and example of Christ are mirrored in the lives and service of those we remember on our observance of Memorial Day, in their willingness to pay the ultimate price in service to their country and its citizens. If the headstones of our national cemeteries could speak of the service of those whose remains they identify, they would expound upon the interred soldier's commitment to friends, family, comrades, and nation and their willingness to give their life to defend and protect them from harm. It is their unfettered commitment and willingness to pay the ultimate price that gives us cause to humbly memorialize them on the day we call Memorial Day.

If this holiday is one we tend to take for granted, what can we do to more fully appreciate the original intent of the day and more appropriately pay tribute to those whose memory we seek to honor? First, it should be a day of remembrance in which we recognize those who have served and died in our nation's armed forces, participate in an organized observance meant to honor their memory, and celebrate their lives and example. Second, it should be a day of reflection in which we pause to consider their sacrifice, and what such sacrifice should mean to us. Third, it should be a day of rededication in which we commit ourselves anew to never let the memory wane of those who served and died to purchase and insure the freedom we enjoy.

The last Monday of May - a day we call Memorial Day - will it be just another holiday with little or no meaning to our daily lives? Or will it be a day in which we invest the time and energy to appropriately honor the memory of those to whom we are indebted for the freedom and liberties we enjoy? For many, it will represent just another three-day weekend, an extra day at the lake, or an excuse to party. For Christians, it should be an opportunity to honor the memory of those who have died in service to their country as well as the memory of Him whose teachings and example are reflected in their service and their sacrifice.

Have a safe and enjoyable Memorial Day. May your observance honor those whose service and sacrifice we remember!

* [With apologies to readers outside the United States, this post speaks of a uniquely American holiday observance. It is my assumption that there exist similar observances in most countries that honor those who have paid the ultimate price in service to their country. May the thoughts expressed in this post speak to your life situation and the country you love.]

