

## MEMORIAL DAY: REMEMBERING THOSE WHO DIED FOR OUR FREEDOMS

### Galatians 1:1-5

"Paul, an apostle—not from men or by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead—<sup>2</sup> and all the brothers who are with me: To the churches of Galatia. <sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> who gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father. <sup>5</sup> To whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

### INTRODUCTION

Scott Jensen has served the United States with the USAF for 32 years. He is currently a Lt. Col. and a Squadron Commander of the 85<sup>th</sup> Engineering Installation Squadron. Though never a chaplain, Scott was ordained as a pastor in 2007 and is the Associate Pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church on the Island of Oahu, in the small town of Aiea, which is within a mile of the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor. On this Memorial Day, Scott is stationed at Keesler AFB in Biloxi, MS. While serving in Afghanistan in December, 2008, he recorded this event in his journal:

It's 3am on a cold winter day. Patchy snow covers the landscape as loudspeakers blare overhead telling everyone to get to their places. Surrounded by sandbags, concrete barriers and roughly 10,000 soldiers, sailors, airman and marines, Bagram Air Base has flipped a switch and turned from a deployed city in sleep, to a sea of green and tan military awaiting further direction. Some just woken from a few moments of sleep, others leaving their duties to attend to more pressing concerns, all focused on the events that are about to unfold. Down the 3-mile main road of this Afghanistan base, standing shoulder-to-shoulder, men and women in arms, awaiting to pay their respects to a fallen comrade. Soon, the lights of emergency vehicles can be seen slowly making their way up the boulevard. Escorts, leading a flatbed trailer to an awaiting C-17 cargo plane on its way back to the United States. On the trailer are 3 caskets draped in U.S. Flags. As the trailer approaches the lines of servicemen lining the streets, each pays their respects by saluting sharply the men and women who have paid the ultimate price. Once the trailer reaches the plane, the formation is dismissed. Thousands of servicemen in the middle of a war zone, paying homage and respect the best way they know how. Similar ceremonies are played out in other parts of the world. All to show the love and respect for the sacrifices and dedicated duty our military servicemen and women show on a daily basis.

Memorial Day recognizes veterans who have made the supreme sacrifice in defense of the liberties that are the birthright of citizens of the United States of America. This Holiday arose in the aftermath of the deadliest war in our nation's history, the Civil War, when 620,000 soldiers and civilians died; nearly 2% of our population. On May 5, 1868, three years after the War's end, the head of an organization of Union veterans — the Grand Army of the Republic — established Decoration Day to honor the Civil War dead and to decorate their graves with flowers. By 1900, ceremonies honoring Memorial Day (as the Day came to be called) were being held on May 30 across the land. State legislatures passed proclamations designating the day, and the Army and Navy adopted regulations for proper observance at their facilities. It was not until after World War I that the Day was expanded to honor those who've died in all American wars. In 1971, Memorial Day was declared a national holiday by an act of Congress. Today we honor The Supreme Sacrifice Made by Veterans and The Supreme Sacrifice Made by Our Savior.

### I. THE SUPREME SACRIFICE MADE BY VETERANS

Every conflict involving Americans has had its share of heroes & casualties. Some troops display actions so extraordinary that Congress acknowledges their heroism and sacrifice by awarding them the Medal of Honor. As with the Memorial Day Holiday, the Congressional Medal of Honor dates back to the Civil War. Military awards and medals had little role in the early years of the U.S. military. But as

the Civil War engulfed more and more of our nation in bloody battle, Congress called for a suitable medal to honor the exceptional acts of valor of our soldiers. By February 17, 1862, President Lincoln had signed into law the acts creating the Medal of Honor for the Navy and the Army. This Medal is presented by the President in the name of Congress to recognize gallantry above and beyond the call of duty. The acts performed must have been ones of self-sacrifice so conspicuous as to clearly distinguish the individual above his comrades and must have involved risk of life. More often than not, this Medal is awarded posthumously to individuals who sacrificed their lives for the greater good of others.

One such individual is Canadian-born Chief Petty officer Douglas Albert Munro. He became the first and only member of the U. S. Coast Guard to be awarded The Medal of Honor for his actions of September 27, 1942, in the Battle of Guadalcanal; the first major offensive & victorious action of the Allies in the Pacific Theater. Munro commanded 24 Higgins boats (landing craft). He engaged them in the evacuation of a battalion of marines trapped by Japanese forces at Point Cruz, Guadalcanal. After making preliminary plans for the evacuation of nearly 500 beleaguered marines, Munro, under constant strafing by enemy machine-guns on the island, and at great risk of his life, daringly led 5 of his small craft toward shore. As he closed the beach, he signaled the others to land. Then, to draw the enemy's fire and protect the marine-filled boats, he valiantly placed his craft with its 2 small guns as a shield between the beachhead and the Japanese. The perilous task of evacuation was nearly completed when Munro was instantly killed by enemy fire. But his crew, 2 of whom were wounded, carried on until the last boat loaded and cleared the beach. By his outstanding leadership, expert planning, and dauntless devotion to duty, he and his courageous comrades undoubtedly saved the lives of many who otherwise would have perished. Petty Officer Douglas Albert Munro gallantly gave his life for his country. The total number of Americans slain in all U. S. wars is now more than 1.1 million!

## II. THE SUPREME SACRIFICE MADE BY OUR SAVIOR

Many men and women have put their lives in extreme danger for their comrades in arms, and/or to protect civilians under enemy fire. In some cases, they gave up their lives that others might live. Such heroism often arises from individuals many least expected to display such brave and selfless devotion. In a small, Middle Eastern country nearly 2,000 years ago, that's exactly what happened. A closer look at this hero reveals strong similarities to the heroes just described, but also some significant differences.

**Jesus** arose from the humblest of beginnings, as could be said of many veterans. We know Him as the firstborn son of Joseph the carpenter and a peasant girl named Mary. Raised in Nazareth, a poor town of 500 residents, the Bible reveals little about His early life—the familiar Christmas story, the visit of the magi and His family's flight to Egypt, and the time at age 12 He stayed behind at the Temple. He'd come to Jerusalem with His parents in the spring for the Passover Festival celebrating that the LORD "passed over" every Israelite home protected by sacrificial "blood" on the night God brought His final judgment upon the Egyptians and their "gods" and "struck every firstborn male" with death (**Luke 2:41-48; Exodus 12:5-7, 12-13; 13:29**). After the Temple incident, there's a significant jump ahead in time to His adult life when He began His public ministry among His people the Jews and many Gentiles.

Let's read again **Galatians 1:1-5**: "Paul, an apostle—not from men or by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead—<sup>2</sup> and all the brothers who are with me: To the churches of Galatia. <sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> who gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father. <sup>5</sup> To whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen." Looking backward nearly 20 centuries to **Jesus'** exemplary conduct in the performance of His mission, it's easy for us to overlook how few of His contemporaries expected such heroic action from this man. **Isaiah 53:2** (NLT) foresaw how plain and ordinary He would appear to others: "There was nothing beautiful or majestic about His appearance,

nothing to attract us to Him." This explains His reception the first time He went back to the town where He grew up after launching His public outreach in His 30s to convince the world He is the Son of God and our Savior. **Matthew 13:54-57a** (NLT): "He returned to Nazareth, His hometown. When He taught there in the synagogue, everyone was amazed and said, 'Where does He get this wisdom and the power to do miracles?'<sup>55</sup> Then they scoffed, 'He's just the carpenter's son, and we know Mary, His mother, and His brothers—James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas.'<sup>56</sup> All His sisters live right here among us. Where did He learn all these things?'<sup>57</sup> And they were deeply offended and refused to believe in Him." You'd have thought His hometown would have said, "We always believed there was something special about Him and He would one day achieve great things for God!" Instead, they sneered in disbelief when He presented Himself as the Commander of Heaven's Armies to lead them in defeating death and Hell; Satan and sin. Most who'd watched Him grow up around them weren't ready to follow Him anywhere!

Yet, did **Jesus** fit the profile of a true hero? Did He qualify for Heaven's Medal of Honor? He put Himself in harm's way; He endured pain and suffering for the benefit of others facing mortal danger; everlasting destruction. **Isaiah 53:4-6** (NCV) foretold this far in advance: "He took our suffering [sickness] on Him and felt our pain for us. We saw His suffering and thought God was punishing Him.<sup>5</sup> But He was wounded for the wrong we did; He was crushed for the evil we did. The punishment, which made us well, was given to Him, and we are healed because of His wounds.<sup>6</sup> We all have wandered away like sheep; each of us has gone his own way. But the LORD has put on Him the punishment for all the evil we have done." Not only did He put Himself in harm's way to save others but He did it willingly and without complaint, as **Isaiah 53:7** (NLT) continues: "He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet He never said a word. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, He did not open His mouth." **Jesus** willingly exposed Himself to the Enemy's fire (Satan) even to the point of sacrificing Himself in death.

Men & women of the military put their lives in danger for the sake of fellow soldiers & loved ones against other human beings. **Jesus** waged a battle against something far more sinister and devastating, as **Ephesians 6:12** (NLT) reveals: "For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places." The ultimate victory in **Jesus'** mind as He took on the hideous forces of Hell involved far more than taking an important hilltop or body of water, or one country gaining victory over another—as our Armed Forces did over Great Britain, Mexico, Spain, Germany, and Japan. **Jesus** sought victory over the power of the Devil, victory over sin's corruption within us and its crippling consequences over us, and victory over the death-grip upon us! **Hebrew 2:14-15** (NLT): "Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could He die, and only by dying could He break the power of the devil, who had the power of death.<sup>15</sup> Only in this way could He set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying." **I John 3:5 & 8** (NLT): "And you know that Jesus came to take away our sins, and there is no sin in Him.<sup>8</sup> But when people keep on sinning, it shows that they belong to the devil, who has been sinning since the beginning. But the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil."

In spite of the wide assortment of issues that have crippled our nation and our defensive capabilities in recent decades, America still has the best equipped and trained military in the history of the world. The caliber of our troops and the technological superiority of our weaponry still keep the vast majority of our citizens safe from harm. However, in a world of terrorist attacks, where individuals do not hesitate to destroy themselves in the name of their "god," we've learned we may never again be totally safe and protected. Yet, the same is true on the level of spiritual warfare. The Bible warns us of the forces within and without us ready to "wage war" against us. **James 4:1** (NASB): "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your [craving for] pleasures that wage war in your members?"

**I Peter 2:11** (Phillips): "I beg you, as those whom I love, to live in this world as strangers and 'temporary residents,' to keep clear of the desires of your lower natures, for they are always at war with your souls." **I Peter 5:9** (LB): "Be careful—watch out for attacks from Satan, your great enemy. He prowls around like a hungry, roaring lion, looking for some victim to tear apart."

The Bible teaches us three important truths about spiritual warfare. *First*, **II Corinthians 10:3-5a** (Phillips) clarifies, "The truth is that, although of course we lead normal human lives, the battle we are fighting is on the spiritual level. The very weapons we use are not those of human warfare but powerful in God's warfare for the destruction of the enemy's strongholds." *Secondly*, though we are ill-equipped to confront Satanically driven evil in our own power, "God's armor" and weaponry are available to us, which are sufficiently powerful to route Satan's forces. They are detailed in **Ephesians 6:12-18** (NLT): "For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. <sup>15</sup> For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. <sup>17</sup> Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. <sup>18</sup> Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere." *Thirdly*, we don't have the option to abstain from spiritual warfare, which rages within and without us. Our only true option is whether to allow the forces of evil to assault us, our loved ones, and our nation unopposed by us, or whether to serve our Savior as valiantly as we expect the Armed Forces of our Country to serve us! **James 4:7** (NCV): "So give yourselves completely to God. Stand against the devil, and the devil will run from you." In **Luke 10:19** (LB), **Jesus** exhorts us, "I have given you authority over all the power of the Enemy, and to walk among serpents and scorpions and to crush them. Nothing shall injure you!" The victories we can help secure in the name and power of our Savior and Commander-in-Chief, **Jesus Christ**, can achieve great earthly good and may last for eternity!

## CONCLUSION

The story is told of one soldier who lived with such confidence of spiritual armor and authority even as he found himself in the heat of battle. During the Korean War, a man was hurt badly in the battle of Heartbreak Ridge, which took place September 13-October 15, 1951. His buddies were in a foxhole about 50 yards away when he was hit by sniper fire in an ambush. As the firing continued, his friends discussed what to do. The intensity of the sniper fire made it almost certain death to crawl out and bring back their wounded friend. For a while, no one moved from their foxhole, despite the cries for help of their brother-in-arms. Then one of the men in the foxhole began to look intently at his own watch. He could not keep his eyes off it. Others in the foxhole noticed this and began to question him. But the soldier silently gave full attention to his watch. Suddenly, he jumped out of the foxhole and crawled over to his wounded buddy. He grabbed him by the nape of the collar and very slowly made his way back to the foxhole, with sniper fire whizzing past them. Both men amazingly made it back to the foxhole without additional injury. When the sniper fire died down, the other men asked the one who'd saved their buddy why he'd waited before choosing to rescue their wounded friend. He responded, "My mom said every day at the exact same time she would be praying for me. According to my watch, I left the foxhole exactly when she started praying."