**SUNDAY 5/30/21**

**SERMON**

**JOHN 3:1-17**

**Memorial Day - Never Forget The Cost Of Freedom**

Needless to say, protecting our freedom has come at a great cost.

President Franklin Roosevelt said:

          "Those who have long enjoyed such privileges as we enjoy,

                   forget in time that men and women have died to win them."

On this Memorial Day weekend, may we never be guilty of forgetting

          those who gave their lives on behalf of our wonderful nation.

We are free to worship our Savior this Sunday

          because of those who sacrificed their lives so we might enjoy

          this great privilege.

We are grateful and humbled by their sacrifice.

Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this,

          that one lay down their life for others."

They made a difference in our lives.

What they did continues to make a difference.

What Jesus accomplished on the cross made a great difference in our lives.

The meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus

          was more than simply an encounter between two religious figures.

It was a collision between two philosophies.

Two opposing views on salvation.

Nicodemus thought we did the work.

But Jesus said God did the work.

Nicodemus thought it was a tradeoff.

Jesus said it is a gift.

Nicodemus thought it was our job to earn it.

Jesus said it was our job to accept it.

It was simply a matter between legalism or grace.

Either humans do it, or God does it.

Either salvation is payment for deeds done –

          or salvation is a gift based on Christ's death.

A legalist believes the supreme force behind salvation is us.

If we look right, speak right, and belong to the right segment of the right group,

          we will be saved.

The brunt or responsibility doesn't lie within God, it lies within us.

But Jesus began by revealing the true source of spirituality:

          Human life comes from human parents,

          but spiritual life comes from the Spirit.

Spiritual life is not a human endeavor.

It is rooted in and orchestrated by the Holy Spirit.

Every spiritual achievement is created and energized by God.

Spirituality, said Jesus, comes not from church attendance, or good deeds, or correct doctrine, but from heaven itself.

Such words must have set Nicodemus back on his heels.

He thought if he did enough good things, he would get into Heaven.

But salvation is God's business.

Grace is His idea, His work, and His expense.

He offers it to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ.

What we say and do is our gratitude for such a magnificent gift.

The question must have been written all over Nicodemus's face.

          Why would God do this?

          What would motivate him to offer such a gift?

What Jesus told Nicodemus, Nicodemus never could have imagined.

What could be the motive behind the gift of new birth?

Love. Simply God's incredible, amazing, great love for each one of us.

Nicodemus had heard all the laws, and rules, and commandments.

But he had never heard such words as Jesus spoke.

He had many discussions about salvation.

But this was the first in which no rules were given.

          No system was offered,

          No code or ritual.

Jesus told him: "Everyone who believes can have eternal life in Him."

Could God be so generous?

Even in the darkness of night, the amazement could be seen on Nicodemus's face.

Everyone who believes can have eternal life.

          Not everyone who achieves.

          Not everyone who succeeds.

          Not everyone who agrees.

But everyone who believes.

Everything we do, everything we say,

          is in thanksgiving for the wonderful free gift God has already given us.

Dr. Billy Graham going on French television and being told by the commentator:

“Dr. Graham, the whole of France is watching you - you have two minutes to prove to us God exists.”

          To which Billy Graham replied:

I can't do that. But I can tell you what I do know:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,

          so that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life."

No one described it better than Paul.

          Listen to his confession:

I realize I don't have what it takes.

I can will it, but I can't do it.

I decide to do good, but I don't really do it.

I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway.

My decisions, don't result in actions.

Something has gone wrong deep within me, and gets the better of me every time.

The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up.

I truly delight in God's commands, but it is obvious that not all of me joins in that delight.

Parts of me covertly rebel, and when I least expect it, they take charge.

Paul admits that no matter what he does, how hard he tries,

          how much he strives, he still sins against God.

He loses his temper, he forgets his purpose, he demands his way,

          he lies, he lusts, he turns away, he falls.

If Paul the missionary, Paul the zealot, Paul the martyr, Paul the Bible writer,

          is also Paul, the sinner,

          then it is doubtful we will be so very much different.

And so we treasure God's promise:

          Whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life."

AMEN