

## **Introduction**

Since tomorrow is Memorial Day, I'd like to briefly comment on its origin and purpose. It began on May 5, 1866 and its purpose was to honor soldiers who died in the Civil War. After World War I, Congress extended the day to honor the dead of all American Wars. Memorial Day, in other words, is a day for remembering those who **"gave their last full measure of devotion,"** to quote Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Its primary focus is memorable deaths that profited us all.

But let me ask you a question in that regard. Does a memorable death necessarily make a memorable life? The answer of course is **"No!"** A memorable life is just as important as a memorable death and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

## **If I Surrender My Body to Be Burned**

I'd draw your attention to a striking clause in verse 3, **"if I surrender my body to be burned."** It's clear to whom that clause refers. It's martyrs, those who paid **"the ultimate sacrifice."**

On Memorial Day, for instance, we remember those who died in combat for our freedom and us. Listen to these names: Lloyd L. Aarant, Nathan R. Abbott, Robert A. Abbott, Jacob W. Abel, and Norman S. Abelman. Those are the names, in alphabetical order, of just five of the 6,821 Marines who were killed on Iwo Jima in World War II. They died for our freedom and us. That clause in verse 3 speaks of them.

But it also speaks of those who died for God and His kingdom. Listen to these names: Lawrence Saunders, William Hunter, George Marsh, Rollins White, and Anne Askew. A 16<sup>th</sup> century English historian named John Fox wrote a classic book titled *Fox's Book of Martyrs*. It records the sufferings and deaths of early Christian and Protestant martyrs. Those names I read are just five of the martyrs about whom he wrote who died for God and His kingdom. That clause in verse 3 speaks of them.

Whatever the persons for whom they die, all of us esteem martyrs.

There's nothing nobler, we think, than sacrificing our lives for others, especially God – which is why we consider Christian martyrs the noblest of all. In earlier times, for instance, many considered a Christian martyr's death a "**baptism in blood**" that actually cleansed him or her of their sins. And today, most of us think that martyrs will have higher places in heaven than the rest of us.

### **It Profits Me Nothing**

But that isn't so. Notice what Paul declares in verse 3, "**It profits me nothing.**" A martyr's death almost always profits others. But it may not profit him or her at all. It's clear to what Paul is referring. The only way a person could profit from death is if he or she continued to live and that's to what Paul is referring. It's life after death.

The Bible teaches that everyone will have just that – a life after death. Once we're conceived, we never stop existing and there's nothing we can do about it. We will continue to live forever after we die.

Now, notice the penetrating insight Paul gives us in verse 3. Dying a martyr's death may not profit us in that life after death. We may not be any better off in it for having died sacrificially – even for God. That's certainly contrary to the conventional wisdom that dominates our current thought but it's true. Dying sacrificially may have no effect at all on the quality and condition of the eternal life we live after death.

### **But Do Not Have Love**

But living sacrificially does.

Paul teaches us a general and defining principle here. It isn't the nature of our deaths that profit us in our eternal lives after death. It's the nature of our lives before those deaths.

Let me quickly say that it takes courage to believe that.

Listen carefully as I quote Albert Einstein: "**Neither can I – nor would I want to – conceive of an individual that survives his**

**physical death. Let feeble souls, from fear or absurd egotism, cherish such thoughts.**" One of the greatest intellects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in other words, thinks you and I are feeble souls. We believe that we'll live after we die because we're too cowardly to believe, like he, that we won't.

But just the opposite is true. The reason people believe they won't live after they die is because they're too cowardly to believe they will. I think of English poet Algernon Swinburne who wrote a poem that was read at his funeral. One stanza goes like this: **"From too much of living, from hope and fear set free, we thank with brief thanksgiving whatever gods may be, that no one lives forever; that dead men rise up never."** Then there's C.S. Lewis, the atheist turned Christian, who said that the most comforting thing about atheism is that there's an exit sign in the universe. We die and then cease.

Please grasp that it takes courage to believe what the Bible teaches. There's no exit sign in the universe. Once we're conceived, we never stop existing and there's nothing we can do about it. We will live an eternal life after we die. And the nature of that eternal life we will live is determined by the nature of the earthly life we have lived. That teaching infuses an accountability into earthly life that only the most courageous will believe.

ing in that regardLet's consider two points of view about what happens **"after death."**

One is that we cease to exist. The brilliant cosmologist Carl Sagan illustrates this point of view. In a 1996 Parade Magazine article he authored during his final illness, he wrote: **"I would love to believe that when I will die I will live again, that some thinking, feeling, remembering part of me will continue. But as much as I want to believe that, . . . . I know of nothing to suggest that it is more wishful thinking."** Sagan, like two secularists I talked to just last Sunday, believed that we die and cease to exist.

- I. Memorable deaths
- II. Memorable lifes
  - A. Judgment Day
  - B. Give account
- III. What a memorable life is not
- IV. What a memorable life is