

Introduction

Memorial Day is a day for remembering American martyrs – those who **"gave their last full measure of devotion"** for their country to quote Abraham Lincoln. It's appropriate though to remember Christian martyrs as well – those who gave their last full measure of devotion for Jesus. They include 10 of the 12 disciples and Paul, who died for Jesus as follows: (1) Peter – crucified; (2) Andrew – crucified; (3) James the son of Zebedee – beheaded; (4) Bartholomew – crucified; (5) James the son of Alphaeus – stoned; (6) Matthew – killed with an ax; (7) Philip – crucified; (8) Simon the Zealot – crucified; (9) Thomas – burned; (10) Thaddeus – crucified and (11) Paul – beheaded.

As we look at this list, we can be thankful that probably none of us will be martyrs for Jesus in death. But we can and should be martyrs for Him in life. We can and should be living martyrs and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

Willing to Die for Things

During Paul's third missionary journey, the Holy Spirit, in Acts 20:22, directed him to go to Jerusalem. As he journeyed there, he stopped in Caesarea, about 50 miles away. A prophet named Agabus then came and prophesied that the Jews in Jerusalem would seize him if he went there and hand him over to the Gentiles for punishment. But notice Paul's response in verse 13, **"For I am ready not only be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."**

That response of his reminds me of something by way of contrast. In 1978, Jimmy Carter attempted to reinstate the draft and college students all over the country protested as a result. One newspaper that covered the protests posted a picture of a Princeton student holding up a sign that said, **"Nothing is worth dying for."** His sign reflects the posture of many people, one that's based on this value judgment. Nothing, including Americans living free, is as important as my one that

Americans lose their freedom than that my life on earth ceases. Nothing is worth dying for.

But Paul disagreed. He declared in verse 13 that he was ready not just to be imprisoned for Jesus but to die for Him as well. That was his posture. Jesus and His cause are worth dying for, excuse the dangling preposition. That posture of his was based on the value judgment he made in verse 5 of the previous chapter, **“But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus.”** Jesus and His cause are more important than my one life on earth is. Better that my life on earth ceases than that Jesus and His cause are thwarted. Jesus and His cause are worth dying for.

That’s true but it does raise an issue. Is anyone or anything else worth dying for? The cross of Jesus resolves that issue for us. We often say that He died on it for everyone. The vagueness of the word **“everyone”** though minimizes the profundity of what He did. We should particularize it and say He died on the cross for **“each one.”** If you, singular, were the only sinner who ever lived, He would have died for you alone, which reveals His posture. You are as important as His life on earth is. You are worth dying for.

Jesus of course, not the Princeton student, is our example. If each of you is as important as His life on earth is, then each of you is as important as my life on earth is. If each of you is worth Him dying for, then each of you is worth me dying for. That should be my posture and yours. Jesus said it plainly in John 15:13, **“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”** Some things, *primarily* people, truly are worth dying for.

Live for What’s Worth Dying For

Now let’s go back to Paul again. It’s true that he died for Jesus. But he lived for Him as well. As he wrote in Philippians 1:21, **“For to me to live is Christ.”** His posture was clear. If Jesus is worth dying for,

He's certainly worth living for. More generally, if anything is worth dying for, it's certainly worth living for.

But what does it mean to live for something? I'd explain it this way. Everything has a nature or order, which determines what it needs to thrive. To live for something means to give it what it needs. Think about our republican form of government, for instance. It needs something to thrive – citizen participation, including first of all voting intelligently. To live for America, therefore, means to participate. Or think about children. They need something to thrive – their mothers loving their fathers sacrificially and vice versa. To live for our children, therefore, means to love our spouses sacrificially. You get the idea. To live for something means to give it what it needs to thrive.

You can see then why I said what I said. If something is worth dying for, then it's certainly worth living for. Dying for something requires that we give the most that we have, our life. Living for it requires that we give less than that. If something is worth giving our most, then it's obviously worth giving anything less than that.

A Christian's younger brother selfishly took a piece of personal property from their father's estate that she had cherished and wanted. She told her sister as they talked about it that she loved her brother enough to die for him, but that she was now **"done with him."** To which her sister replied, **"If he's worth your life, isn't he worth your forgiveness as well?"** Her rhetorical question drives home the point. If something is worth dying for, it's certainly worth living for as I defined that. So, let's live for what's worth dying for.

Not Living for What We're Willing to Die For

You might think it's a given that people would do that, but it isn't, and Paul's experience reveals why. He lived for Jesus and recounted the cost of doing so in 2 Corinthians 11:23-29: frequently imprisoned, beaten numerous times, often in danger of death, whipped with 39 lashes five times, beaten with rods three times, stoned, shipwrecked three times,

labor, hardship, many sleepless nights, hungry, thirsty, cold, exposed, and more. Paul's experience implies a rarely recognized fact of life. In some ways, it's easier to die for things than to live for them.

Consider Abraham Lincoln. He died for the Union and became our most beloved and remembered president as a result. But would he have become that if he had lived? If he had lived, he would have faced one of the most perplexing and highly charged problems in American history – reconstructing the South. He set out his reconstruction policies in his Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction in 1863. His successor, President Andrew Johnson, attempted to carry out his policies and was bitterly opposed and finally impeached as a result. Would the same have happened to Lincoln if he had lived?

The moral of the story is that in some ways, it's easier to die for things than it is to live for them. Think of it this way. There is glory and finality in dying for things but routine and constancy in living for them. Dying for things requires ultimate momentary sacrifice but living for them requires common continual sacrifice.

Many people find the former easier than the latter, which explains one of the curious facts of our existence. They don't live for what they're willing to die for. There are some things they'll die for. But they don't live for those very same things.

I once counseled a mother of four children who was unhappy with her husband and decided to divorce him. He was genuinely willing to do whatever was necessary to make their marriage work, but she wasn't. So I asked her, **"Are you willing to die for your children?"** **"Of course I am,"** she answered. To which I replied, **"If you're willing to die for them, then be willing to live for them as well. Do whatever it takes to love their father. Them flourishing requires it."** But she wasn't willing to and divorced him. She'd die for her children, but not live for them. She wouldn't give what they needed to thrive.

Let's not be like that mother. Let's be clear-headed and make the right value judgment instead. If the nature of some person or thing

makes it worth dying for, let live for it.

Don't Live for What Isn't Worth Dying For

But there's another nuance here. Don't live for what isn't worth living for. The value of many things isn't worth what they need to thrive. So, we don't give them what they need. Many things require an investment of thought, time, energy, money and concern that their value doesn't deserve. So, we don't give them that investment.

Jimmy Fallon and Drew Barrymore starred in a movie titled *Fever Pitch*. In it, Barrymore's character comes to love Fallon's character who has a glaring flaw. He's obsessed, like many of their fans are, with the Boston Red Sox. In one scene, a news reporter at spring training asks him where the Red Sox rank in his life. He answers excitedly that it's the Red Sox, a second thing I won't mention, and breathing, in that order.

Considering how much thought, time, energy, money, and concern he devoted to following the Red Sox, we'd think that was true. But in the end, it wasn't. Forced to choose between the Red Sox or Barrymore's character, he chose her. He was living for something that wasn't worth living for. He was giving to it more than its value deserved.

He isn't alone. We know by observation that countless people are doing the same. They're giving more to a host of things than their value is worth. They're investing the best that they are and have in things that don't deserve it. That is a catastrophic value misjudgment that ultimately ruins their lives. No one who does that can have the fullness of joy and abundance of life that everyone wants.

Application

So, let's do two things. First, live for what's worth dying for. And second, don't live for what isn't worth living for. That's our call and here's a four step process to help us answer it.

First, make a list of the things that are, objectively, worth dying for, in their order of priority. We make it based on what we know about the

Bible and the nature and order of things.

Second, make a list of the things that we're living for in their order of priority. We need to be reflective and brutally honest about this. What are the things to which we're giving priority – the things to which we're devoting the best of our thought, time, energy, money, and concern? We place whatever those things are on our second list.

Third, compare the two lists. We determine if the second list contains the same things in the same order of priority as the first. You can see what we're doing here. We're determining if we're living for what is worth dying for.

And fourth, adjust our lives accordingly. If the second list is incompatible with the first, we rearrange priorities. We begin devoting the best of ourselves and our resources to the things that are on the first list – in their right order of priority. Simply put, we begin living for what is worth dying for.

Conclusion

I close by identifying what is objectively first on the first list, the things worth dying for. It's Jesus. He is the dominant reality of the universe – the greatest and the best, perfect and infinite in competence and character. He, more than anyone or anything else including our spouses and children, is worth dying for.

That raises a personal question that's directed to us all, including me. Is Jesus also first on our second list, the things that we're living for? If He isn't, He should be. So let's rearrange our priorities and make Him just that, first. Let's devote the very best of ourselves and our resources first of all to knowing Him and second of all to serving Him. We may never be martyrs for Jesus in death. But we can and should be martyrs for Him in life. So let's be just that. Let's be living martyrs!