

Memorial Day 2020

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, May 24, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us today. It is wonderful to have those of you who are joining us via the LIVESTREAM. It is also wonderful to have some gathered here IN-PERSON (i.e., for the first time in over two months). Please have a Bible at the ready, take some notes, and give the Lord the best of your attention!

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

As I mentioned last week, this season of pandemic has brought about a series of seismic-level CHANGES to our nation (and will continue to do so for some time). Of course, some of these changes may be more NEGATIVE in nature, which is beyond our time to address this morning. Others, however, are certainly POSITIVE and BENEFICIAL.

KEY – I put forth that one of the best things to take place in our culture is the rediscovery of what is HEROIC.

i.e., It has caused us to understand who the HEROES of our society truly are! This is a good and necessary time of REORIENTATION. For some time, we have lauded figures who may NOT be worthy of the accolade and esteem we shower upon them. Consider the superstars our culture has elevated in seasons past...

1) People of ATHLETIC Prowess

Men and women who excel on the field of competition or in a sport.

2) People of Tremendous WEALTH

Men and women who are famous for the money they have earned/accumulated.

3) People of POP-CULTURE Notoriety

Pop-culture phenomenons and influencers (e.g., recording artists, models, actors, etc.).

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

FYI – But something has changed as of late! Very few are connecting the word hero with ballplayers, the rich and famous, or the beautiful. RATHER, it has been connected more and more with individuals who are doctors, nurses, teachers, first-responders, stay-at-home parents, and (though I dislike the term) essential workers. This brings me back a bit...

ILL – I recall seeing a painting after 9/11 of a grouping of superheroes (e.g., Superman, Spiderman, the Hulk, etc.) looking up to a larger-than-life image of fireman, police officers, etc. It was a GRIPPING image! Recently, I have seen such imagery surface once again, this time with superheroes lauding a doctor or a nurse walking down the corridor of a hospital. This indicates healthy PERSPECTIVE/PRIORITY (i.e., at least for a time)!

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 3

With all of this talk regarding heroes/heroism, I thought it would be of benefit to EXPLORE these themes.

KEY – So let us wade into these waters in the SIMPLEST way possible...

Q. What is a hero? (REPEAT)

Q. What are the characteristics of a hero?

A. A hero is “a person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievement, or noble qualities.

NOTE – As we can see, varying elements characterize a genuine hero...

1) Courage

A true hero will show forth some sense of valor or bravery. This is NOT the absence of fear, but the willingness to endure and persevere in the face of danger, opposition or adversity.

QUOTE – “I would define true courage to be a perfect sensibility of the measure of danger, and a mental willingness to endure it” (W. T. Sherman – Union Army General from the Civil War).

2) Outstanding Achievement

A hero will perform a noteworthy or singular task that is EXCEPTIONAL in its benefit to/influence upon others.

3) Noble Quality

A hero will demonstrate some noble quality (i.e., qualities). This is a BLANKET term that can convey seemingly any virtue! I think that we would ALL agree that this phrase would certainly include selflessness, sacrifice, compassion, etc. (to name a few)!

SECTION 1 (PANDEMIC)

NOTE – Thus said, I can see why many have begun to classify doctors, nurses, first-responders, etc., as heroes.

Q. Have they not demonstrated a considerable degree of COURAGE?

The Coronavirus was deemed a NOVEL virus in that it had never before been seen in human beings (i.e., novel meaning new). Therefore, what we did not know about the affliction was far greater than what we did know. Yet, despite the unknown, rightful fears and a natural sense of hesitation, our medical community suited up and went to work.

In fact, there were times they could NOT even suit up due to the lack of PPE—but they went in anyway!

QUOTE – As one commentator wrote, “As we continue to navigate this unprecedented crisis, the one word that comes to mind when I think of our healthcare workers is COURAGE. Courage is the quality shown by someone who decides to do something difficult or dangerous [despite the fear].”

Q. Have they not demonstrated OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT?

I will NOT linger long on this point, but how many people would have died apart from their services? How many people would have died completely alone in isolation if not for the presence of compassionate hospital workers? How many innovated new treatments and solutions to newly presented problems? How many have come to discover the outstanding and often unrecognized labor of teachers and stay-at-home parents!

These things seem pretty outstanding to ME!

Q. Have they not demonstrated NOBLE qualities?

i.e., Have these figures NOT demonstrated the qualities we noted beforehand (e.g., selflessness, sacrifice and compassion)? We have all seen the photos of medical personnel traveling to NYC by plane or bus because there was a dire need for workers! We have seen the images of their weary yet determined faces, covered in red lines from the imprints of their masks. We have heard their stories of having to live in a trailer/rent a hotel room, separated from home and families for indeterminate periods of time (i.e., risk of contamination). We have seen the clips of teachers checking up on their students in-person from afar or utilizing technology to remain connected with their pupils.

KEY 1 – Of course, these precepts are NOT just limited to nurses, doctors, teachers, etc. MANY have demonstrated a heroic spirit in these trying times. I can’t help but think of a woman name SUZANNE HOYLAERTS—i.e., a 90-year-old woman who died from COVID-19. She refused ventilator treatment when resources were low, saying: “You do not need to put me on a ventilator. Keep it for the younger patients. I have lived a beautiful life.”

Such an attitude makes me think she must have known the Lord!

KEY 2 – Stories such as these abound in these times, and we do well to consider them. At a time when much of the public is becoming cynical, angry, conspiratorial and beyond at what might the agenda of the WORST of us, give some thought to those who are the BEST of us and aspire to their example!

SECTION 2 (THE FALLEN)

Of course, I would be REMISS if I did not make proper mention of the fact that this is Memorial Day Weekend. This annual holiday provides for us the opportunity to REMEMBER the 1.4 million men and women who gave their lives in service to this nation.

KEY – If a hero is one who “is admired for courage, outstanding achievement, or noble quality” the fallen dead must CERTAINLY be called by that name. Have they not demonstrated courage in the face of danger, adversity or opposition? Have they not performed outstanding achievements (e.g., the establishment/preservation of freedom)? Have they exhibited noble quality (i.e., selflessness, sacrifice, etc.)?

FYI – Each year Ron Phelps takes the time to remind us of their heroism. Due to the uncertainty of this season, we were NOT able to coordinate his sharing. Now, I am no Ron Phelps, but I would like to continue his tradition (it is worthwhile) and share with you the following account of a Medal of Honor recipient:

TRAVIS ATKINS

U.S. Army – Staff Sergeant
2nd Brigade Combat Team – War on Terror (Iraq) 2007

CITATION

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty: Staff Sergeant Travis W. Atkins distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty on 1 June 2007, while serving in the position of Squad Leader with Company D, 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, 2d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. While manning a static observation post in the town of Abu Samak, Iraq, Staff Sergeant Atkins was notified that four suspicious individuals, walking in two pairs, were crossing an intersection not far from his position. Staff Sergeant Atkins immediately moved his squad to interdict the individuals. One of the individuals began behaving erratically, prompting Staff Sergeant Atkins to disembark from his patrol vehicle and approach to conduct a search. Both individuals responded belligerently toward Staff Sergeant Atkins, who then engaged the individual he had intended to search in hand-to-hand combat. Staff Sergeant Atkins tried to wrestle the insurgent’s arms behind his back. When he noticed the insurgent was reaching for something under his clothes, Staff Sergeant Atkins immediately wrapped him in a bear hug and threw him to the ground, away from his fellow soldiers. Staff Sergeant Atkins maintained his hold on the insurgent, placing his body on top of him, further sheltering his patrol. With Staff Sergeant Atkins on top of him, the insurgent detonated a bomb strapped to his body, killing Staff Sergeant Atkins. Staff Sergeant Atkins acted with complete disregard for his own safety. In this critical and selfless act of valor, Staff Sergeant Atkins saved the lives of the three other soldiers who were with him and gallantly gave his life for his country. Staff Sergeant Atkins’ undaunted courage, warrior spirit, and steadfast devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, the 2d Brigade Combat Team, and the United States Army.

KEY – We do well to remember that the 1.4 million SOLDIERS who gave their “last full measure of devotion” were 1.4 million PEOPLE. They were men and women who had dreams, desires, aspirations and names (like Travis Atkins). Their families called them son, daughter, brother, sister, mommy, daddy and beyond...

...WE do well to call them HEROES.

SECTION 3 (CHRIST) PT. 1

As this sermon begins to make its way to a close, it is fitting to address the heroic nature of CHRIST Himself. i.e., Let us regard Him as THE Hero for both time and eternity. Allow me to touch upon the following points regarding the heroic quality of Christ Jesus...

1) Courage

Let us address the courage of Jesus Christ. Again, courage is the sense of bravery and valor that operates in the face of danger, opposition or adversity. It is NOT the absence of fear per se, but the willingness to persevere—i.e., to endure—despite one’s circumstance. Did Christ not exhibit heroism in the face of fear?

Matthew 26:36–46 (NIV – Post Last Supper)

36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. 41 “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

42 He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

43 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. 44 So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

45 Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

cf. Luke 22:44

44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

QUOTE – It is interesting that the physician of the group, St. Luke, is the only one to mention this. He says, "And being in agony, He prayed the longer. And His sweat became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground." Though very rare, the phenomenon of ‘bloody sweat,’ is well documented. Under great emotional stress, tiny capillaries in the sweat glands can break, thus mixing blood with sweat. This process alone could have produced marked weakness and possible shock. Let us not forget that at this point his friends have fallen asleep and He knew that they would abandon Him. He was aware of the scheming Judas, the betrayer, and the brutality that He was soon to face. It is no wonder that He was extremely emotional.

Q. Does this not sound like a man of unparalleled courage?

SECTION 3 (CHRIST) PT. 2

2) Outstanding Achievement

i.e., the performance of a noteworthy or singular task that is exception in its benefit to/influence upon others.

NOTE 1 – Of course, MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS may work to keep the afflicted alive. Yet Christ singularly gives LIFE abundant and eternal to those who will trust in Him!

John 3:16

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 10:10b

10 . . . I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

NOTE 2 – Of course, we marvel at the contribution of TEACHERS—but who was a Teacher like Christ?

Matthew 7:28–29

28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

NOTE 3 – Of course, soldiers might work to establish and preserve FREEDOM. Yet Christ singularly offers freedom to those who are His (e.g., freedom from the consequence/condemnation of sin [Rom. 8:1]; freedom from the power/influence of sin [Rom. 6; Gal. 5:13–26; delivery from the kingdom of darkness and freedom to serve the Lord in the newness of life [Col. 1:13]; ultimate deliverance from death, hell and the grave [Rev. 1:18]).

QUOTE (One Solitary Life by Dr. James Allen Francis) – Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty. Then for three years He was an itinerant preacher.

He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put His foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself...

While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. While He was dying His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth – His coat. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen long centuries have come and gone, and today He is a centerpiece of the human race and leader of the column of progress.

I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that were ever built; all the parliaments that ever sat and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life.

SECTION 3 (CHRIST) PT. 3

3) Noble Quality

Q. Did Christ NOT exemplify selflessness, sacrifice or compassion in their fullness?

Matthew 9:36

36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Matthew 20:28

28 “. . . the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Philippians 2:5–8

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

- 6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage [i.e., grasped];
7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

Q. Does He not represent the ideal—i.e., the PERFECTION—of every and any virtue?

QUOTE – “Learn much of the Lord Jesus. For every look at yourself take ten looks at Christ. He is altogether lovely. Such infinite majesty, and yet such meekness and grace, and all for sinners—even the chief [among us]” (Robert Murray McCheyne).

APPLICATION(S)

As this sermon ends, I call you to consider Jesus CHRIST. I call you to regard the FALLEN. I call you to consider your noble PEERS in the midst of this pandemic. As you do, ASPIRE to their examples of heroism and become a hero in your own right!

1) Daily YOU Can Practice Bravery – i.e., You can step into the unknown each day, resist fear, and endure despite challenge, opposition and adversity.

2) Daily YOU Can Achieve – Of course, you may not cure cancer, etc., but the Lord deems outstanding EVERY activity done unto Him and for His glory (cf. **Matt. 10:42** – “if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward”). Even the smallest act (overlooked by humanity) will be NOTICED/LAUDED by heaven!

3) Daily YOU Can Exhibit Noble Quality – Allow Him to SHAPE you into the image of Christ (i.e., Rom. 8:29).

CONCLUSIONS

- The LORD is looking for such people.
- The world is in dire need for such people.
- RISE UP and GO FORTH in such a time as this!

KEY – Thank you for taking the time to join us today. Should those of you who have joined us online wish to give, please do so through the giving portal of our church WEBSITE (www.NewLifeBarre.org). For those who are present, you may feel free to give to the ushers stationed at our two primary exits.

You can't leave UNTIL you give!

Numbers 6:24–26

- 24 The Lord bless you
and keep you;
- 25 the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
- 26 the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.