

"HEROES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS"

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

© 2024 Rev. Dr. Brian E. Germano

[Veterans' Appreciation Sunday]

[PROP NEEDED: Video clip from *Saving Private Ryan*]

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 11-10-24]

--I--

1. [Read Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 and Pray]
2. From Lexington and Yorktown, to Gettysburg and Appomattox; from Verdun and Normandy, to Midway, Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima; from Inchon and Khe Sanh to Baghdad and Kabul; and even from stateside work during times of conflict to service around the world in times of peace,...

A--...Americans in the branches of our nation's military have served faithfully both at home and abroad over the last 200+ years to protect and preserve the causes of liberty and freedom.

B--My own father and both grandfathers served our country in this way, and many of you here today, either in person or worshipping online, have been/are among them, too.

C--Well, tomorrow (November 11th), we pause to celebrate and honor you and the nearly 18 million of your fellow Veterans ¹ for your service to our nation and the things it stands for.

D--And as we remember your service and sacrifice, I want to invite us all to consider three reasons why I think it's important for us to honor both you and them as what I'm calling "*Heroes of Righteousness*."

--II--

7. First, we honor you for your **COMMITMENT** to God through our country.

A--It's true that as Christians, our commitments to God and country are not always compatible -- sometimes we serve God *best* by standing up and speaking against injustices of the reigning authority. ²

B--But there are many more times in which God calls us to commitment precisely *through* the work and policies of our nation. ³

1--Jesus illustrates this in his words from Mark 12:17 where, after showing his disciples a Roman coin, he then tells them "*give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and give to God the things that are God's.*"

2--And in Romans 13:1-7, Paul tells Christians to be subject to their governments, for he says, *"the authorities that exist have been instituted by God."*

D--Well, you as veterans have willingly followed Paul's advice (even if at times unknowingly) by answering the call of *GOD* through the authority of our nation -- and we honor you and those like you today for that commitment.

8. Second, we also honor you and all our veterans for your **CONVICTION** -- your dedication to those things you consider important enough to be willing to lay down your life to protect.

A--Sir Winston Churchill once said to *"Never, never, never, give in! In anything great or small, large or petty...never give in, except to convictions of honor and good sense."* ⁴

1--Another author has said that *"[In order] to measure a [person], note the height of [their] ideals, the depth of [their] convictions, the breadth of [their] sympathies, and the length of [their] sacrifices."* ⁵

2--In like fashion, Jesus himself says in Matthew 5:6&10 *"Blessed are those who hunger & thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.... Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"*

B--It's true that not all causes for which people fight or serve in a nation's armed forces are "honorable" or "righteous."

1--Examples include medieval Christians fighting in the Crusades, Confederate armies in the Civil War, & the German & Japanese armies in World War II.

2--But even though there's no such thing as an absolutely "pure" motivation for going to war, we dare not dishonor the conviction of those who believe so deeply in their cause they're willing to lay down their life for it.

9. A final reason today for us to honor you and all our veterans is because of your/their **COURAGE** -- and by this I don't just mean courage to face death in battle, but more importantly the courage to do the hard things which must often be done to protect and ensure justice and equity for all.

A--War and violence in *any* form (and for *any* reason) is a *tragic* thing that should be avoided, if possible ⁶ -- even one criteria of what's known as "Just War" theory used by Christians to justify war in some circumstances insists that war be the absolute *last* resort after all other options have been exhausted.

B--But when it *must* be employed -- as Verse 8 of today's scripture seems to imply -- it demands a moral courage and fortitude on the part of those who wage it.

1--Nineteenth-century preacher G.K. Chesterton once said that "*Courage is almost a contradiction in terms, [as] it means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die.*" ⁷

2--And the courage I'm speaking of isn't just *any* type of courage -- it should have a certain shape to it. General Douglas MacArthur called it "*Moral courage -- the courage of one's convictions, the courage to see things through [in a] world that is in a constant conspiracy against the brave. It's the age-old struggle of the roar of the crowd on one side & the voice of your conscience on the other.*" ⁸

3--Authentic courage, you see, always contains within it a sense of moral and ethical integrity. ⁹

C--And whether He's recognized or acknowledged as such or not, it's actually *God Himself* who is the source of this kind of courage.

1--Psalm 27:1-3, 14 -- "*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh -- my adversaries and foes -- they shall stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.*" ¹⁰

2--Courage, then, is not the *absence* of fear, but rather (in the words of Dorothy Bernard) "*fear that has said its prayers.*" ¹¹

D--So, today we honor you and all our Veterans for your display and practice this kind of Godly, moral courage which dares to confront death itself by being willing to stand up and do those hard things which ensure freedom, justice, and righteousness.

--III--

10. Here, then, are three reasons for us to honor you, our Veterans, today as "*Heroes of Righteousness*": your **Commitment** to God through your country; your **Conviction** of things worth dying for; and your Godly, moral **Courage** to do whatever is necessary for the cause of freedom and justice.
11. Of course, these three qualities (commitment, conviction, courage) aren't *only* for Veterans.
12. Nevertheless, the real test (and challenge) for Veterans (and for ALL of us who follow Gods) is not the DEATH we might face, but the LIFE we must live after our service. ¹²

A--That's why those of us who've *not* served in our nation's military owe not only a debt of THANKS to you, our Veterans, but also a debt of LIFE itself.

B--Following the great Civil War battle of Gettysburg in 1863, Abraham Lincoln offered these words in part of his dedication speech for the cemetery there:

"It is for us, the living, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is... for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us - that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to the cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion - that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." ¹³

C--Considering this, I want to conclude by inviting us to watch a short video-clip from the movie Saving Private Ryan that reminds us of the importance of each of us (Veteran or not) doing all we can to make every part of our life count...

[WATCH VIDEO CLIP OF "Saving Private Ryan" (scene on bridge to end of movie, edited down; superimposed at bottom of final screen are the words *"Greater love has no one than this: that they lay down their own life for [others]"* (John 15:13)" -- TIME 4:44]

13. [PRAYER]

14. [Suggested closing 11am hymn, UMH#514 "Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus"]

ENDNOTES:

¹ Current veteran data according to the Department of Veterans Affairs, cited from <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/11/08/the-changing-face-of-americas-veteran-population/>

² Examples include the early Christians who refused to call Caesar "lord", or the American colonists of the 1770s who refused to submit to the unjust laws of a tyrannical king in England and who then launched the American Revolution, or the work of MLK, Jr. speaking against racial injustice, or even some of the protests over the last few years against the continued inequalities of our society.

³ For example, at least in the Old Testament, God used various nations as tools of discipline upon other nations -- at times He even used those nations to discipline his own people of Israel. Throughout the New Testament, as well, we find the implication that nations are instituted by God himself as tools for order and discipline in the world.

⁴ Sir Winston Churchill (1874-1965), cited in Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992). Entry#8548.

⁵ Croft M. Pentz, The Complete Book of Zingers (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1990).

⁶ After an overwhelming victory by his Confederate army at Fredericksburg, VA in 1862, General Robert E. Lee is said to have remarked, *"It is good that war is so terrible, lest we should grow too fond of it."*

⁷ G. K. Chesterton, cited in Leadership magazine, Vol. 10, no. 4.

⁸ Douglas MacArthur, cited in Bob Phillips, Phillips' Book of Great Thoughts & Funny Sayings (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1993), p. 77.

⁹ According to one author, the waging of war requires "*integrity... [which is] the courage of one's convictions*" (Stephen L. Carter in "Integrity," Christianity Today magazine, Vol. 40, no. 12).

¹⁰ See Also 1 Corinthians 16:13 ("*Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous and strong*").

¹¹ Dorothy Bernard, cited in Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), Entry#1919. Mark Twain once even said that "*Courage is not the absence of fear... but is resistance to fear [and] mastery of fear*" [Mark Twain, cited in Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), Entry#1920].

¹² In the words of the Italian poet V.C. Aferi, "*Often, the test of courage becomes rather to live than to die*" [Robert C. Shannon, 1000 Windows (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing Company, 1997)].

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gettysburg_Address