

REMEMBER THE SONG OF THE BOW

I Samuel 31: 1-13, II Samuel 1: 1-27 --- Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Back in 1985, thirty-two years ago, Robert S. McGee wrote a powerful book entitled “The Search for Significance.” It’s a book my mother recommended that touched her life. I recommend this book to each of you who need to get off the performance treadmill. Many of us grew up thinking God doesn’t want us to be honest with Him about our thoughts or our lives either with ourselves, with others or with Him. God longs for us to be honest with Him at the deepest levels. We are significance. We can suppress emotions and strive to be perfectionists. Sometimes we drive ourselves to succeed, or we can attack people who hurt us, or who block our way to success. We may punish ourselves when we fail. We may say clever things to be accepted. We may even help others with one motive-to be appreciated. We may withdraw, depressed from life, feeling inadequate.

Beside our search for significance, is our deep fear of being insignificant. All of us want to be remembered for something. One of the major tragedies of the Viet Nam War was that many of our bravest soldiers fought and died in that unpopular war, a war that had no positive resolution. Many of these soldiers suffer repercussions as survivors of that war. None of us want to believe our lives are worthless. None of us wish to live in vain. It’s Memorial Day tomorrow, Decoration Day. All of us – not just soldiers, hope we will not live or die in vain. On May 23, 2003, Dennis McCarthy wrote an editorial for the L. A. Daily News with the story of one soldier named Brian Rooney. Brian Rooney is a science teacher in L.A. He has spent thousands of dollars, and hundreds of personal hours, remembering, memorializing America’s war dead all the way from the Revolutionary War to the present. Brian Rooney has catalogued over 8,600 memorials in all 50 states, remembering men and women who have died protecting America from the enemy.

Brian Rooney’s mission began in the jungles of Viet Nam with a promise He made to a dying soldier. As this soldier died, he whispered to the young Army medic, Brian Rooney, “Remember me.” Brian Rooney leaned over this mortally wounded soldier, trying to read the name on his dog tags. “Remember me,” the soldier whispered again into Brian Rooney’s ears. Brian Rooney promised that he would remember him. Beloved, granting significance to those we affirm is a godly exercise. Giving significance to the departed, all of our loved ones gone before us is biblical. Remembering those who have died as soldiers protecting our country is biblical. The question in the mind of every dying soldier must be, “Will I have died in vain?” Have our American soldiers died in vain?

Does the way we live our lives reflect our thanks to those dying in battle, on Bunker Hill and Yorktown in the battles of the American Revolution, or the battlefields in Chalmette, Louisiana and the Battle of New Orleans from the War of 1812, or the battlefields of the Mexican War and the battlefields of Gettysburg, Shiloh and others in the Civil War? How about the battle in Cuba on San Juan Hill in the Spanish American War, or in the trenches of Verdun and Belleau Wood in World War I, or the beaches of Normandy, the city of Bastogne, the fields of Europe, the jungles of the islands of Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima and many more in World War II, or the battlefields at Inchon and the Frozen Chosen Reservoir of Korea from the Base Camp of An Khe and Hamburger Hill to the Mekong Delta of Viet Nam? Does the way we live our lives reflect our thanks to those dying the battle of Granada, Panama, the sand dunes of Kuwait and Iraq in Desert Storm, or the and how many war deaths in Kosovo, Somalia, Iran, Saudia Arabia, the mountains of Afghanistan, Bagdad, and the cities of Iraq? So many countless thousands of lives paid the ultimate sacrifice to preserve our nation and our liberty today. It is fitting to take time to remember fallen heroes, to bow our heads to thank God for those who loved our country enough to give their lives and their future and their fortunes in our defense.

The setting of the final battle for King Saul and his 3 sons, especially David's dear friend, Jonathan, is the plain of Esdraelon, the valley of Megiddo, that stretches out from Mt. Gilboa. Jinny and I stood there on Mt. Gilboa, where Elijah defeated the 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah. We looked out across this vast plain where the final battle of Armageddon will be fought, the great conflict when the kings of the whole earth someday will be gathered together unto the battle of the great Day of Almighty God. Here Barak defeated the Canaanites and Jael put a nail through the head of their general, Sisera—in Judges 4,5. Here, Gideon defeated the Midianites and the Amalekites—with 300 men with their 300 trumpets and pitchers they smashed. (Judges 6,7.) Here, Jehu smote all the descendants of the house of Ahab. Here, King Josiah was slain in his battle with the Egyptians. This valley has been the chosen place of encampment in every great contest in Israel until the disastrous march of Napoleon Bonaparte from Egypt into Syria. Jews, Gentiles, Saracens, Crusaders, Egyptians, Druses, Turks, Arabs, French, and warriors out of every nation under heaven have camped here. Their banners have been wet with the dews of Mt. Tabor and Mt. Hermon. This is doubtless, the greatest battlefield on earth, greater than the plains of Belgium, the plains of Lombardy, or the sands of Iraq.

The Philistine hosts gathered together in Shunem where they pitched their tents, I Samuel 28:4. Then they moved their troops to Aphek, and pitched by the fountain in Jezreel. (I Samuel 29:1) They advanced from a westward to a northward position in the plain of Esdraelon. King Saul had the upper hand with his fearless

troops on the northern slopes of Mt. Gilboa, an excellent position to fight, but not retreat. The Philistines began the battle by moving southward across the plain till they reached the foot of Mt. Gilboa. Soon, the battle went heavily against King Saul. A Philistine archer hit him. He was badly wounded. Saul knew well the Philistines would subject him to awful mutilation or horrible humiliation. They would flay the enemy alive. So, Saul asked his armor-bearer to draw his sword and end his life before one of the uncircumcised Philistines came to make-sport of him.

God's time had come to abandon King Saul in battle after Saul abandoned God. King Saul had disguised himself and gone to a witch, the medium at Endor. I Samuel 28 declares in verse 6 that Saul inquired of the Lord, but the Lord had abandoned Saul and would not answer him by dreams, by Urim or Thummin or by prophets. The medium was frightened telling disguised King Saul, I S. 28: 9, "Behold, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off mediums and spiritists from the land?" Saul vowed she would not be punished, and asked her to bring up Samuel from the dead. It's strange stuff. The medium did and Samuel chided Saul saying, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" Saul's sad answer was, "I am greatly distressed, for the Philistines are waging war against me, and God has departed from me and answers me no more, either through prophets or by dreams. Therefore, I have called you, that you may make known to me what I should do." Samuel told Saul that God was his adversary and that the next day, the Philistines would kill him and his three sons. One act of sin leads to another. Sin takes us further than we ever want to go. The way of the transgressor is hard. Samuel's prophecy came true. Saul, and his three sons, Jonathan, Abinadab, and Melchishua were all killed in this great battle—I Samuel 31:2. When the tragic news came to David, he cried out a wail and lament, "the song of the bow."

As we remember "the song of the bow" today, David teaches us how to remember those who have died while defending our country. This "song of the bow," remembering the death of King Saul and his three sons, including Jonathan, David's closest friend, has some important lessons for us to learn today. This song reveals four lasting lessons to remember today and tomorrow on Memorial Day.

THE DEFEAT OF ANY NATION HAS ALWAYS BEEN LINKED TO THE PERCEIVED DEFEAT OF THAT NATION'S GOD. Notice in II Samuel 1:17, "And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and Jonathan his son." Part of David's lament is over this temporary defeat of God and His people Israel. It's true that God brought defeat to Israel to judge King Saul. Nevertheless, now Israel was temporarily living under the victors—the Philistines. David had been on the other side of these Philistines, victorious in battle. Remember the defeat of Goliath and the Philistines in I Samuel 17? That was in 1079 BC. This Philistine

victory over King Saul and his army, happened in 1056 BC. What a victory for God it had been when David slew Goliath the giant! Remember the days of Eli when the ark was taken? Not only was Israel defeated that day along with the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, but in the view of the Philistines, Israel's God had been defeated. The ark of God was taken. Many of us well remember 9-11-01. Some ministers in America called these acts of terror God's judgment on America for our forsaking Him. There were swift rebuttals of those words. Yet, in America, this defeat turned our country back to God, temporarily. Our nation for a short while, saw the Lord as the Source of our defense, protection, and hope. For two to three months, America began to espouse a new desire to be a godly nation. Praying in school was all right for a few days at least. Our perceived defeat in having the Twin Towers fall, with around 3,000 deaths, made us stop to remember that God is Sovereign. Many of us will not soon forget the sense in our country that we were crying out to God. When victories are won, most nations view it as victory for God if freedom to worship Him is being fought for. When defeats occur, most of us know God may be using defeat to bring us, through the defeat, back to Him in faith, repentance, and worship. The defeat of any nation has always been linked to the perceived defeat of that nation's God. There is a second lesson:

THE DEATH OR DEMISE OF THE LORD'S ANOINTED IS ALWAYS CAUSE FOR WEeping. II Samuel 1:18 reads, "And David said this

lamentation, "the song of the bow," should be taught to the people of Judah; behold it is written in the Book of Jashar." This song is remarkable. King Saul was finally dead, David's deadly, mortal enemy. King Saul committed the sin of suicide in war, after going to seek counsel from the witch of Endor. What a time for rejoicing! Right? Wrong! Not for David, no, never! Even the way Saul died, was a huge cause for much weeping. God has never given to any of us as men and women, the choice to dispose of our life—or to help another person dispose of their life. It is a daring thing to close our day of grace, sooner than God would close it. It is a reckless thing to rush into the presence of our Maker before He has called us to appear. It is a presumptuous decision to calculate that we will better our condition by plunging from life to death and then on into eternity. We should be tender in judging others pressed hard by life's staggering problems. Yet, suicide should always move us to tears. David wasn't only weeping for Jonathan; he was weeping for Saul, the Lord's anointed.

This false account of the Amalekite taking Saul's life, differs sharply from the Word of God. It was a made-up story by this man who was banking-on David rejoicing in the death of his mortal enemy. I Samuel 31: 4 ,5 tells us Saul killed himself outright, and his armor bearer, who wasn't wounded, followed his king's example. One suicide can lead to another. It wasn't this lying Amalekite who killed

King Saul. He must have thought he would gratify and please David for claiming to have slain His arch rival. What this lying Amalekite did not know, was that David had nobly spared Saul's life twice, because he would not lift his hand to kill the Lord's anointed. This Amalekite may have been a servant in Saul's army. The Philistines never came to strip the slain king and his sons and the other slain Israeli soldiers until the next day. (I Sam. 31: 8) This foolish Amalekite got to Saul first, removing his crown that David recognized. Coming to David, the man expected David to rejoice. It didn't happen. David mourned for King Saul whom he loved, whom he had tried repeatedly to serve and he wept for Jonathan. This was a time for weeping, not for lying to try to steal a great reward. David ended this liar's life.

This honoring of "the Lord's anointed" is not a popular theme these days, but it is still God's desire for "the Lord's anointed to succeed," whether he or she is leading the nation, or a state, or a church, or a family. When my father died when I was 21, the mantle of patriarch of the family fell to me. Yet, my mother was the leader of our family and I believe she was "the Lord's anointed," in our family until God took her Home on March 1, 2001. Every time we receive a new president in our country or a new governor in our state, God is the one who raises up leaders, as Daniel declared in Daniel 2: 20, 21. "Blessed be the Name of God forever and ever to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings." I Timothy 2: 1 urges us to make supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for all people, first for kings and all who are in high positions." King Saul was no perfect man, but he was "the Lord's anointed," just as President Donald Trump is "the Lord's anointed," in America now. When "the Lord's anointed" is embroiled in moral failure or he dies, resulting from his own sin, as King Saul did, it is still a deeply tragic day in any nation. Thirdly,

THE DIGNIFIED MEMORY OF THE DEPARTED MUST BE FILLED WITH A CHARITY THAT THINKS NO EVIL. Notice v. 23 and listen to David's lament. David's heart was full of generosity, not jealousy. His song dwells on all that was ever good or to be commended in King Saul. David make no allusions to Saul's faults. No, David focused on and celebrated Saul's courage and energy in war, his cooperation with Jonathan, and his advancement of the kingdom of Israel. What exceeding beauty and spirit David lamented with, eulogizing forever the virtues of Saul. David's words are a eulogy that transfigured his deadly enemy into his beloved friend, for David loved Saul. David's words buried every painful association. He said nothing but what was good of the departed. The day after Saul died, he and his three sons were mutilated, beheaded and their bodies were hung up to mummify and dry out in Bethshan, a place I have been. But remember the brave men of Jabesh-gilead? They came at night to Bethshan and unfastened those beheaded bodies from the wall of the temple of Ashtaroth. This

god and goddess Astarte was androgynous—said to be male in the morning and female in the evening. These brave men walked all night and took the bodies of Saul and his sons down from the wall of Bethshan. They brought those mutilated bodies back to Jabesh-gilead, burned them and buried the bones under a tamarisk tree there and fasted 7 days. Those men, along with David, in “the song of the bow” showed Saul and his sons honor and charity that thinks no evil, the kind of words President Abraham Lincoln spoke in his two minute Gettysburg Address. Fourthly,

THE DISTRESS OF LOSING OUR CLOSEST FRIENDS IN WAR OR IN SERVICE TO THE LORD IS A GRIEF THAT WILL LAST A LIFETIME.

Notice David’s words in verses 25-27. “How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain on your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women. How the mighty have fallen, and the the weapons of war perished.” But the distress David felt, he didn’t want announced in Askelon or Gath-v. 19,20, to tell them that they took the life of a friend that was greater to David than any other friend. Many misunderstand David’s words and accuse him of a sinful relationship with Jonathan. No, David just had a friend in Jonathan such as few men ever know in another man. Like props under a house, one of the main props of David’s life was swept out from under him. This friendship was so beautiful and wonderful—never sensuous, but sensitive, not sexual, but closer than a brother, not homosexual, but a love matching and greater than many men’s love for their own wife. This was a man to whom David opened his very soul. Oh, this hurt, when the closest friend of your life is brutally slain—this sensitive, closer than a brother, friend.

Some of you know God has knit us as pastors in this church together, bringing Pastor Larry, Pastor Kevin, Pastor James, Pastor Will, Pastor Zaqueo, and Pastor Saul into my life. Our David--Jonathan relationships as brothers in Jesus, ones whom I trust and love and admire and learn from. As pastors, we share a holy relationship with each other. I never knew that fellow-pastors could ever be such close brothers in Jesus. But God has done it! I don’t know which of us seven pastors will go Home to Jesus first, but we will lament that day! It will be the earthly ending of a relationship that mirrors David with Jonathan. We love and defend each other. What gentler veil can be drawn over death than to throw our arms of love around a fallen brother whose body has been mutilated by war, or worn out in service to Jesus, but whose spirit is alive and awaiting us in Glory.

May God help us remember and weep and thank Jesus for Calvary and for all those who have died serving Him and our country. Let us resolve to be faithful as Jesus was, and as our fallen comrades were. I love you all. Amen.