

His Empowerment

Knowing Your Counselor:

Acts 4:31-35, Romans 5:5

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On Memorial Day we honor those who laid down their lives for our nation. In the Revolutionary War 4,435 men died in battle. Some 2,260 soldiers were killed in the War of 1812. Another 13,283 American fighters died in the Mexican War from 1846 to 1848. A total of 364,511 union soldiers died in the Civil War. At least 133,821 confederate fighters died with an estimated 26,000 to 31,000 more confederates dying in union prisons. From 1898 to 1901, 2,446 American soldiers died in the Spanish-American War. Another 116,516 American soldiers died in World War I. In World War II we buried 405,399 American troops. Some 36,574 American military died in Korea, 58,220 in Vietnam. In the Persian Gulf 383 laid down their lives. A month ago, the Iraq war death toll for American soldiers was 4,397. In Afghanistan, the most recent count is 1,083 Americans.

These folk laid down their lives in major confrontations. More servicemen and women lost their lives in smaller skirmishes, conflicts, and operations defending our nation. Is the sacrifice worth it? Certainly, what one generation provides can be squandered by the next. What one person sacrifices can be trampled by another! Do our selfish, destructive acts nullify the unselfish heroism of another?

For 29 years, it has been my privilege to speak when families gather to remember their dead. I speak because I bring good news. I've been sent with good news. Here it is.

First, the Creator of the universe is a good, loving, personable God. He has chosen to create you in his image so that just as he chose to love you, you can choose to love him. Love requires choice. Don't your friends and family need to hear what the Creator has done for them. Second, in deception our ancestors chose a path of estrangement from God that brings death through every attitude and action. Isaiah prophesied that our righteous acts are filth. Solomon wrote that there is a way that seems right to us, but it ends in death. People argue over morals. They argue over political ideas, economic ideas, military ideas; but no one, no matter how clever, knows the consequences of our actions or the corruptions of our ideas. Because of our estrangement from God, we and our entire world suffer. Don't your friends and family need to think about that? Third, God restored knowledge of himself through a covenant with the nation of Israel and by sending to them a promised deliverer who died in payment for the sins of every human being. This savior, Jesus of Nazareth, is one with God and broke the power of death for the human race. He revealed that God passionately loves you as your Father and intends for you, a life that is everlasting... as a gift. The gift of forgiveness and eternal life is simply welcomed and received by faith. Thus, those who die in Christ, continue to live, and are more powerful than we can imagine. Do your friends and family know that? Fourth, in response to Jesus' request, God has poured out his presence, the Holy Spirit, into the heads and hearts of people who repent from their estrangement, their deceived way of life and believe in Jesus. Through the giving of his Spirit, Jesus actually speaks, works, and lives through believers that he is sending into every part of the world. Do you recognize the work of the Spirit? Are your friends and family alert to the Spirit of Jesus reaching to them? Fifth and finally, through a believer, God's Spirit is talking to you right now, making his appeal to you, so that soon he will make his appeal through you to his lost children, to some of your friends and family members, and in that way

continue to restore his lost creation. Have you planted in the minds of some of your family members that God is speaking through you to them? They need to think about that.

Now given our situation, all of this is good news. It is great news, but it has put us believers at risk. We live our lives in a world of discouragement and death because of the estrangement of our people from the Creator. We believers live our lives in a world of discouragement and death, so that through our actions God completes the desires of his love for a sinful people who suffer from their sins. What we do can be squandered by those we are sent to, just like the sacrifice of the American soldiers who gave their lives. However, God calls us to trust him and make the sacrifice.

In a tough fight, soldiers need periods of refreshment, rest, training, and inspiration. They need to be equipped, organized and led into battle. That whole process of refreshment, rest, training, inspiration, equipment, organization and leadership is empowerment. They are empowered as soldiers by the rest, training, inspiration, equipment, organization and leadership.

When you bury a loved one, suffer a loss, get hurt or disappointed, you can lose focus and become discouraged. In Acts 4, two apostles Peter and John were challenged with real, frightening threats. The people and leaders that killed Jesus had jailed them and now threatened them. If you don't think Peter and John were spooked, ponder this verse of Scripture:

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. (Acts 4:23, NIV)

It is easy to dismiss compliments, but insults and threats are hard to forget. Peter and John reported all the chief priests and elders said. The swords from the mouths of those men incited fear. That was the intention. When Peter and John finished reporting their experience, their Christian brothers and sisters did not pat them on the back and say it will be okay. They

cried out in prayer to God. They brought the threats to God. They remembered what these leaders had done to Jesus, but they also remembered what God had done as a result. They prayed:

Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus. (Acts 4:27-30, NIV)

These folk had good news for the world. They were back on their heels, but they had been given a Comforter, the Holy Spirit. Their attention had been captured by enemies of the gospel. Now in prayer they turned to God. Listen to what happened:

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. (Acts 4:31, NIV)

The whole group, not just Peter and John, were filled with the Holy Spirit, they spoke boldly in the face of threats. Indeed, God unified them into one heart and agreement of mind. They cared for each other's needs, generously helping one another, completing God's loving desires for each other.

It is easy for us to get distracted, defensive and discouraged. The wages of sin is death and so division, hurt and death is constantly about us. The thoughts and works of death invade our hearts and minds. However, Jesus gave us a Counselor to overcome. He gave us a Counselor to refresh us, train us, inspire us, equip us, organize us and lead us into battle.

What is your relationship with the Counselor? When Paul wrote the Christians in Rome about suffering, he assured them that God was building them up. He lifted to them hope that would not disappoint them. He wrote:

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Romans 5:5, NIV)

Have you experience God's loving mercy and grace in your hearts? Then you know the hope you are given won't disappoint you. God delivers on his love for you.

However, are you back on your heels right now? Are you fearful? Are you worn out? Are you discouraged? Solomon wrote in Proverbs:

Hope deferred makes the heart sick... (Proverbs 13:12, NIV)

Is that true for you? Has your hope not come true and you're shaky?

The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, is to be the key influence on your heart and mind. You are to be filled with the Holy Spirit continually. You are to be empowered by the Holy Spirit and all that means.

You have a choice in being filled with the Holy Spirit. *First, invite him to fill you and counsel you. Second, look for him as you sing praise to God. Third, listen for him in the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs that believers share with one another. Fourth, welcome him in the counsel and loving ministry of your brothers and sisters in Christ.* Remember, he is living and working through the gifts and faith of the followers of Jesus Christ. Be filled with the Spirit today.