

Proper Memorials And The Right Spirit

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On January 30, 1968 an uneasy quiet had settled over the land of Vietnam. It was the quiet of a ceasefire in a land ravaged by 25 years of war. The Communist troops had called for a ceasefire, ostensibly to celebrate Tet, which is the Vietnamese Lunar New Year. But suddenly and spontaneously, mortar fire, gunshots, and bombs began to rip open the uneasy peace. The old imperial city of Hué became the scene of one of the fiercest battles of what would later become known as the Tet Offensive.

Meanwhile, 6,000 American marines were fighting for their lives surrounded by 20,000 North Vietnamese at a remote mountain base known as Khe Sahn at Tan Son Air Base in Saigon, an area that had not felt the full impact of this war because it had been geographically removed from the actual battle zone. The Viet Cong or the Underground Communist Revolutionary Force dedicated to overthrowing the governments of South Vietnam and Cambodia, sent waves of sappers across the runways at Tan Son with satchels of explosives to destroy parked aircraft.

Sappers were those who had dug the tunnels and set traps throughout the battle zone to undermine American military and the French troops before them in guerilla warfare. But even now in Saigon, the South Vietnamese capital that had been secured from the day to day horrors of the war, suddenly found itself totally immersed in the conflict. Suddenly, desk jockeys and logistical support in the secure headquarters were exposed to attack from 6,000 Viet Cong sappers who had slipped into the capital city. American advisors in the remote village of South Vietnam had to rally ill-equipped and ill-trained local militias to stave off the attacks by fellow villagers who used the Tet Offensive to reveal their true colors and allegiance to the Viet Cong.

Back in the Old Imperial City of Hué, a city of 140,000, the communists had completely overrun the city and a 800 American troops fought desperately

for days to avoid death, while communist troops hunted down and killed 6,000 civilians. The Tet Offensive became the turning point in the war and almost literally assured a communist victory in Vietnam because the war came home to Americans via television with a resounding thud.

Only two months earlier on November 21, 1967, General William Westmoreland assured everyone that the war was going well and the communists were on their last leg. He could say this with certainty because he knew the war was proceeding exactly according to the plan and it was moving into Phase Four which would bring home all American troops in two years.

But now Americans at home were suddenly faced with the grim horrors of fierce battles, the low point of which came at 2:45 AM on the second day of the offensive, when a beat up old taxi and a truck pulled up next to the American embassy in Saigon. Nineteen sappers jumped out, blew a hole in the wall, and stormed the embassy, the symbol of America. They immediately killed five Marine guards as the fight unfolded. It was mid-afternoon on the 30th of January on the other side of the International Date Line so all Americans saw firsthand on the evening news, the battle that raged literally on American soil as an American flag burned at the embassy. It was, for the U.S., the beginning of the end. As Americans at home watched the embassy wall breached and with the very graphic image of the American eagle seal of the U.S. might blowing into pieces as the wall was breached.

However, the reality of the situation was that when the offensive ended about a month later, the communists were thoroughly destroyed. America had lost 1,000 men. South Vietnam had lost 2,800. There were 14,000 civilian casualties but 45,000 communist troops were killed, including virtually the entire leadership of the Viet Cong. The whole of the Communist guerilla army in South Vietnam had been destroyed.

So what happened? Well, the Vietnamese leader, Ho Chi Minh, knew they were beaten just as General Westmoreland had said. But being the consummate politician and knowing that wars are as much a political contest

as a military one, he decided that the only way to defeat the American military might was to defeat the will of the American public. And that is exactly what he did.

General Westmoreland had said just months prior to this as he looked to what he saw as the inevitable victory, "We are making progress and it lies within our grasp. The enemy's hopes are bankrupt. With your support we'll give you a success that will impact not only Vietnam but on every emerging nation in the world." But what happened was America's *hopes* became bankrupt. Up to this point in the war, 20,000 American soldiers and advisors had died but because of their loss of resolve, 25,000 more died by 1975 when the United States literally fled in Vietnam. This lack of vision and resolve then played a significant role in the massacre of six million Cambodians and Vietnamese as communist insurgency leader, Pol Pott, continued the communist-led overthrow of the legitimate government of Cambodia, that was right next door to Vietnam. What a terrible price to pay for a lack of resolve and for fear!

So what is the most important lesson we can learn from this today? Not as it applies to any nation on earth but to those who have their citizenship already assured in the Kingdom of God, if we continue, and that is a big *if* brethren, to boldly move forward while remembering the mighty works of God, who has assured us the victory.

The most obvious one, of course, is that perception is not always reality. We need to be careful not to let our enemy be the one to control the narrative and be so quick to jump ship rather than follow our leaders. This, of course, is not blind faith, but it should be a confidence in leadership built on a carefully considered track record rather than self-serving emotion. We are going to address that last sentence in a few minutes.

But first turn with me, if you would, to Numbers the 12th chapter. We are going to start here before going on to Israel's own Tet Offensive as described in chapters 13 and 14, because God set the stage in Numbers 12 for the next event with a warning to remember who really is in charge. In the chapter, God clearly shows that He is absolutely in charge and He places whom He chooses in positions of leadership to serve and act, while learning to think as He thinks. We are going to start in verses 1 and 2, which is Aaron and

Miriam's presumptuous behavior. And then I am going to carry it down to verse 6 which is God's response.

Numbers 12:1-2 Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. So they said, "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" And the Lord heard it.

Numbers 12:6-11 Then He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; he is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?" So the anger of the Lord was aroused against them, and He departed. And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper. So Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my lord! Please do not lay this sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned."

Now, following Moses' plea on behalf of Miriam, God heals her because Moses gave reasons, thinking like God does. God heals her and brings her back into the camp. And then we read down in verses 15 and 16.

Numbers 12:15-16 So Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days, and the people did not journey until Miriam was brought in again. And afterward the people moved from Hazeroth and camped in the Wilderness of Paran.

God makes a point of letting us know that all Israel was well aware of what went on as they remained in one place waiting for Miriam's return so they could move. The lesson is so important that God even makes sure this is something the Israelites are told to remember within the instructions regarding leprosy.

Deuteronomy 24:8-9 "Take heed in an outbreak of leprosy, that you carefully observe and do according to all the the priests, the Levites, shall teach you; just as I command them, so you shall be careful to do. Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam on the way when you came out of Egypt!

Again, this lead-in to chapter 13 is very important because it gives us the clear connection to moving forward under proven leadership while trusting God. Now on to Numbers 13 and 14, which is the account of God's instructions through Moses to boldly move forward into the Promised Land.

Numbers 13:1-3 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them." So Moses sent them from the Wilderness of Paran according to the command of the Lord, all of them men who were heads of the children of Israel.

Then the representative scouts were named. In the next few verses, from each of the 12 tribes were named people that were leaders. And then down in verse 17, we see the instructions.

Numbers 13:17-20 Then Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, "Go up this way into the South, and go to the mountains, and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; whether the land is rich or poor; and whether there are forests or not. Be of good courage. And bring some of the fruit of the land." Now the time was the season of the first ripe grapes.

You are all quite familiar with these two chapters. The scouts, leaders of their tribes, did go into the land, finding it exactly as God said, bringing back reports and evidence of the incredible richness of the land, just as God had promised. However, they also let the real enemy sow his seeds of fear in them and contaminate the very spirit of hope in all the tribes of Israel with

their own contagious curse of fear, once again doubting the great God who had already paved a trail of evidence of His power and deliverance that He expected them to remember. Their victory that had been assured by God through Moses never took place because their fear turned it into the curse of defeat from a broken spirit that was driven by forgetting the mighty hand of God.

We read their Ho Chi Minh-like report in verses 27 through 29, then 31 through 33.

Numbers 13:27-29 Then they told him, and said, "We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan."

Numbers 13:31-33 But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we." And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people who we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

Then we see the broken spirit, the faithless reaction of the people, along with their abominable behavior against these leaders who would stay the course.

Numbers 14:1-10 So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the Lord brought us into the land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should

become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" So they said to one another, "Let us select another leader and return to Egypt." Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.

But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: "The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, 'a land which flows with milk and honey.' Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them." And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before the children of Israel.

We are all familiar then with God's reaction to this. But I would like to pick out just a few of the verses from the next 27 verses as we move into the next part of this sermon, starting with verse 11. And then we will pick it up after Moses' carefully considered response to God, who was right in line with God's own mind.

Numbers 14:11 Then the Lord said to Moses, "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?"

Numbers 14:20-24 Then the Lord said [after Moses pleaded with the Lord and interceded]: "I have pardoned, according to your word; but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord—because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it. But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it."

Numbers 14:26-32 And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron saying, "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me. Say to them, 'As I live,' says the Lord, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you. The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in the wilderness, all of you who are numbered according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter into the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in the wilderness.'"

Brethren, I want us to pay close attention to two things that appear in verses 22 and 24. We will start with the second of the two that we will find in chapter 24 because it shows what God expects to find in leadership that should have been built on conviction that comes from carefully remembering the mighty hand. Where it says in chapter verse 24, "But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring him to the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it."

Why was there a different spirit? Because he remembered God's mighty hand and it built in him a conviction of victory. There was a completely different spirit maintained in Caleb that kept him on course to fully follow God and that God could be trusted and God knew he could be trusted with the inheritance God was going to give him. But it is what God said in Numbers 14:22 that will take up most of the remainder of this sermon. "Because of these men who have seen My glory and signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice."

Through a broken spirit produced by following self-serving perception rather than the reality of God's power and deliverance, they had witnessed time

after time, ten times, they lost their assured inheritance. They failed to memorialize and remember the reality of God's glory, power, and deliverance under any circumstances.

The number ten typically indicates completeness. Here, God is indicating He has given enough of a witness of His glory, power, and deliverance to pass judgment. Here, if only they had remembered His power and glory as Moses, Joshua, and Caleb did. Looking forward beyond what seemed to be their own self-centered circumstances, their spirit would not have been broken and they would have moved forward in faith.

Instead of remembering God's glory, power, and faithful deliverance, they remembered their own loss and desires. They did not remember what He did at the parting of the waters of the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh's army. They did not remember the bitter waters made sweet at Marah. They did not remember the miraculous giving of the angel's food in the daily manna in the wilderness of Sin between Elim and Sinai. And they did not remember when they participated in double miracles that bracketed God's Sabbath in double portions of the day of preparation and then one on the seventh day. They did not remember when God brought water from the rock at Rephidim. They did not remember when He powerfully thundered His law at Sinai while they foolishly made the Golden Calf that He destroyed. They did not remember when He made His constant presence known in the cloud by day and the pillar by night. And they did not remember when He satisfied their foolish lusts just to keep them going with the quail they demanded. And finally here at Kadesh when He showed them the land full of milk and honey, and the promises that He gave and He was fully capable of delivering, they did not remember.

They should have been convicted by all these acts of deliverance along the way, but they failed to internalize them and physical perception was still the reality that broke their spirit. They should have heard His thunderous voice of glory and power if they only diligently memorialized these things along the way. Each incident should have been added on to the other and etched into their memories as memorials to God's glory, His power, and His perfect deliverance to form the same spirit of God's victorious work just as it had been formed in Moses, Caleb, and Joshua.

But they let the real power and God's glory slip away and because of this, they lost their sure inheritance. They lost sight of the foundation of faith that was being built by God in each one of these events so they could boldly enter into the Promised Land and receive the inheritance. If they would have remembered and memorialized what had been given them to them instead of focusing on what they wanted and the perceived things they feared, their spirit would never have been broken, and the same spirit would have been in them that God noted in Caleb.

Brethren, these things were written for our admonition. Are we paying close enough attention? How many of us in just the last week since Pentecost have already started to come under a barrage of difficult problems? How quickly have we already forgotten all the things God gave us the privilege to consider over the last six weeks of His power to deliver us, feed us with the unleavened bread of His truth, and then intensely focus our walk through this world over a 50-day count to Pentecost? Those days were His gift to us to continue to intensely memorialize His power and might in our own lives within the body of Christ so we can continue on our journey with the right Spirit convicted of His power to bring us all through it.

1968 seems to be a watershed year in the history of the United States that may hold some important lessons for us as the protesters' chronic rebellion against any authority became the norm and continues to this day. The year began with that Tet Offensive which led to Lyndon Johnson's shocking decision not to run for reelection, followed by the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr and Robert F. Kennedy. After that came the violence in the streets of Chicago as the media continued on a feeding frenzy filled with the supposed horrible atrocities of the Chicago Police Department over the so-called peaceful protests of the flower children who were camping out in Grant Park, but who were in fact throwing rocks and human feces at the police intended to cause violence. As we learned later from Abby Hoffman, one of the ringleaders of that group, years later he admitted that they had actually come to Chicago to provoke the authorities, taking a page out of Ho Chi Minh's playbook where perception became reality with the help of a manipulated media.

As hard as it may be for some of you younger people out there to believe who did not live through that time, soldiers returning from the war in

Vietnam actually had to take off their uniforms to travel within the United States or suffer the indignities of being hooted at and spat upon. This did not change until President Reagan's administration in the 80s where he acknowledged their service. Up until that point, they had been considered horrible, horrible people. It is quite a bit different than the respect that are given to those who serve and sacrifice their lives and limbs today.

But that is what the late 60s and into the 70s were like. This is one of the reasons you are witnessing the self-destruction of America today. Those kids of the 60s are now leading this country with the same contempt that they had held before they had the power. But I am not relating all of this to you as some kind of political statement but to give us a warning because perhaps the most significant event of that whole year is one that is least remembered or even known. However, it is the one event that showed, in principle, the source for all the broken spirit in America, just as it had been the source for the wrong spirit that overwhelmed most of Israel in the wilderness.

Following the Civil War at the end of the spring in 1865 which had claimed more American lives than any other war, even to this day, national cemeteries were established to bury and honor the dead from both sides of the horrible conflict. In the late 1860s, Americans began to set aside a day for tributes to those who had fallen and began decorating the graves of soldiers with flowers while praying that these soldiers were not in vain and that they, nor the conflict that divided Americans, should ever be forgotten. On May 5th, 1868 General John A. Logan, leader of an organization of northern Civil War veterans, called for a national day of remembrance. He proclaimed the 30th of May 1868 as designated for the purpose of strewing flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village, and hamlet churchyard in the land.

The date of the Decoration Day, as he called it, was chosen because it was not the anniversary of any particular battle. By World War I, both the northern and southern states were observing May 30th as the day of memorial for those who had fallen and sacrificed for others. As one of the sources that I read records, Memorial Day was born out of necessity. After the American Civil War, battered United States was faced with the task of burying and honoring 600,000 to 800,000 Union and Confederate soldiers

who had died in the single bloodiest military conflict in military in American history.

The first national commemoration of Memorial Day was held in Arlington Cemetery on May 30th, 1868 where both Union and Confederate soldiers are buried. However, in 1968 the Uniform Monday Holiday Act publication number 90-36382, Statute 250, was enacted June 28th, 1968 by an act of Congress that moved permanently to a Monday three federal holidays in the United States: Washington's birthday, Memorial Day, and Labor Day; also making Columbus Day a federal holiday permanently on a Monday. This created, according to the statute, long weekends with three days off, ending with holidays such as Memorial Day weekend and the Labor Day weekend. I quote, "The act was signed into law June 1st, 1968 and took effect on January 1st, 1971. The act was designed to increase the number of three-day weekends for federal employees, a favorite goal of the travel industry."

1968 is considered a watershed year when the American spirit was broken. But the chaos and confusion was just the outward sign of what really broke the American spirit. What really broke the American spirit, as well as Israel's in the wilderness, was the self-serving failure to remember with gratitude both the costs of the liberty we enjoyed, our duty in maintaining it, and that the actual One through whom all is done, even in the face of perceived danger, is our great God. And we should not have the deadly fear.

Brethren, a couple of weeks ago in a commentary, I quoted from President Reagan's presidential farewell address and his warning where he said, "Our spirit is back, but we have not re-institutionalized it." He said, "If we forget what we did, we will not know who we are."

I would like to change his words a bit to fit more correctly into the principle I would like us to take away from this sermon on this Memorial Day weekend, just barely a week after God's most recent memorial of remembrance that He places within the body of Christ in His holy days. If we forget what God did and continues to do and we forget who we are by reason of His power and His strength our focus will drift back to ourselves. And God's holy Memorial Day of remembrance of His plan and His purpose

and His power to carry us through will only become self-serving events and not the foundation of the courage that we must have to walk this walk with the absolute conviction it will take to boldly face the trials ahead.

Brethren, it is not wrong to enjoy the Memorial Day weekend just as it is not wrong to enjoy the holy days that God has graciously given us for times of feasting. But it is wrong when we forget *why* these things are there in the first place. Although not nearly on the same level of God's holy days, we can learn a good lesson here. Memorial Day was created as a time of remembrance and gratitude for self-sacrifice. But as it turned away to merely a self-serving three-day weekend for the travel industry, the spirit of a nation was changing with it. This may seem to be an oversimplification, but we need to get this idea firmly planted in our minds.

Deuteronomy 7:6-21 "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure of all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor chose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath that He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them. Then it shall come to pass because you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the Lord your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers.

And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle, the

offspring of your flock, in the land in which He you swore to your fathers to give to you. You shall be blessed above all the peoples; there shall not be a male or female barren among you or among your livestock. And the Lord will take away from you all sickness, and will afflict you with none of the terrible diseases of Egypt which you have known, but will lay them on all who hate you. Also you shall destroy all the people whom the Lord your God delivers over to you; Your eyes shall have no pity on them, nor shall you serve their Gods. And that you will be a snare to you; your eye shall have no pity on them; nor shall you serve their gods, for that will be a snare for you.

If you should say in your heart, "These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?"—you shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and all to Egypt: the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs and the wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm, by which the Lord your God brought you out. So shall the Lord your God do to all the people of whom you are afraid. Moreover the Lord your God will send the hornet among them until those who are left, who hide themselves from you are destroyed. You shall not be terrified of them; for the Lord your God, the great and awesome God, is among you."

Brethren, we must remember and internalize these things because all this was written for our admonition as we approach the Day. As Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 12, "Remember our Creator and all His mighty works." He loves us and our victory is assured. But it must continually be internalized when we have the opportunity to do so.