

The Sentinels

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When I was a junior in high school, I had the great opportunity to travel to Washington, DC with my classmates. That was really an exciting experience for me. It was the first time I have ever flown on an airplane. We went to the Capitol, and we did all the tours. We went to the Capitol Building, we went to the White House, we did the tours of those buildings.

And we visited all the monuments: The Jefferson Memorial, Washington Monument, and the Lincoln Memorial. Then we went to cross the river to Arlington Cemetery. And personally, it was probably the most special to me because I do have a special place for the sacrifice of those that have gone before us.

And so, as we walked through Arlington Cemetery, and looked at the graves, I was just in awe of everything I saw; to know that these men had sacrificed so much for our country. But then we reached the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. And it was an amazing experience. We watched the soldier march.

And I noticed that everyone around us, it was so quiet. And that is what they asked us to be, is quiet. But they also asked us to stand as well, out of respect. And I was amazed with the precision of these guards.

As they marched there was a black mat across the way and they would march exactly 21 steps across there over the memorial. When they reached the other end, they would pause. And then they would turn and face the memorial. And then they would hesitate 21 seconds. And then they would turn back.

They would move their rifle to the outside shoulder away from the tomb. They would pause another 21 seconds. And by the way, their gloves were wettened, so they would never have any issues with dropping the rifle. And then they would walk the same pace, 21 paces to the other end. And they

would do this over and over again, exactly the same way with the same precision.

Now you may ask, why 21 steps? Why 21 seconds in a pause? Well, that is because the highest military honor that can be bestowed is the 21 gun salute. And the other part that was so amazing, that is so memorable is the changing of the guard, which is done every 30 minutes. And again, this is done with such precision and it was just amazing. And again, the audience would just be in awe, and you could tell everyone was mesmerized to watch them as they performed this.

And when they did this, the new guard would come on. There would be the relief commander that walked with him in perfect unity throughout this procedure. And I always found it interesting that you could not even hardly tell when they were changing over to the new guards from the old guards as they went because they were, they were in sequence so perfectly. And just so you will know, this duty is performed by the 3rd US Infantry Regiment, also known as The Old Guard. And know that there is a permanent guard at this location every 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And it has been done since July 2nd, 1937.

Day or night, rain or shine, even when the cemetery is closed to visitors, whether it be 3 o'clock in the afternoon or 3 o'clock in the morning, they are faithful to their duty. And I found this to be an extremely profound commitment. We can take so much from that because they were not doing it for their own glory but out of respect. And our commitment to God, and our duty to God, is not for our glory but for His. They were not doing this for honor, bring attention to themselves, but out of respect for those fallen soldiers.

That is why we are here, out of respect for God, not to bring attention to ourselves but to bring glory to God. Can you imagine those long cold nights, the rain pelting or the snow or the driving winds or the blistering heat in the middle of the day. You might say, what is going through their minds? You think they ever go through frustrated? Were impatient?

Well, I can tell you this. 2003, when Hurricane Isabel approached Washington, Congress took off two days, and it was announced on TV that

the guarding of the tomb was to be suspended. But the guards respectively declined. They bore the wind. They bore the soaked skin. They endured the pelting rain. Because it was their assignment, it was their duty. And it was the highest honor they could give to those servicemen that have fallen. And in fact, in 2004, the very next year, Hurricane Ivan hit the same area. I am sure that they had this very same attitude. I happen to know that because I happened to be in Arlington that very same week at that time.

It did not matter to them. It did not matter because what was more important to them is to follow these procedures. They wanted to sacrifice themselves. They were willing to give of themselves to a greater thing.

But it is about sacrifice. It was not done for show. It was done out of respect. And that is the way our walk is to the Kingdom of God. Are you committed to your duty to your honoring of God, to be perfect as He is perfect?

The last time couple of times I have spoken, it has been the subject that we must be holy as He is holy. And it comes at a cost. It comes with sacrifice. And I felt as I prepared this, that the tomb guards, who are called the sentinels of the memorial, were a perfect example of sacrifice and dedication. And that is something that we could draw from.

They have this unyielding honor and dedication. And when I meditate on this, I ask myself, do I have the same type of dedication? And then I am really thankful for the great gift that has been given to me. We have been chosen to a higher calling which is unequaled by anything on this earth. We are called to something special, something unique that requires a special duty and service to God. Because He deserves it, because He has sacrificed so much for us, we should be willing to sacrifice for Him as well. In Matthew 7: 14, it says.

Matthew 7:14 "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

This was a very difficult path that they walked. And yes, today, our path can be very difficult in this world. But if we stay true to God, we will have a great reward. See, to become a tomb guard, there are tremendous requirements on their part to become a part of this elite group. And they

understand that it is going to take a total sacrifice, and they understand that sacrifice is not an option but the requirement. And so, do we realize that our sacrifice is not an option but a requirement to be holy as God is holy? It takes total dedication.

It is interesting the requirements of the tomb soldiers to become one of the guards, and I just want to go through this first for a few moments.

A guard must be between 5'10 and 6'2, and his waist cannot exceed 30 inches. (I never had a chance, just so you know).

Each guard, must commit two years of his life to guarding the tomb. And during his first six months, the guard cannot watch TV. He cannot even speak to anyone but study.

He must live in the barracks which are below the tomb. And in their off-duty time is spent studying about the cemetery history, about certain individuals in that cemetery, cleaning their weapon, preparing it. And also I found interesting is that they also spend time helping the other guards prepare for duty. I saw this in a documentary.

I thought it was very interesting, because the guards take five to six hours of every day to prepare their uniforms. The guard's uniform must be completely free of wrinkles, folds, or lint. And these uniforms are solid wool. So in the middle of the summer, it cannot be that comfortable. But regardless of the temperature, they gladly do it.

It is also interesting that they cannot swear in public for the rest of their lives. They cannot drink any alcohol on duty or off duty for the rest of their lives. They cannot do anything that may disgrace the uniform, so they cannot fight in any way, shape, or form. And after the two years that they have served, they receive a wreath to wear on their lapel signifying their dedication to guarding the tomb. And by the way, there is only around 400 presently wearing that wreath.

You know, when I think about this, they do so much sacrifice and they are able to wear this wreath. And of course, have the reputation of being a part of this great regiment. But then when I look at and think about our reward

for our sacrifice, it is immeasurable. It is immeasurable for what we are seeing here.

And again, remember for the guards here, these rules apply for the rest of their lives. If they do anything to bring dishonor to their oath, they are stripped away of that badge. Even after all the commitment of that two years, if they do anything to dishonor, that uniform is taken away.

Brethren, we have been given so much. Do we think about the possibility of our great gifts that God has given to us being stripped away because we were not willing to sacrifice, to give up ourselves, to give a total commitment and dedication to our God. It is really something to think about.

The guards of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier are bound by the Sentinel's creed. And it is a set of words that defines their unwavering dedication, dignity, commitment to preserve the honor and memorial of the soldiers they protect. And this is a creed that they must learn in training, and again, it is a central part of their identity as a tomb soldier, as a tomb guard.

This is the principles that they live by. And I want to read this to you. Listen to the words of this creed. I think it could almost been taken straight out of the Scriptures. It says:

Sentinel's Creed: My dedication to this sacred duty is total and wholehearted. In the responsibility bestowed on me never will I falter. And with dignity and perseverance my standard will remain perfection. Through the years of diligence and praise and the discomfort of the elements, I will walk my tour in humble reverence to the best of my ability. It is he who commands the respect I protect, his bravery that made us so proud. Surrounded by well-meaning crowds by day, alone in the thoughtful peace of night, this soldier will in honored glory rest under my eternal vigilance.

I just find it very amazing. I am just going to go through this a little bit if I could. The first line, my dedication to this sacred duty is total and wholehearted made me think of Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. And it says:

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Here we see Paul giving the church their marching orders, so to speak. It is our sacred duty to offer ourselves as living sacrifices. That is, our bodies, our minds, our actions so they will align with God's purposes. This requires that we submit our desires, our plans, and even our fears. We are to live a life set apart from this world that we may be pleasing to God, to be transformed and shaped into His character. Like I said, there is no doubt, maybe whoever wrote this read Romans 12.

The next line of the creed says, in the responsibility bestowed on me never will I falter. And with dignity and perseverance my standard will remain perfection. Through the years of diligence and praise, and the discomfort of the elements.

I Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

You are going to be steadfast. That reminds me of Galatians 6, verse 9.

Galatians 6:9 And let us not grow weary. . .

Paul is telling us to hang in there. Do not lose faith. Do not lose vision in our goal. And remember that our strength does not lie in ourselves but lies in Jesus Christ.

The next line says, I will walk my tour in humble reverence to the best of my ability. You know, it is interesting. The guards do not wear any rank or insignia on their uniforms. Every other member of the military wears some type of insignia to denote their rank. But not the tomb soldiers. Why?

Because the identities and the ranks of those soldiers within the tomb are unknown. And the guards did not want to wear insignia to avoid potentially outranking those soldiers which they are watching over. Their focus, see, is not to bring attention to themselves but it is to give honor in the service of those men that gave their lives.

Philippians 2:3-4 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Humility must be at the core of our conversion. Sacrifice must be at the core of our conversion. We must avoid self-gratification. A godly attitude is one of selflessness. Esteeming others better than ourselves is exactly what God looks for in us. We should not be looking for personal recognition but lifting up others. That is a godly attitude.

So we see here how these tomb soldiers, and our relationship with God match up a little bit. It is their command that they give respect to those that served so bravely. The bravery of Jesus Christ is unmeasurable.

No matter how hard we try, you will never be able to wrap your mind around it, at least for me, that God would take on mortal flesh, live a perfect life, and then die a horrible death. How much greater should our willingness to be servants, to guard this truth, to be dedicated to this duty than these soldiers. It makes me desire to walk the line for God, to count my steps, to walk the walk, to pause, pause in prayer, meditation, pause on the Sabbath, to focus on Him for His great sacrifice.

The next line of the creed says, surrounded by well-meaning crowds by day, alone in the thoughtful peace of night. This oath is saying that it does not matter if it is in the middle of the day or in the middle of the night, I am still going to do 21 paces. I am going to pause and turn, pause for 21 seconds. And he is going to follow that procedure, no matter if there is someone before him or he is alone.

You know, true character is what we do when we are alone. It is easy to do the right thing when we are around other people. But when we are alone, that

is where true character shines through. Because that is the time that only you and God know what is going on.

This reminded me of an article written by Mike Ford. He wrote back in the *Forerunner* back in May of 1993 titled, "What Do You Do in the Dark?" You might want to give it a read.

Mike begins this by stating in Ephesians 5:1, that Paul is urging us to imitate or follow God, and it is not an easy thing to do, and it takes many qualities, not the least of which is good character. Character definition is the combination of qualities that distinguishes one person, a group, or thing from another. It is moral or ethical strength, integrity, fortitude, and excellence.

By the way, character does not happen overnight. It is a process. It is something that we build over time by making serious, courageous, and right decisions. Mike ended his article with the line, character is what we do in the dark.

This reminded me, a long time ago, when I used to work in Southern California as an inspector. And I was down in Temecula in Southern California, and I was in a brand new subdivision. And there were no houses yet.

But there were streets, and they put up the stop signs, and there was no one around for miles. But I remember stopping at the stop signs. And I cannot tell you why (I cannot remember), but the one thing I do remember that brings it back to mind is that one of those stop signs, I looked at the stop sign up there, and there was one of these little white owls sitting on the top.

And you know, maybe that is why God did that, to help me remember that little story. That it does not matter if you are around someone else. That what you do, how you conduct your life in front of people or when you are alone, it means everything. And it is a sign if you want to measure if you are growing in godly character. Think about how you do or what you do when you are alone and what principles that you live by.

The last two lines of the creed says, this soldier will in honored glory rest under my eternal vigilance.

My dedication to the sacred duty is total and wholehearted. A tomb soldier's vigilance, their duty, their responsibility, is everything. They march with precision in unhurried steps. Their movements are a testament to their continued watchfulness. And for the Christian—for you and I—is our walk with God, is our work to be watchful and careful in how we walk, how we take our steps, and what is our spiritual posture.

I Peter 5:8-9 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith.

Last Sabbath I read I Peter 1, where it said to "gird up the loins of your mind." And in verse 16, it said, "Be holy as I am holy." We are talking about sacrifice, we are talking about dedication, we are talking about duty. That is how we can be holy and perfect before God.

I did not mention this earlier, but the volunteers of the duty of the tomb guard, about 97% of the trainees fail. They cannot handle the difficult training program and they opt out. But it says here the guards, the sentinels who successfully complete their training are described as men and women who are dedicated and devoted to their duty, humble, selfless in service, the ultimate perfectionists. And then it says, the tomb guards are considered to be the elite of the elite.

Brethren, you are the elite of the elite. God has chosen you to be His son and He wants us to walk before Him perfectly. These men walk with the highest of dedication, so they could be the best of the best. And that is what we need to be doing. It is work. It is a process. It takes time. We will stumble. We will falter but we cannot stop. You know, these tomb soldiers, they walk a different way than other soldiers. Their whole lives are to be lived on a higher standard.

To put it simply, the message today is that we are expected to walk in a different way. We are to live our lives to a higher standard. We are committed, we are in a constant state of being on guard because of sin and

temptation and recognizing that our battle is not seen, but it is spiritual. And so we must remain vigilant through our prayers, through our study, with our fellowship with our brethren.

You are sentinels, you are guards for God. May we would never, never take for granted what we have been given.

You know, these men they were not concerned about recognition, being popular. And that is the way our lives should be. They should be a labor of love rooted in unwavering trust in our God.

A calling above personal comfort. Tomb soldiers are volunteers, as I said. And they live and abide by a very strict set of duties. They march, no matter what the weather is. And their commitment is so much greater than we can understand as we see these soldiers. And that is what our lives should mirror on a Christian level.

The Christian life demands a discipline that forsakes personal glory, pleasure, for our higher purpose of serving our God, living in quiet honor and integrity. That is what the Old Guard does. They are a monument of honor. And it is a powerful message to me, I think, that we can take from this.

And so when our actions, of what we do even when no one is looking, we should be thinking about how we are, what our commitment is, and what type of reflection it is on our God. We live in a world that is self-rewarding, self-promoting. Our life is the one of humble service that points not to ourselves but to God.

Let us be reminded that through this metaphor of a guard, that we must always be looking to Him for our strength. And that we will do our duty, maybe in quiet service, and remember that this is a powerful testimony to your selfless honor of this calling.