



Knowing Who We Are

*The heavens declare
Thy glory, Lord,
In every star Thy
wisdom shines;
But when our eyes
behold Thy word,
We read Thy name
in fairer lines.
Isaac Watts*

Sixth in a Series

A recent man-on-the-street video revealed the abysmal and disheartening ignorance of some Americans (and I use that term loosely) of Memorial Day. People hanging around the beach area in San Diego, California, were asked by interviewer Mark Dice in a number of different ways what the holiday was all about.

Dice first asks a young woman, "What's the purpose of Memorial Day?", to which she refuses to even come up with an answer, asking, "Do I have to do this?" Another African-American man is then told that Memorial Day is about celebrating the repeal of "don't ask, don't tell," and the "inclusiveness of the LGBT community." "I love the LGBT community, I'm all about it," he responds.

"What is the purpose of Memorial Day?" Dice asks another man. "No clue, that's my answer," he bluntly replies. Failing to challenge Dice's assertion that Memorial Day is about "the freeing of the slaves and the end of the civil war," another man says he will commemorate the occasion by "doing some drinking."

A man wearing a red shirt and hat then agrees that it was right for the government to cancel NASA's annual Memorial Day celebration of Neil Armstrong's walk on the moon. A woman then relates that Memorial Day means to her, "a day off work on Monday," before another woman who says she has never taken part in any Memorial Day activities agrees that the government is right to cancel Memorial Day, "if it's in the best inter-

ests of the country.”

Told that Memorial Day is to commemorate “the first flight of the Wright brothers,” another man says he will recognize it by “partying” before admitting that he doesn’t know what Memorial Day is.

What was particularly discouraging was the utter lack of embarrassment or regret in these individuals over their ignorance. Many seemed almost proud *not knowing* that Memorial Day (did these people not even understand what the word “memorial” means?) is when Americans honor and give thanks for those who fought and died serving their country to protect the liberty and freedoms we all enjoy. It was originally called Decoration Day, honoring those who lost their lives in the War Between the States.

It was officially proclaimed on 5 May 1868 by General John Logan, national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic: “The 30th of May, 1868, is designated for the purpose of strewing with 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,” he proclaimed. Later the commemorations were expanded to include those who had lost their lives in the first World War, and

then all subsequent wars.

For those who love their country, and do remember the blood-soaked cost of its liberty, revelations of the sheer ignorance in some parts of our society of its history and unique status in the world are painful and demoralizing. Perhaps worse, they leave us feeling detached and alienated from a growing segment of the populace.



“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 5:13-16

There has never been a time, since the founding of these United States, when the American Christian should be more at odds with the culture in which he dwells. There has never been a time during the last 240-plus years when American society, in the aggregate, was either as indifferent to or actively aligned against the God and Savior of the believer as it is now.

On December 23, 1776, during the Revolutionary War, the patriot

Thomas Paine wrote, "These are the times that try men's souls." We might echo that sentiment: These are times that test the faith of believers. But even within that faith, just as there are Americans ignorant of this nation's history, and what it means to be one of its citizens, there are Christians ignorant of what it means to be a citizen of God's kingdom in Christ Jesus. So how can they know they are to be different from non-Christians when they don't bother to educate themselves about their faith? How can they stand against the evils of these times when they don't recognize them as evil?

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.

2 Peter 2:20-21

While there is indeed something supernatural in one *becoming* a Christian, the process of *being* a Christian requires some effort. Oh, the Spirit is there, counseling, translating, encouraging; the Divine is still involved. But we mature in Christ by passing through the fire of the desert. We grow in Christ by striving to live as Him, in obedience to God. And the only way we can do this

is to *know* Him—and know our history.

An American's history begins with this nation's founding documents, and the remarkable men who wrote them, men who imagined a new and unique nation in which all people would be "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness"—a nation in which power would not flow down from a king or queen, or even from the government, but would flow *up* from the people themselves.

Just so, a Christian's documented history begins with Genesis 1:1; his spiritual history begins the moment his name was added, some time "before the foundation of the world," to God's Book of Life.

To know who we are in Christ, we must scour the pages of our documented history: God's written word. There we discover our heritage, our lineage; we learn that we had a spiritual beginning before there was time; we learn God's definition of holiness, and what it takes, in human terms, to satisfy His wrath. And there we learn, too, how and why He sacrificed His own Son as the only means by which that wrath could be extinguished for the believer.

Part of our determination to take God seriously should be a determined effort to know our history. God *wrote* that history. It is His story even

more than ours. It is the story of His Son. And above all else, it is the story of Their illogical yet transcendent, enduring love for everyone calling Jesus Lord.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death.” The Jews said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets also; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste of death.’ Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be?” Jesus answered, “If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God’; and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word. “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” So the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.

John 8:51-59

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