

Fall Series: “Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith”

Series Text: Jesus says, “Much will be demanded from everyone who has been given much, and from the one who has been entrusted with much, even more will be asked.” -Luke 12:48

Sermon #8: “Captain America - Serving God and Country”

Scripture: Matthew 22:15-22

Sermon Text: Matthew 17:27

Source: Drawing from *Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith*.

Theme: Christians live as two different kinds of citizenship. We have our national citizenship with our earthly country. Yet we also have a citizenship with God’s spiritual kingdom. Serving God means being a faithful citizen on earth, but that loyalty is defined not by our country but by God’s ideas for how we live as Christ followers.

Wednesday Blurb: Nov. 11 is Veterans Day. We stop to give thanks to all those who have served our country and helped make it such a great nation. Yet we realize that our country also struggles to do what is right and good. We are in an election year, and as we watch the rhetoric, we wonder if as a country we are able to rise above our differences and work together for what makes our country great. In the comic world, Captain America embodies all that is good about veterans and the ideals for which they have always fought. This Sunday we will use the figure of Captain America to explore how we, as people of faith who strive to serve God heroically, should we live out our faith as American citizens. Don’t miss it!

Gathering Song: “Come, thou Almighty King” - Sanctify

Welcome - Pastor David

Worship Songs: “Did You Feel the Mountains Tremble” - Sanctify
Cannons
Cornerstone

Worship Prayer - Andrew

Kid’s Invited to Kid’s Church - Andrew

Stewardship Moment - Teresa Gruber

Offering: Thom Johnson

Joining of New Members - David

Andrew & Tracy Bonsell - Profession of faith

LaVayne & Jean Dupslaff - Transfer

Misty Thoen - Profession of faith

Trisha Amann - Reinstated

Larry & Judy McKee - Transferred back

Prayer Time - Pastor David

Prayer for our Veterans - thanks and blessing

Video Clip: “Captain America Movie Clip "Shield Intro" Official (HD)” (0:53 minutes)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0m7IP2B6JnM>

PP#1: *Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith.* “Captain America - Serving God and Country.” Matthew 17:27 Jesus said, ““But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.””

Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith. “Captain America - Serving God and Country.” Matthew 17:27 Jesus said, ““But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.””

PP#2: *Image of veterans of various kinds, in uniform and out.*

We’ve been talking in this sermon series about how we are each called to live heroic lives. That means we commit to serve and protect others, that we sacrifice ourselves, that we live by higher standards. We don’t need to look at fictional superheroes to see examples of this. We can look at those people who live with us and around us, who are veterans. In them we see examples of heroic lives. No, they don’t do it perfectly. But that’s why we pray for them. This Veterans Day, “on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month,” I’m going to ask you to pray for each Veteran you know by name. Will you do that, church? If not at 11 a.m., then at some time during that day.

Captain America is the hero we’re looking at today, not so much because he’s a superhero, but more because he’s the image of what veterans stand for, and in that image we can see biblical examples of how we are called to live heroic lives, too. Because I can tell you this, I’ve spoken to a number of veterans lately, and they’ve agreed that what would honor them the most is if all of us, veterans and non-veterans, if we tried to live by the heroic ideals they’ve committed to protect. Veterans, am I right?

PP#3: *Front cover of Captain America Comics #1 (March 1941)*

Captain America has always stood for what is best in America, and what is best in Americans.

Now, for Captain America, we have to go back long before Stan Lee at Marvel Comics. Stan Lee had teamed up with legendary illustrator Jack Kirby in the 1960s to give us most of the Marvel superheroes we’ve been talking about. But Jack Kirby was active 20 years earlier. In March of 1941 Kirby created Captain America, and his first issue had him punching Hitler right in the jaw. Now, remember, America didn’t enter WWII until eight months later! So, it kind of showed you Kirby’s opinions.

Steve Rogers was a scrawny and sickly young man who was turned down by the military. He is small in stature and weak in body, but he is big in character and strong in heart. Even before he becomes Captain America, he already has the most important qualities that Captain America became known for: courage, resolve, honor, character, and valor. So, he volunteers for the top-secret Super-Soldier Project. In the 2011 movie *Captain America, The First Avenger*, we see a scrawny Rogers among all the other volunteers. He does something amazing that reveals his character, and also singles him out for the secret project. Have a look.

Video Clip: “Captain America Movie Clip "Grenade" Official (HD)” Skinny Steve falls on grenade
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v620E6ozrKI> (0:53 minutes)

PP#4: Captain America - Serving God and Country

1. Your greatness comes from who God made you to be

“Whoever claims to live in Him must live as Jesus did.” - 1 John 2:6

What makes Captain America great is not the superpowers he got, but the but the qualities he had before. And that is also a biblical teaching for God’s people. We don’t need some super power or special talent to do important things. You can live heroically just by living the good that God has created in you. God has created you full of character, and honor, and courage. But it requires a willful choice on our part to live that way every day. It’s not easy. It’s heroic.

PP#5: Colossians 3:12-15

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.”

Listen to Colossions 3:12-15. “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.”

See? We aren’t called to be super strong, or fly, or leap tall buildings. When we give our lives to Jesus, living heroically means daily conforming your will to live life with this kind of character, with these godly qualities. Now, we can’t sustain this kind of living very long over time. We wear out and wear down. We need a special injection. We need a dose of the Holy Spirit in us, that will give us God’s strength to do it. In God’s strength we can! And we are called to. With the strength of the Holy Spirit in us, we can live into this God-given character, and live as God’s superheroes.

That’s what I like about Captain America. His most important qualities aren’t superpowers. And that’s why he’s chosen for the secret project. He’s injected with a special serum that transforms his body into the full potential of what the human body can be. He’s big, tall, strong, fast, and nimble. He dons a special, patriotic uniform, and is given one special piece of armor. As you saw in the opening clip, it’s a shield.

PP#6: *WWII poster of Captain America, w/traditional shield & “I want you to buy war bonds.”*

And that’s interesting, too. Captain America is a soldier, but he usually hasn’t carried any weapons. His shield shows a defensive stance, a desire to protect, and defend. He fights when he has to, but he never seeks out a fight. That’s a helpful alternative among other superheroes who are so aggressive and violent. That’s a better example.

Now originally, the shield was more traditionally shaped. But this is where Stan Lee comes in. After WWII, people were tired of war, and so Captain America was discontinued as a comic for a while. Jack Kirby worked with Stan Lee in the early 1960s to renovate the comic world. Jack proposed reintroducing Captain America, and Stan Lee agreed. But this time, Stan wanted the shield to be round. It offered more options, like throwing it like a big frisbee.

They explained the time passage by having Captain America frozen in ice at the end of the war. He is discovered by the Avengers, thawed out, and miraculously wakes up. His super body had been in a special hibernation that preserved him and prevented him from aging.

PP#7: Captain America - Serving God and Country

1. Your greatness comes from who God made you to be
2. Your biblical values and virtues are needed today

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” - Romans 2:12a

So one of Captain America’s ongoing motifs is that he is a throwback. He represents the virtues and values of a bygone time. But he soon discovers that those values and virtues are still needed in the world he woke up to. Even in the movies, they portray him struggling to catch up with the culture, but then the culture also trying to catch up with him: his wholesome, balanced and grounded approach. At first people tease him and consider him so dated, but soon he is the one others look to as the leader.

In the comics, the Avengers who re-discover him soon take him on as their leader. He leads with strength and conviction, but always with a humble team mentality, making it his job to be sure his helps each teammate become all she or he can be, and together the best team they can be. It’s not his abilities that make him the leader, for often all the other Avengers have superior powers to his. It is his character, his values, his self-discipline.

This is biblical teaching! It’s the same with us! A lot of time, the values and morals that Christians find in the Bible are considered old-fashioned. We may stick out as odd, or different. But that is part of the biblical calling to live heroically. We live by a different standard than the world. We follow the way of Jesus, not the way of the world. And that may make us seem a bit of a throwback. But it is also true today, that our world needs those virtues and values. Are we courageous to live by them?

This past Thursday our youth group attended an event called the Silver Ring Thing. The idea is that youth are called to live by God’s standards of sexuality rather than the world. Those that committed to living differently could buy a ring, as a reminder of their different way of life. I’m proud to say that a number of our youth made that commitment. That’s leadership! We see in them what it looks like to live heroically!

PP#8: *Image showing soldier disillusionment of confidence in the government & US policies*

This past summer I was talking to a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom and two subsequent operations in Afghanistan. He had been following the policies of our government, and the continued violence and unrest in the Middle East. He spent some time reflecting on his tours of operation there, and the ways he felt he had served our country. He then looked at me and said, “I’m not sure what I fought for. Our government hasn’t gotten it right. How do you serve when you aren’t sure you

believe in what you're doing?"

Captain America, during his WWII run, was exceptionally patriotic. He was a popular symbol of total support for the U.S. government. But after he was reintroduced in the 1960s, Marvel had him struggle with serving a country whose people are divided and a government that has issues of corruption and self-interest. At one point he was called in to put down some rebels demonstrating against Washington. He walks away thinking to himself, "Who's to say the rebels are wrong? But, I've never learned to play by today's new rules. I've spent a lifetime defending the flag and the law. Perhaps I should have battled less and questioned more."

PP#9: *Cover of Captain America and the Falcon #175 (August 1974)*

Then, during the Watergate scandal of the 1970s, the writers had Captain America in the comics discover a thinly-veiled fictional presidential scandal. In this issue, a disgusted Steve Rogers renounces his role of Captain America and walks away. He has to discern. America the reality doesn't always match America the dream.

In the Captain America movie last year, *Winter Soldier*, Steve Rogers goes through a period of discernment. His government has corruption in it. What should he do? He goes and talks to a woman who knew him back in the 40s. She, of course, is now very old. Take a look.

Video Clip: "Captain America: The Winter Soldier - Clip: Steve Visits Peggy (1080p HD)"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBVh8G-7Edg>

(3:13 minutes) Note: Play only until Peggy coughs, about 2:15

"All I ever wanted to do was the right thing." But how do I know what that is? What should he do? Peggy tells him the world is a mucked up place. All we can do is start over. Try again. Keep giving it your best.

In the movie, he takes up the costume again. Same in the comics. He reasons that he must continue to fight for what America ought to be, to remain devoted to its ideals. He doesn't have to always agree with the policies of the American government to represent the American spirit.

PP#10: Captain America - Serving God and Country

1. Your greatness comes from who God made you to be
2. Your biblical values and virtues are needed today
3. Heroic living keeps love of God *above* love of country

"Be a good citizen. All governments are under God. Insofar as there is peace and order, it's God's order. So live responsibly as a citizen." -Romans 13:1

This brings us to a very sticky part of living heroically. How do we live as Christians and as citizens of our country? Our country is founded on the separation of church and state. Our government is not Christian, the Bible is not our country's law book. How do Christians live within a country whose culture may be very at odds with our values and teachings?

Jesus had this problem. He lived in a political system that wasn't godly. Many of the Jewish leaders were corrupt, and the Roman government didn't care about the true God. The issue comes to a head one day, when some Jewish leaders, called Pharisees, tried to trick Jesus. They ask Him about paying taxes.

PP#11: Matthew 22:15-22

15 Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap Him in His words. 16 They sent their disciples to Him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. 17 Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?”

Matthew 22:15, “Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap Jesus in His words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?’”

You see, they thought they had Jesus trapped. If He said they should pay taxes, the people would despise Him as a Roman sympathizer. If He said they shouldn’t pay taxes, they could accuse Him of insurrection.

PP#12: Matthew 22:15-22

18 But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? 19 Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, 20 and He asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

21 “Caesar’s,” they replied.

Then He said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

22 When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left Him and went away.

Verse 18: “But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, ‘You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.’ They brought him a denarius, and He asked them, ‘Whose image is this? And whose inscription?’”

“‘Caesar’s,’ they replied.”

“Then He said to them, ‘So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.’”

“When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left Him and went away.”

Christians live in two kingdoms. We are citizens of our country. The Bible calls us to be good citizens and to live respectfully within our country. We are to live by the laws, and live in peace. We are to pay unto Caesar what is Caesar’s. Yet we are also citizens of God’s Kingdom. And God always gets our first allegiance. Everything we do must first conform to our citizenship in God.

This means, first of all, we are Christians before we are Americans. There are Christians in every country of our world, and we must be careful of blind nationalism. We cannot equate God’s plan with America. God wants freedom, but God also wants justice and mercy.

Secondly, it means we must live by God’s laws, not our country’s. No matter what our country allows or doesn’t allow, we first live by the way of Jesus. We can thank God that much of living God’s way is easy and encouraged in our country. But there have been, and still are, parts of our country and culture that oppose God’s way. That brings us to the third part.

PP#13: *Image of the new MLK Jr. memorial in Washington, D.C.*

And, thirdly, living as Christians in our country, means always respecting our country and government, even when it's wrong. The Bible says that God has given each country as a gift to its people. Therefore we must treat it with respect. Even when it gets it wrong, we must still live under it. So, for Christians, that means we live all the ways that our country's laws conform with God's laws. It also means that we work hard to make our country not a theocracy, we don't want to make Christianity our national religion. After all, according to the Bible, following Jesus is always an individual choice, it can't be forced on anyone. But Christians are to work hard to write into our laws and governance, the godly attributes of peace, justice, truth, freedom, equality, and mercy. Our faith is a helpful source of values and principles to draw upon as we do our civic duty and strive to make our country the best that it can be. And finally, it means that when we find ourselves at an impasse with ungodly laws of our country, we must still respect our government enough to live under it. For many Christians, this means that our option in those extreme cases, is nonviolent civil disobedience.

In the end of the last Captain America movie, Steve Rogers fights against the corrupt leaders. He breaks into the building, and over the loud speakers, calls upon all those who will follow him to fight for what is right. Take a look.

Video Clip: "Captain America's speech (Captain America: The Winter Soldier)" (1:40 minutes)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BW8_usG_B0E

Note: Stop when Smith says, "Did you write that down?" as the next words are swear words.

PP#14: Captain America - Serving God and Country

1. Your greatness comes from who God made you to be
2. Your biblical values and virtues are needed today
3. Heroic living keeps love of God *above* love of country

This may be an overdramatized situation, but it can be a reminder for all Americans to stand up and fight for what is right, and true, and good. That is our calling as Christian American citizens, not just our veterans. Living heroically means serving out of the greatness that God has put into you, every day, in all the consistent and small ways, sustained by the Holy Spirit within you. It means living boldly and courageously the biblical values and virtues in a culture that needs it now more than ever! And it means being first a citizen of God's kingdom, but then also being a respectful and good citizen of our country.

PP#15: *Classic WWII poster of Uncle Sam "I Want You!" (But NOT the "for U.S. Army" part)*

We are called to be national heroes. And by that I don't mean just be like Captain America. We are called to live heroically within our own nation, to be respectful citizens of it, as we put our first allegiance under God. God has sent us as heroes to our nation. That's not just our veterans, as heroic as they are. That's for all of us. Our country needs us! It's time to answer the call.

Amen.

Closing Song: "The Same Love" - Sanctify

Announcement & Benediction - David

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR NOV. 9, 2015

Fall Series: “Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith”

Series Text: Jesus says, “Much will be demanded from everyone who has been given much, and from the one who has been entrusted with much, even more will be asked.” -Luke 12:48

Sermon #8: “Captain America - Serving God and Country”

Scriptures: Matthew 22:15-22

Opening prayer

Introductions: Introduce yourself & share any changes you can think of that would improve the way our various governments extract taxes.

Context: Skim Matthew 22:1-14. What is going on in this chapter?

Read Matthew 22:15-22

1. Verses 15-17. What is the trap the Pharisees are laying for Jesus? Is it possible for Jesus to answer either “yes” or “no” and not be in trouble?
2. Verse 18. Why does Jesus called them hypocrites? In what way are they acting like that?
3. Verse 19-21. How does Jesus’ answer this question speak to you?
4. What does it mean for you to “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s”?
5. What does it mean for you to “Give to God what is God’s”?

Skim Matthew 17:1-26. What is going on?

Read Matthew 17:27.

6. What is the offence Jesus is referring to?
7. What does it mean for us to live as citizens not causing offense?
8. How do you live as a citizen of God’s kingdom and as a citizen of this country? Are there any conflicts? If so, how do you resolve or deal with them?
9. Application: What will you take away from this passage? How will you live it out?