



WEEKLY SERMON

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Again this is a longer than usual devotional letter instead of the usual **Weekly SERMON**. As an American, keep in mind as you read and meditate over this letter, that he who forgets his history and the price paid for his freedom, might well be living in slavery in the near future!

In Psalm 33:11-12 we read, "**The counsel of the LORD standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD...**"

Again may you pause on our Nation's 246th Anniversary to reflect on the blessings of our liberty dearly paid for by others! And at the same time, pledge yourself anew to be a faithful steward of those freedoms you have been granted.

Remember the principle from Luke 12:48, "**...For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.**"

Remember the words of Abraham Lincoln, "**Unless the great God who assisted George Washington shall be with me and aid me, I must fail. But if the same omniscient mind and mighty arm that directed and protected him shall guide and support me, I shall not fail, I shall succeed. Let us pray that the God of our Father may not forsake us now.**"

Remember the words of the prayer in President Ronald Reagan's Inaugural Address, "**May we remain, One people, under God, dedicated to the dream of freedom that you have placed in the human heart.**"

Remember the seldom used words of the 4th stanza of our national anthem:

O thus be it ever, when free men shall stand
Between their loved homes and the war's desolation!
Blest with victory and peace, may the heav'n rescued land
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just;
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust!"
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
Over the land of the free and the home of the brave!

We are a nation of people with God-given rights, and ours is a government designed to protect those rights. It all began with the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776.

A new kind of freedom was born that day. But the journey from that declaration to actual independence was to be bloodstained and long. Between them were war, agony, wounds, death, prison and destitution for the men who signed that declaration. What a price they paid for freedom!

The Declaration of Independence of the United States of America was grounded in one unforgettable and unforgotten premise:

Every person derives his rights from the Great Architect of the universe, God our Father; and the chief purpose of the government is to ensure and protect those rights. Few documents ever inscribed upon paper anywhere are held in esteem equal to that of this statement of honor.

The Declaration of Independence contains 1,321 words. Its average reading time is eight minutes. Within the text, God is mentioned twice at the beginning and twice toward the end. Fifty- six brave men conceived, authored, adopted and signed this document.

One of the youngest was Thomas Jefferson, thirty-three years old, a poor speaker but a giant of the written word. Two who signed the declaration would later become presidents - Thomas Jefferson and John .Adams. Two signers were to be fathers of future presidents - President John Adams, whose son was John Quincy Adams; and Benjamin Harrison, the elder, whose son, William Henry Harrison, and great-grandson, Benjamin Harrison, would serve as presidents.

Each of the thirteen original colonies had delegate representatives present at this historic event. The fifty-six signers were scattered throughout the thirteen colonies. Pennsylvania had nine; Virginia, seven; Massachusetts and New Jersey, five each; Connecticut, Maryland, New York and South Carolina, four each; Delaware, Georgia, New Hampshire and North Carolina, three each; and Rhode Island had two signers.

Among the fifty-six men who signed the Declaration of Independence were twenty-six lawyers, nine merchants, six farmers, six physicians, two future soldiers, two statesmen, one planter, one surveyor, one shoemaker, one minister and one printer.

Eighteen of these men - almost one-third of the total - were under forty years of age, and three were in their twenties. The oldest was seventy-year-old Benjamin Franklin.

The purpose of the declaration was officially to separate the thirteen colonies from the authority, rule and repression of the King of England. These men, on behalf of their respective colonies, declared this new land to be free and independent from the power and authority of any other force save that of God.

The very act of signing automatically made each of these men legal traitors to England, a technical criminal and a fugitive from London justice. John Hancock, as the presiding officer, already had a price of five hundred pounds on his head before he signed with a bold flourish.

It was a long, bloody, agonizing and terrible road from the declaration to independence. The two were sharply set apart by months and years of struggle during the American Revolution. Not one of the fifty-six finished that span of time or that tragic road without suffering some penalty; most suffered grievously.

Let us review the penalties suffered by only a few of these valiant men.

Lyman Hall of Georgia - confiscation of property; **George Walton** of Georgia - imprisonment; **Joseph Hewes** of North Carolina - died of overwork; **William Hooper** of North Carolina - driven from his home along with his family; **William Floyd** - all his property confiscated by the British, his wife and children driven from the land; **Philip Livingston** - all his property confiscated, his family driven out, and he died in 1778, while still working in the Congress; and **John Morton** of Pennsylvania - died eight months after the signing, despised by friends, relatives and foes alike.

Richard Stockton of New Jersey signed away his post as state chief Justice. He was betrayed, dragged from his bed and thrown into prison.

Caesar Rodney of Delaware, suffering from facial cancer, left his sickbed one midnight to rush to Philadelphia to cast a vote in favor of the declaration. The eight-mile horseback trip from Dover to Philadelphia took him through a severe thunderstorm. He arrived just in time to cast one of Delaware's three vital votes. Then he said, **"As I believe the voice of my constituents and of all sensible and honest men is in favor of independence, and my own judgment concurs, I vote for independence!"**

John Hart of New Jersey, at sixty-five years of age, was forced by a British search party to flee as he tried to come to the bedside of his dying wife and to see their thirteen children. The British soldiers burned his home and every building on his farm and confiscated all his animals. He lived as a fugitive for another eighteen months before dying.

Robert Morris lost 150 of his own ships which were sunk during the war. **Carter Braxton** of Virginia saw his ships driven from the waters, all his wealth eliminated, and his personal property seized for payment of debts.

Three of the four signers from South Carolina - **Thomas Heyward, Arthur Middleton** and **Edward Rutledge** were taken prisoner during the war and suffered severely for months. **Thomas Nelson** of Virginia lost his fortune helping to finance the War of Independence, and died at age fifty. **Francis Lewis** of New York had his home ransacked and burned. His wife was taken prisoner, and because of maltreatment, died within two years.

What price freedom! True, all of these fifty-six men fought in defense of their homes, their property, their families and their future. True, they coveted all they had worked for throughout their lives, prized their possessions as would any honorable man; but each felt the call to a high duty and knew that truth of life's greatest reward - freedom. For that one thing, freedom, fifty- six men signed a declaration and suffered.

What is the purpose of recalling, however briefly, the agonies and the sacrifices of men long since dead? There are two purposes.

The **first purpose** is to teach or re-teach you the historical truth about the real price of freedom, about the real cost of this nation and about your heritage. Since without men like this, you might well be living quite differently today without a Declaration of Independence - quite possibly without liberty.

The **second purpose** is to challenge the citizens of our modern United States with the question: Would you pay one-tenth or one- hundredth the price these men, and countless others unsung, paid for freedom and liberty? The purpose of these accounts is to give us ground upon which to judge our own worthiness for the unequalled position, wealth and opportunity we have, only because of what happened between the declaration and independence.

Among the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence was **Abraham Clark**, a self-made man with little formal education, but of considerable wealth. Two of his sons became officers in the Revolutionary Army. One was captured and confined in a British prison hulk in New York Harbor. It was the cruel ship, Jersey, where 11,000 American captives were to die.

Dr. John Witherspoon was president of the College of New Jersey which later became Princeton University. The college was used by the British as billeting headquarters and staging grounds; and they burned Witherspoon's great library, much of which he had brought with him from Scotland.

Francis Hopkinson of New Jersey had his home looted at Bordentown. He was constantly pursued throughout the war, a fugitive serving the Continental Congress.

A great many of our citizens today would say, "**Fools, those men of wealth who sacrificed everything they had for an idea.**" But who is the fool?

Is it that quiet American who has never lived in brutal slavery yet somehow knows the infinite worth of liberty and would be willing to die for its living future? Or is the fool the one who takes his freedom and independence so very lightly, spits in the eye of tradition, scoffs at our great principles, uses the bomb, the rifle and the knife, and spews out verbal hatred in a mad race to enslave us all?

What these men signed was an entire destiny, not merely a document. Their armor during the great revolution was made of the principles that led them to sign in the name of the

future freedom of all colonial Americans. They were men who could not, would not and did not evade what they clearly saw to be their duty.

They were courageous, valiant and selfless men, fighting to make life better for others than life had been for them under the yoke of tyranny. None of them were, at the time of signing, soldiers or sailors in the uniform of any country. They were somewhat ordinary men who rose to an extra ordinary responsibility.

Until recent years, men like these and others whose names are known because of high positions were proudly emulated by extraordinary Americans of every generation. Because of what they did on July 4, 1776, almost a million Americans have paid the supreme sacrifice in wars to protect and extend what they purchased at so dear a cost.

No, freedom does not require war as its fuel or revolution as its engine. Freedom requires war only in the protection and extension of freedom. Freedom demands that those who are free never yield to that last great thrust of the tyrant who would enslave his own fellow citizens for power, wealth and glory.

I do not hold myself as an advocate for the memory of these fifty-six stalwart Americans who signed the Declaration of Independence, for I have not their power or authority. But because of them and because of grave errors in the way we live today, I have every right to ask the question: Did these inspired, dedicated and committed signers and their war-slain descendants really die in vain?

For, you see, in a very real sense that for which they gave up so much is steadily slipping away from you and me. We all demand and want to keep so much. It is greed versus sacrifice, and greed is winning while freedom slips away.

The spirit of the 1776 declaration is not in us, and we are trading our independence for the security of the enslaved.

In Zephaniah 2:15 we read, **"This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand."**

In America we must remember that the glory of a nation is righteousness and faith in God - and going the way God points - and in such is our security against all foes, and our immunity against the ravages of time.

Isaiah 60:12 points out **"For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted."**

This sober truth found in Proverbs 14:23 reads that only **"righteousness exalteth a nation."**

If ever America loses her faith in God, she will have to come off her pedestal. Pallbearers that carried other nations to their graves will do work for us, if we forsake God and refuse to go the way He points.

Remember in the last century this happened to Germany. As someone wrote,

"We should remember that early in the twentieth century Germany was regarded as the most Christian nation in Europe. The Scriptures so influenced the home, the school and the church of Germany that the national life saw a phenomenal progress. Germany was making terrific strides in science, art and cultures.

Then came a day when innate conceit got to work. Christianity was emasculated. Christ was rationalized to be nothing more than a good man. The Holy Scriptures were reduced to a crazy quilt. Religion came to be built on negatives. God was dwarfed, and man was deified. "Let the

strong survive," became the new religion. Germany was de-civilized, and Hitler had no trouble getting his followers to arm to the hilt to conquer the world."

The time was 1940. America was still in a terrible economic depression. Hitler was taking over Europe and Americans were afraid we'd have to go to war. It was a time of hardship and worry for most Americans. This was the era just before TV, when radio shows were HUGE, and American families sat around their radios in the evenings, listening to their favorite entertainers, including one known as Kate Smith.

With Kate Smith's voice coming over the radio, she was the biggest star of her time. Kate was also patriotic. It hurt her to see Americans so depressed and afraid of what the next day would bring. She had hope for America, and faith in her fellow Americans. She wanted to do something to cheer them up, so she went to the famous American songwriter, Irving Berlin (who also wrote "White Christmas") and asked him to write a song that would make Americans feel good again about their country. When she described what she was looking for, he said he had just the song for her.

He went to his files and found a song that he had written, but never published, 22 years before, way back in 1917. He gave it to her and she worked on it with her studio orchestra. She and Irving Berlin were not sure how the song would be received by the public, but both agreed they would not take any profits from "God Bless America."

To this day, God Bless America stirs our patriotic feelings and pride in our country. Back in 1940, when Kate Smith went looking for a song to raise the spirits of her fellow Americans, I doubt whether she realized just how successful the results would be for her fellow Americans during those years of hardship and worry...and for many generations of Americans to follow. Let us pray he still does, and it's still not too late.

God bless America, land that I love,
Stand beside her and guide her
Through the night with a light from above.
From the mountains, to the prairies,
To the oceans white with foam,
God bless America,
My home sweet home.

While the storm clouds gather far across the sea,
Let us swear allegiance to a land that's free.
Let us all be grateful for a land so fair,
As we raise our voices in a solemn prayer:

God bless America, land that I love,
Stand beside her and guide her
Through the night with a light from above.
From the mountains, to the prairies,
To the oceans white with foam,
God bless America,
My home sweet home.
God bless America,
My home sweet home

Let us ask the help of Almighty God in these days, when there are evils that would lead our greatest to the grave and leave the world no example. Let us ask the help of Almighty God in these days lest our country become a despised IChabod among the nations on earth.

In His Amazing Grace,
Pastor David Miklas

PS: The section on the Declaration of Independence was taken from a June 30, 2006 article written in the Sword of the Lord.