A JULY 4TH CONTEMPLATION

Text: Psalm 9:17; Proverbs 14:34; Psalm 33:12; I Kings 18:21-39

Two hundred and forty-nine years ago on Thursday, July 4, 1776 the Declaration of Independence was signed and upon it's first public reading in Philadelphia on Monday, July 8 bells rang and people cheered to celebrate this, our official Declaration. We have so much to be thankful for.

Just above the signatures of the fifty-six patriots who signed the Declaration of Independence, these last words were written: "And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor." These were no empty words. My father's favorite newsman of the 20th Century, Paul Harvey said of those signers, "Of the Fifty-Six, few were long to survive. Five signers were captured by the British as traitors, and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons in the Revolutionary Army. One of the signers had two sons captured. Nine of the fifty-six fought and died of wounds or the hardships of the Revolutionary War. John Hancock…was one of the wealthiest men in New England. And yet he stood outside Boston on a terrible night of the war and he said, 'Burn, Boston, burn. Though it makes John Hancock a beggar- if the public good requires it.'"

I. LET US BE, ABOVE ALL, A NATION UNDER GOD

II Chronicles 26:5: "And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper."

Samuel Adams said when he signed the Declaration, "We have this day restored the Sovereign to whom all men ought to be obedient and from the rising to the setting of the sun, let His kingdom come." So much more was happening in our freedom from Great Britian. In this government by the people and for the people, we were saying above all, it is a nation under God as President Lincoln reminded us in the Gettysburg Address.

On Thursday, June 28, 1787, in Philadelphia, PA in the Constitutional Framing Convention Bejamin Franklin was pushing the men present to pray. He said, "I have lived, Sir, a long time and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth -- that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to

the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings that 'except the Lord build they labor in vain that build it.'"

A great good was done by Peter Marshall's and David Manuel's book, *The Light and the Glory."* These graduates of Yale and Princeton unearthed in the archives at Harvard the battle cry that was used by the patriots during the Revolutionary War, "No King But Jesus." You cannot have liberty without faith. If you dissolve the bonds of faith, the government moves in.

II. THE FOREFATHERS' ORIGINAL INTENT IS THAT WE WOULD BE A REPUBLIC GOVERNED BY LAWS, NOT MOB RULE.

Joshua 1:7: "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest."

Isaiah 33:22: "For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us." I am reminded of the response which is attributed to Benjamin Franklin at the close of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, when queried as he left Independence Hall on the final day of deliberation: "Dr. Franklin!" Elizabeth Willing Powel queried. "Well, Doctor, what have we got? A republic or a monarchy?" "A republic!" replied Franklin, "if you can keep it."

Samuel Rutherford, the famed Scottish pastor wrote *Lex, Rex* subtitled *The Law and the Prince* in 1644. Basically it was a book setting forth that government should always place the law above the king, rather than the prevailing view: "Rex, Lex," promoting the "divine right" of the monarchy. After the government of Cromwell was gone, Charles II came to the throne and the king ordered that the hangman burn a copy of *Lex, Rex* publicly. Then Rutherford was ordered to come before the court to stand trial for treason. But due to the fact that he was sick and close to death, Rutherford sent this message to the king: "I have got a summons already before a Superior Judge and judicatory, and I behoove to answer my first summons, and ere your day come I will be where few kings and great folks come." This longing of freedom was birthed in Britain, but perfected in America.

III. THE BEST POSSIBLE WAY TO APPRECIATE OUR FREEDOMS AS AMERICANS IS TO MOVE BEYOND RELIGION TO A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Although salvation is the message of the church, the church does not save; only Christ saves. The salvation provided is personal. Christianity is not real until it is personal. “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9). The key is to believe in your own heart.

I shall evermore be thankful unto God for being reared in a Christian home, but I am also aware, God has no grandchildren. You are either a child of God or you are not. Mom can’t save you, Dad cannot save you, and neither can preachers, teachers or well-meaning people. Jesus said, “Ye must be born again!” (John 3:7).

Allow me to give you the exact words of our two most famous presidents, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, from their personal, documented testimonies.

This is a prayer written by the hand of our first president himself: "Accept of me for the merits of Thy Son Jesus Christ...Cover my sins with that absolute obedience of Thy dear Son...for the sake of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, offered upon the cross for me. Direct my thoughts, words and work. Wash away my sins in the immaculate blood of the Lamb. And purge my heart by Thy Holy Spirit from the dross of my natural corruption. Increase my faith in the sweet promises of the Gospel. Thou gavest Thy Son to die for me...Pardon my sins for the sake of Thy Son, my only Saviour, Jesus Christ."

There is a fascinating letter that comes to us from an Illinois clergyman who talked to Lincoln some time after the Gettysburg Address. He questioned the president: "Mr. President, do you love Jesus?" After a long pause, Mr. Lincoln solemnly replied: "When I left Springfield I asked the people to pray for me. I was not a Christian. When I buried my son, the severest trial of my life, I was not a Christian. But when I went to Gettysburg and saw the graves of thousands of our soldiers, I then and there consecrated myself to Christ. Yes, I do love Jesus" (from the Lincoln Museum, Washington D.C.; The Lincoln Memorial: Album-Immortelles in the O.H., Oldroyd Collection. Published in 1883, page 366). It’s not real until it’s personal.

IV. LET US HUMBLE OURSELVES AND PRAY FOR OUR COUNTRY.

Stephen Lynch in his article, History Reflection for 4th of July: How Prayer Underpinned American Independence wrote, “Prayer played an important role in the American struggle for independence. The First Continental Congress (Sept. 5-Oct. 26, 1774), comprised of delegates from all the colonies except Georgia, met for the first time in September 1774. In a letter to his wife, John Adams wrote of this occasion when Jacob Duche, an Episcopal pastor read the 85th Psalm. And then, the assembly prayed. John Adams recorded: “I never saw a greater effect produced upon an audience. It seemed as if heaven had ordained that psalm to be read on that morning. George Washington was kneeling there, alongside him Patrick Henry, James Madison, and John Hancock. By their side there stood, bowed in reverence, the Puritan patriots of New England, who at that moment had reason to believe that an armed soldiery was wasting their humble households. They prayed fervently for America, for Congress, for the Province of Massachusetts Bay, and especially for the town of Boston (whose port had been closed and in which British troops were being quartered). And who can realize the emotions with which they turned imploringly to heaven for divine help. It was enough to melt a heart of stone. I saw the tears gush into the eyes of the old, grave, pacifist Quakers of Philadelphia.”

May we follow our Founding Fathers on this birthday of our nation and find the common bond and promise that prayer brings. “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (II Chronicles 7:14).

God bless America and help us keep the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all!

-Pastor Pope-