

July 3, 2016

*Christian Patriotism*

Romans 10:9-13

**Opening words:** This is the history of Independence Day. In June of 1776, a Virginian by the name of Richard Henry Lee proposed an American independence from England. The idea kept gaining support until the Second Continental Congress voted for independence from England on July 2, 1776. The group decided a document was needed to explain their actions. A committee of five was selected to draft that document; the chief writer was Thomas Jefferson. He submitted the document back to the Congress, who tweaked the wording. It was approved on July 4, 1776. Richard Henry Lee became one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. Copies were made, and the new nation embraced their independence. Because this Declaration of Independence was dated July 4, not July 2, it was viewed as our Independence Day. How are you celebrating this Independence Day?

On this holiday weekend, we are in the Epistle to the Romans, one of the great theological works of all time. It was written by the Apostle Paul in the spring of AD 57. He was writing to the Gentile population in the city of Rome. The major theme is God's plan of salvation for all mankind, both Jew and Gentile. That is what the scripture lesson tells us today. May God give you ears to hear these sacred words, Romans 10:9-13. Let me call this message *Christian Patriotism*.

**Romans 10:9-13** <sup>9</sup> If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. <sup>11</sup> As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." <sup>12</sup> For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, <sup>13</sup> for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

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It was one of the most unusual situations in my life. It was New Year's Eve and I was an hour and a half north of Moscow, in the city of Dmitrov, the home of the Renewal Orphanage. After ninety years of Communism, where Christmas was shunned, New Year's Eve is a big deal. All Russians celebrate New Year's. In that institution, it was the custom for the teenagers to gather together and celebrate. I remember them coming into the room, wearing their best clothes. The cook prepared their best food. Everyone's spirits were high. What fueled the excitement were the visiting Americans. It was at that moment something unusual happened. I had never seen it before. An old television set was rolled into the room and a few minutes before midnight, their president went on the air to address the Russian people. There he was, Vladimir Putin. Emotionally, I had the typical American reaction to him, but the orphans listened intently. The oldest of the teens looked over at the American's table to look for our

reaction. Once the short speech was complete, the Russian national anthem was played. The Russians, who were able to stand, did. Some sang the words. As the music played on I didn't know what to do. Do I stand in respect to Russia? Our Russian hosts had been good to us. Do I sit there in silent protest? There is so much of Russia that is just wrong. I sat and prayed the moment would pass quickly. It did, and the party resumed. I have never felt more like an American. As my good friend says, "There comes a time when you have to take a stand." In this case, not standing was taking a stand. Can I ask you a question? When was the last time you really thought about being an American? If those questions make you think, say, **"Amen!"**

This is Independence Day weekend. We call it the Fourth of July. For it was on that date in 1776 the Declaration of Independence was adopted, declaring our independence from Great Britain. In the past 240 years, the holiday has evolved. Today, it is a day of fireworks, parades, barbecues, fairs, picnics, concerts, baseball games and family reunions. There is nothing to dislike about the Fourth of July. Do you know of anyone who does not like the Fourth of July? It is a day to celebrate our nation and it is a time to celebrate God's love for us. Let me say this ever so gently. It is a simple truth:

God loves all people. God does not care about our politics. God has no trouble crossing manmade borders. God loves all people, regardless of their nationality. God loves Americans as much as people from South Africa. God loves Americans as much as the people of India. God loves Americans as much as the people of France. God loves Americans as much as the people of Brazil. Did you know, if you count Taiwan, there are 196 nations in our world today and God loves the citizens of each one. Have you ever stopped to consider, the phrase "The United States of America" is not found in the Bible one time? That really doesn't matter because God loves everyone, including us!

That theme is reflected in Paul's letter to the Romans. The resurrection changed everything! Romans 10:9 says, *"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* Think about those words for a moment. They simply mean that all have the opportunity to be saved. However, I will say this. Traditional America seems to have special appreciation of the faith. We can relate to the faith because Christianity is part of American history. George Washington said in his farewell address, *"Do not let anyone claim the tribute of American patriotism if they even attempt to remove religion from politics."* Just think about it for a moment. Christianity and American patriotism stand side by side in three ways. I want to look at those three ways before we go to the Communion table. If you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

### **A Bold Declaration**

First, there is a bold declaration in both Christianity and American patriotism. In declaring our independence, the patriots made a bold declaration. Britain was the greatest political force in the western hemisphere in 1776. The thirteen colonies paled

in comparison. History tells us the cry for independence was much clearer in the northern colonies. The southern colonies were more reserved on the topic. Yet, on July 2, 1776 the continental congress voted to announce and declare that they would accept nothing less than their absolute freedom from Britain. It took two days to find the perfect words. Even 240 years later, you can see the Declaration of Independence was a bold declaration. If you believe that is true, say, **"Amen!"**

When was the first time you declared to your world that Jesus was your Lord and Savior? Maybe you made that declaration on a youth mission trip or at church camp? Maybe you made your declaration during a revival or during a small group study? Maybe you made that declaration when you were young, or not so young. The details really don't matter. The only thing that matters is that you declared Jesus was your Lord and Savior. That declaration revolutionized your relationships and your life. If you still declare Jesus as your Lord and Savior, say, **"Amen!"**

### **A High Price**

Second, there is a high price in Christianity and American patriotism. Did you know fifty-six men signed the Declaration of Independence? That is not the end of their story. Their conviction resulted in untold sufferings for themselves and their families. Of the 56 men, five were captured by the British and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons in the Revolution. Another had two sons captured. Nine of the fifty-six fought and died from wounds or hardships of the war. Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships sunk by the British navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts and died in poverty. At the battle of Yorktown, the British General Cornwallis had taken over Thomas Nelson's home for his headquarters. Nelson quietly ordered General George Washington to open fire on his own home. Nelson died bankrupt. John Hart was driven from his wife's bedside as she was dying. Their thirteen children fled for their lives. His fields and mill were destroyed. For over a year, he lived in forest and caves, returning home only to find his wife dead and his children vanished. A few weeks later, he died from exhaustion. George Washington never received a cent from the government for his military service. There is no other way to say it. The patriots paid a high price. However, it wasn't just the signers of the Declaration of Independence who paid a price.

The general population paid a high price. Only one-third of the population even wanted independence. Another third was indifferent and another third remained loyal to England. The third that supported the war paid a high price. Did you know 7,200 died, 8,200 were wounded and another 10,000 died from disease? Their suffering was a reality. That generation paid a high price.

Jesus paid a high price, but what about you? I hate to say it, but we live in times of cheap grace. We want the benefits of the faith without discipleship. This is a weekend when we celebrate our independence. How is the faith altering your daily life? What are

you willing to give up in the name of Jesus? What are you doing in the name of Jesus? What have you sacrificed lately for the faith? If that question makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

### **A Great Reward**

Third, there is a great reward in both Christianity and American patriotism. The American Revolution ended nearly two years after the battle at Yorktown. The treaty was signed in Paris in 1783. They didn't just gain their freedom. They won new land. Great Britain surrendered all the land they held east of the Mississippi River. America is not the oldest nation in the world, but it is the oldest democracy in the world. Their great reward is our great reward. In America we really are free! And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

What is our great reward in the faith? On the day you declared Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you suddenly had a special relationship with the God of the universe. You can live at peace in this world because you know that someday you are going to heaven. The Apostle Paul wasn't wrong. He said, *"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* Someday we are all going to heaven! And all of God's Christian Americans said, **"Amen!"** Let me end where we began.

During the 1940s, Peter Marshall was pastor of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC. He was also appointed the chaplain of the United States Senate. He once stood before that body and offered this prayer:

Lord Jesus, thou who art the way, the truth, and the life; hear us as we pray for the truth that shall make all free. Teach us that liberty is not only to be loved but also to be lived. Liberty is too precious a thing to be buried in books. It costs too much to be hoarded. Help us see that our liberty is not the right to do as we please, but the opportunity to please to do what is right.

And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"** Have a great Independence Day weekend!