

“What IS Freedom?”

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As John Adams signed the Declaration of Independence, he said, *"Whether we live or die, sink or swim, succeed or fail, I stand behind this Declaration of Independence. And if God wills it, I am ready to die in order that this country might experience freedom."*

As our forefathers signed the Declaration, they not only were declaring their independence from England, but also their strong dependence on Almighty God. The Declaration points out that Freedom comes from God alone. The second paragraph of the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence concludes: *"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."*

It's important we see this very basic declaration of their dependence, for the United States today is rapidly forgetting the God of our fathers, Who gave this nation its birth and its greatness! We see babies aborted, terror threats, natural disasters, and actions against God's Will all around us.

This isn't a new problem! God delivered the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt and led them through the Red Sea. He gave them 10 Commandments to follow. He gave them a new land, and directions of what their life was to be like. But instead, the people did whatever they wanted! Because of this, some of their freedom was lost.

Open to 2 Chronicles 7. The people needed to be on their knees praying that God would deliver them and restore them. Solomon had followed God's command and built a temple for Him. As Solomon was building, he continually prayed God's hand would guide him and bring success and restore the nation.

Look what God says needs to be done in verses 12-14, *"Then the LORD appeared to Solomon in the night and said to him: "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."*

What God directed the people of Israel to do is exactly what He's directing us to do! As God's chosen people there are four things we need to do continually: humble ourselves. We need to realize we're not in control. The only power we have comes from God alone. We need to pray to Him. God asks us to come to Him seeking His guidance for everything. We need to completely rely on Him.

We need to seek His face. Our focus has to remain on Him. Of all the things that distract our attention away from Him, we need to change our focus back to Him trusting in His grace. We need to turn from our wicked ways. Each and every day we sin against Him and do what goes against His Will. God knows our hearts and that's why He sent His Son to suffer and die on take our punishment!

In these same verses from 2 Chronicles, look at what God says He will do. He'll hear us when we pray. God says in Isaiah 65:24, *"Before they call, I will answer; while they are speaking, I will hear."* He's always turning His attention to us! He'll forgive us for the sins we've committed against Him. He'll heal our land.

Our land is His land! He is the creator and giver of all things! Our land is in desperate need of His healing! It's true we can still worship, sing, and pray here in church and in our homes, but God has been removed from so many other things!

The 10 Commandments can't be displayed, calling on God's name in prayer is wrong, Christian symbols like the cross are under attack because someone else might be offended if they're displayed. Our money says, *"In God we trust"*, but do we? We need to follow the words of 2 Chronicles each and every day. Solomon said in Proverbs 14:34, *"Righteousness exalts a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people."*

A nation can experience freedom won on the battlefield, but no nation is free until its people are free on the inside! Look at Paul's words from 2 Corinthians 3:17 on our cover, *"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."*

We need to stay focused on God and realize the Holy Spirit's power and direction. It's only through Him that we have true freedom! When we experience this freedom, we will change and can affect change around us!

The world around us will try to pull us away from God and make us go along with the crowd. Sometimes we don't want to cause any waves! Turn to 1 Peter 2. This section gives us a glimpse of how God views us as His people and what He asks us to do. Look closely to verses 9-10, *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."*

We are chosen by God. We're to show and tell God's power, grace, and direction to those we meet. As His people, we have a responsibility to not just sit back but to be actively involved in proclaiming Him. We're a holy nation, not because we're perfect, but our God is! We've been set apart to do His work. He sees us as His possession!

Luther put it this way, *"We must recognize in our hearts and believe that we receive everything from Him and that He is our God. Then out with it, and freely and openly confess this before the world—preach, praise, glorify, and give thanks!"* Unbelievers pay attention to the actions of Christians. Good works, especially unexpected things, often make a strong impression on them. Deeds that demonstrate faith are a powerful witness. Always remember you're deeply loved by God.

As you celebrate the birth of America this weekend, pray for our country that it might have a new birth of freedom, a freedom built on God. May each one of you, as an individual, and as part of this church, reaffirm your dependence on God. In all you say and do, represent Christ by your lifestyle.

May you look to Jesus Christ, and see your true Independence Day was declared at the cross on Calvary, then, as did the founding fathers of the country, find in Almighty God, your true freedom, your true *"life, liberty and happiness!"*