

Fort Payne church of Christ



The Weekly Moment

A Weekly Motivational Message

Wednesday, July 4, 2018

(ED Note: For the past several years, I have been running this article about our founding fathers. I believe it is something we need to hear over and over again. BS)

THE AMERICANS WHO RISKED EVERYTHING

237 years ago, 56 courageous men put their signatures on a document that changed the course of history forever. This document, the **Declaration of Independence**, told the throne of England and, indeed, the world that the peoples of the 13 independent colonies established in America would no longer be subject to the dictates of England, but would now and forever be self-governing and free. But did these men really understand what they were doing?

The initial draft of the declaration was penned by Thomas Jefferson who later served as our 3rd President and established the University of Virginia. Jefferson completed the initial draft in 17 days and then the process of debate and modification began. A total of 86 alterations were made. Almost 500 words were eliminated, leaving 1,337. At last, after three days of wrangling, the document was put to a vote.

Here, in the hall where Patrick Henry had once thundered: *"I am no longer a Virginian, Sir, but an American,"* the loud, sometimes bitter argument stilled, and without fanfare the vote was taken from north to south by colonies, as was the custom. On July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was adopted.

There were no trumpets blown. No one stood on his chair and cheered. The afternoon was waning and Congress had no thought of delaying the full calendar of routine business on its hands. For several hours, they worked on many other problems before adjourning for the day.

What kind of men were the 56 signers who adopted the Declaration of Independence and who, by their signing, committed an act of treason against the Crown? To each of you the names Franklin, Adams, Hancock, and Jefferson are almost as familiar as household words. Most of us, however, know nothing of the other signers. Who were they? What happened to them?

I imagine that many of you are somewhat surprised at the names not there: George Washington, Alexander

Hamilton, Patrick Henry. All were elsewhere. Ben Franklin was the only really old man. Eighteen were under 40; three were in their 20s. Of the 56, almost half--24--were judges and lawyers. Eleven were merchants, 9 were land-owners and farmers, and the remaining 12 were doctors, ministers, and politicians.

With only a few exceptions, such as Samuel Adams of Massachusetts, these were men of substantial property. All but two had families. The vast majority were men of education and standing in their communities. They had economic security as few men had in the 18th century.

Each had more to lose from revolution than he had to gain by it. John Hancock, one of the richest men in America, already had a price of 500 pounds on his head. He signed in enormous letter so "that his Majesty could now read his name without glasses and could now double the reward." Ben Franklin wryly noted: "Indeed we must all hang together, otherwise we shall most assuredly hang separately." Fat Benjamin Harrison of Virginia told tiny Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts: "With me it will all be over in a minute, but you, you will be dancing on air an hour after I am gone."

These men knew what they risked. The penalty for treason was death by hanging. And remember: a great British fleet was already at anchor in New York Harbor.

They were sober men. There were no dreamy-eyed intellectuals or draft card burners here. They were far from hot-eyed fanatics, yammering for an explosion. They simply asked for the status quo. It was change they resisted. It was equality with the mother country they desired. It was taxation with representation they sought. They were all conservatives, yet they rebelled.

It was principle, not property, which brought these men to Philadelphia. Two of them became presidents of the United States. Seven of them became state governors. One died in office as vice president of the United States. Several would go on to be U.S. Senators. One, the richest man in America, in 1828 founded the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. One, a delegate from Philadelphia, was the only real poet, musician and philosopher of the signers (it was he, Francis Hopkinson--not Betsy Ross--who designed the United States flag).

Richard Henry Lee, a delegate from Virginia, had introduced the resolution to adopt the Declaration of Independence in June of 1776. He was prophetic in his concluding remarks:

"Why then sir, why do we longer delay? Why still deliberate? Let this happy day give birth to an American Republic. Let her arise not to devastate and to conquer but to reestablish the reign of peace and law. The eyes of Europe are fixed upon us. She demands of us a living example of freedom that may exhibit a contrast in the felicity of the citizen to the ever increasing tyranny which desolates her polluted shores. She invites us to prepare an asylum where the unhappy may find solace, and the persecuted repose. If we are not this day wanting in our duty, the names of the American legislators of 1776 will be placed by posterity at the side of all of those whose memory has been and ever will be dear to virtuous men and good citizens."

Though the resolution was formally adopted July 4, it was not until July 8 that two of the states authorized their delegates to sign, and it was not until August 2 that the signers met at Philadelphia to actually put their names to the Declaration.

William Ellery, delegate from Rhode Island, was curious to see the signers' faces as they committed this supreme act of personal courage. He saw some men sign quickly, "but in no face was he able to discern real fear." Stephen Hopkins, Ellery's colleague from Rhode Island, was a man past 60. As he signed with a shaking pen, he declared: *"My hand trembles, but my heart does not."*

Of those 56 who signed the Declaration of Independence, nine died of wounds or hardships during the war.

Five were captured and imprisoned, in each case with brutal treatment. Several lost wives, sons or entire families. One lost his 13 children. Two wives were brutally treated. All were at one time or another the victims of manhunts and driven from their homes. Twelve signers had their homes completely burned. Seventeen lost everything they owned. Yet not one defected or went back on his pledged word. Their honor, and the nation they sacrificed so much to create, is still intact.

And, finally, there is the New Jersey signer, Abraham Clark. He gave two sons to the officer corps in the Revolutionary Army. They were captured and sent to the infamous British prison hulk afloat in New York harbor known as the hell ship "Jersey," where 11,000 American captives were to die. The younger Clarks were treated with a special brutality because of their father. One was put in solitary and given no food. With the end almost in sight, with the war almost won, no one could have blamed Abraham Clark for acceding to the British request when they offered him his sons' lives if he would recant and come out for the King and parliament. The utter despair in this man's heart, the anguish in his very soul, must reach out to each one of us down through 200 years with his answer: "No."

The 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence proved by their every deed that they made no idle boast when they composed the most magnificent curtain line in history. ***"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."***

Yes, this was a memorable time in American and even World History. Yet, it can't compare in the least to the Man who gave His life for the sins of all, **Jesus, the Son of God**. We honor the men and the event that gave us the freedoms that we enjoy in this country. How much more should we honor the Man and the event that gave each of us the freedom we enjoy in Christ? We honor Christ by the way we live; by being faithful to Him each day; by remembering His death on the cross by partaking of the Lord's Supper each Lord's Day.

Honor your county, yes; but honor Christ, the Man who gives us life eternal!

Think about it.

Here's hoping you'll make the *"most of your minutes"* this week.

Hope to see you at Bible Study tonight.

In Christian Love,

Bob Strickland