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Does God Bless America?

1 Peter 2:16: (NASB) Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.

Tomorrow is America's birthday - it was on the 4th day of July in 1776 that a document was signed in Congress that would inevitably change the course of world history - that document was the Declaration of Independence. What was it? It was a series of statements and decisions made to declare that God has given all men the right and freedom to pursue "life, liberty and happiness." This call to freedom rang out here in America and has been ringing ever since. As we look back today, we ought to ask ourselves about our freedom - is it still the same kind of freedom the founders envisioned or has it become something else? Stay with us as we look into America, freedom, choices and God's role in all of these things!


We will weave today's program with three distinct threads aside from the scriptures: American History, American Patriotic Hymns and America, A Land of Unspeakable Beauty.

William Bradford was one of the pilgrims of the 1600's:

 **William Bradford through age 12, ColdWaterMedia.com**

- *Born in England, an orphan early on.*
- *Saw an unusual church service at age 12 and kept returning to its fervor of reform.*

Cape Cod: Change is a constant on Cape Cod, despite laws and control measures. The terrain here is young, in geologic terms: It was covered by glaciers toward the end of the last ice age, about 18,000 years ago, and it displays the capricious disposition of youth. Waves, winds, and storms continually reshape the peninsula, gnawing away at the beach in one spot, creating new land elsewhere, cutting off a spit to make an island here, joining one to the mainland there. Thoreau estimated that beaches on the eastern shore were disappearing at the rate of a few feet a year, and that observation remains true today. In 1996, two historic lighthouses, Highland Light and Nauset Light, were moved inland from eroding cliffs; without that human intervention, they would have collapsed before long as their foundations were eaten away.

 **William Bradford, father figure to the colony, ColdWaterMedia.com**

- *He became governor of the colony in 1621 and served for eleven consecutive years...he became a beloved father figure to the colony.*

The Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4th, 1776, and was read publicly four days later in the Philadelphia State House Yard. After its reading, the Liberty Bell rang out, announcing America's freedom. **Inscribed on the bell is a quote from this scripture: Leviticus 25:10: (ASV) And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.**

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776, The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen United States of America When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

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.

The last paragraph of the Declaration: ...We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these united Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States, that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the



British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. — 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.

The Declaration of Independence was a God-honoring document that shows the founders were God-honoring men.

Are all of America's most patriotic songs just about America?

Who was the source of inspiration, principle and courage for the founders? (Source: Wikipedia) "America the Beautiful" is an American patriotic song. The lyrics were written by Katharine Lee Bates and the music composed by church organist and choirmaster Samuel A. Ward. In 1893, at the age of thirty-three, Bates, an English professor at Wellesley College, had taken a train trip to Colorado Springs, Colorado, to teach a short summer school session at Colorado College. Several of the sights on her trip inspired her, and they found their way into her poem, including the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the "White City" with its promise of the future contained within its alabaster buildings; the wheat fields of America's heartland Kansas, through which her train was riding on July 16; and the majestic view of the Great Plains from high atop Zebulon's Pikes Peak. On the pinnacle of that mountain, the words of the poem started to come to her, and she wrote them down upon returning to her hotel room at the original Antlers Hotel. The poem was initially published two years later in *The Congregationalist* to commemorate the Fourth of July. It quickly caught the public's fancy. Amended versions were published in 1904 and 1913. Ward had originally written the music, *Materna*, for the 19th century hymn *O Mother dear, Jerusalem* in 1882. Ward's music combined with the Bates poem was first published in 1910 and titled, *America the Beautiful*.



"America the Beautiful (Verse 1)," Ray Charles

There are three New Testament words for freedom:

Strong's #1658 eleutheros (el-yoo'-ther-os); unrestrained (to go at pleasure), i.e. (as a citizen) not a slave, or (genitive case) exempt (from obligation or liability): KJV-free (man, woman), at liberty.

Strong's #1659 eleutheroo (el-yoo'-ther-o'-o); to liberate, i.e. (figuratively) to exempt (from moral, ceremonial or mortal liability): KJV-deliver, make free.

Strong's #1657 eleutheria (el-yoo'-ther-ee'-ah); freedom (legitimate or licentious, chiefly moral or ceremonial): KJV- liberty.

The first word for freedom carries a physical or civil sense of being free - not a slave, not being held under: (physical freedom) 1 Corinthians 12:13: For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or **free <1658>**; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. Galatians 3:28: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor **free <1658>**, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Regardless of your physical condition, spiritually you are not a slave.

Buffalo National River in the Ozarks of Arkansas: As you drift along you may pass through actual clouds of fragrance from pink clumps of wild azaleas clinging to a bluff. Algae-covered rocks on the streambed will appear to slide beneath as you pass, and water snakes may wriggle across the river, hoisting their heads out of the water. On the bank, willows gnawed off a few inches above the ground and sticks cleaned of their bark tell of beavers. You will seldom be without the sound of birdsong or the sight of a dozen tints of green in the forested hills. Minnows may go skimming near the surface with big black shadows right behind them. Snakes and turtles sun themselves along the banks, and bright red cardinals flit through the forest. Bobwhites call their names from the ridges. In the night, whippoorwills sing and bullfrogs bellow while coyotes howl. Fireflies mingle with the stars overhead.



The founders were focused on the separation of church and state, but their definition wasn't that religion can't exist in the same context as state. They were saying the two should be separate powers and entities. The states should not be ruled by a church, but powers should overlap in certain areas.



"America the Beautiful," United States Army Brass Band

Verse 2: "O beautiful for pilgrim feet / Whose stern impassion'd stress / A thoroughfare for freedom beat / Across the wilderness. / America! America! God mend thine ev'ry flaw, / Confirm thy soul in self-control, Thy liberty in law."

Saguaro National Park, Arizona: They have starred in more Western movies than John Wayne. Throwing long shadows across celluloid horizons, saguaro cactuses have come to symbolize the American Southwest. But in fact, these elegant long-limbed plants live only in a limited portion of the Sonoran Desert, including southwestern Arizona and adjacent areas of northern Mexico. Their home is one of the hottest, driest, and botanically most interesting parts of the continent. Summer daytime temperatures rise well above 100 degrees F for weeks at a time. Annual rainfall averages only 12 unreliable inches - in many places less. A good portion of that comes during summer thunderstorms that pour down too suddenly for the thin, rocky soil to absorb much water. You might expect few living things to survive in such a difficult place, yet the Sonoran Desert is a rich environment blessed with more than 2,700 plant species placed neatly across the desert. In spring, if winter rains have been sufficient, the desert erupts in dense carpets of orange poppy, blue lupine, globemallow, scorpion weed, primrose, and brittlebush. The air fills with an intoxicating blend of floral perfume and birdsong, and it is hard ever again to think of the desert as a barren place.

The second New Testament word for freedom carries a very full sense of being made free - not merely "not a slave," but rather being liberated. (Civil freedom) **Romans 8:2:** *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath **made me free <1659>** from the law of sin and death.* **Galatians 5:1:** *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath **made us free <1659>**, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.* The third word for freedom carries the personal application of being liberated - the ability to make personal decisions. (Spiritual freedom) **Galatians 5:1:** *Stand fast therefore in the **liberty <1657>** wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*

*There can never be freedom from consequence, laws, or responsibility.
There can never be freedom without contribution.*

Theme Text: **1 Peter 2:16:** As **free <1658>**, and not using your **liberty <1657>** for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Even though this isn't specifically for America, it sure is appropriate! There are consequences to not maintaining a high standard.



"America the Beautiful (Verse 3)," Kelly Clarkson

"O beautiful for heroes prov'd, / In liberating strife, / Who more than self their country loved, / And mercy more than life. / America! America! / May God thy gold refine / Till all success be nobleness, / And ev'ry gain divine."

What kind of freedom did Jesus come to deliver? **Luke 4:16-20** **John 8:32-36:** Jesus and the Apostles' teachings regarding freedom were very focused on the second and third words in our New Testament list. They were not nearly as concerned with physical freedom, as they understood servitude, etc., to be a temporary condition, contrasted with the deeper personal freedom to be gained in Christ. Their primary concern seemed to be grasping "freedom with responsibility" on a spiritual level.



"America the Beautiful (Verse 4)," Lee Greenwood

"O beautiful for patriot dream / That sees beyond the years / Thine alabaster cities gleam / Undimmed by human tears. / America! America! / God shed His grace on thee, / And crown thy good with brotherhood / From sea to shining sea."

Freedom is a great revealing process. Its purpose, from God's standpoint, is to reveal men's hearts. He already knew the evil men are capable of - it is not a surprise to Him, but it is a surprise to us. With freedom, humanity can see how much they need God and His righteousness. This is a great responsibility. The world will be blessed and this is just the beginning. Don't lose hope! **A small glimpse of what Jesus paid:** Isaiah 53:3-7

The Great Northwest: The enormous scale and diversity of Far West landscapes - from Mount McKinley of the Alaska Range, whose vertical rise surpasses the highest in the Himalaya and can be seen 200 miles away; a waterfall that plummets 14.5 times farther than Niagara; thundering wild rivers; vast soggy plains of tundra; ice fields so large they generate their own weather; and North America's largest collection of fitfully sleeping volcanoes - makes this a region apart, a Brobdingnagian kingdom that tends, by comparison, to make most other North American landscapes seem almost Lilliputian. Like its terrain, the Far West's wildlife is frequently oversized. Its biggest bears weigh in at 1,500 pounds and stand more than nine feet tall. Its wilderness ponds are browsed by 1,300-pound moose with antlers extending six feet across. Some of its oldest trees were growing when pharaohs ruled Egypt.

Liberty is the ability to make choices - God gives us that liberty.



"God Bless America," Mormon Tabernacle Choir (Words and music by Irving Berlin)

"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."

The Great Sequoias, Kings Canyon National Park, CA: Of all the things on Earth that exhibit some form of what we call life, one of the largest is the sequoia tree, perhaps named after the Cherokee who devised an alphabet for his tribe. Thirty-six groves of this member of the redwood family cluster in these parks, including seven of the tallest and broadest trees known to exist. Sequoias have grown as tall as 26-story buildings and have achieved a girth at their base of 113 feet. Nineteenth-century loggers sometimes labored more than a week to fell just one sequoia. In 1876, a section of one mammoth was shipped to Philadelphia for exhibition, where astonished viewers took it for a hoax.

Micah 6:6-8: In the end, what is important? Burnt offerings? Our firstborn? The answer is simple - justice, kindness and humility.

We looked at this subject from three different perspectives: America was founded on Godly principles by men who looked to God for their guide. They weren't perfect, but they sought God's wisdom and His way. Songs of America were written to praise and honor God. The beauty of America also praises and honors God. As we celebrate this 4th of July, make sure that among all the other things we do, we thank God for all that He has done for us. We want to serve Him first and foremost.

***So does God bless America...?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!***