

## **PROCLAIM LIBERTY!**

In Leviticus 25:10b reads, "...Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof..." These are the words inscribed upon the Liberty Bell. This symbol, perhaps more than any other, epitomizes America's struggle for and winning of liberty. This Old Testament verse refers to the "Jubilee" and the instructions to the Israelites to return property and free indentured servants every 50 years. Most historians believe the bell was rung to announce America's independence on the 8<sup>th</sup> of July, 1776, not on the 4<sup>th</sup>, because it was the 8<sup>th</sup> on which the Declaration of Independence was read and publicly announced.

The deliberations of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 were held in strict secrecy. Consequently, anxious citizens gathered outside Independence Hall when the proceedings ended in order to learn what had been produced behind closed doors. The answer was provided immediately. A Mrs. Powell of Philadelphia asked Benjamin Franklin, "Well, Doctor, what have we got? A republic or a monarchy?" With no hesitation whatsoever, Franklin responded, "A republic, if you can keep it."

Two hundred forty-one years ago, the greatest republic the earth has ever seen was born. Our goal is that we may keep what God has enabled us to found on this sacred ground. To borrow from the symbol of the Liberty Bell, let us therefore keep freedom "ringing!" Near the opening of the Declaration of Independence we find these words, "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." Then after declaring our independence, it closes with words that, had we lost this struggle, could have cost the signers their very life: "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."

### **I. LET US CONTINUE TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY FOR THE PRACTICE OF OUR FAITH.**

Much has been referred to in recent years in the demand of "the separation of church and state." Sadly, this phrase is more often used to try to keep God out of the public sector. Please allow me to take you back to 1802 when this phrase was introduced by President Thomas Jefferson in a letter to an assembled group of Baptist pastors:

“Gentlemen, The affectionate sentiments of esteem and approbation which you are so good as to express towards me, on behalf of the Danbury Baptist association, give me the highest satisfaction. My duties dictate a faithful and zealous pursuit of the interests of my constituents, and in proportion as they are persuaded of my fidelity to those duties, the discharge of them becomes more and more pleasing. Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building a wall of separation between Church and State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.

I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection and blessing of the common Father and Creator of man, and tender you for yourselves and your religious association, assurances of my high respect & esteem.” -Jan. 1, 1802.

In the historical context of this speech, I believe we see Jefferson harking back to something that happened in his native state of Virginia thirty-two years earlier. In 1770 three Baptist pastors (Lewis and Joseph Craig and Aaron Bledsoe) were arrested in Fredericksburg, Virginia, where they were holding a meeting. The royal prosecutor then arraigned the preachers with all gravity, “For preaching the Gospel of the Son of God in the colony of Virginia.” Patrick Henry had ridden horseback for fifty miles to represent these Baptist preachers. Upon having the charges read, Henry jumped to his feet. Here is a portion of his defense: “May it please your worships: There are periods in the history of man, when corruption and depravity have so long debased the human character, that man sinks under the weight of the oppressor's hand, and becomes his servile, his abject slave; he licks the hand that smites him; he bows in passive obedience to the mandates of the despot, and in this state of servility he receives his fetters of perpetual bondage. But, may it please your worships, such a day has passed away! From that period, when our fathers left the land of their nativity for settlement in these American wilds, for LIBERTY, for civil and religious liberty, for liberty of conscience, to worship their Creator according to their conceptions of Heaven's revealed will; from the moment they placed foot on the American continent, and in the deeply imbedded forests sought an asylum from persecution and tyranny, from that moment despotism was crushed; her fetters of darkness were broken, and Heaven decreed that man should be free--free to worship God according to the Bible. Were it not for this, in vain have been the efforts and sacrifices of the colonists; in vain were all their sufferings and bloodshed to subjugate this new world, if we, their offspring, must still be oppressed and persecuted. But, may it please your worships; permit me to inquire once more, for what are these men about to tried? This paper says, 'For

preaching the Gospel of the Son of God.' Great God! For preaching the Gospel of the Savior to Adam's fallen race. WHAT LAW HAVE THEY VIOLATED?!"

There is no doubt that our forefathers were not prohibiting the practice of our faith, but rather promoting the free practice of our faith without government intrusion.

## II. LET US PROCLAIM LIBERTY FOR OUR FAMILIES

We do not live in a land where our marriages are arranged, nor are we limited as in Communist China as to how many children we may have. Our women are not relegated to walking ten steps behind their husbands, polygamy is not permitted, nor do we as a nation turn our backs on women and children being abused as many cultures do in distant lands.

A grievance that I do have with our present situation is that our unborn are not guaranteed "life," as guaranteed by our Declaration of Independence. Deuteronomy 30:19: "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live." And another grievance is the mockery of the only form of marriage God honors, which is between one man and one woman (Hebrews 13:4).

## III. LET US PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO THE INDIVIDUAL

Galatians 5:1, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free...." How sad to live in the land of the free and the home of the brave and not enjoy liberty. And the truth of the matter is that if you don't know Christ you are not free. This is stated in Ephesians 2:2: "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." Jesus said John 8:44, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." This is human bondage! But Jesus said in John 8:32, 36, " And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." There can be no true freedom apart from knowing Jesus Christ as your own personal Lord and Savior.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.