

“Ask What You Can Do”

Today we celebrate the 245th birthday of our country! On July 4th, 1776, leaders from the 13 colonies put their differences aside and adopted the Declaration of Independence from Great Britain so that the United States of America could enjoy life, liberty (freedom), and the pursuit of happiness. If you read through the Declaration of Independence you will realize that this wasn't a spur of the moment, acting purely on emotions, taking this lightly sort of decision. The founding fathers of our country recognized that this was a big deal to break away from an established nation and established government. However, they felt after years of abuse and talking with the British government about it, and seeing no change, that it was necessary to take action. So, the birth of the United States of America began what George Washington called in 1790, **“The establishment of our government seemed to be the last great experiment for promoting human happiness.”** And we are happy with this great experiment, aren't we? Would you want to live in any other country in the world? I know I wouldn't. For all of the issues that we have as a nation I think it is telling that our country ranks #1 in the world as the country most sought after when it comes to living here. In fact, of the 331 million people who call the U.S. home, 51 million of them were citizens of a different country first and then moved here to become a citizen. That's 15% of our current population! That stat teaches us that our country must be doing something right.

So the big question for us this July 4th is this – how can we hold on to “life, liberty (freedom), and the pursuit of happiness” that we enjoy in our country? George Mason, politician who was one of 3 delegates who refused to sign the original Constitution of the U.S. because it lacked a Bill of Rights and died a year before the Bill of Rights came into existence, answered that question this way back in 1776, **“No free government, nor the blessings of liberty, can be preserved to any people, but by...a frequent recurrence to fundamental principles.”** In the mid 1800's American poet and writer, James Russell Lowell, answered that question this way: **“As long as the IDEAS of the men who founded it continue dominant.”** President John F. Kennedy offers us food for thought on how to answer that question with these famous words from his 1961 inaugural address: **“Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.”** This topic is worthy of deeper discussion at a different time, but permit me a couple of thoughts based on these quotes. If we want to continue to enjoy the blessings that we do in our country, then we shouldn't just be passive takers of what this country offers us. We need to do our part to make sure that these blessings continue. We need to take pride in our nation and show we appreciate what we have. We need to educate ourselves and others in and promote the ideas and fundamental principles our country was founded on. We need to stay aware of what is going on in our country and community and look for ways to be involved in public service. We need to look out for the public good by being law abiding citizens, leading Christian lives, helping our neighbors, and praying for our country.

Even greater than the blessings we enjoy as citizens of this country is the life, liberty (freedom), and happiness we enjoy as citizens of God's Eternal Kingdom through the gift of faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. As citizens of this kingdom we enjoy full and free forgiveness for all of our shameful, embarrassing, shocking, disappointing sins **“Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed...”** (Lamentations 3:22). Even when we continue to struggle with those same sins and feel badly because of them, **“His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness”** (Lamentations 3:22b-23). As citizens of this kingdom we enjoy purpose as we strive to make it obvious in our daily living that: **“The LORD is my portion”** (Lamentations 3:24a). As citizens of this kingdom we don't even need to be afraid of physical death or eternity

because our God raises dead people and promises heaven to all who believe in Jesus as Savior. **“The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD”** (Lamentations 3:25-26). These blessings are awesome and certainly no great experiment as they were part of God’s plan before he even created the world.

So the big question for us today is this – how can we hold on to the “life, liberty (freedom), and happiness” that we enjoy as part of God’s Eternal Kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior? Listen to 2 Corinthians 8:7,9,13-15.

⁷ But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving...⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. ¹³ Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. ¹⁴ At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, ¹⁵ as it is written: “He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little.”

If I had to sum up what the Apostle Paul is saying here the summary would sound like this: “Ask not what God can do for you. Ask what you can do for God and others.” When it comes to your eternal salvation God has taken care of everything through Jesus Christ. There is nothing for you to add to what Jesus has already done. As you reflect upon what Jesus has done for you: **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich”** (2 Corinthians 8:9), don’t respond by saying “that’s great God, what else you got for me?” If we take for granted what God has done for us and we are constantly in “give me more God” mode then we are going to lose the life, liberty (freedom), and happiness that God provides through Christ not only here, but also for eternity. Instead, daily take to heart these words: **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich”** (2 Corinthians 8:9). You are rich in God’s undeserved love, mercy, and compassion. You are rich in God’s faithfulness and care. You are rich in the confidence and hope that God provides through Jesus Christ. You are rich in eternal life. You are rich in every reason to be happy. You are rich in Christian Freedom which means you understand that the reason you strive to live a Christian life is not in order to get more blessings from God, but simply to say thank you to God for giving you everything you need for life and eternity. Through Christ you are rich beyond your wildest dreams! Protect your wealth through continual education of yourself and others in the ideas and fundamental principles of God’s Word. Furthermore, protect your wealth by excelling in the grace of giving. And please understand that is more than just the financial offerings you give to support charitable causes and Gospel ministry. Protect your wealth by taking pride in your Christian faith and sharing that faith with others. Protect your wealth by being focused on living a Christian life everywhere and looking for ways to use your abilities for the public good. Protect your wealth by staying aware of the physical and spiritual needs of others in your family, church, community, and world and do what you can to help. Ask not what God can do for you. I’m not suggesting that you stop focusing on what God has and does do for you. I’m simply saying remember that if you appreciate what God has and does do for you then it will impact your day to day living. Ask what you can do for God and others and see how that mindset will help take the life, liberty (freedom), and happiness that is yours through Christ to a new level. And see how that mindset will help keep you in the true Christian faith until the end. Amen.