

“Patriotism-Faith of our Founding Father-George Washington”

Deuteronomy 32:7, Hebrews 13:7

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Sunday Evening Sermon

#43410

It just occurred to me that we're going to have to have a Space Force anthem. Anybody ready to write that? How about signing up? I mean, the job is out of this world, I understand. So that's a very old joke. I'm sorry.

It's my joy to share just a few moments of reflection tonight on the faith of our founding fathers, George Washington. If you want a more expansive version, I wrote a 1200 page book that you can read and lots of it. I didn't bring any so I'm not selling any tonight, so relax. But tonight, I want you to think a little bit about two great passages in the Old Testament. There are two parallel texts that I would like us to reflect on as we are celebrating the 247th anniversary of American independence.

One is from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, and the second is from the New Testament book of Hebrews. Deuteronomy 32:7 says this, and it is from the Song of Moses. “Remember the days of old. Consider the years of many generations. Ask your father and he will show you, your elders and they will tell you.” Now our second verse in Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 7 says this. “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you, the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”

Now, those verses almost immediately want me to start talking about Dr. Frank Barker and Dr. Harry Reeder. But I'm going to refrain from that, even though I'd love to do it. They were leaders who taught us the word of God. They were fathers in the faith to us who could tell us a great deal. But tonight, we're going to be looking on this 4th of July weekend at George Washington.

You might say, now, why in the world would we think about George Washington with those Bible texts? Well, first of all, would you not agree that George Washington is a father? He was called the father of this country in his lifetime. In fact, George Washington was not only a father in that sense, he was the framer of our Constitution, an elder of our nation, and clearly a leader as our first president under the Constitution, and the victorious general of the American Revolution.

Both of these passages that I've read tell us to remember and to consider. Remembering means we need to bring it back to our minds again and again. Consider means we need to evaluate and plumb the depths of what we are considering. And so as we do this, I want us to think about the fact that the verse in Hebrews also says, “Remember those who spoke the Word of the Lord to you.” Now, that certainly sounds like Dr. Barker and Dr. Reeder, but you may not know this, this is also true of George Washington. George Washington said this in one of his letters that he was reflecting on possibly sending to the first Congress. He said this, “The blessed religion revealed in the word of God will remain an eternal and awful monument to show how human beings can corrupt the best of institutions.” My goodness, he sounds like a Presbyterian clergyman there. He's basically saying, “We have a word from God, and when we study it, we discover that things that are given by God can be used for

wrong reasons.” And I think especially in that passage, he's referring to the courts of Israel that crucified the Messiah without justice. And so as we think about this passage, it shows us, however, that Washington did speak about the Word of God. In fact, in his writings, which I spent many years reflecting on, he uses such words as the Word of God, holy writ, the religion that is revealed from heaven. In fact, there are over 200 examples from the Old Testament and New Testament where he is alluding, quoting or sharing a biblical text. If you have a chance to get that big fat book, take a look at appendix two. I list over 200 examples of that. He speaks of holy writ, the precepts of heaven, the benign light of revelation, the heaven ordained rules, revealed religion, scripture. And so we see that Washington was, in fact, a man that was deeply conscious of Scripture. And he would, in fact, reflect on it in various ways.

When he began his auspicious career as our first president under the Constitution, you may know that he set the precedent that has been largely followed ever since. After taking the oath that the president is required to take, he added the words, “So help me God.” That's not in the Constitution. It's not required. But he recognized the oath he was about to take was bigger than he could do on his own without divine help. And further, he did something that I think very few presidents have done since. The Bible on which he put his hand and took his oath of office as our first president ...he bent over and kissed the Bible. That was a way of saying, I am committing my words to the ultimate help and judgment of Almighty God who's given us his Word.

So tonight, as Moses has told us in the verse that we've read, “Ask your father. He will show you and tell you.” Tonight, I would like us to ask some questions to George Washington. Now I cannot raise him from the dead. There will be no necromancy here. But what we do have are his extraordinary written statements. There are many things that Washington said that he wrote with his own magnificent penmanship. And I want you to hear some of the answers to his questions.

So, first of all, we might say, “President Washington, General Washington, how can America be a happy nation?” He said this as he retired as a commanding officer in the Revolutionary Army. If you're here this morning, you heard me quote this, but I quote it again. “I now make it my earnest prayer,” said Washington, “that God would have you in the state over which you preside in His holy protection, that He would incline the hearts of the citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to government, to entertain a brotherly affection, love for one another, for their fellow citizens of the United States at large.” And tonight, listen, “And particularly for their brethren who served in the field.” that is in the armed forces... “And finally, that He would most graciously be pleased to dispose this all to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves to that charity, humility and pacific temper of mind, which were the characteristics of the divine author of our blessed religion and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy nation.” George Washington answers the question, “How will we be a happy nation?” One thing is we ought to take good care of our military veterans. But, he says further, we need to love each other as a nation. You Alabamians need to love us Pennsylvanians, and vice versa. And not only that, it tells us that we need to have a humble imitation of Jesus Christ. The Divine author of our blessed religion. We need to have the role model of his love, his humility, and his commitment to peace.

Let's ask him a second question. "Mr. Washington, father of our faith, the Bible says we should ask you as a father and you show and tell us. So what was your vision for America?" Washington wrote this to his victorious troops. And in 1783, "Under the smiles of Providence," he writes, "on the stage of human affairs, happy, thrice happy shall they be pronounced hereafter who contribute anything, who performed the meanest office in erecting this stupendous fabric of freedom and empire on the broad basis of independency, who have assisted in protecting the rights of human nature and established an asylum for the poor and oppressed of all nations and religions." What's he saying? It's that this place that we call America, the United States, is going to be a place where the masses can come to find safety and asylum. And whatever we've done to create a society of loving our weak and humbled neighbors with their hurt, we have done something that's worthy of honor because we have blessed the world with a unique nation, a nation that shows religious liberty and freedom of conscience is something we can have. Let us not forget that there are those who are dying today because of their testimony for Christ or because of their criticism of their government. We should remember. Washington says this great gift of America is freedom of conscience.

Let's ask a third question of our founding father. Given contemporary efforts in America to stifle personal beliefs, (remember our cancel culture we hear about everywhere?) "What would you, Mr. Washington, say about religious liberty as provided in the First Amendment?" In May 1789, George Washington said, "If I could have entertained the slightest apprehension that the Constitution framed in the convention where I had the honor to preside, might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical society, certainly I would never have placed my signature to it." He was absolutely convinced that we need to defend free speech and religious liberty. He said it this way to the Jewish audience that was in Newport, Rhode Island, 1790, as president. "For happily the government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens." What he said is that the free conscience of every person needs to be defended. What a great gift that is, and it's been swallowed up whole. We need to stand with Washington.

Fourthly let's ask our father this, "Is religion important for our republic?" President Washington emphasized the necessity of religion and morality when he stepped down after two terms. Remember, he was unanimously elected as president twice. That will never happen again, I guarantee you. He was unanimously elected for two terms, and he refused a third term. And he declared in his farewell address, "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports." He said, "If we want our system of government to work, we need to encourage moral character and the religious life of the nation."

Number five, "Mr. Washington, who is America's God, in your opinion?" We said one nation under God. We've heard God's name in different ways. And I quoted this this morning, I repeat again tonight in case you missed it, writing to the Jewish synagogue in Savannah, Georgia, he said this, "May the same wonder working deity who long since delivered the Hebrews from their Egyptian oppressors and planted them in the promised land, whose providential agency has lately been conspicuous in establishing these United States as an independent nation, still continue to water them with the dews of heaven and to make the inhabitants of every denomination participate in the temporal and spiritual blessings of the people whose God is Jehovah." Isn't that amazing? Washington said, "It's not just Jehovah

that rescued the Israelites when the Red Sea parted, but it was Jehovah God who gave America its freedom. That is the God of the American people.”

Number 6, “What do you believe are necessary to secure America's political prosperity?” He says this in a fuller quote of what we’ve used, now in his farewell address again in 1796. Listen carefully to his words. “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.” Now here he adds, “In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert these pillars of human happiness. These firmest props of the duties of men and citizens...” pause with Washington....he said anybody that attacks morality and religion cannot be a patriot in America. A patriot will stand for these things. Washington goes on to say, “The mere politician equally with the pious man ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. And let us, with caution, indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education of minds, a peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.” Washington would have been utterly stunned that the Supreme Court removed the Bible and prayer and spiritual training from our schools. He said, “Without these, we're not going to have a government that lasts.” They are necessary.

Seven...”Did you call yourself a Christian, Mr. Washington? Did you ever call on others to become Christians? Did you share your Christian faith?” In 1763, he signed a private letter, “On my honor and the faith of a Christian.” General Washington gave this general order at headquarters on July 9th, 1776. “The colonels or commanding officers of each regiment are directed to procure chaplains accordingly, persons of good characters and exemplary lives to see that all inferior officers and soldiers pay them a suitable respect and attend carefully upon religious exercises. The blessing and protection of Heaven are at all time necessary, but especially so in times of public distress and danger. The general hopes and trusts that every officer and man will endeavor so to live and act as becomes a Christian soldier.” In his general orders, he said, “The highest honor, higher than patriotism and military service is to be a Christian.”

The Declaration of Independence ends with a stirring call for national dependance on providence. “Mr. Washington, would you agree that the doctrine of providence is important for America?” And for the support of this declaration we read, “We need divine providence in the Declaration.” This is what Washington says, as general. “It is not a little surprising nor less wonderful to contemplate that after two years of maneuvering and undergoing the strangest vicissitudes perhaps ever attended any one contest since the creation, both armies are brought back to the very point where they set out from, and that which was the offending party in the beginning is now reduced to the use of the spade and pickax for defense. The hand of providence has been so conspicuous in all this that he must be worse than an infidel that lacks faith and more than wicked that has not gratitude enough to acknowledge his obligations. But it will be time enough for me to turn preacher when my present appointment ceases and therefore I shall add no more on the doctrine of providence.” Washington says providence is clearly at work. He says, “I'm almost a preacher of providence.” Well, guess what? When he gives his first inaugural address, half of that is a sermon on providence. He will tell us that “We ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which

heaven itself is ordained, and that Americans, more than any others, must recognize God's providential care.”

So as we finish in this very quick asking of Washington as a leader, a man who is to show and tell us of how he taught the Word of God, “Were you a man of faith, Mr. Washington?” At the beginning of the War in May in 1776, Washington wrote to a clergyman, “No man has a more perfect reliance on the all-wise and powerful dispensations of a Supreme Being than I have, nor thinks His aide more necessary.” He told us that we need to imitate Christ. In fact, he put it this way in one of his public letters, “You speak the language of my heart in acknowledging the magnitude of our obligations to the Supreme Director of all human activities.”

As we end this quick study, we need to conclude with an application for own lives. On this July 4th weekend, reflecting the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews call for us to imitate the faith of those who spoke in the Word of God to us, may I ask you if your faith is possible to imitate Washington and his character? Can you say with Washington, “I have a perfect reliance on the all wise and powerful dispensation of the Supreme Being.” Can you confess, as he did, “On My honor and the faith of a Christian?” Are you willing to publicly declare as Washington did, that you are seeking to imitate Jesus Christ in his love, humility, and peace, since He is the divine author of your blessed religion? Is the language of your heart to honor the sovereign Lord of history in your duties for your family, church and state? My prayer is that it might be. And may God send us to another Washington that would lead our country with such great values. Thank you.