

JULY 3, 1988

CELEBRATING GOD'S VICTORY

We celebrate various happenings from our past with holidays. A good example of this is The Fourth of July or Independence Day. Most business offices and many factories will be closed. Those places that operate will pay their hourly workers extra for working. There will be parades and fireworks and a lot of our national resources will be spent on this one day--and we do it every year. Why do we do that? For that matter why do we do what we do for any holiday? Celebrations help us remember significant events or significant people and what they stood for. Is it worth the cost? Maybe, maybe not. If we just celebrate and never think about why we celebrate, then I would argue that such celebrations are a poor use of resources. On the other hand, if we plan the celebrations around the significance of the event so that we can really remember and learn the lessons of the past, then what we do for the Fourth of July is a bargain.

Even though we call this day "Independence Day" the real issue is not so much independence as freedom. Not many (any) of us are capable of being totally and completely independent. We have significant interdependence on many people, organizations and nations. What we really cherish is the privilege of choosing those with whom we will be interdependent.

The cliché, "those that don't learn from the past are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past" is applicable argument for the value of effective celebrations. Why would anyone (or any nation) want to experience the trauma of not being able to choose the significant relationships that define their lives or have any voice in the decisions that affect themselves or those relationships? The answer is obvious, there is no good reason! None of us would consciously choose to surrender our freedom

to another individual or group unless there is reciprocity in the relationship. Yet, if the cliché is correct, then we are at risk of losing the benefit of those hard-earned freedoms if the Fourth of July means nothing more to us than a "firecracker". Let us remind each other of what we have and the truly significant value these freedoms are to us. Let us remind ourselves and truly be thankful that we have the opportunity to live in such a time as this having the freedoms that we possess. But let us also be diligent to watch for erosion of those freedoms, both internally as well as externally. King George of England of the 18th Century was not the last of the tyrants that would rob people of their "certain inalienable rights" endowed to us by our Creator.

The issue of FREEDOM must go beyond a preference to something that we believe in. How can you tell the difference? A preference is something you choose to do or experience if the price is not too high; something you believe in does not let the cost stand in the way. Belief in freedom causes us to echo Patrick Henry in declaring, "Give me liberty or give me death." A simple preference for freedom may cause us to sink to the stance of "Better red than dead."

Should we celebrate? Most definitely! But as we celebrate let us keep in mind the cost of freedom and resolve to be one that is willing to pay the price, whatever the sacrifice, to hold on to our freedoms. Such resolve is the means by which we can prevent the erosion of the principles that we celebrate this Fourth of July.

What does the Fourth of July have to do with Moses and the Children of Israel? They too experienced a liberation. For them it was freedom from slavery to Egypt and even before it happened, God instructed them to

plan for remembrance through celebrations of the event. For nearly 4000 years the Israelites have continued to observe Passover which has reminded them of God's provision.

EXODUS 12:14-17 The celebration had several aspects and each of these was designed to teach and remind of something significant relative to their deliverance from Egypt. The beginning of the celebration was concerned with preparation for their departure from Egypt. The significance of the unleavened bread was primarily to show that there was urgency associated with the departure. In other words, they didn't have time to wait for the dough to rise before being about the business of leaving Egypt. This, of course, has significance for us from the standpoint of our personal salvation in that salvation is so important that we must not delay in being about the business of disassociating our selves with sin and its consequences. Later the elimination of the leaven from the household took on the significance of getting rid of all the influences of the world and being a separated people unto God. Each of us ought to take inventory, on a regular basis, to see how much of the leaven of the world has grown into and permeated our lives and then take the necessary steps to remove it from our "house".

The second part of the celebration observance had to do with a lamb that was sacrificed.

EXODUS 12:21-23 From the Garden of Eden until the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the shedding of blood for the remission of sin and protection from the consequences of sin has been central to God's dealing with mankind. This theme of sacrifice was carried into the worship experience of the Hebrew people and had its purpose in pointing to God's remedy for the sin problem--the shed blood of Jesus Christ. There are many significant parallels and inferences that could possibly be drawn between the physical and the spiritual. The family: in the Passover

celebration the father would take the lead and in doing so would include his family under the protection. In our Christian walk we see time and time again that if the father in the family is serious in his Christian walk that the family will usually follow his lead and put their trust in Jesus. The need to stay under the protection of the blood: In the Passover, the people were not to go outside the house after the blood had been applied until the next morning. In our Christian walk, we are afforded protection under the blood of Jesus Christ from the consequences of the worldly way of life if we choose to walk with the Lord and remain under the protection that God gives. We cannot expect to escape the judgment on the world if we apply the blood to the door post and then go out and spent the night with the Egyptians.

EXODUS 12:24-27 This is where we started--Why celebrate? They could not afford to forget the lesson of Egypt and what it was like to live in slavery nor could they afford to forget that it was by the mighty hand of God that they were delivered out of that circumstance. We should cultivate the memory of our own salvation experience. Most Christians can only vaguely remember how it was when they accepted Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives. Many can't remember because they really did not experience it, they expressed a preference for the way of Christ but they didn't come to the point of belief in it. We have to go beyond "convenience Christianity" and realize that "committed Christianity" is the only kind that works.