

The Journey to Freedom

by Travis Dean

June 26, 2010

This weekend we celebrate a uniquely American holiday – the 4th of July or Independence Day. It's often called the birthday of our nation. The experience recalled on this holiday parallels the experience that we recall during our Communion Service. Independence Day celebrates the day our nation declared itself to be free from the rule of the King of England and thereby an independent nation. The Communion Service celebrates the death of Jesus Christ when we were set free from our sins and thus became free children of God. As we consider these parallel experiences let's invite the Holy Spirit to guide us.

As we begin let us consider the colonists' journey to freedom. For about 150 years (1607-1760's) American colonists were happy English citizens. When they came to this new world they had a lot of autonomy. For the most part England was uninvolved in the day to day affairs of life. There were such groups as the Pilgrims and Puritans in New England. Other groups were spread along the east coast down to the Carolinas. Each lived pretty much as they wished and were able to create their own little cultures. They developed their own local governing bodies and made their own laws. As a result, the colonists were quite content to be citizens of England.

In 1763 a series of conflicts began. The French & Indian War (1754-1763) had just ended. England and France had been fighting over disputed land in the current states of Pennsylvania and New York as well as parts of present-day Canada. Afterwards England decided to retain some of their military in America to protect their land of conquest. In order to fund the added expense of keeping part of their military in America, England started imposing taxes on American colonists. These taxes began an up and down experience between England and the colonists. Parliament passed a series of legislation requiring taxes on certain products. For example, the Sugar Act required the colonists to pay tax on sugar and molasses that was imported into America. The colonists opposed these taxes claiming that the imposing taxes was the right of their local legislatures. Somehow they would either find a way around the tax (smuggling) or they would simply refuse to import the products with the tax. Often with sufficient complaint the act would be repealed.

This up and down experience between the colonists and the English Parliament continued through 1772. Throughout these years there continued to be times of contentment with the political situation.

However in 1773 the colonists and Parliament encountered irreconcilable differences. At this time tea from the East India Company was brought to America at a greatly reduced price. The colonists opposed importing the tea since it still carried a small import tax. In most American city ports the tea was either sent back or left to rot except in Boston. Here the governor insisted on landing the tea. In protest the colonists in Boston threw 342 chests of tea into the harbor. This event became known as the Boston Tea Party. It has been called "the beginning of the end". Neither England or American colonists ever recovered from this conflict. From this point on their paths never converged.

By April of 1775 the colonists and England were at war. As a result of the Boston Tea Party, the local government in Boston was ended and the British governor took control. In protest the Continental Congress convened for the first time on September of 1774. It encouraged the collection of arms by local militia to defend their local governments. The first battle was fought at Concord, Massachusetts where the British attempted to destroy a storage of weapons and gun powder. In June of 1775 the Continental Army was formed with George Washington as Commander-in-Chief.

Finally on July 2, 1776 the Continental Congress voted for complete independence from England. Previous to this in December of 1775 King George III had disowned all Americans. He forbade all trading with and protection of America. On June 7, 1776 Richard Henry Lee made a radical proposal to the Continental Congress in the following words: "Resolved: That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States." It took close to a month to gain enough support for this proposal. But on July 2, 1776 the Continental Congress voted for independence from England. Two days later, on July 4, 1776, the Congress

voted to approve the "Declaration of Independence" document. The journey towards choosing freedom and independence from England was over. The American colonists had made a complete break with England.

Now let's consider the parallel experience of the Christian's journey to freedom. Every person born into this world experiences this first stage: united with sin. According to Romans 3 everyone was born consumed with and passionate about sin. Paul describes this experience in verse 14 saying that our mouth is "full of cursing and bitterness". Sin consumes us. According to verse 15 of Romans 3 we are "swift to shed blood." In Ephesians 2 Paul says we all used to walk in partnership with sin. And in so doing we were simply fulfilling our natural desires. At this stage in our journey there is no desire to be free. Our partnership with sin is natural with complete unity. Some of us may have been spared the greater evil of this partnership by being raised in a Christian environment. But regardless, we all begin our journey in a natural partnership with sin.

The next stage on the Christian's journey to freedom is a union under attack. David describes this stage in Psalm 32:4. He says, "[God's] hand was heavy upon me." His life of sin was no longer casual and pleasant. God brought a heaviness into his experience. John 16:8 echoes this when it says the Holy Spirit has been sent to convict of sin. It's like being pricked every time we choose to go along with sin. Sin no longer feels natural and pleasant. We are given a glimpse of what we have lost from when we were created.

The third stage is being desperate for separation. In 2 Corinthians 7:11 Paul describes the emotions of this stage as having "vehement desire". It is a time of strong emotions when we have great sorrow for our relationship with sin and greatly desire to be free. In Psalm 51:11 David cries out to God, "Do not cast me away from Your presence." Since the Garden of Eden we have been separated from God and now a yearning desire consumes us to be united with God again.

The last stage brings complete deliverance. In Romans 7:24 Paul mournfully cries, "Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" How can I be free from this bond with sin? Is there a solution? Is there someone who can set me free? And in verse 25 of Romans 7 Paul gives the answer: "I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!" When we find Jesus Christ, we find what we've been looking for. Jesus Christ gives us complete freedom from sin. Through the death of Jesus Christ we are completely free. Jesus Himself says in John 8:36, "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

The Communion Service is a living parable of this experience. The symbols of the bread and wine allow us to relive this experience with all our senses. In Matthew 26:28 Jesus says, "My blood is shed for the remission of sins." In other words, "My blood will be spilled so you can be free from sin." When we drink the juice from the vine, we recall His death that has made us free. The revolutionary war with sin continues to rage but the declaration has been made. All ties with sin have been cut. We are free children of God. Today let's celebrate the event in history that has made us free indeed.