



water from rock

Selah: Stop, Look Listen - July 4, 2024

The Lord be with you.

“When in the course of human events...” I've always thrilled to the sound of those words beginning our Declaration of Independence and, and the words that follow about how you and I are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

On this Fourth of July, I want to suggest that if, if we the people, if we, the people would take up the pursuit of happiness in the way that America's founders had in mind on that Fourth of July, that it would be the way ahead for us out of this horrible political, moral economic mess that we find ourselves in.

When Thomas Jefferson and the other 54 signers of the declaration, when they wanted liberty for the pursuit of happiness, they thought of happiness a lot differently than many people think of happiness today. so often did today people think of happiness as, as the pursuit of pleasure. They think of happiness as hedonism, indulgence, self gratification, being able to buy all that stuff that's being thrown at us on TV. When the founders carefully crafted this phrase, the pursuit of happiness, they were actually influenced by earlier philosophical thinkers and by the Bible which all equated happiness with virtue.

Our nation's founders, they wanted a nation where liberty and the pursuit of happiness did not mean license to pursue pleasure and indulgence, but it meant the freedom to pursue the highest moral life. George Washington said, happiness and moral duty are inseparably connected. And in equating the pursuit of happiness with the pursuit of moral duty, the founders were going back to early Greek thinkers like Socrates, Aristotle who said that true happiness is found in virtue. And, and, and they looked at a long history of Christian thought and Biblical teaching that all connected happiness with living a morally good life.

This is what the Declaration of Independence has in mind in the words, “the pursuit of happiness.” The liberty, the freedom to pursue virtue, to pursue a moral life. Our nation's founders studied history. They, they, they learn from history as they wrote the Declaration of Independence and framed our government in the United States Constitution. They wanted to learn from those who had gone before us and they were very much guided in their thinking by an ancient Greek writer, by the name of Polybius. That's P O L Y B I U S. He was a Greek historian writing about 200 years before Christ. And, and, and Polybius looked closely at the various Greek City states finding in their histories a cycle, a reoccurrence, a repetition of forms of government. Each one beginning with a monarchy, then turning into a



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tyranny, then aristocracy to an oligarchy that is ruled by the few. And, and then into democracy, the democracy ultimately falling apart, corrupting into mob rule.

And Polybius saw that repeating cycle again and again in the history of the rise and fall of governments. And from what he saw, Polybius warned that what happens with a democracy is that the prosperity and luxury of democracy leads to moral and social decay. A poverty of virtue.

People get too comfortable to focus on wealth and the moral and civic foundations of the democracy gives way, it crumbles leading to mob rule. In declaring independence and laying the foundation of a new nation, our founders were keenly aware of those dangers. And they acknowledged that yes, we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights, including the pursuit of happiness, but a happiness found only in virtuous living.

The Psalmist well understood this as in Psalm 33 verse 12, the Psalmist declares happy is the nation whose God is the Lord.

So today as we celebrate our nation's birthday, let you and me recommit ourselves. Did the pursuit the pursuit of virtue of Godly living. The future of our country today depends on a lot more than the strength of our military, the strength of our economy, but it depends on the character of we the people.

So, our Father, at this very difficult time in our nation's history, remind us of your ancient time honored promise. If my people are called by my name, humble themselves, pray seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Lord, may we come to understand as the wise men of Proverbs says, right, living alone exalts a nation. We pray all of this in the name of our Savior, Amen.

I am Tim Smith, the fellow traveler. Thank you for listening. Until next time.