

CONCEIVED IN LIBERTY



Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. - A. Lincoln

"From time to time a rush of patriotism reminds us, that we do not live for ourselves alone. Indeed, sacrificial faith born of conflict and adversity, and lifted up to strategic principles, strengthens our nation, and toughens its people." - jhc

Scripture:

Psalm 90

¹Lord, you have been our dwelling-place in all generations. ²Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

³You turn us back to dust, and say, 'Turn back, you mortals.' ⁴For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.

⁵You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; ⁶in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.

⁷For we are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed. ⁸You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance.

⁹For all our days pass away under your wrath; our years come to an end like a sigh. ¹⁰The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

¹¹Who considers the power of your anger? Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due to you. ¹²So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

¹³Turn, O LORD! How long? Have compassion on your servants! ¹⁴Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. ¹⁵Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil. ¹⁶Let your work be manifest to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. ¹⁷Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands—O prosper the work of our hands!

Genesis 1:12

¹²The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good.

Mark 4:3-13

³'Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ⁸Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.' ⁹And he said, 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!'

¹⁰When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. ¹¹And he said to them, 'To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes

in parables; ¹²in order that “they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.” ’

¹³And he said to them, ‘Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?’



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I've had a rush of patriotism this week.

- It could have been from the goal scored by the US team against Algeria in World Cup Soccer.
- It could have been the red sunset on Thursday night.
- It could have been talking with Herm Hess about Westinghouse building nuclear engines for the Nautilus nuclear subs.
- It probably was the reading of the Gettysburg address and looking at pictures of our trip to Washington DC last summer, and the picture on the bulletin I took in Sacramento.

I hope we can all have a rush of patriotism born of faith, not privilege, this week as we approach our nation's birthday. Civic duty, spiritual obligation, and sacrifice for a great ideal are ideas upon which our nation and our faith were built. Today I want to overlap them just as Abraham Lincoln did a century and a half ago.

GETTYSBURG

It was a rainy day in November. A crowd had gathered in the small town of Gettysburg, PA, population 2,500, to dedicate a national cemetery. The year was 1863. They lined up at the end of the main street in front of a seventeen-acre parcel of land purchased by the United States government. Dignitaries had assembled from major cities on the east coast, and a powerful orator had been selected as the focal point of ceremonies. He was Edward Everett.

The national cemetery in Gettysburg was urgently needed. From July 1–3, 1863, one-hundred-seventy-two-thousand American soldiers clashed in the Battle of Gettysburg, in what would prove to be a turning point of the Civil War. When the battle was over, the battlefield was left with the bodies of more than seven-thousand-five-hundred

soldiers and five-thousand horses of the Army of the Potomac and the Confederacy's Army of Northern Virginia.

Interring the dead in a dignified and orderly manner became a high priority for the few thousand residents of Gettysburg as the bodies decomposed. Initially, the town planned to buy land for a cemetery and then ask the families of the dead to pay for their burial. The Governor of Pennsylvania, Andrew Gregg Curtin, at the urging of local citizens, suggested instead a National Cemetery to be funded by the states. By the time it was to be dedicated, fully half of the bodies had not yet been transferred from their graves in the field of battle where they had fallen.

A great speaker would be invited. He was Edward Everett, who had served as Secretary of State, U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, Governor of Massachusetts, president of Harvard University, and Vice-Presidential candidate. Everett told the organizing committee that he would be unable to prepare an appropriate speech in such a short period of time, and requested that the date be postponed to November 1863.

AN AFTERTHOUGHT

As an afterthought, the event committee also invited President Lincoln to participate in the ceremony. He was controversial because of the war and his views of slavery and states' rights. So Everett would be the main speaker, and Lincoln would be given a couple of minutes to summarize, and do a little dedication ceremony.

Lincoln arrived by train in Gettysburg on November 18, and spent the night as a guest in the city, where he put the finishing touches on the speech he had written in Washington, D.C. Later some said that he had written the Gettysburg address on the back of a napkin on the train to Gettysburg, however, an original draft of the speech -- which is one of five that were hand written by Lincoln on executive mansion letterhead -- can be found in historical archives. At best he did a little editing on the train.

THE CEREMONY

On the morning of November 19 at 9:30 a.m., Lincoln, astride a chestnut bay horse and riding between Secretary of State William H. Seward and Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase, joined in a procession with the assembled dignitaries, townspeople, and widows marching out to the grounds to be dedicated. Lincoln's horse was too short for the president and some remarked about this tall man on a short horse. Not much was expected of him, and that was clear through many signs and signals surrounding the dedication.

Fifteen thousand people are estimated to have attended the ceremony, including the sitting governors of six of the twenty-four Union states. The program consisted of music from the Birgfield Band, a prayer by Reverend T. H. Stockton, DD, music by the Marine Band, the two hour oration by the Honorable Edward Everett, a hymn, and brief remarks by the president of the United States, followed by a dirge, and a benediction by another DD minister.

No one remembers Everett's thirteen-thousand word, two-hour speech. The text is on file somewhere. It begins: "Standing beneath this serene sky, overlooking these broad fields now reposing from the labors of the waning year, the mighty Alleghenies dimly towering before us, the graves of our brethren beneath our feet, it is with hesitation that I raise my poor voice to break the eloquent silence of God and Nature. But the duty to which you have called me must be performed; — grant me, I pray you, your indulgence and your sympathy." Thus began the orator.

NATIONAL TREASURES

However Lincoln's two minutes are national treasures, and they are as much spiritual as they are political.

No one could have ever done more for faith in two minutes than Lincoln did at Gettysburg. He gave a two-sentence rationale for the war, he called upon humankind's highest moral efforts, and he expressed it in deliberately biblical language.

Lincoln had completely mastered the King James Bible so completely that he could recast abstract issues of constitutional law in biblical terms.

In his remarks, Lincoln began by telling his countrymen what the war was about. Lincoln invokes the Bible in the phrase "**Fourscore and seven years ago**" at the beginning of the speech. A score is a biblical measure of about 20 years. And Lincoln used biblical language to remind his audience of the birth of a unique nation: "**our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all are created equal.**" *Bringing forth* is the second metaphor that Lincoln used in this speech; conceiving and bringing forth a nation, just like conceiving and bringing forth a child, is a difficult process. This new nation is unique specifically because it was "conceived in Liberty" and dedicated to equality.

"**Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.**" Testing is something that remains to be proved. When this cemetery was dedicated a question hung across our country as the Civil War raged: Would this nation survive? The United States was less than one hundred years old; its future was uncertain. The country was at war because others would destroy its founding principle of equality. The question was economic, but Lincoln said that it is also spiritual and moral. And what was at stake was whether or not a nation conceived in Liberty was a viable political structure.

"**We are met on a great battlefield of that war.**" Lincoln repeats the word *great* because it is the only word that will work.

"**We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live.**" In two sentences, Lincoln has explained what the war was about and why it was being fought—so that the nation might be sustained. In none of the more recent wars, including Iraq and Vietnam, have people been told so succinctly the reason for the war. Lincoln faced the more difficult task of explaining why Americans were killing their fellow Americans. He also invoked the spirit of

Christianity in asserting that these men, like Christ, died so that others might live.

“It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.” *Dedicate, consecrate, and hallow* are religious words. These men have made this ground sacred in dying for their country.

“The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.” When Americans cease to be touched by walking on the hallowed ground of Gettysburg or any other National Cemetery, the ideals of those who fought will be but shadows.

“It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.” Like Pericles, Lincoln shifts back to the present: The living must take up the challenge of the dead.

“It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us... that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” Although the Declaration of Independence mentions or invokes God four times, the Constitution does not refer to God. Further, it condones slavery. Lincoln is stating that the Constitution had a flaw. The United States must have a new birth of freedom, and it must be under the will of God, who created all men equal.

Although Lincoln used the word *liberty* at the beginning of the speech, he used the *word freedom* toward the end. The term *liberty* refers to political liberty; Lincoln is saying that the United States is about *true freedom* of the entire human race.

Lincoln's largely Christian audience would have understood that “shall not perish from the earth” echoes John 3:16, which states: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but shall have eternal life.” Lincoln has again transformed each of these soldiers into Christ, an

individual who suffered and died so that the nation might live on. Lincoln was not an ostentatiously religious man, but he believed—and became more convinced as the war went on—that he had been called to this duty, to end the great sin of slavery.

TRUE EQUALITY

Abraham Lincoln's carefully crafted address came to be regarded as one of the greatest speeches in American history. In just over two minutes, Lincoln invoked the principles of human equality espoused by the Declaration of Independence and redefined the Civil War as a struggle not merely for the Union, but as "a new birth of freedom" that would bring true equality to all of its citizens. It is a worthy prayer; it is a challenging sermon; and for those who died at Gettysburg, it was their final benediction.



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June 27, 2010**