

Lest some of you who hear this message fail to hear my next sermon on the nature of heaven, then let me close this message on hell by saying that every person who enters hell must do so by going past Jesus Christ who stands at hell's door warning, rebuking, loving and calling to heaven instead.

THE OLD RUGGED CROSS

There stands that old rugged cross, antiquated by the blood stains of the stranger of Galilee, it stands as a road sign with one of its cross beams like an index finger pointing straight up to heaven away from hell. My, what an arresting thought, that no one need enter that door of hell, that

the Son of God has taken up permanent sentinel duty at hell's door seeking to save up all from our own fool-heartedness.

But Christ will not stand astride the door and bar one's entry any more than He will stand at heaven's door and force one in. If He did so, it would rob one of his freedom to choose his own destiny.

I know no better way to say than this: last night when better than an inch of rain fell on the earth in less than an hour it looked as though nature was crying her eyes out. But all that rain—those tears—would not exhaust God's tear ducts when He sees men and women for whom His Son died, turn their backs on Him choosing to enter hell instead.

“THE RAMPARTS WE WATCH”

Dr. John W. Raley

President, Oklahoma Baptist University

Scripture: Psalm 33:12, Isaiah 51:1

July 4, next Friday, this country will celebrate the 182nd anniversary of its birth into the family of nations. But to return to the sources of our inspiration, we must go back 156 years before the immortal documents celebrated today were proclaimed.

On the fourteenth day of January at four o'clock in the morning, 1620, approximately one hundred people stood on the prow of a little ship and looked across the dark water to the dim shoreline. This intrepid little band had risked their life capital and pledged their sacred honor to develop a civilization in which they could live, work, and worship as they pleased.

Suddenly, as they watched the shore line, a flame burst from the blockhouse; and with growing despair, they saw the work of their hands, the supplies and the seed—their most precious possessions—go up in flames. They were thousands of miles from home with no friends on either side of the dark water they had crossed.

They were men, in modern terminology, of the “underprivileged class;” and certainly they faced the prospect of living in a “backward, undeveloped country”

with no seventeenth century Point Four program to tide them over.

PROFOUND PURPOSE

And yet, they had everything necessary for the conquest of a vast land and the establishing of a new civilization in the world. They had a great idea and a profound purpose. They believed that every man was endowed with a divine right to live, to grow, to think, to learn, to work, to be, to become, and to contribute of his own life in his own way to the wealth and wisdom of the race, and they were determined to fulfill their destiny.

The governing document of the founders of this nation is steeped in the philosophy of Christianity. Conceived in the highlands of their minds, it is an abstract of Christian principles stated in political terms. These new political doctrines, so disturbing to old world autocracies, were not new at all—they were simply the stated convictions of men whose minds were steeped in Biblical lore and whose education in Christian schools prepared them for their hour. From the glow of an enlightened conscience, they spoke their lines on a world stage through the

Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. Indeed they were men to match the hour.

Men of heart and brain and brawn
Tall men, sun-crowned,
Strong, sturdy men, earthy,
Living close to the soil,
The stream, the sod,
Woodsmen, scouts, and trappers,
Ranchers and farmers,
Miners and railroad builders,
Storekeepers and school teachers,
Itinerant preachers and country
doctors,

These were the builders of America.

The heritage of the twentieth century American is the heritage of spirit as well as of space. By the dedicated lives of our fathers we inherited the right of inquiry for truth in all realms, a sense of law under God and the insatiable desire to make conquest over opportunity.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

It is an arresting fact that most of these leaders were ministers, representing nearly one-half of all the college educated men of their day. Standing before the people Sunday by Sunday, they lighted the fires of religious freedom which swept the nation and set the people free. *This nation was born with the church as the midwife.*

But today America faces a danger point. That danger point lies in the prospect of failure to man the ramparts of freedom. Freedom can be lost by lethargy or inaction. Furthermore, to be kept vital and creative, the Soul of Freedom must be constantly fed by moral awareness and spiritual concern.

At this point the disciplines of freedom must be invoked. A major discipline of freedom is knowledge. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free," said the Master Teacher. Knowledge is freedom, and knowledge is the pathway to the increasing powers of freedom. Through learning, man climbs to high mountain peaks and there sweeps the broad vistas of adventure and opportunity. By intellectual development, he increases

his capacity to know. He must know to dare, and he must dare to do. Knowledge is discipline; knowledge is power, knowledge is the tool of freedom.

But knowledge is not enough. Vital faith in our God and the good purposes of God is the highest requirement. If by knowledge we dare, by faith we dedicate. Men risk their lives for the things in which they believe. Personal vital faith releases energy beyond that of nuclear power and guarantees unlimited freedom. Hermann Hagedorn was right in his dramatic appraisal of the strength of soul.¹

"There is power in the Human Soul,"
said the Lord

"When you break through and set it
free.

Like the power of the Atom.

More powerful than the Atom,

It can control the Atom,

The only thing in the world that can.

I told you that the Atom is the greatest
force in the world, save one.

That one is the Human Soul!"

Where can faith for such power be found? I have suggested the Christian school. But there are other sources. The first is the church.

"HERE I STAND"

A summer ago, I visited one of freedom's greatest shrines, Luther's church in Germany. While standing on ground sacred to all men who believe in freedom of conscience, I did not find it difficult to reconstruct the scene of the greatest and most far-reaching victory of the Christian conscience since the first century. Faced by the arrayed powers of the state and the mighty church of Rome, stolid, stubborn Martin Luther stated his position on salvation by grace, through faith, then shouted, "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me! Amen."

Hagedorn, Hermann, "The Bomb that Fell on America," The Questing Spirit, selected and edited by Halford E. Luccock and Frances Brentano, Coward-McCann, Inc., New York, New York. Copyright, 1947.

That shout became the chant of the middle ages, and the music of it has inspired faith and set men free through succeeding centuries. At that moment the church, established on salvation by grace through faith, became the acknowledged rampart of freedom in Western civilization, and, in the words of Doctor Mullins, revealed herself as "the nursing mother of all freedoms," fulfilling her highest national destiny in America.

The church, then, is more than the polite social gesture of men made to acknowledge the presence of deity. It is more than a sentimental meeting place around which we have clustered certain beautiful customs and conventions. The church is the soul form of this nation—the rampart of our faith and the guardian of the world's best and last hope.

HOME IS PRIMARY

If this nation endures the church must stand.

But the church cannot stand alone. In the scheme of things it is but the secondary institution, the group expression of faith and hope. For the primary unit of all social relationships is the home.

Not long ago I stood beside the charred ruins of an old and beloved landmark in a small community. Ashes sifted through

my fingers and fell aimlessly to the ground as memories of the past flooded in. Here indeed was once a fortress, a shelter in a storm, a school room, and a playtime palace. Again it was peopled with those I loved—boys and girls who worked at assigned chores, helped one another with arithmetic problems, spelling, the grammar lessons, played the old reed organ and sang sweet old songs, read Bible readings aloud and said goodnight prayers.

The whispering leaves of the cotton fields around me broke the spell and brought me back into the present. The castle was gone—my boyhood home had burned to the ground.

And yet in spite of the empty space and the ashes, everything that really counted was left. The house had served its purpose—the lessons had been learned—the boys and girls were now men and women, building their own little fortresses across the broad landscape of America. So, we salute the home, with the church, as a rampart of Fortress America.

NATIONAL POWER

The strongest symbol on the landscape of our national power was given us by artist John Stewart Currie. In a dramatic seascape and silhouetted city skyline he portrayed the approaching World War storm of 1939. Across an angry ocean, vivid flames consume a continent; streaks of lightning gash black clouds as they in turn enshroud lighted skyscrapers; frightened people huddle on a cliff, seeking some haven or symbol of safety. Behind them a factory flies the stars and stripes in white light—and in the far distant center, the focal point of the scene, but dimly shown, the spire of a church holds a cross against the angry sky.

Mr. Currie named his painting "The Light of the World" but left to each viewer the selection of the symbol of his choice—the skyscraper beacons, the burning continent; the lighted flag above the factory, or the church spire holding the cross against the storm, all are symbols.

American History says, "The past chose the Cross." God help us to choose for America's prescient future!

