

## **Raising a Banner**

**Text: Ex. 17-8-15**

I believe that there is strong nexus between American history and the Christian faith. It was comforting to me that this past March the US 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit of Appeals reversed the ruling given in 2002 that the phrase "one nation under God" was unconstitutional. The recent court also ruled that the phrase "in God we trust" on US currency was not ordered by the government, but is a national motto. They ruled that neither item was ordered or required by the government. In essence if you want to say the pledge "one nation under God" you may, but it is not a law. If you don't want to use that currency you can give it to me.

One noticeable symbol we have on this Memorial Day weekend is the Flag of the United States of America.

Why do we feel so strongly about "The Stars and Stripes?" Some attach the flag to the beautiful places we enjoy in America. It happens most often when for some reason one is in a foreign land. Mental pictures of Yosemite, Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, Pikes Peak, and Lake Tahoe are replayed, we find ourselves longing to see our homeland. We sometimes become poetic in our feelings as Katharine Bates did when she wrote. *O beautiful for spacious skies, For amber waves of grain, For purple mountains majesties, Above the fruited plain.* Others identify the flag with sporting events. It would seem almost sacrilegious to start the Super Bowl or the World Series without singing the "Star-Spangled Banner."

But beyond these feeling is the fact that we know that the flag is interwoven into the very fabric of our national history. There are many stories that could affirm this, but none more dramatic than the words of a young lawyer in 1814. It was a September night and he was standing on the deck of a ship in Baltimore City harbor watching the sky light up in colors of red, orange and white.

The British army had just burned Washington, DC and Francis Scott Key was afraid! The United States had lost almost every battle up to that day when Ft. McHenry was shelled. So Key set up a vigil that night. He kept his eye on the large American Flag that flew over the fort. Major George Armistead had commissioned Mary Pickersgill and her thirteen year old daughter to create a flag so large that it could be seen from a distance. In their bedroom they sewed together 400 yards of the best quality of wool bunting. They cut 15 stars that measured two feet from corner to corner, 8 red and seven blue stripes that were two feet wide. The flag measured 30 by 42 feet. That was the flag watched by Key late into the night. By dawn he had lost sight of it.

It was dark and rainy and there was an ominous silence as the shelling has ceased.

**WHAT COULD IT MEAN? HAD THE FORT BEEN TAKEN?** When the sun brightened the sky, Key looked to see if Baltimore had fallen to the British. But to his joy the flag still hung there. It seemed to stand for freedom, and hope and most of all for home. He started to write on the back of an envelope the words of his favorite lyrics. See the words on the power point.

**OH, SAY, CAN YOU SEE, BY THE DAWN'S EARLY LIGHT, WHAT SO PROUDLY WE HAIL, AT THE TWILIGHT'S LAST GLEAMING. WHOSE BROAD STRIPES AND BRIGHT STARS, THROUGH THE PERIOUS FIGHT OR THE RAMPARTS WE WATCHED, WERE SO GALLANTLY STREAMING? AND THE ROCKETS' RED GLARE, THE BOMBS BURSTING IN AIR, GAVE PROOF THROUGH THE NIGHT THAT OUR FLAG WAS STILL THERE. OH SAY, DOES THAT STAR-SPANGLED BANNER YET WAVE. FOR THE LAND OF THE FREE AND THE HOME OF THE BRAVE.**

**There is a similar display of a banner in the First Testament of the Bible.** The military leader was Moses in battle against the Amalekites. Moses had experienced many victories with the use of his staff. on this occasion trusting in God's power he raised the staff above his head. As long as he held it high, Israel's army was victorious, but when his arms grew weary and the staff was lowered the enemy won. Two lieutenants, Joshua and Hur, aided Moses. They set him on a rock and each one held his arms up. God gave them a great victory. Moses celebrated that moment. Read Ex. 17:8-15 emphasizing v. 15a. It "***The Lord is my Banner.***" This is the translation of two Hebrew words Jehovah and Nissi, (one of the names of God,)

As Christians we have dual citizenship. The American Flag speaks of our earthly kingdom, but as believers in Jesus we belong to a greater ***kingdom, the kingdom of light, the kingdom of God's dear Son.*** Paul, the hero of church planters, expressed it so clearly in Phil. 3:20 "***But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.***"

One of the banners that we need to lift is the cross. Jesus spoke of it in John 3:14-15. He refers to the time when the Hebrews complained and God sent poisonous snakes to bite them. Many were dying. Moses was desperate and pled with God for their lives. He told Moses to make a bronze snake and lift it up. The people who turned their eyes to the metal snake were healed. [The interpreter should explain it was not the serpent with magical power to heal, but the message of God that if they obeyed and looked they would be healed.]

Years later Jesus explained to a very religious person that he was spiritually dead and that He must turn to Christ for salvation. I will be lifted up (the cross) and I will die for your sin and you must accept that message in order to enter the kingdom of God. John 3:14.

Again in John 12:32-33 Jesus spoke that same message. But I when I am lifted up will draw all men to myself. He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. THERE IS MAGNETISM TO THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS.

That is one banner upon which our souls depend. Paul never left home without that message. He wrote to the Corinthians that the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us which are saved it is the power of the God. I Corinthians 1:18 He adamantly declared, "I am resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." I Corinthians 2:2

Again to the Galatian church he wrote, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," 6:14 among other banners you may raise, let this one be raised higher and higher. [The interpreter would do well to quote the words of the gospel song, There's a royal banner given for display to the soldiers of the cross.

Other responses songs that are appropriate are: Kneel at the Cross, and there's room at the cross for you!