



Building Wholehearted Disciples of Jesus

America: God Shed His Grace On Thee

Part 1

Teacher: Steve Holt

America: God Shed His Grace on Thee

Part I

- Long before you, your parents, grandparents, or great grandparents were born, went to a great school, got an education, and found out that it was still true that it was possible to dream about, search for, work hard to achieve: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness ...
- There were a group of men and women who literally risked their very lives to come to the shores of present day Massachusetts and Virginia for:
 - Freedom from oppressive government
 - Freedom to worship any way they desired
 - Freedom to work hard and achieve their God-given talents
 - Freedom to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ wherever and whenever they so were led
 - They came with no guarantees that this expedition would work
 - They came, leaving behind fortune, future and family
 - They came and founded America
- With all the problems we have in our country, America is still considered a “light on a hill” that other nations look to lead the world morally, ethically and spiritually.
- Even with all of our shortcomings and faults, aliens and immigrants from all over the world still flock to America to show them how to find the universal dream of mankind — freedom.
- Why do all the clear thinking, freedom loving nations of the world still look to America for vision, values and purpose?
- In spite of the opinion of many revisionist historians that occupy the academic chairs of our schools, is their historical evidence that America was founded to be a Christian nation?
- Was America just another land discovered by accident as our school text books tell us, or was God’s hand involved?

- Did God have a plan for America? Was the discovery of America the beginning of a great drama of God that would unfold like no other nation before or since her?
- Listen to the words of Christopher Columbus as he wrote in his journal (Christopher means “Christ bearer”):

It was the Lord who put into my mind (I could feel his hand upon me) the fact that it would be possible to sail from here to the Indies. All who heard of my project rejected it with laughter, ridiculing me. There is no question that the inspiration was from the Holy Spirit, because He comforted me with rays of marvelous inspiration from the Holy Scriptures.... I am a most unworthy sinner, but I have cried out to the Lord for grace and mercy, and they have covered me completely, I have found the sweetest consolation since I made it my whole purpose to enjoy His marvelous presence. For the execution of the journey to the Indies, I did not make use of intelligence, mathematics or maps. It is simply the fulfillment of what Isaiah had prophesied.... No one should fear to undertake any task in the name of the Saviour, if it is just and if the intention is purely for His holy service. The working out of all things has been assigned to each person by our Lord, but it all happens according to His sovereign will, even though He gives advice. He lacks nothing that it is in the power of men to give Him. Oh, what a gracious Lord, who desires that people should perform for Him those things for which He holds Himself responsible! Day and night, moment by moment, everyone should express their most devoted gratitude to Him.

Genesis 12

Now the Lord had said to Abram:

***“Get out of your country,
From your family
And from your father’s house,
To a land that I will show you.***

2

***I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.***

3

***I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”***

I believe God has raised up America to be a light to the nations.

I believe God has raised up America to be a model of Christian charity and love to a hurting and increasingly needy world.

I believe God raised up America to show the world that if all religions are free to thrive, then truth will always win out.

I believe God has raised up America to show the world what free enterprise can do for individuals and the incredible blessing it can bring for raising the standards of wealth for a nation.

In 1492, Columbus discovered a group of islands in what was once called the West Indies, or what is now called the Bahamas.

- Columbus lost his original vision and much of his next three expeditions were marked by blind ambition and a mad search for gold...Columbus died a broken man in 1506.
- The dawn of the 16th century saw more and more vessels approaching the New World.
- Adventurer after adventurer came to the Americas: Cortez to the Aztecs, Pizarro to Peru, Ponce De Leon to Florida.

- Along with these adventurers came young missionaries of the Jesuit order; Franciscan orders, reaching deep into the Indian populations with the love of Christ. Many of these early Spanish priests were martyred for their faith.

Jamestown

In April 1607, a fleet of three ships settled into Chesapeake Bay. The settlers sailed up a river they named James. In May, they established a settlement they called “Jamestown.”

- Jamestown had many problems, all of which were spiritual in nature:
 - The settlers at Jamestown did not seek the Lord’s direction or wisdom, the location chosen was low-lying and malaria infested.
 - The river water was contaminated.
 - They treated the Indians with contempt and paid dearly with hostile attacks a regular occurrence.
 - With little spiritual input or commitment, the people were either too lazy to work or too proud to do common labor.
 - But one of the biggest problems was the communal system by which each person had to give to a common store, meaning that the most industrious had to provide for the idle and lazy.
 - Jamestown was an abject failure!
 - It took 19 years before Jamestown produces its first crop!

At the same time as the Jamestown debacle, there were two great spiritual movements gaining momentum in England

In the 17th century, several groups of Englishmen longed for a deeper communion with God through obedience to the Scriptures. They became dissatisfied with the established Church of England.

- One movement that was gaining momentum all over England was a group of highly committed Christians who wanted to see a revival within the Church of England. They were called “**Puritans**” for their desire to purify the existing church.

Next week, we will look at the contribution of the Puritans.

- Another group decided to completely separate from the Church of England and they were called **Separatists**, and they withdrew completely and formed their own independent churches.
 - It may be hard to imagine, but in a country where the civil government ruled over the church, any disagreement with the church was considered rebellion to the political/civil system.
 - The Separatists were hunted down, jailed, tortured, and, in many cases, executed for the deep commitment to the Bible and the Lord Jesus.
 - The Separatists lost virtually everything for the gospel.
- King James I wanted all of England to totally conform to the practices of the Church of England.

The Separatists

- To escape persecution, a congregation of Separatist from the village of Scrooby, England, decided to move to Holland. In 1609, under the leadership of their pastor, John Robinson, they arrived in the Dutch city of Leyden where they lived for 11 years.
- Holland was a very difficult place to live as the children were put under great stress, being forced to work long hours and neglect schooling. They left Holland and returned to England.
- These Separatists, whom you may better know as “The Pilgrims,” began to believe it was their destiny to bring the light of Christ to the New World.

John Robinson, the pastor of the group, wrote at this time:

Now as the people of God in old time were called out of Babylon civil, the place of their bodily bondage, and were to come to Jerusalem, and there to build the Lord's temple, or tabernacle...so are the people of God now to go out of Babylon spiritual to Jerusalem...and to build themselves a lively stones into a spiritual house, or temple, for the Lord to dwell in....

- The day they were to leave was declared a day of Fasting and Prayer.
- Their leader, John Robinson, admonished them as they were leaving saying:

...whereas you are to become a body politic, using amongst yourselves civil government, and are not furnished with any persons of special eminency above the rest. Let your wisdom and godliness appear not only in choosing such persons as do entirely love and will promote the common good, but also in yielding unto them all due honor and obedience in their lawful administrations...[for] the image of the Lord's power and authority, which the magistrate beareth, is honorable, in how mean persons soever....

- Edward Winslow, one of the leaders of the group wrote:
“We refreshed ourselves, after our tears, with the singing of Psalms, making joyful melody in our hearts as well as with the voice, there being many in the congregation very expert in music; and indeed it was the sweetest melody that ever mine ears have heard.”
- It was 7 weeks of hell on earth. An ill-lighted, rolling, pitching, stinking inferno...The pilgrims were also daily harassed by the sailors.

- o The story is told of one of the seaman who was the most obnoxious, calling the pilgrims, “psalm-singing puke stockings.”
- o At the peak of one of the worst storms, this sailor suddenly became gravely ill and died.
- o Finally on Nov. 9th, the cry “Land ho!” was heard. The place was identified as Cape Cod.
- On Nov. 11th, William Bradford wrote: ***“Being thus arrived in a good harbor and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees and blessed God of heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean....”***
- But the Pilgrims had a problem; having landed outside the territory of the London Company, they had no basis for a civil government. But understanding man’s sinful nature, they knew they would need discipline among themselves. The Pilgrims drew up a document that has become a milestone in American history. Before the settlers went ashore, 41 men, including many who not separatists, signed the **Mayflower Compact**:

In the name of God, amen. We whose names are under-written, the loyal subjects of our dread Sovereign Lord King James by the Grace of God of Great Britain, France, Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, etc. Having undertaken, for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian Faith and honor of our King and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid, and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions and offices from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the colony. Unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cape Cod, the 11th of November, in the year of the reign of our Sovereign King James of England... Anno Domini 1620.

The Plymouth Colony

- The first winter was dreadful. Food and shelter were inadequate and the pilgrims started dying.
 - o 6 dead in December,
 - o 8 in January
 - o By February, they were dying at a rate of 2 a day, even 3 on some days!
 - o At one point, only 5 men were well enough to care for the sick.
- Forty-seven men, women and children had died. 13 out of 18 wives were dead. But compared to Jamestown, where the mortality rate had been 90%, they felt blessed.
- But gradually the light of Christ was winning the victory. Even the non-believers were being touched by the witness of the Pilgrims.
- But the struggle for survival continued until one day a most remarkable thing happened. This event was the turning point of their fortunes...

Arrival of Samoset: The Turning Point (from pages 129-136 of “Light and Glory”)

- One day, an Indian walked into the settlement and said in perfect English, “Welcome.”
- His name was Samoset, and he was a Sagamore, or chief, of the Algonquins.
- It was then in conversation with Samoset that the Pilgrims discovered how providential their location for the settlement had been.
 - o This area had been the territory of the Patuxets, a large hostile tribe that had murdered every white who had landed on their shores.

- o But four years before the Pilgrims arrived, a mysterious plague had broken out, killing every man, woman, and child.
- o Hence, all the land had been cleared, perfectly prepared for the Plymouth settlement.
- o The land literally belonged to no one!
- Samoset then returned with Massosoit, the Indian chief who would prove to be a great blessing to the Pilgrims.
- It was Massosoit that signed a peace treaty with the Pilgrims that lasted for over 40 years, and would be a model to all other future settlements in America.
- After Massosoit and Samoset left, one Indian brave remained...his name was Squanto.
- Squanto, according to Governor Bradford would become “a special instrument sent of God for their good, beyond their expectation.”
 - o Squanto’s story is nothing less than amazing and quite similar to the biblical story of Joseph. I don’t have time to tell it now, but it would be worth your own personal reading and study.
 - o Squanto showed the Pilgrims how to plant corn the Indian way, which was better suited for American climates than England.
 - o That fall, through Squanto’s help, the Pilgrims harvested 20 acres of corn.
 - o Squanto showed the Pilgrims how to catch cod and eels.
 - o He showed them how to hunt for turkey and deer.
 - o Squanto taught them how to harvest and refine maple syrup; how to plant pumpkins among the corn; and how to discern herbs that could be ate and herbs that could be used for medicine.

- o Squanto introduced them to the pelt of the beaver, which was greatly desired in Europe.

By the summer of 1621, the Pilgrims were brimming with thanksgiving. There was now enough food for the coming winter.

- Gov. Bradford called for a day of public Thanksgiving, to be held in October.
- Massasoit, the peaceful Indian Chief was invited, and unexpectedly arrived a day early with 90 Indian braves!
- Fortunately, the Indians did not come empty handed. They brought with them five dressed deer and over a dozen turkeys.
- They were also the first to introduce a new product line in America ... corn kernels dropped into a hot pot over the fire, that popped.
- The Thanksgiving celebration lasted for three days!

But the next winter would be just as difficult with the entire community reduced to only five kernels of corn per person per day.

- But unlike the Jamestown colony, they did not give in to discouragement nor to despair, but trusted God.
- Not one person died of starvation that winter.
- It was now April of 1623:
 - o Time to plant the year's corn.
 - o But there was a listlessness about them.
 - o Everyone knew they had to plant and harvest twice as much as last year in order to survive the next winter.
 - o So the leading men of the colony made a momentous decision...there would be two plantings:

1. The first planting would be a common crop for all to share.
 2. But the second planting would be for the planter's own use.
- Suddenly, new life seemed to infuse the Pilgrims (pg. 141, "Light and Glory"):

...it made all hands very industrious, so as much more corn was planted than otherwise would have been by any means the Governor or any other could use, and saved him a great deal of trouble and gave gar better content. The women now went willingly into the field and took their little ones with them to set corn, which before would allege weakness and inability, whom to have compelled would have been thought great tyranny and oppression.

- But soon a great drought swept the northeastern seaboard. It hardly rained for 12 weeks!
- The Indians danced and prayed, but nothing happened.
- The Pilgrims prayed and fasted, and the rains came! And oh did it come.
- Not only was the corn saved, but they brought in a bumper harvest. They brought in so much as to have a surplus for corn for trading and storage.
- The Plymouth Colony would go on to be vibrant spiritually, and the free enterprise would produce a remarkably wealthy and charitable people.

Foundational Lessons from the Pilgrims

What we learn from the Pilgrims that have been and are Foundational for America:

***Now the Lord had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family and your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'* —Genesis 12:1-3**

1. The Pilgrims really believed that they were the new Israel, sent out to build a great nation that would in turn be a blessing to all other nations of the world.

In 1647, Governor Bradford wrote:

Last and not least, the Pilgrims cherished a great hope and inward zeal of laying good foundations, or at least making some ways toward it, for the propagation and advance of the gospel of the Kingdom of Christ in the remotest part of the world.

America has been the world's leader in giving and sending to world missions for the past 100 years

America leads the world in the giving of medicines, food, hospitals, shelter and free volunteer help to developing nations.

2. They were committed to God, not gold...blessed to be a blessing!

Hebrews 10:31-33 describes the Pilgrims:

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

3. The Pilgrims were willing to stand for and suffer hardship for their Christian beliefs. They lost everything for the cause of Christ, and God blessed them!

- They believed that if you honored God, no matter what the outcome, God would honor you! They were so faithful.

4.The Pilgrims were the first to experiment with true democracy and succeed.

- No one was special. There were no “gentleman” on the Mayflower. Everyone was equal and everyone was treated with respect and honor according to their character rather than their ancestry.
- The Mayflower Compact is still considered the finest precursor we have to our Declaration of Independence.
- The Pilgrims showed the world just how important it is for each man and woman to be able to have the freedom to work hard with free enterprise and entrepreneurship. They especially saw its value in that second spring planting.
- We now have the longest constitutional democracy the world has ever known.

5.The Pilgrims believed in the power of God!

- They fasted and prayed, and God honored their devotion and faith. At every turn, no matter how difficult, the Pilgrims did not resort to despair and discouragement, but rather fasted and prayed for God’s miraculous power.
- They fasted before their perilous voyage across the ocean. Not one Pilgrim died on the voyage.
- They prayed and fasted before setting foot on the beach of their new home. They later learned that the place they chose was one of the only areas in the New World that had no hostile Indian tribes.
- They fasted and prayed for rain, and they were given a most remarkable harvest.
- Governor Bradford called for a day of fasting and prayer the day before elections for any public office! The people were to pray for God’s will as to who was elected to any public office. How about that?!

6.The Pilgrims were the first to give us the separation of powers

- Because of the great persecution they had experienced, they immediately set up a civil government and a church. The civil government took care of civil matters and the church took care of the spiritual.
- Elder Brewster, the minister of the Plymouth Colony, was organizationally separate from the civil authority, Governor Bradford.
- The church could pick its own pastors and elders without government interference.
- Once more, anyone, regardless of social standing, could join the church.

These Pilgrims were just a handful of light-bearers, on the edge of a vast and dark continent. But the light of Christ was now growing in America.

William Bradford, the first governor of the colony, would later write:

As one small candle may light a thousand, of the light kindled here has shown unto many, yea in some sort to our whole nation...we have noted these things so that you might see their worth and not negligently lose what your fathers have obtained with so much hardship.