

## Dependence Day

John 15: 1-8

Proverbs 3: 5-6

248 years ago this past week, the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia. On July 2, the Congress met and passed the Lee Resolution, which was the formal assertion that the thirteen American colonies were free and independent from British rule.

Two days later, the Congress ratified the Declaration of Independence. This document officially declared and explained the desire and reason for this action that would create the United States of America.

Almost two-and-a-half centuries later, Americans continue to rightfully celebrate their independence. July 4<sup>th</sup> is one of our favorite times of the year, with families and friends gathering for picnics and cookouts. We have festivals and, of course, plenty of fireworks.

Independence Day, though, isn't a uniquely American tradition. In fact, more than 150 countries celebrate some form of an Independence Day.

Perhaps one of the oldest celebrations of independence occurred a few months ago in April. We can read about that one in the book of Exodus as it's the feast of the Passover, commemorating the Israelites gaining their freedom from the Egyptians.

Celebrations of independence are nothing new, and they're quite common throughout the world. That shouldn't be very surprising, either. People naturally desire to be free and independent.

Susan B. Anthony fought for other types of independence in our country. She began collecting anti-slavery petitions at the young age of 17. Throughout the rest of her life, she would be a leading figure in the anti-slavery movements and the women's suffrage movement.

If you're wondering what made her devote her life to the independence of others, you can likely find the answer in these words of hers: "Independence is happiness."

I think there's some truth there. We don't like being tied down, held back, or oppressed by other people. So if that rightly causes us agony, then the opposite should cause happiness. So perhaps there is a large measure of happiness that goes with independence.

It would also explain why we celebrate with parties and fireworks. Those are things you do when you're happy, so it makes perfect sense we would celebrate like we have this past week. It also makes perfect sense why so many other countries and cultures celebrate the same thing.

Independence makes us happy.

Now, however, I'm going to throw you a curveball.

Today we are not talking about independence.

I know. That was a mighty long introduction about independence for a sermon that's not about independence.

I wanted to mention all of that because I want to reinforce that independence is a good and wonderful thing. It is surely something we should pursue for all people in our earthly lives.

But at the same time, our Christian life is exactly the opposite.

We are not called to a life of independence when it comes to walking with God. We are not called to a life of independence when it comes to following Jesus Christ. We are not called to a life of independence from the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, our life as a Christian, which actually should be our main focus, is a life of dependence.

So today, rather than focusing on Independence Day, we're talking about Dependence Day.

Let's do that by going to the Gospel of John. We're reading the first eight verses of the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter:

*15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes<sup>so</sup> so that it will be even more fruitful. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*

*<sup>5</sup> "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

I don't know how much you know about plants, but I bet you at least know this: a branch needs its vine. The vine is the source of nourishment. The vine connects the branch to the roots. If a branch doesn't get what it needs from the vine, it withers and dies.

A branch is dependent on the vine.

We, as branches, are dependent on Jesus, our vine. And by extension, we are also dependent on God, our gardener. Apart from our vine, we can do nothing. We are dependent beings.

I think we can all agree on that idea. I think most of us sitting here today would say that we do depend on God for all things.

But what does it mean to be fully and completely dependent on God? What does it look like to be truly dependent on Jesus in every aspect of our lives?

It's an easy thing to say and it sounds good. It's harder to fully live that life. It's also hard to explain when we need to put it into words.

That's what I want to take a deeper look at today, and we're going to break it down into a progression of three things.

The first step on our way to total dependence on God is to recognize who God is. We must acknowledge that God is the creator, and thus the owner, of all things.

There is nothing in this world that is truly our own. Even our own bodies are on loan. When they say you can't take anything with you when it's your time, they really mean you can't take anything with you.

And sometimes it's uncomfortable to look at life that way. We may even find it depressing. We like to think we have control over the things around us. We like to think we have full authority over our bodies and ourselves.

We like to think we know what we need more than anyone else does. But that is the very definition of pride. And if you remember that saying about pride, it does come before a fall. If we want to avoid that fall, we need to shift our perspective.

If we are to fully depend on God for all things, we must recognize that everything we do, everything around us, and everything we are first belongs to He who created it all.

When we shift from maintaining the illusion of control in our lives to acknowledging the full sovereignty of God, His full control and ownership of all things, we begin to realize our dependence on Him.

When we start down that path, we experience the second stop on our journey to total dependence on God. We need to acknowledge who we are.

When we acknowledge God controls all things, that pride that we talked about earlier starts to fade away. Our overconfidence in our own abilities and knowledge begins to be replaced by something more fruitful.

We start to know humility.

On a visit to the Beethoven museum in Bonn, a young American student became fascinated by the piano on which Beethoven had composed some of his greatest works.

She asked the museum guard if she could play a few bars on it; she accompanied the request with a lavish tip, and the guard agreed.

The girl went to the piano and played the opening of the Moonlight Sonata. As she was leaving she said to the guard, "I suppose all the great pianists who come here want to play on that piano."

The guard shook his head. "Paderewski, the famed Polish pianist, was here a few years ago and he said he wasn't worthy to touch it."

What an example of the right and wrong ways to humility all wrapped up into one story!

But that's the point. When we realize our place in God's creation and that we have been invited into His presence, we should come away with a sense of awe. We should realize our own unworthiness to be a part of His plan and stand amazed that He has still called us by name.

That brings us to the third and final stop on our path to full dependence on God. When we acknowledge God's ownership and authority over His creation, when we live humbly into our role in His creation, we live in a continual connection to Christ.

In other words, when we cease putting ourselves at the center of importance, we get to know what it means to live as branches on the vine that is Jesus Christ. We get to experience that continual source of life that is Jesus Christ.

When we experience a continual connection to Christ, we will live into his teachings because we will realize he is the only true and eternal source of wisdom and advice.

When we experience a continual connection to Christ, we recognize him as the only true and eternal source of strength and sustenance peace we will ever know.

When we experience a continual connection to Christ, we know what it means to live a holy life.

We like to be independent, and with good reason.

We like to feel that we are in control of our own destiny. We like to own what we believe is ours. We like to set the rules for our own lives.

In many ways, that independence is natural for us. It is good and right and just for us to want to see nobody created in the image of God have to live in any form of oppression.

But when it comes to our life with Jesus Christ, when it comes to our eternal life with God, we must toss that desire for independence aside.

We need to acknowledge who God is and the authority He has over His creation.

We need to know who we are and that God still calls us to a life in His presence despite who we are. That will move us into an attitude of humility as we go about our everyday life.

And we need to live into that continual connection with Christ, which leads us to a life of holiness.

We need to live our life in full dependence on God, and that is how we get there.

And all of God's people said...