

Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death

by Patrick Henry (23 March 1775)

© Beverly Schmitt, All Rights Reserved

No man thinks more highly than I do of the patriotism, as well as abilities, of the very worthy gentlemen who have just addressed the house. But different men often see the same subject in different lights; and, therefore, I hope it will not be thought disrespectful to those gentlemen if, entertaining as I do opinions of a character very opposite to theirs, I shall speak forth my sentiments freely and without **reserve**. This is no time for ceremony. The question before the house is one of awful moment to this country. For my own part, I consider it as nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery; and in proportion to the magnitude of the subject ought to be the freedom of the debate. It is only in this way that we can hope to arrive at the truth, and fulfill the great responsibility which we hold to God and our country. Should I keep back my opinions at such a time, through fear of giving offense, I should consider myself as guilty of **treason** towards my country, and of an act of disloyalty toward the Majesty of Heaven, which I revere above all earthly kings.

Mr. President, it is natural to man to **indulge** in the **illusions** of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth, and listen to the song of that siren till she transforms us into beasts. Is this the part of wise men, engaged in a great and **arduous** struggle for liberty? Are we **disposed** to be of the numbers of those who, having eyes, see not, and, having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their **temporal** salvation? For my part, whatever **anguish** of spirit it may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth, to know the worst, and to provide for it.

I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. I know of no way of judging of the future but by the past. And judging by the past, I wish to know what there has been in the conduct of the British ministry for the last ten years to justify those hopes with which gentlemen have been pleased to **solace** themselves and the House. Is it that **insidious** smile with which our petition has been lately received?

Trust it not, sir; it will prove a **snare** to your feet. Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed with a kiss. Ask yourselves how this gracious reception of our petition **comports** with those warlike preparations which cover our waters and darken our land. Are fleets and armies necessary to a work of love and **reconciliation**? Have we shown ourselves so unwilling to be reconciled that force must be called in to win back our love? Let us not **deceive** ourselves, sir. These are the implements of war and **subjugation**; the last arguments to which kings resort. I ask gentlemen, sir, what means this **martial array**, if its purpose be not to force us to **submission**? Can gentlemen **assign** any other possible **motive** for it? Has Great Britain any enemy, in this quarter of the world, to call for all this **accumulation** of navies and armies? No, sir, she has none. They are meant for us: they can be meant for no other. They are sent over to bind and **rivet** upon us those chains which the British ministry have been so long forging. And what have we to oppose to them? Shall we try argument? Sir, we have been trying that for the last ten years. Have we anything new to offer upon the subject? Nothing. We have held the subject up in every light of which it is capable; but it has been all in vain. Shall we resort to **entreaty** and humble **supplication**? What terms shall we find which have not been already exhausted? Let us not, I beseech you, sir, deceive ourselves. Sir, we have done everything that could be done to **avert** the storm which is now coming on. We have petitioned; we have remonstrated; we have supplicated; we have **prostrated** ourselves before the throne, and have implored its **interposition** to arrest the tyrannical hands of the ministry and Parliament. Our petitions have been slighted; our remonstrances have produced additional violence and insult; our supplications have been disregarded; and we have been spurned, with contempt, from the foot of the throne! In vain, after these things, may we indulge the fond hope of peace and reconciliation.

Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death !

Page -2-

There is no longer any room for hope. If we wish to be free — if we mean to preserve **inviolable** those inestimable privileges for which we have been so long contending — if we mean not **basely** to abandon the noble struggle in which we have been so long engaged, and which we have pledged ourselves never to abandon until the glorious object of our contest shall be obtained — we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight! An appeal to arms and to the God of hosts is all that is left us! They tell us, sir, that we are weak; unable to cope with so **formidable** an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week, or the next year? Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house? Shall we gather strength by **irresolution** and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance by lying **supinely** on our backs and hugging the **delusive phantom** of hope, until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot? Sir, we are not weak if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power. The millions of people, armed in the holy cause of liberty, and in such a country as that which we possess, are **invincible** by any force which our enemy can send against us. Besides, sir, we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations, and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us. The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the **vigilant**, the active, the brave. Besides, sir, we have no election. If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is **inevitable** — and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come.

It is in vain, sir, to **extenuate** the matter. Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace — but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of **resounding** arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

Vocabulary —

reserve, treason, indulge, illusions, arduous, disposed, temporal, anguish, solace, insidious, petition, snare, comports, reconciliation, deceive, subjugation, martial array, submission, assign, motive, accumulation, rivet, entreaty, supplication, avert, prostrated, interposition, inviolate, basely, formidable, irresolution, supinely, delusive, phantom, invincible, vigilant, inevitable, extenuate, resounding

Phrasing —

Mr. Patrick Henry has a marvellous command of the American language. Discuss the following phrases. Do they remind you of anything else? Do they remind you of any Scripture verses?

1) "awful moment" ... What is meant by this phrase? Has the USA ever faced other "awful moments"? Do individuals ever face "awful moments"?

2) "Majesty of Heaven" ... What is meant by this phrase? Have you ever heard this phrase before? If not, why do you think you have not heard such phrasing?

3) "having eyes, see not, and, having ears, hear not" ... What is meant by this phrase? Have you heard it elsewhere? If so, where? (Site your source).

Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death !

Page -3-

- 4) "one lamp by which my feet are guided" ... What is meant by this phrase? Have you heard something similar to it? If so, where? (Site your source)
- 5) "a snare to your feet" ... What is meant by this phrase? Have you heard it before? If so, where? (Site your source)
- 6) "Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed with a kiss" ... What is meant by this phrase? Does it remind you of someone else? If so, whom? (Site your source.)
- 7) "holy cause of liberty" ... What is meant by this phrase? Do you think it is an appropriate phrase? What does true liberty mean? Does this remind you of any Scripture verses?
- 8) "There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations" ... What does this mean? Can you provide Scriptural support for this claim?
- 9) "The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone" ... What is meant by this? Do you agree? Does this remind you of any famous heroes? (Site your source)
- 10) "Peace, Peace--but there is no peace" ... What is meant by this? Have you heard it before? If so, where? Can you find this phrase in Scripture? If so, where? Do you think this applies to today?

Questions —

- 1) Why do you think Mr. Henry thought (not felt) that it would be treasonous behavior if he withheld his thoughts at that time? Would an "act of disloyalty toward the Majesty of Heaven" be equal to treason? Give Scriptural support for your stance.
- 2) Discuss: "We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth, and listen to the song of that siren till she transforms us into beasts."
- 3) Why do you think Mr. Henry held that it was important to know the whole truth and to provide for it? Can you find Scriptural support for his stance?
- 4) Do you think Mr. Henry would hold that words alone are acceptable behavior or words PLUS actions will give a clue as to the character and intentions of others? Why? Give Scriptural support.
- 5) Mr. Henry compares and contrasts Britain's preparation for war versus what they were saying (either verbally or in writing). Do you think this is a wise and proper manner in which to assess a situation? Did Mr. Henry prove accurate? Can you find Scriptural support for this stance?
- 6) What are "the last arguments to which kings resort"?
- 7) Explain: "An appeal to arms and to the God of hosts is all that is left us!"

Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death !

Page -4-

8) Discuss: "They tell us, sir, that we are weak; unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week, or the next year? Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house? Shall we gather strength by irresolution and inaction?"

Can you think of any modern day situation(s) that this sentiment might apply to?

9) Explain: "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!"

Do you agree or disagree with Mr. Henry? Why or why not? Does this remind you of any famous heroes? (Site your source)

Activities —

- 1) Make a poster inviting the public to hear Mr. Henry speak.
- 2) Make a tri-fold document ... like what your parents receive around election time from politicians ... from King George of Britain's perspective.
- 3) Can you think of a fun limerick to address the main issues of Mr. Henry's speech?
- 4) With the aid of either a handheld tape recorder or a video camera, make a 15-30 second radio or television spot for ...
 - (a) Patrick Henry; (b) the "moderates" in Continental Congress; (c) the British
- 5) Based on this speech, what character traits would you assign to Mr. Henry? Why?
- 6) Discuss with your parents the difference between a statesman and a politician. Which one do you think Mr. Henry was ... a statesman or a politician? Why?