

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. The text for this message is from the sixth chapter of Galatians:

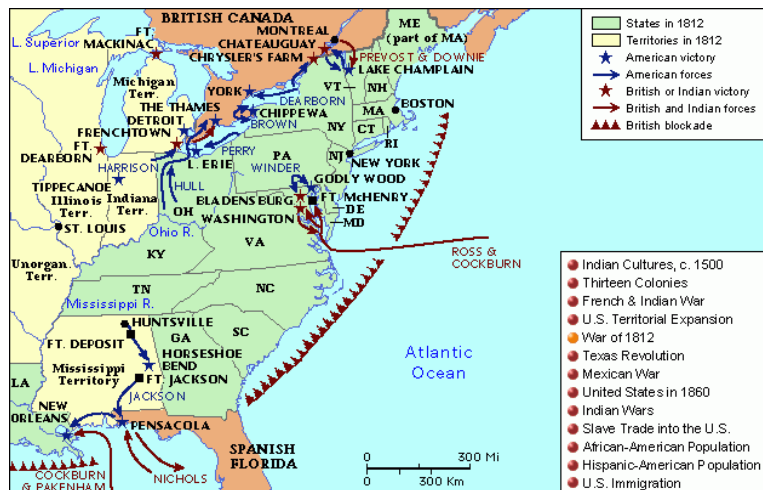
***<sup>1</sup>Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. <sup>7</sup>Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. <sup>8</sup>For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup>And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup>So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. . . . <sup>14</sup>But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.***

The War of 1812 was fought by the British to try to keep the young republic of the United States within its empire. For the first couple years, the British had to deal with other matters, not the least of which were the Napoleonic Wars going on in their back yard. By 1814, most of these wars had wound down, and the British were able to give their full attention to bringing the United States back into the fold of the Empire.

With little trouble they burned Washington, D.C., including the Capitol and White House. Their next plan of attack was a three-pronged assault from the north via Canada; the southwest via New Orleans and the Mississippi; and the dagger to the heart of the nation, dividing it and taking away not only one of its largest ports but its second-largest city, was to be the attack of Fort McHenry – protecting Chesapeake Bay and the City of Baltimore.

During the attack on Washington, Dr. William Beanes was captured.

On September 7, 1814, the US sent Francis Scott Key (and Col. John Skinner) to the HMS Surprize to negotiate his release. This they were easily able to do, for Dr. Beanes had treated British soldiers with equal care, and these soldiers also pleaded for him. However, during the course of the negotiations, they would have been able to overhear plans for the attack on Baltimore, so they were detained until after the Battle.



Legend has it that while they were diplomatic guests, dining and drinking with British officers, they were subjected to a popular drinking song of the day, “Anacreon in Heaven.” Anacreon was a Greek poet (570 BC) whose poems exalted lust for women and the intoxication of wine. The first stanza reads:

*To Anacreon in heaven where he sat in full glee,  
A few sons of harmony sent a petition,  
That he their inspirer and patron would be,  
When this answer arrived from the jolly old Grecian:  
Voice, fiddle and flute, no longer be mute,  
I'll lend you my name and inspire you to boot!  
And besides I'll instruct you like me to entwine  
The myrtle of Venus and Bacchus's vine.*

Many verses follow, extolling a fight between the Greek gods on whether or not to let Anacreon and his followers have their fun. Anacreon and his merry men, of course, prevail.





The attack on Baltimore and Ft. McHenry started on September 14, 1814. Knowing the British were coming, a special flag was commissioned – 30 by 42 feet! – that the British could not help but see as they sailed into the bay. But the British had their own psychological weapon: The Cosgreve Rocket. Imagine a bottle rocket on steroids, and you'll get the idea. 32 pounds of propellant sat atop a 15 foot pole. Interchangeable charges could be attached to the end which would ignite as the propellant burned out. One would set things on fire, another would blow things up, and a third would spray shrapnel over troops. Their aim was not great, but the sight and sound of so many rockets and explosions – especially in 1814 – had quite an effect.

The Americans in the belly of the HMS Surprize struggled for a view of the famous flag, but during the night it was taken down due to a rainstorm. A Storm Flag flew in its place. In the early morning hours, the shelling stopped, and an eerie silence ensued. Rather than inquire of their British captors, the Americans would get their morning news report of the battle's success by one sight: Whose flag would fly over Fort McHenry?

This is the setting for our National Anthem, which Francis Scott Key wrote to the pattern of the Anacreonic Hymn:

*O! say can you see by the dawn's early light,  
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming,  
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight,  
O'er 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;  
O! say does that star-spangled banner yet wave,  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?*

You did not come here today for a little music history. You did not come for Trivia Americana. You came to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is where the rubber meets the road for this day's message. Whose National Anthem ends with a QUESTION MARK???? If this were the only verse of our national anthem, the story would be incomplete. But what about us? Whose banner is over us? An old campfire song went, "He calls me to His banqueting table, His banner over me is love." Is that banner still there for us? That love so obviously shown to our enemy in the waters of our baptism – does it still fly over our lives for all to see? Or have the assaults, the bombardments and the subterfuge of daily life toppled that flag?

Fortunately, our National Anthem continues:

*On the shore, dimly seen through the mists of the deep,  
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,  
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,  
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?  
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,  
In full glory reflected now shines in the stream:  
'Tis the star-spangled banner, O! long may it wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.*



*HMS "Surprise"*

Just imagine yourself deep within the bowels of the HMS Surprise that morning of September 15, 1814. The storm has passed, and the air is still. The smell of burnt gunpowder still hangs in the air. Every now and then the ship turns so that you can just get a glimpse of that flag – but whose is it? The British flag has red, white and blue; so did the star-spangled banner. At its corners, the British flag has stripes; so does ours. So whose is it? It's not until the wind carries it away from the pole into mid-air that its glory could be seen by those on the ship.

Again we ask, how about YOUR flag? Are you content just to have the glory of the Lord hang limp around you, or is the wind and breath of the Spirit moving you to show your true colors to the world? Sometimes we revel in our liberty so much that our colors aren't much different than our enemies'. Christians still freely dabble in wine, lust, and song, showing little contrast to the worst of our society. (Just look how liquor is advertised these days – are we that far removed from Anacreon?) It is time to have the gusts of the Spirit dispel the lusts of the world, and to have the Light of the World shine upon us and through us to show what TRUE liberty is all about.

Our text tells us, ***'Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*** Yes, we ARE to be our brother's keeper. We ARE to be that city built on the hill, that others may see our true colors and come to a knowledge of the saving truth! But with that commission comes a caveat: Watch yourself!

The third stanza of our National Anthem comes oh, so close to crossing that line. In fact, the third stanza has been omitted whenever the US and Britain are allies in war. See for yourself why this should be:

*And where is that band who so vauntingly swore  
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion,  
A home and a country should leave us no more!  
Their blood has washed out their foul footsteps' pollution.  
No refuge could save the hireling and slave  
From the terror of flight, or the gloom of the grave:  
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.*

One would hardly call an ally's footsteps "foul pollution!" But an enemy's? Absolutely! So who is our enemy these days? Not politically – there are plenty of those – but spiritually? The same old "unholy trinity" of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. These enemies do swear to separate us from our home within the church on earth and the saints in heaven. It is no coincidence that the church on earth is referred to as the "Church Militant." We ARE at war.

**BUT NOT WITH SINNERS.**

When we fly our flag of faith, it is to gently, tenderly, lovingly restore others to the kind of life God wanted for them all along. We are their allies against our COMMON enemy. We're on the same side, and God is with us. He will always be with us.

And so our National Anthem's fourth and final stanza is a prayer that this may be so for our country as well, that God may be with us always. What's that? A PRAYER? In our National Anthem? How could that be so? Again, see for yourself:

*O! thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand  
Between their loved home and the war's desolation!  
Blest with victory and peace, may the heav'n rescued land  
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation.  
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,  
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust."  
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!*

Prayers have petitions, thanksgivings, and adoration for the Lord. Does this stanza? Let's see, the first two lines are a petition that our country should remain free... the second couplet calls for praise on account of the blessings of victory and peace, and the next calls for our trust to remain in God. Sure sounds like a prayer to me.

Dear friends, as our nation struggles with her very nature these days, we are evermore called upon to be the light that leads our nation in the right direction. I'd like to read for you portions of an article written by Bill Stevens:

In July each year we take a day off to celebrate our liberty. The celebration is supposed to keep us from taking it for granted. When you've had something all your life, it's difficult to sense how valuable it is or believe it can ever be lost. Our forefathers came to this country because they wanted to be free to worship, work, buy, sell, and shape their own destiny. They wanted to be able to pursue their own hopes and dreams. To them, freedom was a dream come true. For us, it has become a relic from our past. We tend to believe that once freedom is secured, it can never be lost. This simply isn't true.

Freedom without responsibility leads to lawlessness. Lawlessness leads to anarchy, and anarchy leads to totalitarianism. When a society loses its ability to govern its own passions, it must be governed by force for order to be maintained. John Adams, 2<sup>nd</sup> President of the US, understood this very clearly... "It is religion and morality alone upon which freedom can securely stand. We have no government armed with the power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

God didn't give us laws to make us unhappy. He gave them to bring health and wholeness to our lives. Freedom is a fragile thing. The kind of society we pass on to our children and grandchildren is going to be determined by the moral choices we make today.

-Bill Stevens, reprinted from Answer Magazine, in "Peace Talks," Peace Lutheran, Grand Island, NE

Back to our text: <sup>7</sup>***Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.*** <sup>8</sup>***For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.*** <sup>9</sup>***And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*** <sup>10</sup>***So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.***

Whatever we sow, we will reap. The children of Israel learned this lesson the hard way time after time after time. They sinned, and they were carried off. They were faithful, and they were restored.

So now, the question comes back to us: What will be the banner flying over your life? Will YOU be content in your corner of the country to let lawlessness, permissiveness, and perversion rule the day? Or will the banner of Jesus and His love be clearly shown? Let us not grow weary, even though there will be oh, so many who will look at us and just shake their heads in derision. ***For in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.***"

When Jesus sent out the 72 in today's gospel lesson, He sent them "as sheep among wolves." I'm sure the soldiers defending Ft. McHenry felt the same way! But these sheep, let it be known, have teeth and claws. Protected by the full armor of God, they are armed with God's word which can cut down and heal with equal ease. God has entrusted this warfare to us, not to ride rough-shod over the weak in faith and morally vile, but to gently restore the lost sheep, to steal them back from the enemy, and make them God's own once again.

It's an interesting legend that "Anacreon in Heaven" was sung on the Surprise, and that the tune was still ringing in Key's ears when he penned our national anthem. It was common practice at the time with no copyright laws to "borrow" other tunes and make them your own. The US had appropriated their territories from King George in the Revolutionary War, liberated them and made them their own. Who knows what material the soldiers in that war and the War of 1812 "liberated" from the enemy and made their own. Here Key liberated the tune from a bawdy drinking song and made it the proud anthem of an entire country. At the end of the service we will sing "God bless our Native Land" which was liberated from "God Save the Queen."

You and I are called to be liberators as well. Lovingly, gently and with full heart we are to seek to liberate our fellow men and women from their chains of sin, death, and the power of the devil. The fight will be long. There will be a LOT of rockets shot our way. But when the final dawn arrives, whose flag will be seen by all? Our Lord Jesus Christ and His love. That's the ship I want to be on in that final day.

Let us thank God for our liberty today both as a nation and as a Christian. Let us pray for strength to take on the battles ahead. Let us rejoice that our names are written in heaven.

Good Night, and may  
God Bless America!