

Liberty

It's Not Something that 'Just Is'

Too often we don't appreciate what we didn't work for or had to sacrifice for in one way or another. Hand something to us with no effort exerted on our part to acquire it, and we'll probably exhibit some scantily shallow and rather quickly fleeting degree of appreciation for it. But make us work for something and expend actual energy in order to obtain it, and we'll likely hold it with noticeably more importance. Force us to step it up and sacrifice for some cause to the point that we lose something desperately cherished in the pursuit and it becomes valuable above and beyond most other things. Press us to the edge and put us in a position where we actually risk dying for something and that this one cherished shot that we have at life hangs in a frighteningly precarious balance, that 'something' becomes indescribably priceless.

If we didn't give something in order to obtain something, then we're probably holding it rather loosely and with some inexcusable degree of disregard. If there's not some work or sacrifice or risk in the exchange, then the greatest gifts imaginable can experience the greatest disregard conceivable. Taking great things for granted is little more than taking them to a grave from which we can never reclaim them. Liberty is one of those things.

Liberty 'Just Is'

The vast majority of us were simply handed liberty. Most of us were innocuously born into it, and as time droned on we grew into it as a natural part of our existence. Because of the freedom liberty afforded us, we grew up and out into life free of encumbrances that we didn't even realize existed because liberty relentlessly kept those things at bay. Liberty seamlessly paved the way for us regardless of the fact that we made little to no contribution to the paving. We've walked the road of freedom most often focused entirely on how far and how fast we can get down the road, with little to no emphasis on how much might be able to contribute to the road itself.

The greatest abuse that we perpetrate on liberty is our assumed right to it. We resolutely claim liberty as our God-given right, and we vigorously decry the unjust desecration of it when we feel that it's being violated. We zealously claim it as our due, but few of us cherish it as a gift. We declare it as an entitlement, but only a scattered remnant see it as a sacred endowment whose survival requires that we invest more back into it than we take out of it. Too many of us view liberty as something that 'just is,' and too few see it as something that 'is' only because someone, somewhere, at some point in history was faced with the formidable reality that to keep liberty meant paying a stiff price. And millions did exactly that, over and over and over again. Yet, too few of us have worked for it, even fewer of us have sacrificed for it, and only a scant handful of us have been put in the position of potentially dying for it. And because that's the case, for many of us liberty 'just is.'

Subsequently, liberty is something that's celebrated in patriotic holidays, we have a robust national anthem within which its glories are penned and sang at the outset of sporting events, the calendar is peppered with federal holidays extolling some aspect of liberty, and the nation is sown far and wide with monuments of every shape and kind that espouse` liberty. Too often liberty has become a nice idea, a worthy principle, or a presumed right that 'just is.' But liberty isn't any of that.

Liberty Isn't Something that 'Just Is'

Liberty isn't something that 'just is.' Liberty is a far cry from just being something that just

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happened to be around. It isn't even remotely close to just being something that inspired a handful of holidays, or provided some basic material for a collection of vigorous songs, or a spawned an assortment of weathered monuments that stand silent sentry in capital buildings and cemeteries. To relegate liberty to these things is to make it an elderly gentleman that we're fond of to the degree that we understand him, but someone who we largely bypass as we pursue the more important matters of life and living.

Liberty isn't something that 'just is.' Liberty is something that men and women were willing to trade their lives for, to ransom their dreams to achieve, and to selflessly risk all that life meant to them in order to protect everything that liberty meant to the existence of everyone else. People have always stepped up to defend it and stepped out to die for it if needed. They've come in droves from farms and factories. They've left cities and small towns, family businesses and academic pursuits to stand against those who threaten it. And they've stood in places like Bunker Hill and San Juan Hill and Cemetery Ridge and Iwo Jima and the DMZ and the winding streets of Baghdad. In places just like these and in thousands of others places now lost to the faded pages of history 1,344,000 American servicemen and women died in the defense of this country. They never went back to the farm or the factory. Cities and small town's mourned innumerable flag-draped coffins. Family businesses struggled on without them, and academic pursuits were left for others to pursue because they had the liberty to do so. I would dare any of us to tell these people or their families that liberty 'just is.'

But the story doesn't even begin to end there. 1,530,000 American servicemen and women were wounded in the defense of this country. Yes, they returned to the farm and factories, but they returned with wounds that would haunt them for a lifetime. Cities and small towns tried to understand how to cope with disabilities that changed the person that they had sent away with pomp and circumstance. Family businesses struggled to support them and academic pursuits were either taken up with great struggle or abandoned altogether. I would dare any of us to tell these people or their families that liberty 'just is.'

And finally, 38,160 American servicemen and women were missing in action in the defense of this country. Yet today, farms and factories wait and wonder, praying that through some miracle they'll be found and come home. Cities and small towns move on, always keeping an eye on the distant horizon out of an ever fading hope that the silhouette of a loved one will someday take shape on those horizons. Family businesses go on but always preserve some place out of the desperate hope that a vacant desk will someday be filled. Academics vigilantly stand with an empty desk at the ready as well, hoping that studies might resume and that a road to the future might once again be embarked upon. And I would dare any of us to tell these people or their families that liberty 'just is.'

It's Not About Nostalgia

All of those thoughts are moving and warm and tingly and inspiring. Thoughts like these energize our flagging sense of patriotism and cause us to puff out our chests in pride. For a fleeting moment we have the sense that liberty is more than we understand it to be. But liberty is not about some nice feeling. People didn't feel like dying. People didn't feel like being wounded. People didn't feel like being lost in action. And the uncountable number of people left behind didn't feel like being left behind to deal with the loss of being left behind. Liberty is not about a good feeling.

It's About a Priceless Principle

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Liberty is about a priceless principle that has captivated the hearts and hijacked the minds of generations for endless millennium. Liberty is something that mankind has ceaselessly pursued throughout every second and every segment of history. There is not a generation in all of existence who was not riveted by the concept of it, spellbound by the idea of living in its embrace, and therefore in valiant pursuit of it. And that's because liberty is tightly woven throughout the core of our being in such a manner that it is entirely impossible to extract its threads. Liberty is God's unalterable and untouchable design. It is His uncompromising and eternally unflinching intent. We carelessly threw it away in a Garden at the beginning of time, and the cross lovingly handed it back to us.

Liberty is God's war cry for us, and like millions since He sent His son into the very same battle. And like millions since, His son died in the battle to achieve liberty for us. The difference is that there is no flag draped coffin, and there are no impaling wounds, and He's nowhere close to being missing in action. This man Jesus died to liberate us, and then He liberated Himself by rising from the very death He died to bring us liberty. There is no greater or more far-reaching liberation than that. Our forefathers understood that. And out that understanding our forefathers seized the liberties that we bask in today.

May we realize that liberty is unimaginably costly. May we never forget that we hold liberty because others held a line at great cost to themselves. May we never be so remiss as to assume that liberty 'just is,' because that renders the sacrifices of others as 'just nothing.' And may we forever and always remember that the truest liberty of all is found only in God and the gift of His Son on our behalf. May all of this liberate you in ways that are wildly liberating.