

after a feast, much singing, a sermon and fervent prayers the Pilgrims boarded The Speedwell. They set sail on July 22nd 1620. But soon the vessel shipped a lot of water.



The Speedwell got to Southampton harbour and docked next to The Mayflower. After two more attempts sailing first in the Solent, and then the Atlantic it was clear the Speedwell was unfit to cross the Atlantic. Some of the passengers stayed whilst others were to board The Mayflower setting sail from Plymouth Sound on September 6th. The ship rolled and many of the 102 passengers were sea sick. A tremendous storm almost turned them back, but determined to continue they struggled on. During the voyage, one passenger

died, and one baby was born. Their diet consisted of dried fish, salt beef, cheese and beer. During one particularly violent storm one of the main beams cracked and slipped out of place.

One seaman who was both proud and blasphemous not only abused and bitterly swore at some passengers but planned to throw some overboard mid Atlantic. William Bradford records, 'But it pleased God before they came half seas over, to smite this young man with a grievous disease, of which he died in a desperate manner, and so was himself the first that was thrown overboard ... His fellows noted it to be the just hand of God upon him.' Bradford also recorded how another young man came up to deck for some air. The ship rolled badly and he was thrown into the sea. He managed to grasp the topsail halyards which hung overboard and though sinking he held on until pulled back on board with a boat hook.' So they saw both the judgement and mercy of God at work.

The journey from Plymouth took 65 days, though from Delft Haven, four months. On board, they had drawn up and signed the 'Mayflower Compact' establishing a civic body with just and equal laws whilst being loyal subjects to



King James I. There was to be no nobility such as ruled England.

Landing on Plymouth Rock on 22nd December in a good harbour, and

brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean'. It was the beginning of one of the world's great civilisations.

The sea-weary passengers came ashore bringing all their belongings with them. They faced tempest, sleet, snow, hunger, cold and exposure and sickness began to strike their weakened bodies. About half of their company soon died, yet

they had to build houses as well as begin cultivating the land and establishing their livelihood whilst freely worshipping God, preaching the Good News 'that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' and that 'God commands all people to repent and believe' in Jesus who died for their sin and rose from the dead. They testified that 'God was nearer to us than He ever had been in dear old England.'

They never murmured against God, and when eventually they had their first harvest the survival of the colony was assured. Their relations with Native Americans were largely peaceful, despite profound cultural misunderstandings. The devout Christian settlers not only won the sincere friendship of Native leaders, they set a model for interracial diplomacy that was followed, with varying success, by later Puritan colonies. Justice, tolerance, decisiveness, and amity became the keystones of Plymouth's Native American policy. They laid the foundations for the United States which has become populous

and become prosperous and continues to bear the imprint of the character of the men and women who founded it on Christian principles and a love for liberty.

Four centuries later, religious freedom still cannot be taken for granted. More than any other group, Christians are being persecuted not only across the world, but increasing pressure is being brought to bear on them in the West too. But for them, the privilege of knowing a relationship with God, and being able to worship God in freedom, with the certainty of heaven one day, surpasses any opposition and difficulties they may have encountered. It's a lesson we need to heed today.



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The MAYFLOWER and the PILGRIM FATHERS

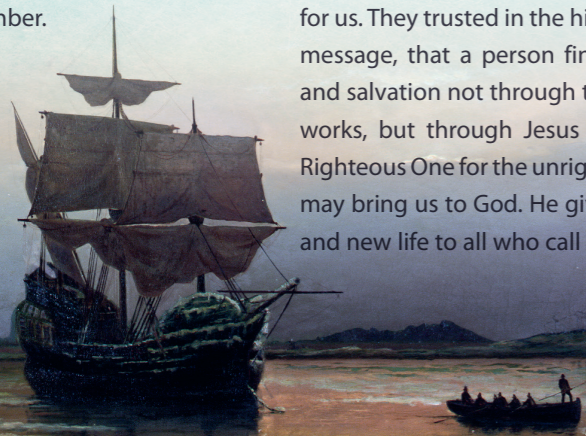


Roger Carswell

It was no easy step for a small group of Puritans to board The Mayflower in September 1620 and set sail for the unexplored, uncultivated continent of America.

But 'the Establishment' had so limited their freedom to worship that they were willing to risk everything to freely establish a God-fearing, self-supporting community. They never imagined that they would be regarded as the founding fathers of the world's most powerful democracy, or that their humble first Thanksgiving Day would become a national remembrance every fourth Thursday in November.

The Pilgrim Fathers are remembered for their simplicity and purity, who refused to compromise their Christian principles just because the Church



and the government insisted they should. The Pilgrim Fathers valued the relationship they enjoyed with God through Jesus more than any decree from hierarchy or government. They believed that the Church should not go beyond the message of the Bible whose central theme is that people can be forgiven by God because of the love of Jesus who died and rose again for us. They trusted in the historic Christian message, that a person finds forgiveness and salvation not through their own good works, but through Jesus who died, the Righteous One for the unrighteous, that He may bring us to God. He gives forgiveness and new life to all who call on Him as Lord

and Saviour. They believed that Jesus finished the work of buying our salvation through His death and resurrection, and that people are forgiven and given eternal life through trusting in Him.

They were clear that the New Testament taught that the early Church knew nothing of Archbishops, Archdeacons or Diocesan Bishops. Rather, each individual church should have its own pastor, but no single minister or church was supreme over another. They said the Bible never teaches the wearing of clerical vestments, or that it is necessary to kneel for communion. But Queen Elizabeth I would have none of this. Nor would King James I who stormed out of a conference he had called at Hampton Court, declaring that he would make the Puritans conform to church rules, or he would drive them out of the country.

SECRET MEETINGS

Secret gatherings of believers began in London and East Anglia. They were people who had put their trust in Jesus Christ, and had been born again by the Spirit of God. These congregations appointed pastors, teachers, elders and deacons. Their services of worship included Bible reading, a sermon and extemporary prayer which did not use the Prayer Book. Their authority was the Bible, and Jesus Christ. Neither the Queen, nor King, was the head of the church. The essence of the gospel, of the Christian faith, was that there is salvation through the grace of God, which is received by faith in Christ. They believed that every congregation should be a voluntary body and not subject to a central authority.

But English law stated that these congregations were illegal. Those attending and simply listening to the preaching of the Bible were hunted, persecuted, imprisoned and fined. With

life becoming very difficult for them, in the autumn of 1607 many left for the Low Countries where cities offered refuge from religious persecution. However, it was not easy to leave as the ports and havens were shut against them. On one occasion a group hoped to leave via Boston in Lincolnshire, but they were betrayed, robbed, the women molested, some imprisoned and others paraded through the streets of the town. One assembly which left England had been based in Scrooby on the border of Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire. It was here that William Bradford, an orphan, experienced new life as he put his trust in Christ as Lord and Saviour. He was later to sail on The Mayflower.

In Amsterdam, and in 1609 in Leyden, the Puritans who had previously made their living on the land, settled becoming felt-makers, button-makers, pipe-makers, drapers, tailors, hatters, glovers, cobbler, carpenters, barbers and masons. Some began to teach English

in the university. Within five years their church had 300 members. They read the Bible, sang Psalms, though they didn't use an organ which they called 'the devil's bag-pipes'. There were times when any believer could share what they had learnt from the Bible, though John Robinson was publicly made their pastor. They were a zealous, loving, compassionate congregation. They began to publish books, but these were banned in England and Scotland.

They stated, 'This we hold and affirm, that a company consisting though but two or three, separated from the world ... and gathered together in the name of Christ by a covenant made to walk in all the ways of God known unto them, is a church, and so hath the whole power of Christ'. They believed that every true Christian is a prophet, priest and king: a prophet to teach; a priest able to pray and praise God; and a king to guide and govern himself and others in the ways of God. They did not believe

that there was any such thing as the Priesthood in the New Testament, as there had been in the Old Testament, but all true Christians are priests who offer spiritual sacrifices to God. The Church is a people gathered out of the community, not everyone who resides in the Parish.

By 1617, there was a growing belief that to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, they should establish their own colony where they were free to

preach to everyone and where future generations could worship freely. They knew to do this may cost them their lives. They did not accept an invitation for free transport to America and so missed going with the Dutch and being the founders of New York City. The Leyden party acquired a 60 ton fishing vessel called the Speedwell, and

