Patrick Henry

Patrick Henry is one of the most important Founding Fathers. He had the remarkable ability to translate his political ideology into the language of the common man. He was selected to serve as a delegate to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia in 1774. There, he met Sam Adams and, together, they stoked the fires for revolution. During the proceedings, Henry called for the colonists to unite in their opposition to British rule: "The distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers and New Englanders, are no more. I am not a Virginian, but an American."

It is very likely that the colonists wouldn't have pushed for independence from Great Britain if it weren't for Henry's influence and especially his fiery speech on March 23, 1775 at the Virginia Convention held at St. John's Church. He made constant pleas to the colonists to stand up for their God-given liberties.

Patrick Henry's speech was heard by Thomas Jefferson who stopped by St. John's Church to listen to the convention in session. It was merely by chance that he heard the stirring words calling for liberty. Years later he would say that this day in March, 1775 was the most important day of his life. The speech stirred him to turn his interest to governments and laws of civilizations. The result of this speech was his activity in government and becoming a delegate to the Continental Congress from Virginia where he would be called on to write the Declaration of Independence.

This speech is considered the most important in our country's history. Henry proposed raising independent militias "to secure our inestimable rights and liberties from those further violations with which they are threatened." Not everyone at the Church appeared to agree with him. At that point he rose, and with his wrists crossed like that of a slave, he delivered a speech so eloquent and so fiery and so ringing in defense of liberty that it has been recognized as the colonists' call for independence.

"The question before the House is one of awful moment to this country…. Mr. President, it is natural to man to indulge in the illusions of hope.... Is this the part of wise men, engaged in a great and arduous struggle for liberty? Are we disposed to be of the number 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; 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. 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. There is no longer any room for hope. If we wish to be free²if 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? Sir, we are not weak if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power. Three 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... 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!"