

The Tale of Two Colonies

It Is One's Faith That Shapes Everything in Life, Culture, and Country

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We trace our annual Thanksgiving Day holiday back to the Plymouth Colony's three-day Thanksgiving celebration in 1621, which included the surviving 50 Pilgrims and 90 American Indians to thank God for the abundant harvest and their friendship with the tribal people. However, another Colony preceded Plymouth by 13 years and had a very different story — the Jamestown Colony.

So, we could also call this "The Tale of Two Cultures" and note the role faith in God had in how the cultures of these two colonies developed.

A few similarities are that they both began with just over one hundred settlers and lost significant numbers during their first winters (almost two-thirds in Jamestown and half in Plymouth). Furthermore, they both settled on unoccupied land (that may surprise some, but this is true).* However, as time progressed, two very different cultures developed in the North and the South that tie directly to the purpose for which the settlers came to this New World.

Briefly, what became the colony at Jamestown was the product of a group of investors that formed the "Virginia Company," authorized by King James I. Their purpose was to find gold and silver and new trade routes to the Orient — they came as investors looking to get rich. When the first slave traders arrived on the shores of the Jamestown colony in August of 1619, they purchased about 20 of the 50 slaves to achieve the goal of finding riches.

In the South, Jamestown had more conflicts and sometimes war with the Native American tribes of the region than those in the North. Their obsession with searching for gold caused conflict among the members of their colony because they failed to prioritize those things that would prepare the colonists to survive the winter (i.e., preparing crops, securing wells, and other resources).

However, the Pilgrims of the Plymouth colony were very different in purpose and outcome.

The same year the first settlers landed at Jamestown, the Pilgrims were chased out of England by King James I for not aligning with the Church of England, of which he was the head. Anyone choosing to practice their faith outside of the King's official State Church was harassed, persecuted, and even put in prison. Therefore, due to such an oppressive climate, they immigrated to Leiden, Holland, in their pursuit of religious freedom.

However, even in Holland, the King was able to pressure them. Moreover, after 12 years, the leaders became concerned that the wickedness of the culture was seducing their young people, so after much prayer, they determined to sail for America. Only one ship was available, the Mayflower, on which just over 100 of these Pilgrims set off for the New World.

Once they arrived, but before disembarking the ship, they created a governing document for their new colony called “The Mayflower Compact.” It begins like this: “In the Name of God,” followed by their reason for seeking a place in this new land:

“For the Glory of God and the Advancement of the Christian Faith.”

Unlike in Jamestown, these Pilgrims came for religious freedom and with hopes of sharing their Christian faith with the land’s inhabitants, not for financial gain or to enslave any people (contrary to the erroneous “history” taught in Nikole Hannah-Jones’ “1619 Project”). This fundamental difference birthed a different and more beneficial culture within the Plymouth Colony.

For example, due to the biblical values that directed their conduct and treatment of the native tribes, their relations with them were much better than in the southern colony. Furthermore, the work ethic taught in Scripture moved them to prioritize their efforts appropriately. Prayer was often offered, and they saw God answer them in marvelous ways.

One example of God’s providential hand directing the Pilgrims was when they intended to go to Jamestown, but the winds pushed them off course, and they ended up in what we know as Plymouth — in December 1620. To their great joy and relief, they found an abandoned settlement with corn stored up as if someone knew they were coming. Sometime later, they would meet Squanto, who spoke perfect English and knew their customs because he had been trained in their country for several years before returning the year before they arrived.

Furthermore, the land that the Pilgrims occupied was Squanto’s tribal land, but while he was in Europe, the rest of his tribe died from sickness, and he was the only one left. He chose to befriend the Pilgrims and taught them how to farm the land and fish the sea, enabling them to survive and thrive. Then, at their first harvest in 1621, they were filled with such gratitude and thanks to God for the abundant crops, they organized the Thanksgiving celebration we celebrate today.

And then, unlike in Jamestown, when the first slave traders arrived on their shores in 1646, they arrested them and set the prisoners free. David Barton comments that although the following years were far from perfect, it was in New England, and Massachusetts especially, where slavery was first outlawed in 1783 — a full 50 years before England.**

The lesson learned from this comparison between the “investors” of Jamestown and Pilgrims of Plymouth is that thing which we worship (which is pursued of first importance) — God, Money, Power, Pleasure, etc.- shapes everything else about our character, our life’s direction, and the culture in our homes and community. We can see which colony fared better.

The Plymouth Colony illustrates the promise in Psalms 33:12, which declares, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” Likewise, America was founded upon biblical principles and faith in the biblical God, and as a result, this nation flourished and prospered like no other nation since.

Sadly, our nation is deeply divided in on many levels, and it is my belief that the fundamental catalyst of this is that we, as a nation are much less “Christian” in values, morals, laws, and practices than any time during my life. We were told not to mix politics with religion — well, how has that been working for us?

History and Scripture reveal how we got where we are today as a nation, and reveal that the remedy to the cultural, political, and youth crisis today begins by embracing our nation’s motto, “In God We Trust.” As King Solomon wrote in Psalms 127:1a, “Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain.”

Let us pray, work, and live so that this nation will return to faith in God and experience “a new birth of freedom” in our day and for the next generations we seek to “Make America Godly Again.”

* Online Encyclopedia Britannica; **Wall Builders (and for more American History) see their website: wallbuilders.com.