

## **“Give me liberty or give me death” – Patrick Henry**

In contrast to others who retreated in fear in 1775, **Patrick Henry** was first to protest in the House of Burgesses the angrily debated *Stamp Act*—England’s attempt to impose *taxation without representation*. On March 23, 1775 the Convention gathered at St. John's Episcopal Church in Richmond, and **Patrick Henry** spoke:

*No man thinks more highly than I do of the patriotism of the gentlemen who have just addressed the House. But different men often see the same subject in different lights. Therefore, I hope it will not be thought disrespectful if I speak my sentiments without reserve. This is no time for ceremony. The questing before the House is one of awful moment to this country. I consider it as nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery; and in proportion to the subject ought to be the freedom of the debate. Only in this way can we arrive at truth, and fulfill the responsibility we hold to God and our country. Should I keep back my opinions through fear of giving offense, I should consider myself guilty of treason to my country, and disloyal to the Majesty of Heaven which I revere above all earthly kings.*

*Mr. President, it is natural to indulge in illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against painful truth, and listen to the song of that siren till she transforms us into beasts. Is this the part of wise men engaged in a struggle for liberty? Are we those who having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not the things which concern temporal salvation? Whatever it may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth; to know the worst, and to provide for it.*

*Is it that insidious smile with which our petition has been received? Trust it not, sir; it will prove a snare. Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed with a kiss. Ask yourselves how this reception of our petition comports with those warlike preparations which darken our land. Are fleets and armies*

*necessary to a work of reconciliation? Let us not deceive ourselves. These are implements of war and subjugation; the last arguments to which kings resort...*

*What terms shall we find which have not been already exhausted? We have done everything to avert the storm coming on. We have petitioned; we have prostrated ourselves. Our petitions have been slighted, and we have been spurned from the foot of the throne!*

*There is no longer room for hope. If we wish to be free-- 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 we are weak. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be next week, or next year? Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a guard shall be stationed in every house? Shall we gather strength by inaction?*

*Sir, we are not weak if we make use of those means in our power. The millions of people, armed in the holy cause of liberty, in such a country as we possess, are invincible by any force our enemy can send against us. Besides, we shall not fight alone. There is a God who presides over nations who will raise up friends to fight for us. The battle is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave. Besides, it is too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! War is inevitable--and let it come! I repeat it, let it come.*

*Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace-- but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? 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!***