

The first duty of a government is to be true to itself. This does not mean perfection -- it means a plan to strive for perfection. It means loyalty to ideals. The ideals of America were set out in the Declaration of Independence and adopted in the Constitution. They did not represent perfection at hand, but perfection found. The fundamental principle was freedom. The fathers knew that this was not yet apprehended. They formed a government firm in the faith that it was ever to press toward this high mark. In selfishness, in greed, in lust for gain, it turned aside. Enslaving others, it became itself enslaved. Bondage in one part consumed freedom in all parts. The government of the fathers, ceasing to be true to itself, was perishing. Five score and ten years ago, that divine providence which infinite repetition has made only the more a miracle, sent into the world a new life destined to save a nation. No star, no sign foretold his coming. About his cradle all was poor and mean, save only the source of all great men, the love of a wonderful woman. When she faded away in his tender years from her deathbed in humble poverty, she [endowed] her son with greatness. There can be no proper observance of a birthday which forgets the mother. Into his origin, as into his life, men long have looked and wondered. In wisdom great, but in humility greater, in justice strong, but in compassion stronger, he became a leader of men by being a follower of the truth. He overcame evil with good. His presence filled the nation. He broke the might of oppression. He restored a race to its birthright.

His mortal frame has vanished, but his spirit increases with the increasing years the richest legacy of the greatest century. Men show by what they worship what they are. It is no accident that before the great example of American manhood, our people stand with respect and reverence. In Abraham Lincoln is revealed our ideal -- the hope of our country fulfilled. He was the incarnation of what America was to be. Through him, the Almighty bestowed upon the nation a new birth of freedom that this dear land of ours might be returned to the health of its fathers.

We are the beneficiaries of a life of surpassing service. Wise in wisdom and gentle in gentleness. Freedom has many sides and angles. Human slavery has been swept away. With security of personal rights has come security of property rights. The freedom of the human mind is recognized in the right to free speech and free press. The public schools have made education possible for all and ignorance a disgrace. In political affairs, the vote of the humblest has long counted for as much as the vote of the most exalted. We are working towards the day when, in our industrial life, equal honor shall fall to equal endeavor.

Duty is collective as well as personal. Law must rest on the eternal foundations of righteousness. Industry, thrift, character, cannot be conferred by act or resolve. Government cannot relieve from toil. Do the day's work. If it be to protect the rights of the weak -- whoever objects -- do it. If it be to help a powerful corporation better to serve the people -- whatever the opposition -- do that. Expect to be called a stand patter, but don't be a stand patter. Expect to be called a demagogue, but don't be a demagogue. We need a broader, firmer, deeper faith in the people, a faith that men desire to do right -- that the government is founded upon a righteousness which will endure.