

Cape Henry, April 29, 1607

“Reverend Hunt was an honest, religious, and courageous divine (pastor). He preferred the service of God in a voyage to every thought of ease at home. He endured every privation, yet none ever heard him repine. During his life, our factions were oft’ healed and our greatest extremities so comforted that they seemed easy in comparison with what we endured after his memorable death. We all loved him for his exceeding goodness. He laid down his life in the foundation of Virginia.”

The Jamestown Chronicler

¹ Excerpt from the *First Charter of Virginia*, April 10, 1606

² Excerpt from the *First Charter of Massachusetts*, 1629

³ From *A Model of Christian Charity*, by John Winthrop, 1630

The *Vision* for America Was for Propagating the *Gospel*

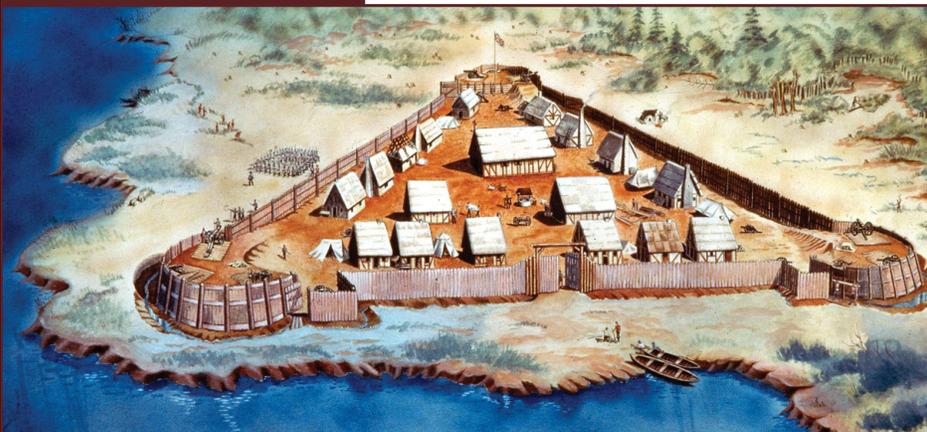
Cape Henry, Virginia, 1607 – the first landing of the Jamestown expedition – the stage was set for Act I, Scene I of the American drama. It could be argued that our nation’s history began in Roanoke (1585) or even in Plymouth (1620), but the people of Roanoke vanished without a trace and the Pilgrims may have never come if it were not for the Jamestown settlement. No, it was at Cape Henry that the curtains were pulled back, the actors took center stage, and the opening scene of American history unfolded, and what an opening scene it was!

After the embarrassment of the Roanoke disaster, England’s Queen Elizabeth dismissed colonizing in the New World. It would be twenty years later when her successor, King James I, gave his permission to try again. However, to have his blessing, the expedition had to go in the interest of “propagating the Christian religion to such people as yet live in darkness and ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God...”¹ Furthermore, to ensure that the will of the King was satisfied, an able chaplain was secured for the voyage, the good Vicar of Heathfield, Reverend Robert Hunt.

When attention is given to the cast of the Jamestown crew, Reverend Hunt is often overlooked, especially in light of notable figures like Captain Newport, Governor Wingfield, Chief Powhatan, Pocahontas, and the colorful Captain John Smith. Nonetheless, it is Robert Hunt who deserves the honor of being called the “first American hero.” It is no secret that the Jamestown expedition was hamstrung by incessant squabbling between warring factions. Had it not been for Hunt’s cool head and godly exhortations, the men would have never lived to see Virginia. Sadly, after Hunt’s unfortunate death, during the infamous starving time, the settlement collapsed into chaos.

However, Robert Hunt was more than a peacemaker. God used him to cast a vision for the great nation that was to come. That vision was voiced at Cape Henry, April 29, 1607, the place of the first landing. There, beneath a large wooden cross, Reverend Hunt led the first prayer on American soil. He thanked God for their safe passage and committed to Him their work in Virginia. Then, it was as if he saw the future. “From these shores,” he said, “the Gospel shall go forth, not only for this New World but to the entire world!” He knew that what they were there to do would impact all of mankind for centuries to come. He was right. Once the vision was cast, Hunt took the first step and established in Jamestown the first Protestant Church of the New World.

“The Gospel shall go forth” – it would be a common theme among those who landed on America’s shores. The Pilgrims



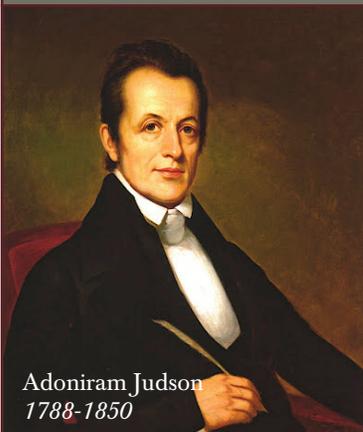
A Vision for Propagating the Gospel



Cape Henry Memorial Cross

"How do Christians discharge the trust that is committed to them (to share the Gospel)? They let three fourths of the world sleep the sleep of death, ignorant of the simple truth that a Savior died for them. Content if they can be useful in the little circle of their acquaintances, they quietly sit and see whole nations perish for lack of knowledge."

Adoniram Judson



Adoniram Judson
1788-1850

declared it in their Mayflower Compact (1620), as the primary purpose in coming to Virginia, "for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith." Their long-time governor, William Bradford, even wrote in his account, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, "They cherished a great hope and inward zeal of laying a good foundation or at least of making some way towards it, for the propagation and advancement of the Gospel of the kingdom of Christ in the remotest parts of the world, yea, even though they should be but stepping stones to others in the performance of so great a work."

The Puritans, who followed the Pilgrims in waves (1630-1640) and established the colonies of New England, also desired to be a shining light for the Gospel. Their royal charter included these words, "May we be so religiously, peaceably, and civilly governed as our good life and orderly conversation may win and incite the natives of the country to the knowledge and obedience of the only true God and Savior of mankind and the Christian faith, which in our royal intention is the principal end of this plantation..."²

The Puritan Governor, John Winthrop, also cast a vision of being an example to the world of what Christ can do in a community of people who were committed to Him. "The Lord will be our God," he wrote, "delighted to dwell among us. He shall make us a praise and glory, that men shall say in succeeding plantations, 'may the Lord make it like that of New England.' For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us..."³

While our forefathers were not perfect in the execution of their vision, their intentions were clear. They came seeking freedom to worship the God of the Bible, and, in that freedom, to make the Gospel of

Christ known to all. This desire is represented in the charters of the other colonies, it is confirmed in many of the constitutions of the states, and echoed in the declarations of the early Congress. *The vision for America was the propagation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

It is safe to say that this vision became a reality. While Roger Williams, John Eliot, David Brainerd, and others evangelized the natives here, Adoniram Judson volunteered as the first American foreign missionary. In 1812, he and his wife traveled to India, but when the government would not allow them into the country, they settled in Burma. For the next 38 years, Judson gave his life to plant the seeds of the Gospel in that country. "I will not leave Burma," he wrote, "until the cross is planted here forever!" Thirty years after his death, Burma had 63 Christian churches, 163 missionaries, and over 7,000 baptized converts!

Judson launched a tidal wave of U.S. foreign missionaries. Since then, the Gospel has been America's number one export. The American Church has dispatched more missionaries than any other nation in history. God has used the United States to be the greatest expression of a Christian civilization, and in so doing it has been the champion of spiritual liberty both here and abroad.

It seems that Reverend Hunt's historic prayer was a prophetic vision of America's Gospel purpose. Even you and I are members of the cast and crew whom God is using today to complete His intended work in and through our beloved country. So then, let us not forget our nation's origin and heritage. Let us not forsake the purpose of its existence, but let us carry on, exclaiming the name of Jesus Christ while we are still at liberty to do so.