

# If You Can Keep It

## The Forgotten Promise of American Liberty

Eric Metaxas     July 3, 2016

---

### If You Can Keep It: The Forgotten Promise of American Liberty

- before anything else, Metaxas emphasized loving God first and worshipping Him
- loving America, but not to the point of becoming a nationalist in a way to push God out
- true patriotism is loving our country correctly
  - being active in our world now, balanced with eternity
- new book by Eric Metaxas (available from Viking Press)
- steeped in critical analysis of our founding father's original intentions for America
- review of America's uniqueness — including our role as a “nation of nations”
- reminder that America's greatness cannot continue unless we embrace our own crucial role in living out what the founders entrusted to us.
- America is not a nation bounded by ethnic identity or geography, but by a radical and unprecedented idea, based on liberty and freedom for all
- it's nearly past time we reconnect to that idea, or we may lose the foundation of what made us exceptional in the first place

---

### Name of the book

- In 1787, when the Constitution was drafted, a woman asked Ben Franklin what the founders had given the American people. “A republic,” he shot back, “if you can keep it.”
- more than two centuries later Metaxas examines what that means and how we are doing on that score

---

### The Promise

- The Constitution of the United States was crafted over 100 days in 1787
- it created the possibility and promise of something never before in existence
- what is required of each one of us who are “we the people”?
  - things mostly forgotten, reason for the book
  - America would not flourish without help of all Americans
  - the promise of this nation was also a promise to the whole world beyond this nation
  - we must not let the flame of liberty given to us by the founders go out

---

## **The Idea of America**

- putting the idea of American liberty, which might also simply be called self-government into actual practice, was a great experiment
- paradox at center of what's been called American exceptionalism
  - we are a nation with a mission beyond ourselves and beyond our borders
- to keep the republic, is not merely for our own sake, but for the world's
- Statue of Liberty faces outward
- demonstrated our belief in the idea that if we bless others, we will be blessed
- if we have ever been great, it is only because we have longed to help make others great too
- earnest humility and generosity must be attended to

---

## **What is American freedom?**

- true freedom must be an “ordered freedom” at the center of which is what we call “self-government”
- people would not have freedom from government, but would have freedom from tyrannous government
- ordered freedom given to us by the founders was meant to enable the people to govern themselves

---

## **How does self-government work?**

- founders understood that for people to govern themselves, two things that had never before existed must be brought into existence simultaneously
- first: understanding view of mankind as fallen
  - creating government that took this into account, and whose structure limited the power of any one part, lest that power grow and take over, devolving into tyranny
  - ideas of democracy and checks and balances
- second: what would enable a group of people to be trusted to govern themselves and then actually to do so? — religion
  - idea of religious freedom was paramount — and unprecedented
  - one's religion was not coerced nor mandatory nor affiliated with the power of the state in any way
  - they knew that religious people were less likely to misbehave
- founders understood that freedom and religion went hand in hand, that freedom must have religion and religion must have freedom
- the more each person governed himself, the less there would be a need for strong government
- the faith and the virtue of the American people made possible the most free nation in the history of the world

---

## **The limits of freedom**

- “liberal” misunderstanding of American freedom is confused with license
  - to do anything at any time is not what the founders had in mind when they were talking about freedom
- “conservative” misunderstanding of American freedom is “neoconservative” way of approaching things
  - false “conservative” hope that American-style “freedom” will take hold in any place as soon as any repression is removed

---

## **The government cannot force us to be good**

- the free market can be corrupted; no amount of regulation can ever deal with this
- it must be the people and the culture that solves the problem
- it is not the role of the government to solve all of our problems through legislation
- the less culture attends to things, the more government will attend to them, and the less freedom there will be
- the greater the role the government plays, the more it crowds out the culture’s role, the role of the people — and the true freedom of the people
- the people must guard this freedom, must use it or lose it
- if you take God and faith and morality out of the equation, everything inevitably falls apart

---

## **Golden Triangle of Freedom**

- idea from Os Guinness in his book “A Free People’s Suicide”
- Freedom requires Virtue
- Virtue requires Faith
- Faith requires Freedom

---

## **The rest of the book**

- the above thoughts are from the first 70 pages of Metaxas’ book
- there is much, much more...

---

## **Discussion Questions**

1. How do you view your personal role as “we the people” in the American process?
2. Respond to the idea that America is a nation with a mission beyond ourselves and beyond our borders.
3. Had you ever realized that what was needed for people to govern themselves was religion?
4. Discuss the Golden Triangle of Freedom