

## A Pilgrimage to the Rock

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by Tony Perkins - Family Research Council

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It's been chipped and cracked, dropped and completely submerged. For America's Plymouth Rock, the journey has been anything but easy. For more than 120 years, it sat anonymously on the Massachusetts waterfront -- just another boulder, until an elderly man asked to be carried to the beach to say goodbye. Plans for a new wharf were underway, set to bury the exact stretch of sand where Thomas Faunce's father and the rest of the pilgrims had landed. That rock, he said, "had received the footsteps of our fathers on their first arrival." It should be, he urged, "perpetuated to posterity." Thanks to him, the son of a Mayflower survivor, it was.

In the years after that, the famous boulder was the closest thing the settlers had to a rallying cry. Before the Revolution, the locals even tried moving the stone to a more prestigious place -- the town square -- to bolster people's spirits. Despite teams of oxen and men, the weight proved too much. The helpers watched in horror as it fell from the carriage to the ground, splitting right down

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the middle. Like a bagel," wrote John McEzra. Afterward, people took it as a sign: the colonies should split from England.  
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The bottom half of the rock stayed right where it is today, surviving decades of treasure hunters and others, who cut off pieces as one-of-a-kind souvenirs. By the Civil War, the top of Plymouth Rock was sent back to the harbor and reunited with its base -- a powerful symbol, many thought, of America. The date "1620" was carved in the top then, replacing the fading paint. The stone, like the country, had endured a lot. Even now, historians estimate that with all of the damage and moving, Plymouth's battered hunk of granite is probably only a third the size that it was.

Plenty of visitors will stop at the rock's home this week, under a grand portico on the shore, and say, "Is that it?" Donna Curtin jokes that it's been [nicknamed](#) "the great New England disappointment." "People expect to see something that looks like a... pier that a ship could tie up to, and the people could disembark." That's not what this is. I know, because last month, my wife and two of our children had the chance to have an early Thanksgiving dinner at Lot #1, about 400 yards from Plymouth Rock near the spot that's believed to be the pilgrims first famous meal in the fall of 1621. To a lot of people, the piece of history might be underwhelming. After all, Curtin pointed out, the poor rock isn't in "the prime of its youth and glory." It's been through a lot. Like the pilgrims; like their country.

While we ate, I thought about those brave settlers, and all that they had to endure just to get to Thanksgiving. Their first winter was devastating -- half of them never lived to truly experience the New World. Only three of the families were unbroken by death through the cold, unforgiving snows. The village was littered with abandoned homes and dreams.

"These were not like other men," the late Peter Marshall wrote in *The Light and the Glory*. "The more adversity mounted against them, the harder they prayed -- never giving in to despair, to murmuring, to any of the petty jealousies that split and divide." What the record shows is that their gratitude was a *choice* in their circumstance, not a product of their circumstance. As a result of that choice to be grateful, they laid the foundation for the most prosperous and blessed nation the world had ever seen.

Nothing about those early years -- or any since -- has been easy. The pilgrims came to America and landed on that frigid shore in pursuit of one thing: freedom. The freedom to live by their faith and teach their children to do the same. They had, as their leader William Bradford wrote, "a great hope," "an inward zeal," to lay "some good foundation" to spread the gospel of the kingdom of Christ. The pilgrims wanted to be, as he put it, "stepping stones to others for performing of so great a work."

Hundreds of years later, through different challenges and generations, we still see the stones they laid. The toil, determination, hardship, and resilience -- all reflected in one sandy spot of remembrance. Even today, it's a picture of survival. Because every day, the winds still whip. The tides still cover it with water. The fight for the values that brought them here ebbs and flows. But the

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country built on the Rock still stands. "The strength is in the story," as one of the caretakers of the monument says. "And the story started here."  
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For more on this America's legacy of gratitude, check out my new Washington Times op-ed, "[The Secret Ingredient to a Happy, Healthy Thanksgiving.](#)" From everyone at FRC, have a wonderful holiday!

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*Tony Perkins's Washington Update is written with the aid of FRC senior writers.*