

“BLESSED IS THE NATION WHOSE GOD IS THE LORD”

Psalm 33:12-22

Villa Heights Christian Church
Joplin, Mo
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America celebrates her 230th birthday this Tuesday (July 4, 2006). 230 years ago (1776) 56 brave men signed the most revolutionary document in history – The Declaration of Independence. The final sentence on “our nation’s birth certificate” reads: “And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance upon the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other...our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.”

But the nation in our text is not America. Actually, in the generic sense, it can be ANY nation who makes God their Lord. But, in the specific sense, David was speaking of Israel – “the people He chose for His inheritance.”

In the biblical era no nation prospered more than ancient Israel. No nation was more feared. No nation was greater than tiny Israel. Deuteronomy 4 holds the key.

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. – Moses, to Israel, Deut. 4:5-9 NIV

Israel was the smallest nation on earth (Deut. 7:7) but they rose to become the greatest. Why? Two reasons: (1) they made God their Lord; (2) they governed themselves by God’s righteous laws. As long as they did these two things they were living proof of our text – “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.”

But the same can be true of ANY nation. Peter told Cornelius, an Italian, “God does not show favoritism, but accepts men FROM EVERY NATION who fear him and do what is right”

(Acts 10:35). Paul preached to those in Athens, Greece, “From one man he (God) made every nation of men...God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out to him and find him, **THOUGH HE IS NOT FAR FROM EACH OF US**” (Acts 17:27,27).

So let us, as Christians living in America, a country that is a nation founded on God and His Word, look back on our religious heritage.

Fact # 1. America began as a church-relocation project. The Pilgrims and Puritans found it impossible to have freedom of religion in England, so they came to America. Before they left England they created the Mayflower Compact which reads, in part, as follows:

Having undertaken for the glory of God, and the advancement of the Christian faith... (we) solemnly and mutually in the presence of God and of one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic...

They came to establish a Christian republic designed specifically to advance the Christian faith! In 1643, the early American colonists, feeling the need of a government, composed the first Constitution of our country – the Constitution of the New England Federation. In 23 years, they had not forgotten why they came. They wrote, “Whereas we came into these parts of America with one and the same end and aim, namely to advance the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Fact # 2. In 1772 our forefathers inscribed these words from Lev. 25:10 on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia: “PROCLAIM LIBERTY THROUGHOUT THE LAND, TO ALL THE INHABITANTS THEREOF.” The Liberty Bell is one of our national treasures, just like the Statute of Liberty in N. Y. harbor, but that liberty comes from Almighty God as expressed in His Holy Word!

Fact # 3. Our nation’s birth certificate, The Declaration of Independence, mentions God four times. That’s because at least 50 of the 56 signers were committed Christians – 24 of them had seminary degrees (they were NOT the Deists or agnostics we are told today).

1. “The laws of nature and Nature’s God.”

2. "All men are created equal, that they are endowed BY THEIR CREATOR with certain unalienable rights."
3. "Appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World..."
4. "With a firm Reliance on the Protection of DIVINE PROVIDENCE."

Even though Benjamin Franklin, one of the signers, was not a Christian, he had a Christian world-view. In 1787 he wrote, "Here is my creed: I believe in one God, the Creator of the Universe, that He governs it by His providence and that He ought to be worshipped."

Fact # 4. The Constitution of the United States is specifically signed "in the year of our Lord." During its composition an impasse was reached. B. Franklin stood to the floor and said, "I have lived, Sirs, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this fact, that God governs in the affairs of men, and if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?" The convention recessed for prayer, seeking divine guidance. The result is the envy of every nation on the earth. "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people – what other nation has a God so near when they pray? What other nation is so great to have such righteous laws govern them?"

Fact # 5. The Constitutions of all 50 states mention God in one way or another. "We the people...invoking the favor and guidance of Almighty God (Alabama)...grateful to God and to those who founded our nation (Alaska)...grateful to Almighty God for our liberties (Arizona)... How about Missouri? "We, the people of Missouri, with profound reverence for the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, and grateful for His goodness..." How about Massachusetts, arguably the most liberal state in the union? Not so in 1780: "We, the people of Massachusetts, acknowledging with grateful hearts, the goodness of the Great Legislator of the Universe...in the course of His Providence... and devoutly imploring His direction..."

Fact # 6. Our national anthem specifically mentions God in the 4th stanza: "And this be our motto: IN GOD IS OUR TRUST." A song sung at many sporting events since 9-11 is "God Bless America." Many would prefer it to be our national anthem. It invokes our need for God. "Stand beside her, and guide her, through the night with a light from above."

Fact # 7. Every president, from George Washington to George W. Bush, has been sworn in on the Bible, saying, "So help me God." And prayers have been offered at every presidential inauguration. Every president that has given an inaugural address has mentioned God in his speech.

Fact # 8. Every president has called for national days of prayer, of fasting, of thanksgiving. When the Constitution was finally ratified in 1789, Congress was so grateful they requested

that President Washington call for a national day of thanksgiving to honor the event. President Lincoln made Thanksgiving Day an official, annual holiday. (Some school textbooks are teaching that the Pilgrims gave thanks to the Indians, not God!)

Fact # 9. The words "In God We Trust" has been stamped on our coins since Lincoln, on our currency since Eisenhower. (Incidentally, the eye on the back of the dollar bill with the Latin words *Annuit Coeptis*? "He has favored our undertakings." HE being the all-seeing, all-knowing GOD.) They are also emblazoned over the Speaker of the House in the U. S. Capitol. (But recently Liberty Elementary School in Colleyville, TX, omitted the words "In God We Trust" from a large image of the new "Liberty" nickle on the cover of they school's yearbook.) Also since Eisenhower, our pledge of allegiance includes the words "One nation, under God."

Fact # 10. All over Washington, D.C., God is carved in stone on its monuments and buildings. There are more than 20 artistic drawings of Moses or the 10 Commandments in the Supreme Court building. And at the very top of the Washington Monument are engraved these words, "Praise be to God." And all the people said?

Yes, blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord! But the Bible also says, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to ANY people" (Prov. 14:34).

We only have to look at 2 Kings 14 to see what happened to Israel. The Bible says, "The Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence" (v. 17). Several years ago Bob Russell listed "Top Ten Reasons for the Ten Lost Tribes" based on this chapter. Here they are.

1. Spiritual deafness – "they would not listen" (v. 14).
2. Stubborn wills – "stiffnecked as their fathers" (v. 14).
3. Rejection of God's Word" – "they rejected his decrees and the covenant" (v. 15).
4. Idol worship – "they followed worthless idols" (v. 15).
5. Imitation of godless nations – "they imitated the nations around them" (v. 15).
6. Spiritual amnesia – "they forsook all the commands of God " (v. 16).
7. Astrology – "they bowed down to all the starry host" (v. 16).
8. The killing of innocent children – "they sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire" (v. 17).
9. Occult practices – "they practiced divination and sorcery" (v. 17).
10. Gross materialism – "they sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord" (v. 17).

Bob concluded, "In many ways, it seems that our society resembles theirs more and more."

Jim Nelson Black wrote a book called "When Nations Die: 10 Warning Signs of a Culture in Crisis." In it he measured America and Western culture against the failures of ancient civilizations and found the comparisons to be ominous. They are:

1. The crisis of lawlessness.
2. Loss of economic discipline.
3. Rising bureaucracy.
4. The decline of education.
5. The weakening of cultural foundations.
6. Loss of respect for tradition.
7. The increase in materialism.
8. The rise in immorality.
9. Decay of religious belief.
10. Devaluation of human life.

Hello? Anyone home?

A lesson from history is in order. Alexander Solzhenitsyn said when he was a young boy, the Communist revolution was going on. Blood was flowing in the streets. Millions of people were being slaughtered like sheep. Fear stalked the land. One day he overheard two Russian peasants talking about why all this was happening. He said he never forgot what one of them said. "It is because we have forgotten God. This is why all this is happening to us. We have forgotten God!"

The Bible says, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God" (Psa. 9:17).

The French statesman Alexis de Tocqueville came to America in the early part of the 19th century to study the workings of democracy. He wanted to understand what made this nation so great (he could have read Deut. 4!). After his travels here's what he wrote:

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her spacious harbors and her ample rivers, and it was not there.

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her rich mines and her vast world commerce, and it was not there.

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her public school system and her institutions of learning, and it was not there.

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her democratic congress and her matchless Constitution, and it was not there.

Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.

Is our country, land that we love, beyond redemption? Only God knows. But if there is one verse in the Bible that spells out the remedy for our deplorable condition, it is 2 Chron. 7:14, "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

Written to Israel. Israel did not heed? Will we?

1. Humble ourselves.
2. Pray.
3. Seek God's face.
4. Turn from our wicked ways (repent). Five of the seven churches told to do the same. It is our only hope!

(Some of this material is taken from a previous sermon by Victor Knowles, "What Makes a Nation Great?" and a book by D. James Kennedy & Jerry Newcombe, *What if America Were a Christian Nation Again?*)