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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

America isn't a perfect nation, but it's still the greatest nation on earth. I'm proud to be an American. I'm like that little boy in Sunday school. His teacher was talking about the creation from the book of Genesis and she asked her students, “What was the name of the first man who ever lived?” And the boy raised his hand and said, “George Washington!” “No, his name was Adam.” The boy said, “Well I guess, so if you include foreigners.”

We're glad to be able to celebrate our freedom. Today we're going to be talking about America at the crossroads. Proverbs 14:34 is a powerful verse, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.” It is my contention that America is the greatest nation on earth, because from our very beginning we have been a righteous nation acknowledged God and honored Him. And as long as we do this, God will continue to bless our nation. But if we ever stop, then the judgment of God may fall upon our nation.

In the early 19th century, French historian Alexis de Tocqueville, traveled America from coast to coast. When he returned to France he wrote, “I searched for the greatness of America and her commodious harbors, her flowing rivers, her abundant factories that I did not find it there. It was only when I went into the churches of America and found it ablaze with the righteousness that I found the greatness of America.” Then he made his prophetic statement, “America is great because America is good, but if America ever ceases to be good America will cease to be great.” (*Democracy in America*) Righteousness exalts a nation. That's why God has blessed us. That's why God has exalted America truly above all the other nations of the earth.

Many of you know I'm a great student of history, particularly American history and even more so presidential history. I love to study the trivia of presidential history. For instance, whenever a president is inaugurated, he gives a speech. Do you know who gave the shortest inaugural address? It was George Washington in his second inaugural address, consisting of only 135 words and lasted less than two minutes. On the other hand, the longest inaugural address ever given was in 1841 by William Henry Harrison—almost 10,000 words, almost 2 hours long as he stood outside in a driving snowstorm to give this speech, without a hat, without gloves and without an overcoat. William Henry Harrison died of pneumonia one month later.

To me, the greatest inauguration address ever given by a president was Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address, which by the way, was the second shortest inauguration speech, lasting less than five minutes. For many, many years, historians thought no photograph existed of this second inauguration, but just this year, when the Library of Congress made all its images available online, a researcher in Colorado was looking at a picture that was incorrectly labeled as Ulysses S. Grant's inauguration. It was actually Lincoln's second inaugural.



Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865. Courtesy Library of Congress

If you're ever in Washington, D.C., I encourage you to go into the Lincoln Memorial. Engraved on the North wall is the entire 4-1/2 minute speech, the most theological speech ever given by a president. In this speech, he quotes Jesus Christ twice. He quotes the book of Psalms “the judgments of the Lord are righteous for evermore.” He basically says, “We've been praying to God, both North and South. God can't answer both prayers and what we're experiencing is the judgment of God, because of our own sin and unrighteousness.” Within a month, he would be dead. Four weeks after this address, the Civil War ended. The final sentence of his address was a great testimony of his greatness. With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan [a reference to James 1:27] —to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.” Brief, but eloquent. This is a theological observation that America has been blessed, but if America slides into sin, then we experience the judgment of God.

I believe America is at a crossroads today. Not just because we're electing a new President this year, although we will (unless something amazing happens between now and November). It will

be either Barack Obama or John McCain. But this is not a political message. I’m not talking about politics. The word “politics” comes from two words, *poly*, meaning “many,” and *tics*, meaning “blood sucking varmints.”

Today I want to talk about the need for a revolution of righteousness, because America stands at the crossroads. Israel stood at the crossroads in the sixth century B.C. The prophet Jeremiah said, This is what the Lord says: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’ ...Therefore, hear, O nations...what will happen to them...I am bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their schemes, because they have not listened to my words and have rejected my law.” (Jeremiah 6:16-19). Sadly, the same can be said of America. We are at great nation, because from the very beginning we followed the roadway of righteousness. The ancient paths, Jeremiah called it. But if we go down the road to ruin, where some are trying to lead us, I believe the fate of America might be the fate of Israel, which in 586 B.C. was overtaken by the Babylonian empire.

THE ROAD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS: Our forefathers believed there are absolute truths
THE ROAD TO RUIN: Our culture now believes all truth is relative

People often ask, “What did our forefathers really believe about God and about righteousness?” I want to go to what they wrote themselves, what I believe is the second most important document in American history, second only to the Bible—the Declaration of Independence. Let’s examine one sentence in that important document. It’s familiar to all of us. What were our forefathers saying in this one sentence? “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” What brought us down this road of righteousness? Our forefathers believed there are absolute truths, whereas today, there are many in our culture who now believe that all truth is relative, the road the ruin. We live in an age of moral relativity, where people are being taught in school and people are saying what used to be right is no longer right, what used to be wrong is no longer wrong. What’s right for you may not be right for me, and what may be truth to you may not be truth to me. But our forefathers said there are some truths that are self evident, you can’t argue with them. They’ve always been true and they will *always* be true. That’s what Jesus said. “I am the Way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the father but by me.” When he prayed that high priestly prayer the night before he was crucified, Jesus said, “Your word, O God, is truth.”

What’s the danger of moral relativism? If people in America don’t really have a standard of what is right and what is wrong, then how do we know where we should go? America has always been somewhat of a moral compass for the rest of the world. But today, our moral standards have fallen apart. We took the Ten Commandments off the walls of our schools and what do you see now on the walls of America? Graffiti and tagging. The road to ruin is people who don’t know what’s right or wrong. In our revolution of righteousness, we must go back and say there are absolute truths contained in the word of God.

Peter Marshall was a Senate Chaplain, and in a prayer he prayed these words, “Lord Jesus, who art the way, the truth, and the life, hear us as we pray for the truth that shall make us all free.

Teach us that liberty is not only to be loved but also to be lived. Liberty is too precious a thing to be buried in books. It costs too much to be hoarded. Help us to see that our liberty is not the right to do as we please, but the opportunity to please to do what is right.” How do we know what’s right or wrong unless there are some absolute truths?

THE ROAD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS: Our forefathers believed we are created by the God of the Bible

THE ROAD TO RUIN: Our culture now believes we are biological accidents and any (or no) idea of God is acceptable

Our forefathers said there are truths that are self evident. Let’s look at that sentence again and see what else they believed in. “We hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are life liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” What brought us on the road of righteousness to where we are today? Our forefathers believed we are created by the God of the Bible. Whereas today, on the road to ruin there are many who would lead us to believe we are simply biological accidents, here by evolution and any or no idea of God is acceptable. Our forefathers said we are endowed by our Creator, all men are created equal. What does that mean? If you are just a biological accident, what’s the use in living? On the other hand, if there is a personal God of the Bible who created you, you have a purpose and a reason for a living.

In America we cherish religious freedom, freedom to believe or freedom not to believe or freedom to believe whatever you want to believe. And in America we tolerate people of other religions and other beliefs. But I’m here to remind you that when you examine our forefathers’ original documents, they believed in the God of the Bible. We all know the famous date, July 4, 1776, when the Declaration of Independence was signed, but did you know, about 40 days before then, the Continental Congress passed a proclamation asking Americans to fast and pray for our nation? These are the words of the Congress, right out of the Congressional record on May 17, 1776 the Continental Congress passed a proclamation for prayer and fasting urging citizens to “confess and bewail our manifold sins and transgressions and by a sincere repentance and amendment of life appease God’s righteous displeasure and through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ [yes that’s in the Congressional record] obtain his pardon and his forgiveness.” Doesn’t that sound like the Bible? It’s because they believed in the God of the Bible.

Throughout the Revolutionary War, there were many calls to prayer. For instance, the Continental Congress set aside December 18, 1777 as a day of thanksgiving, passing a proclamation calling for citizens to “express the grateful feelings of their hearts, and consecrate themselves to the service of their divine benefactor; and that together with their sincere acknowledgments and offerings, they may join the penitent confession of their manifold sins, whereby they had forfeited every favor, and their humble and earnest supplication that it may please God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, mercifully to forgive and blot them out of remembrance;

express the grateful feelings of their hearts and consecrate themselves to the service of their divine benefactor and join the penitent confession of their manifold sins that it may please God through the merits of Jesus Christ mercifully to forgive and blot them out of remembrance,” and that Americans petition God “to prosper the means of religion for the promotion and enlargement of that kingdom which consisteth in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.” (Congressional Thanksgiving Day Proclamation, November 1, 1777) If you know your Bible, Romans 14:17 says, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Our forefathers believed in the God of the Bible and used biblical language in their documents. How far have we come from that today!

Many of our presidents have not only asked Americans to pray for us, but have led Americans in prayer. I didn’t know this until recently, but on June 6, 1944, D-Day, when that greatest generation was storming the beaches of Normandy for the liberation of Western Europe, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt didn’t just say “pray for America,” he led America in a prayer broadcast on radios across America.

On the evening of the Normandy invasion, Roosevelt said, “Last night when I spoke to you about the fall of Rome, I knew that at that moment troops of the United States and our allies were crossing the Channel in another and greater operation. It has come to pass with success thus far, and so in this poignant hour, I ask you to join with me in prayer,” and then he started praying, “Almighty God, our sons, pride of our nation, this day has said upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our republic, our religion, and our civilization and to set free a suffering humanity.” He proceeded to pray for six solid minutes for America. (visit the Pastor’s Blog for a full transcript of this speech: <http://fromthepasture.blogspot.com/>) I think we need to elect a leader who will not only say, “Pray for America,” but a leader who will lead us in prayer *for* America.

THE ROAD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS: Our forefathers believed God gives us our rights
THE ROAD TO RUIN: Our culture now believes government gives us our rights

The Declaration of Independence says, “We hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are life liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” We are a great nation because our forefathers believed it is God who gives us our rights. We are endowed by our Creator with certain rights. That means you can’t sell them, or trade them, or forfeit them. They come from God. This doesn’t include all of them, but included are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But there are those voices today in our culture who don’t believe that. The road to ruin is when our culture now believes that it is government, not God, that gives us our rights. “I’m *entitled* to it. The government *owes* me. They need to provide for my needs.” Our forefathers never believed the government was to give rights to the people. They said governments are established to secure (guard, ensure) these rights, but they come from God. That means from the very beginning our forefathers believed God is the source of liberty. He is the source of life. He is the source of our pursuit for happiness. When I say America stands at a crossroads, I believe we stand at a road of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he is the *only* hope for our nation.

The security of our liberty is only guaranteed for every generation. Is this generation going to step up, like that greatest generation did and say we must have a revolution—not a revolution against a foreign tyranny—but a revolution of righteousness against those forces in America that would try to divert us from the road of righteousness that has brought us to this place?

Ronald Reagan once said, “Freedom is a fragile thing and it is never more than one generation from extinction. It is not ours by inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation, for it comes only once to a people. Those who have known freedom, and then lost it, have never known it again. (*Quotable Reagan*, edited by Steve Eubanks, 2001, p. 25)

CONCLUSION

One of the things about freedom that is so precious and moving is the music. In 1993, we took a large group Yalta in the Crimea for mission work. This was just after the collapse of the Soviet Union. We rented the Yalta Opera House, a huge building that seated 3,500 people. We were going to provide a free patriotic concert with Christian songs.

We entered the building from the back door some time before the performance so we could practice. When performance time came, every seat was empty, except two or three, where some of the Russian pastors were. So we started praying and gathering in the back. I was thinking, “Oh Lord, we missed this completely! This is cost a lot of money for us to come over here and we spent all this time training and learning these songs.” I’ll never forget. One of the Russian pastors came up to me and said, “Pastor Dykies, pastor Dykies! (That’s what they called me) Please now, they will open the doors?” I said, “Yes, you may open the doors.” I didn’t know Russians had been lined up for two hours at the doors in front. When the doors opened, people literally *ran* in and filled up every seat. But they weren’t like Baptists, because they filled up the front first.

We started singing “America the Beautiful” and they stood in honor of the freedom we have. And I don’t know how they knew it, but they started singing with us! There’s just something about the music of America that tugs at our hearts and even people around the world are envious of the freedom we have.

One of our greatest patriotic songs is actually a prayer called “God Bless America,” written in 1918 by Irving Berlin. Berlin set it aside for years, but in 1938 at the beginning of World War II, singer and well-known radio personality, Kate Smith, was looking for a song to encourage Americans, Berlin gave it to her and she recorded it—and the rest is history. It’s the only song we sing corporately that is a prayer. After 9/11 it became a popular again and was played and sung at baseball parks, but they no longer do that in any park—except one—Yankee Stadium in New York City. I was there two weeks ago and was surprised when the announcer said, “Now let’s stand and join Kate Smith in singing God Bless America.” I immediately stood up. Some people around me didn’t even stand. As we began to sing, my voice was the only voice in my section singing. I thought, “That’s part of our problem right there. We’re no longer serious about begging God to bless us.” So I call upon every concerned American to pray, to vote, and to be a part of the revolution of righteousness. Let’s begin today by standing to our feet and singing as loudly as we can and ask God to bless America.

OUTLINE

This is what the Lord says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it.'...Therefore, hear, O nations...what will happen to them...I am bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their schemes, because they have not listened to my words and have rejected my law." *Jeremiah 6:16-19*

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