

INTRODUCTION

Over these past five weeks I've challenged you that it's time to get good and M.A.D. I'm not talking about rage, or losing your temper. M.A.D. stands for "Make a Difference." You can make a difference in a child's life through foster care or adoption—that's why we have launched Hope for 100. Just this past week, Hope for 100 received a new endorsement from Cindy McCain, wife of Senator John McCain. She says: "When visiting Mother Teresa's orphanage in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 1991, I met two infant girls who needed to be brought to the United States for medical treatment. John and I adopted one of the girls and named her Bridget. I also helped coordinate the adoption of the other girl named Mickey. From the day we brought Bridget into our family, we have experienced firsthand the incredible blessing and adventure of adoption. As I have traveled the world, I have met so many orphans needing the love of a father and mother. I am always pleased to hear of efforts such as Hope for 100 which has at its core the commitment to make a lasting difference in a world of need."

If you're interested in learning more about making a difference through foster care or adoption, stop by the Hope for 100 display and you can register for the conference we're offering this Saturday called "If You Were Mine."

Last week we learned how you can Make A Difference in our Community by volunteering and supporting some amazing community organizations here in East Texas. My final challenge to you is to Make A Difference for your Country's Sake.

There are always prophets of doom and gloom who want to point out how bad things are in our society. It reminds me of the children's fable Chicken Little who went around crying, "The sky is falling." In fact, I heard a true story about a first grade teacher who was telling her students the story for the first time. She said, "Once upon a time Chicken Little was pecking away at her food when an acorn fell and hit her on the head. Chicken Little looked up and believed the sky was falling, so she ran to all the animals in the barnyard crying, 'The sky is falling! The sky is falling!' Finally, Chicken Little approached the farmer and said, 'The sky is falling! The sky is falling!'" At this point the first grade teacher stopped the story and asked her students, "And what do you think the farmer said to Chicken Little?" Nobody answered, for a moment until finally one little boy raised his hand and said, "I think the farmer said, 'Wow, a talking chicken!'" The teacher laughed so hard she couldn't even finish the story.

There are people who want us to believe things are so bad in America that the sky is falling. Times are bad, but this is no time for hysteria or panic. Our nation has survived much worse times than these. A few days ago, we inaugurated our 44th President, Barack Obama. In his inaugural speech he didn't ignore the problems we face. Our economy is in recession and we're fighting a war in Iraq and Afghanistan. President Obama, who ran on a platform for change said, "Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin the work of remaking America."

From the beginning of Christianity, followers of Jesus Christ have been the very best citizens in any culture, because God's Word instructs us to submit to our government. These words apply to us in 2009, but remember that when Paul wrote them, Nero was the Roman Emperor—not the

man Paul would have voted for. Nero massacred thousands of Christians, yet the Bible says in Romans 13:1-7:

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.”

Through the years I’ve shared with you the words of our Founding Fathers which indicate our nation was founded on deep and abiding belief in God’s sovereignty.

I don’t want to be like Chicken Little and bemoan the problems we face; I want to be a part of what I heard Jerome Milton call “the Solution Revolution.” Here are three things you and I can do to Make A Difference in our nation.

(1) PRAY FOR OUR LEADERS

The most important thing we can do is to PRAY for our nation’s leaders. The Bible directs us, “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” (1 Timothy 2:1-2)

During the election you had a choice about which candidate to vote for, and East Texas voted for John McCain by a healthy margin. So although some might not have chosen to vote for him, you don’t have a choice about whether or not to pray for him—we’re clearly commanded by scripture to pray for our leaders.

Christians across this land have already begun to intercede on behalf of President Obama. You may not know this, but there is a ministry in Washington, D.C. called Faith and Action led by Pastor Rob Schenck. Rob felt led by the Lord a few weeks ago to go to the door in the U.S. Capitol Building and anoint and pray over the door President-elect Obama would walk out for his swearing-in ceremony. When he notified the Capitol Police of his intentions, they informed him in no uncertain terms that if he tried to do that he would be arrested. But he proceeded in faith with his plan, and as he approached the Capitol Building he happened to meet one of his friends, U.S. Representative Paul Broun from Georgia, who is one of the many evangelical Christians in the U.S. House. When Rob told him of his plans Mr. Broun said, “Sure, let’s do it.” They proceeded to the door of the Capitol and had a prayer service for President Elect Obama

and they anointed the doorposts and lintel of the door Mr. Obama walked out on Inauguration Day. You can see a video of this amazing prayer service on www.faithandaction.org. Liberal pundits have ridiculed this as a stupid stunt by crazed religious nuts, but they might be surprised to learn that when George Washington laid the cornerstone for the U.S. Capitol Building in 1793, he anointed it with oil, the Bible was read, and a local pastor prayed over it.

I have committed myself to pray for President Obama with the same frequency and fervency that I have prayed for President Bush. I encourage you to do the same thing. I'm praying that he will be a man who will seek God's face and follow God's leadership. As you pray for him and for our other leaders there is a powerful promise we find in Proverbs 21:1. The Bible says, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases." I have read portions of "The Audacity of Hope," in which President Obama describes his decision to become a Christian and be baptized as an adult. He says he believes in Jesus Christ and I'm praying that God will direct his heart to fall in love with Jesus and know Him in a personal, intimate way. Chances are, most of us will never have the chance to meet President Obama or shake his hand, but every one of us can have a positive influence in his life as we pray for him. There is an intercession movement supported by many national ministries that encourages believers to stop and pray for America every evening at 8 p.m. That may be a good place for you to start but it doesn't matter when you pray—just start obeying God and praying for our leaders and you can make a difference!

(2) PLAY BY THE RULES

Because we are followers of Jesus we will want to obey the laws of our land. The Bible says, "Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men." (Titus 3:1-2)

If anyone ever had a right not to play by the rules, it was Jesus, yet He obeyed the law. When He was asked about a tax payment to the Romans, He didn't have any money, so he told Peter to go catch a fish. Peter caught a fish and found a coin in its mouth. We are in such awe of that miracle that we forget Jesus used that coin to pay His taxes.

Because we are Christians we buckle our seatbelts and don't park in handicapped parking spaces unless we're handicapped. Obeying the law is part of our Christian duty. According to Romans 13, one of the main reasons God established government is to punish the wrongdoer. He wrote that if we obey the laws we don't have to fear the government.

Have you ever been driving down the highway with your cruise control set above the speed limit and you come upon a state trooper pointing a radar gun at you? You start putting on the brake, taking off the cruise control and praying, "Please God, don't let me get a ticket!" (I might have done that a time or two). You're not playing by the rules, obeying the law, so you aren't part of the solution, you're part of the problem. But have you ever been driving along with your cruise control set on or below the speed limit and you see a policeman? No fear. No worries. That's what Paul is talking about.

As Christians we can obey the law without compromising our Christian convictions. It is our duty to encourage every American to live according to the laws of our land. We can't excuse people from other cultures who move to America and want to obey some other law. Australia is one of America's greatest allies and they face some of the same issues we do. There are Muslims there who want to live under Sharia law rather than Australian law, so on January 17, 2007, Prime Minister John Howard spoke on national television and said, "Immigrants, not Australians must adapt. I am tired of this nation worrying about whether we are offending some individual or their culture. This culture has been developed over two centuries of struggles, trials and victories by millions of men and women who have sought freedom. We speak mainly English, not Spanish, Lebanese, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, or any other language. Therefore, if you wish to become part of our society, learn the language! Most Australians believe in God. This is not some Christian, right wing, political push, but a fact, because Christian men and women, on Christian principles, founded this nation, and this is clearly documented. It is certainly appropriate to display it on the walls of our schools. If God offends you, then I suggest you consider another part of the world as your new home, because God is part of our culture. This is our country, our land, and our lifestyle, and we will allow you every opportunity to enjoy all this. But once you are done complaining, whining, and griping about our flag, our pledge, our Christian beliefs, or our way of Life, I highly encourage you take advantage of one other great Australian freedom—the right to leave!" The third thing we can do to make a difference is to:

(3) PARTICIPATE IN THE PROCESS

I've often joked that the word "politics" comes from two words *poli* meaning "many" and *tics* meaning blood sucking creatures. That always gets a laugh, but many Christians think politics are so dirty they shouldn't get involved. That's the position of Jehovah's Witnesses for instance. One of their principles is that they don't vote. Tennis sensation, Serena Williams, said she thought Barack Obama would be a good president, but she didn't vote because she's a Jehovah's Witness.

Sadly, I know some evangelical Christians who say "our kingdom is not of this world" so they embrace a hunker-down mentality and just wait for Jesus to come and rescue us from this mess. But they forget that Jesus said, "Occupy until I come." (Luke 19:13). He meant that we should be busy in the world until He returns. We shouldn't retreat behind our stained glass windows and wait for the rapture. Jesus commanded us to be salt and light in a decaying and dark culture. Thankfully, we live in a political system that invites our participation. From the beginning, our government has been of the people, by the people and for the people.

Let me ask a Government 101 question: Is America a democracy or a republic? If you answered a democracy, you're wrong. A pure democracy is a rule by people where the majority vote of the people is the law. We are actually a republic, which means a rule by law. That's why we say, "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the REPUBLIC for which it stands ..." In a democracy if 51% of the population voted that killing your neighbor was no longer a punishable offense, then murder would be legal. Benjamin Franklin captured this idea in his famous quote about democracy and liberty. He wrote: "Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch. Liberty is a well-armed lamb who is contesting the vote!"

That's why our Forefathers gave us a constitution with a bill of rights designed to protect our God-given rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Because we are a democratically elected republic, government is everyone's business.

There are some obvious ways you can be involved in the process. First, every Christian should register and vote in every election. Second, you should stay informed about the issues we are facing as a nation. Third, we should be the voice crying in the wilderness reminding our culture about the truth of Biblical morality. Fourth, we need Christians to run for political office, in both local, state, and national elections.

I'm not just saying this because he's my friend and a member of our church, but I'm glad that a few years ago, God moved on the heart of Louie Gohmert to run for election to the United States House of Representatives. And as I prepared this message to motivate you to be a better American citizen, I wrote him and asked him to share with you how you can Make A Difference. Let me share his letter with you:

Thank you for your inquiry on what our people can do to be better citizens and most help our country. Since the elections are behind us for a while, we need to focus on making our current leaders better. You and I both know prayer is the number one essential for our country's continued existence. We should pray for our leadership in the protection of freedom, in the recognition of the value of life, and for the promotion of religious liberty so that Christians may continue to worship without persecution. Our freedom of religion has been nurtured up to now in this country and has been used by the Lord to spread the Gospel around the world as never before in history.

Our religious freedom, as Christians, is in danger as never before in this nation. Hate Crime legislation passed the House but not the Senate last term that could effectively prevent ministers, rabbis, or imams from preaching at all on sexual immorality. Laws have been proposed and even passed the House to eliminate a church's ability to hire employees who have a like faith to those in the church. That provision would eliminate the original exception in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which has allowed religious institutions to hire people of like faith, but that is now in jeopardy.

There is an ongoing effort to prevent usage of words in our government such as "God," "Creator," "Lord," "Divine Providence," "Holy Trinity," and "Jesus" or "Jesus Christ" which words are found throughout the documents of this nation's founders. That would be an extremely dangerous rewrite of our amazingly blessed history. Some Christians say we do not have to worry because God is in control. However, God has been in control when every great nation has fallen. God is merciful, patient, longsuffering, and full of grace, but when a nation like ours is determined to abandon God, eventually, He will let it. When that happens, the nation heads on down to the dust heap of history.

We know from Scripture that governments do not gain control without God's allowing it. In the amazing government of the people, by the people, and for the people here in the United States, everyone is part of the government and has a role to play. If the citizens do not daily seek the truth themselves and work to pass on their views to their elected

representatives, then they have not fulfilled their responsibility as PART of the government. When people refuse to serve on juries, fail to vote, or fail to inform their representatives, they have not done their job as PART of the government.

Americans should write, email, or call their elected officials to give them their insights AFTER prayerfully seeking wisdom. Some of the meanest emails, calls or letters come from Christians who have not done all of their homework. Just because a statement is contained in an email or is made by the national media does not always mean it is true. Christians should encourage those who are doing a good job, and help elect opponents of those who are not. All of these are critically important jobs that must be done to preserve a democratic republic as ours is. We all have jobs in a representative government, and that includes every citizen. Failure by enough people will eventually be enough to bring an end to what the founders called this "experiment in democracy." This is far too precious a gift not to protect. Your Brother in Christ, Louie Gohmert

Most of us are quick to point out what's wrong with our culture and how we have experienced a severe moral decline over the past 40 years. But we think our nation will change when the pornographers go out of business, or when the abortion clinics shut down, or when people stop demanding rights for same-sex marriages, or when the drug pushers are all in prison. We see these evils and think when that evil is gone, then we'll see a national healing. But God says that it's not up to the pornographers or the pushers or the prostitutes, He's waiting on US. He says, "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 will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

So, I'm asking God to send us a national spiritual awakening that will sweep our land. Wouldn't it just be like our Father, Who has a twinkle in His divine eye, to send us a national revival while President Obama is in office? After all, if God sent revival during the last eight years some would have said it was because we have an evangelical Christian in the White House who prays and reads his Bible daily. If I know one thing about our God, it's that He doesn't share His glory with anyone.

So will you participate in the process? The great British politician and philosopher Edmund Burke once wrote: "Evil triumphs when good men do nothing." If we don't let our voice be heard, what kind of nation will this be when our children and grandchildren are adults?

CONCLUSION

During World War II, there was a German Pastor named of Martin Niemöller. He fought for the Germans in WWI, but during WWII he came to believe that what Hitler was doing was evil. He was arrested by the Nazis and spent time at Dachau. He narrowly avoided execution before the war ended. After the war ended in 1945, he wrote: "First they came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up, because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up, because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up, because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak up for me." Now more than ever, the voice of Christians must be heard in our nation. The Bible

instructs us to be model citizens and you CAN make a difference in our country as you pray for our leaders, play by the rules, and participate in the process.

OUTLINE

(1) PRAY FOR OUR LEADERS

"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." 1
Timothy 2:1-2

(2) PLAY BY THE RULES

"Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men." *Titus 3:1-2*

(3) PARTICIPATE IN THE PROCESS

"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 will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." 2
Chronicles 7:14



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If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

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