

INTRODUCTION

This is the first of two messages on the theme “Blessed is the Nation.” Next Sunday is our I LOVE AMERICA celebration, and then the following Sunday, July 3, I’ll bring the final message on “Blessed is the Nation.”

Most of us watch the news on television, either the local news or national news. Just imagine for a moment I’m a news anchor reporting Breaking News on GABC News.

“Welcome to GABC News. We have some breaking news. This just in: “The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court has just issued a statement: ‘Divine Providence has given our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.’”

In other breaking news; this just in: “Our research reveals that almost every state legislature has now passed a law requiring all elected officials to take this oath: “I do profess faith in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ His only Son, and I do acknowledge the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be given by divine inspiration.”

And in further breaking news, this just in: “Congress passed legislation today to affirm that ‘The Congress of the United States approves of and recommends the Holy Bible for use in the schools.’” There is no response from the White House yet on this breaking news.

Now, what do you think would be the response to news like that today? There would be a huge outcry that the crazy religious right was taking over the nation. Christians would be called religious extremists. But actually all three of those reports are factual from our history. It was John Jay, the first Justice of the Supreme Court who issued this exact statement in 1816.

And it is true that many of the original colonies including Delaware, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and New Hampshire had requirements for any government official to take a similar oath.

In 1782, Congress approved the use of Bibles in schools and even paid for them with tax dollars. And in 1844 when someone sued to have the Bibles removed, the Supreme Court ruled: “Why should not the Bible, and especially the New Testament, be read and taught as a divine revelation in the schools? Where can the purest principles of morality be learned so clearly or so perfectly as from the New Testament?”

When you look at where our nation is now both spiritually and morally, as the old commercial used to say, “You’ve come a long way, baby.” But we’ve come a long way in the wrong direction.

In the thirty-third Psalm the writer informs us about how God relates to nations. Psalm 33:10-12. “The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he chose for his inheritance.”

The plans of humanity rise and fall. They succeed and fail. But God's plans stand firm forever. That's why you want to get in on God's personal plan for your life, because it makes you a forever person!

The Bible is clear that God relates to nations as well. A nation that acknowledges that God is their Lord will always be blessed. One of the ways God blesses a nation is by giving them His Divine protection. In this message I want to note how much our nation has depended on God's protection. And I want you to consider the possibility that as our nation continues to forget about God and even insult God's Word, that we may lose His protection over our nation. Let me make four affirmations about God's protection over our nation.

1. THE FOUNDING FATHERS EXPRESSED OUR NEED FOR GOD'S PROTECTION

Two hundred and forty years ago, a brave group of colonists banded together to declare their independence to the most powerful monarch on the planet, King George III. And if they weren't granted this independence, they were willing to fight against the most powerful military machine on the planet.

The first years of the Revolutionary War saw many defeats for the Colonists. They were outnumbered 3-1. The British Redcoats were professionally trained soldiers, and the colonists were farmers, merchants, preachers, and teachers.

Those who study military history scratch their heads that the rag-tag group of volunteer soldiers could defeat the British. But I believe God was protecting our cause. Our forefathers knew their Bibles. I'm sure they were familiar with Psalm 5, which says, "But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you." (Psalm 5:11)

That was a prayer God answered. He spread His protection over those who loved His name.

Most of us are familiar with the first part of the Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights." Our founding Fathers demonstrated an understanding that it is God who gives us our rights.

But as they concluded the documents they clearly expressed the need for Almighty God's protection. "And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence (God), we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor." (Last sentence, Declaration of Independence, 1776)

As these fifty-five men signed their names to this amazing document, they did with the understanding that without the protection of God, this endeavor would fail.

Historical revisionists may try to teach our students that God, prayer, and the Bible had little or nothing to do with the founding of our nation, but our records show how much our Founding Fathers depended on God.

2. IN THE PAST WE HAVE EXPERIENCED GOD'S PROTECTION

From the first, our founders looked to God and they were able to claim this promise, "For he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones." (Proverbs 2:8)

On December 7, 1941, a day that will live in infamy, Pearl Harbor was bombed in a surprise attack by the Japanese. 3,800 young Americans lost their lives. If you were alive then, you remember exactly where you were when you heard the news. You may wonder where God's protection was that Sunday morning.

Immediately after the bombing, President Roosevelt called Admiral Chester Nimitz from Fredericksburg, Texas. He made him commander of the Pacific Fleet and sent him to Pearl Harbor. It took him several weeks to get there, and he finally arrived on Christmas Eve. He said that there was such a spirit of despair and defeat; it was as if the Japanese had already won the war.

After touring the harbor he gathered his staff and smiled and said, "We were lucky." They were amazed. "What do you mean?" He said, "We were lucky in three ways. First, the Japanese attacked on Sunday morning when nine out of ten sailors were on shore. Had they attacked at any other time, the casualties would have been 38,000 instead of 3,800. Second, they were so busy bombing the ships, they ignored the dry docks; had those been destroyed every damaged ship would have had to be towed back to California. Third, they didn't bomb our fuel storage tanks. One bomb or machine gun could have blown up every drop of fuel we have." Then Admiral Nimitz turned to one of his officers and asked, "Were those just mistakes they made, or was that God watching over America?" The Officer said, "I believe God was watching over us."

The Japanese had tried to render a navy and a nation helpless, but what they did was awaken a sleeping giant.

When Admiral Bull Halsey saw the damage at Pearl Harbor, he said, "When we get through with them the only place where Japanese will be spoken will be in hell."

And we all know how this greatest generation who had great faith in God won in the Pacific.

On the other side of the world, the Normandy Invasion was the largest military landing in history. Again, brave allied soldiers ran toward the bullets and the rockets. I've mentioned several times before that on the evening of the D-Day invasion, President Roosevelt went on the radio and led our nation in prayer. He didn't say, "Pray for our troops." He actually prayed an eloquent, powerful prayer asking for God's protection over our troops. I won't repeat the prayer again, but if you want to read it, just Google FDR D-day Prayer.

And at the high cost of the loss of life, the invasion was successful. Historian Stephen Ambrose reflected on D-Day and wrote, “There are 9,387 Americans buried above Normandy’s bloody Omaha Beach, where so many were slaughtered on D-Day. They’re not buried beneath some trite ‘co-exist,’ or ‘tolerance’ bumper stickers, they’re buried beneath 9,387 pristine, white marble symbols of our western faith, stars of David and crosses of Jesus Christ. The truth is that in the anxious hours of D-Day, Americans embraced the God of the Bible. That is in 1944 a conservative people, clinging to their guns and religion, actually saved the word.” God was there protecting our troops and leading them to victory.

I’m a student of presidential trivia. I’ve done an in-depth study of the inaugurations of the presidents. The typical inauguration speech is about 30 to 40 minutes. The shortest inauguration speech in history was George Washington’s second inauguration speech. It had 135 words and lasted less than one minute. The longest inauguration speech was given by President William Henry Harrison, our ninth president. He spoke for almost two hours in a cold, wet day, not wearing a hat or an overcoat. Thirty-two days later, President Harrison died from pneumonia. The Vice President replaced him, someone you’ve perhaps heard of, John Tyler, who chose not to make an inauguration speech.

George Washington’s inauguration speech was the shortest, but the second shortest inauguration speech in history was Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s fourth inauguration speech on January 20, 1945. It took less than three minutes. He was in very poor health. Less than three months after giving his speech, he was dead. Less than five months after the speech, the war in Europe was won. Less than eight months later Japan surrendered.

As I read FDR’s last inauguration speech, I was struck by how much he talked about our nation’s dependence upon God. It sounds like a sermon, but this is a presidential inauguration address: “The Almighty God has blessed our land in many ways. He has given our people stout hearts and strong arms with which to strike mighty blows for freedom and truth. He has given to our country a faith which has become the hope of all peoples in an anguished world. So we pray to Him now, for the vision to see our way clearly, to the way that leads to a better life for ourselves and all our fellow men to achieve, to the achievement of His will to peace on earth.” He made references to God and God’s protection eight times in three minutes.

I think the reason America survived and prospered through the twentieth century is because we were a people of faith who found God’s supernatural protection.

3. NATIONS THAT FORGET GOD LOSE HIS PROTECTION

When you look at the history of the nation of Israel, there were seasons where God blessed and protected them because they were faithful to Him. But there were seasons of time where they started worshipping other gods and ignored His commands, and He removed His protection. We find this warning in the ninth Psalm, “The nations have fallen into the pit they have dug; their feet are caught in the net they have hidden...The wicked go down to the realm of the dead, all the nations that forget God.” (Psalm 9:15-17)

There's a powerful picture in Psalm 80 where Israel is compared to a vineyard. The Psalmist says God transplanted a vine from Egypt. Then God gave it rain. The vine took root and grew until it covered the land from the river to the sea. God even planted a hedge around the vineyard to protect it from animals or thieves. But as Israel prospered, they forgot about God, so God didn't destroy the vineyard, but He removed the hedge protecting it. The Psalmist asks God, "Why have you broken down the hedge, so that all who pass by rob the grapes. Boars from the forest ravage it, and insects feed on it." The Lord's answer is simple: "You have forsaken me."

I see a parallel with our nation as well. God planted us in a good land and He blessed us. We grew and spread from sea to shining sea. He put a hedge around us to protect us. America has fought many wars, but not many of them have been here in our homeland. After the British were defeated in 1812, there wasn't an outside attack on our country until Pearl Harbor. Of course, in the middle of that we fought against ourselves in the bloody Civil War. But consider the mainland: Since the British attacked our East Coast in 1812, the next attack on our mainland was September 11, 2001. And whether our government wants to recognize it or not, since that day, we have been at war with Radical Islam. Our brave troops have taken the fight to them wherever they are. But as we all know they are also bringing the fight to our land. They're attacking us at Ft. Hood, Boston, Santa Barbara, and even Orlando.

I feel like the Psalmist who asks the question, "Why have you removed our hedge of protection?" God's answer is the same: "Because you have forsaken me."

In George Washington's first inauguration address, his first official act was to ask God to bless our nation. And he ended that speech with a solemn warning that has become prophetic. He said, "We ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious (favorable) smiles of Heaven, can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right, which Heaven itself has ordained." (First Inaugural Address, April 30, 1789) We've been blessed with the smile of God during much of our history, but our first President warned that those smiles would disappear if we disregard God's rules of right and order. So what you think is God's expression when He looks at our nation?

4. OUR RESPONSE: PRAY THAT OUR NATION WILL RETURN TO GOD!

Now, this message is a warning, but it is also call to action. And I want to declare unequivocally that we have hope. I really DO believe our nation can return to God and find His smile and divine protection once again. There are two reasons I believe this. First, our God does the impossible, and He has offered and invitation to us in the book of Joel. "Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity." (Joel 2:12-13)

The second reason I believe God can smile on America again is because of our history. There have been times of great sin and immorality before. For instance, we know that the very first settlers came to our shores seeking a place to freely express their faith. Their first declarations like the Mayflower compact were filled with references to the Bible and forming a Christian nation. And then fast forward to 1776 when our forefathers had enough faith to rebel against

England. But wait, what happened during the 150 years of the first settlers and the Revolutionary War?

Frankly, this was a dark time of widespread sin and immorality. The second generation of the settlers didn't care about establishing a light on a hill; they were interested in land and money. Another factor was that England started emptying their prisons and sending prisoners to the colonies as indentured servants, so there were thousands of undesirables with a criminal past. There were more pubs than churches. Drunkenness, crime, and lewdness prevailed. Even the extra-strict Puritan religion had a dark side—the Salem Witch Trials took place during this time. So by 1730 it was estimated that only about 10% of the people attended church.

Church members started praying. Men like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield preach to thousands outdoors. Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon was "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." The whole culture changed. Churches filled. It is estimated 50,000 new believers came out of the awakening. It was the moral force behind the move for independence. God has turned our nation around several times, and I'm praying, "Do it again, God!"

One of our church members wrote to me and say, "We've been praying 'God bless America' but we're at a point where we should be praying, 'God save America.'" I agree. So with apologies to Irving Berlin, I have changed the last part of his great song. Let's make it our prayer: "God SAVE America; Land that I love; Stand beside her; and guide her; through the night; with the light From above." Those are great we still need to pray that. Here's my new part, "From your Word; We found our way; But as a nation; Began to roam. God SAVE America; My home sweet home! God SAVE America; Our home sweet home!"

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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