

INTRODUCTION

How many of you are glad to be Americans and live in the home of the brave and the land of the free? Sometimes I'll hear someone say they are lucky to be an American. That reminds me of the want ad I heard about in a newspaper.

LOST DOG Brown hair with several bald spots; Right leg broken from being run over by a car; Rear left hip injured from dog fight; Right eye missing, left ear chewed off; Answers to the name "Lucky."

He doesn't sound very lucky! And neither are we. We aren't lucky to be Americans; we are blessed by God to live in this land.

I grew up reading and loving the King James Bible. As I read it, I kept coming across the phrase, "The Lord of Hosts." It appears 261 times in the Old Testament. I never really knew what it meant. I knew that a host or hostess was someone who welcomed you into their home for a meal, so I thought that God was the Ultimate Host and one day He would welcome me into His house. Boy, was I wrong. The phrase is *Yahweh Sabaoth*. It literally means "God who commands the angelic armies."

When we think about where America is today, we need to seek the grace and forgiveness of the God of the angel armies. Our nation has moved so far away from God, and we are experiencing a portion of His judgment now. Our prayer should be that of the Psalmist found in Psalm 80:

Psalm 80:3-7 *The Message*. "God, God-of-the-Angel-Armies, how long will you smolder like a sleeping volcano while your people call for fire and brimstone? You put us on a diet of tears, bucket after bucket of salty tears to drink. You make us look ridiculous to our friends; our enemies poke fun day after day. God-of-the-Angel-Armies, come back! Smile your blessing smile: *That* will be our salvation."

Let me share three thoughts with you about why we are blessed.

1. OUR FOUNDING FATHERS SAW THE NEED FOR GOD'S BLESSINGS

Some modern textbooks are attempting to rewrite our history and sanitize any reference to the faith of our founding Fathers. But anyone who studies the original documents of our nation will see the faith of these men and women shining through at every point.

In September 1775, 55 brave men gathered at Carpenter's Hall in Philadelphia to convene the first Continental Congress. Their first official act was to request a pastor come and pray for their undertaking. They summoned Dr. Jacob Duché, pastor of Christ Church two blocks away. Duché was an Anglican pastor. He arrived and read Psalm 35 in its entirety. And then he led them in a passionate prayer seeking God's wisdom and guidance. There's a famous painting of this scene

and our first President, George Washington, and the first Supreme Court Justice John Jay and others kneeling in prayer. Wouldn't it be wonderful if our President and Supreme Court Justices would fall to their knees in prayer today? That was such a powerful prayer meeting that John Adams wrote about it in a letter to his wife, Abigail: "Our prayers were enough to melt the hearts of stone. I saw tears gushing from the eyes of the old, gray Quakers of Philadelphia."

These prayers continued every day whenever they convened. In ten months they would write the Declaration of Independence in which they rejected an earthly king and chose a heavenly One. They wrote about some self-evident truths they held: First, "All men are created equal. There can be no more nobility, or lower classes. Second, "They are endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights." Our rights come from God, not from an earthly king. When the Declaration was signed. Pastor Duché went to his church and took the Anglican prayer book. Whenever there was a prescribed prayer for King George, he crossed out the words, "King George" and replaced it "the United States of America."

Cindy and I were in Washington D. C. in February and we visited the National Archives. I had wanted to see it on previous trips, but the line of tourists usually stretched down the sidewalk. But on this cold, wet day, there was no line. We went straight into the Rotunda where the original copies of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are kept under glass. There were only about five or six people there. I bent over and read the Constitution. There was a stone-faced security guard posted next to the case. He was a big African-American man, standing about six-four, and built as if he played in the NFL. After I read the last line of the Constitution. I turned to him and said, "Yep, there it is. Jesus is in our Constitution." That got his attention. He said, "What?" He leaned over and said, "Where?" I read the last line that says, "Done in the Unanimous Consent of the States present the 17th Day of September in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and Eighty seven." I said, "There's only one Lord that fits that description and His name is Jesus." I thought I might be arrested. But the guard smiled and said, "You're exactly right. Nobody has ever pointed that out to me. Thanks for blessing me today."

So, there's no way to ignore the fact that our Founding Fathers embraced a strong faith and trust in God Almighty. But we all know that this is no longer the case in our country.

2. OUR ONLY HOPE IS TO RETURN TO GOD

Over the past fifty years we've seen our culture move farther away from the God who made us great. Ronald Reagan once said, "If America ever forgets that we are one nation under God, we will be a nation gone under." We're drowning and going under for the third time, and we must pray that our nation will return to God.

Billy Graham's wife, Ruth Bell Graham, was once reading a book he was writing on the moral decline of America. She said, "If God doesn't punish America, He'll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah."

Some people are wondering WHEN God's judgment will come. We're experiencing it now. The Bible says, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows." (Galatians 6:7) The rise in violence, the increase of sexual promiscuity, and the increasing acceptance of

drug use aren't simply causes of our moral decline; they are the results. God has sent us plenty of warnings. Are we paying attention?

The prophet Amos wrote to Israel during a time when they thought they were the greatest nation of the earth, and that they were invincible. God said, "I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me...I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away...yet you have not returned to me...Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards...yet you have not returned to me...I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt...yet you have not returned to me. Prepare to meet your God, O Israel." (Amos 4:6-12) How did they meet God? He allowed a godless nation, Assyria, to conquer Israel.

Could that ever happen to America? If Amos was writing to us today, he might say, "You went through two wars in Korea and Vietnam with no clear victory, yet you did not return to me, instead you removed prayer and Bible reading from your schools. You went through the global embarrassment of having your embassy in Iran invaded and American citizens held as hostage for 444 days, and yet you did not return to me. Instead you legalized the killing of unborn babies. You've become the target of terrorism, and yet you did not return to me, instead you lead the world in the production and distribution of pornography. You faced the worst economic recession since the great depression, yet you did not return to me, instead you decided to change my definition of marriage to what my Word calls an abomination. Therefore, America, prepare to meet your God."

Like an airplane in a downward spiral, our nation is spiraling out of control. But I have a word of encouragement. I believe we can recover from this moral and spiritual spiral.

3. DO NOT FEAR BECAUSE GOD IS STILL IN CONTROL

We sometimes make the mistake of thinking that God loves America. He doesn't. He loves Americans. Jesus didn't die for America. He died for Americans—for people. We have such a flashbulb sense of history. America has been in existence for 238 years; that's just a tiny blip on the eternity timeline. God is from everlasting to everlasting. History is His Story. He is in control. God views history from the perspective of His perfect will and purpose.

For instance, we're honoring Korean Veterans this year, and it is long overdue for us to say, "Thank you for putting your lives on the line for our nation." But some people look at the Korean War and wonder. What was the use? When they started, the border was the 38th Parallel, and it's still there. It seems that we wasted our time in Korea. That's looking at it from man's perspective. Let's look the Korean War from heaven's perspective for a moment.

There was a terrible war going on, but we sent almost 2,000 chaplains to Korea. They preached the gospel to the people of Korea, especially the children. When the war started, only 2% of South Koreans were Christians, today 32% of South Koreans are followers of Jesus.

The work of our military chaplains had an amazing impact on the children who would grow up and become the leaders a generation later.

It is even noted in a secular account of the Korean War. “Military chaplains functioned as missionaries to Korean civilians and were often invited to preach in Korean churches. They evangelized South Korean soldiers and were responsible for enlisting and training South Korean Military Chaplains. Working with enthusiastic American soldiers, U.S. Chaplains embraced orphans, lepers, and refugees, soliciting financial support to build orphanages, hospitals, and churches.” (*The Korean War: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Stanley Sandler)

Sixty-one years after the Korean War ended, compare South and North Korea. When it comes to the growth of Christianity, you may be surprised to learn that eleven of the twelve largest Christian congregations in the world are in South Korea. The largest Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Assembly of God churches are in South Korea. There’s still a spiritual awakening happening there.

For instance, the largest church in the world is the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul. They have over 900,000 members. It’s an Assembly of God Church, and our friend David Sobrepeña from Manila has preached there. Their main building seats 21,000 people and they have seven services every Sunday. They have satellite campuses around Seoul. They even have their own youth service that is held in a civic auditorium. A few years ago, they worshipped together at Easter in a huge city park, and over 400,000 gathered at one time.

So, don’t you see the connection? U.S. Chaplains and soldiers planting seeds of the gospel sixty years ago, and today there is a bumper crop of belief, which is absent in North Korea. That just shows me that God is in control!

CONCLUSION

We live in a scary world. There is a growing threat of Militant Muslims taking over Syria and Iraq. Christians are being arrested and executed in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Russia and Ukraine are glaring at each other with guns drawn. Illegal immigrants still pour across our borders. And in Washington D.C. they do what politicians do best. They talk. So while the world rages on, how do you think the God of heaven reacts? Is He’s watching Fox News or CNN 24/7 and wringing His hands saying, “Oh no?” Is He taking Tylenol because all this mess gives Him a holy headache? We don’t have to wonder what God is doing when nations conspire against each other. The Bible says, “Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One...The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.” (Psalm 2:1-4)

God laughs at it all. He doesn’t laugh because He is uncaring. He cares when a sparrow falls to the ground. He laughs because He knows one day there will be a judgment against all sin and wickedness. He laughs when he sees humanity running after so many things that really don’t matter for eternity. He laughs because He knows one day He will set up His throne on planet earth and Jesus will rule.

Not long ago I got an email from a friend reporting he had finally sold his house after months of praying. He ended the email with this phrase: “God is still on His throne!” This was a good enough friend that I could poke a little fun at him, so I wrote back. “I’m glad you sold your

house. But God was still on His throne before it was sold. And He would still be on His throne if it was still for sale.”

I began to think about that. We tend to think God is on His throne when things are going well in our lives, but when trouble and pain comes, we wonder where He went. He’s *still* on His throne.

Pastor, “Things are bad in the U.S.” Yes, they are, but God is still on His throne. “Less people are going to church and believing the Bible than ever before.” He who sits enthroned in heaven laughs and asks, “Since when was truth based on popular opinion?”

Pastor, “Surveys show that the number of atheists in America is growing.” He who sits enthroned in heaven laughs and says, “The fool has said in his heart there is no God.”

Pastor, “Those of us who believe marriage is for one man and one woman are becoming a minority.” God is on His throne—laughing. “Since when did a voter referendum or a liberal judge have a corner on morality?”

Pastor, “One day they might arrest you and throw you in jail for hate speech.” God sits enthroned in heaven and chuckles and says, “Many of my best servants had some jail time!”

I’m not afraid and I think we should join God is laughing at this insanity around us, because we get the joke, we know the secret. We know Jesus is coming back. And we know God is still on His throne.

So, whether there’s sunshine or pain, God is still on His throne!
Whether it’s noonday or midnight, God is still on His throne!
Whether it’s calm or a storm, God is still on His throne!
Whether you’re employed or unemployed, God is still on His throne!
Whether you’re prospering or in poverty, God is still on His throne!
Whether you’re healthy or sick, God is still on His throne!

I agree with King David who sang, “The Lord is light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1)

Join me in making a profession of faith in God. Repeat after me: I know who goes before me. I know who stands behind. The God of angel armies is always by my side. The One who reigns forever, He is a friend of mine. The God of angel armies is always by my side.

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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