

INTRODUCTION

I want to talk to you for just a few moments this morning along the lines of “America, God shed his grace on thee.” throughout history, God has not only, at certain times, chosen individuals to bless but also the Bible makes it clear there are times that God has chosen to bless nations and America is one of those nations. In fact, the Bible says in Psalm 33:12, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he chose for his inheritance.”

When you think about our American democracy, our republic is young compared to all the cultures and civilizations of the world. It was only 235 years ago tomorrow when our forefathers signed the Declaration of Independence, in which they stated there are certain truths that are inalienable, that God our Creator has endowed us with certain rights. And from the very beginning, they recognized that it is God who gives us our freedom. Our government does not give us our freedom, God gives us our freedom. If the government gave you the freedom, it could be taken away—but because God has given us our freedom, *no* man can take it away.

Today I want to talk about what Tom Brokaw called the Greatest Generation, these World War II heroes, those who fought and those who were on the home front. What made the Greatest Generation so great? There are at least three things you can think about immediately. First, they survived the Great Depression. They lived through it. They knew what it was to do without. And then they fought and won the bloodiest, costliest war in human history. And then they came back to America and were a part of the greatest economic and spiritual boom the world has ever known. In fact, they gave birth to my generation, the Baby Boomers.

Today I want to talk to those of you in my generation and younger not so much about the faith of our forefathers, but about the faith of our fathers. It is my strong belief America is a great nation but America is in trouble. We are on a downward spiral. Our foundations are eroding as our moral foundation is decaying. We have lost our moral compass. And unless the younger generations reclaim the values, the dignity, the decency, and the diligence of this Greatest Generation, America may not survive very far into the 21st century.

My dad was part of that Greatest Generation. In World War II, he served in the Navy. I did some research and found out there were a number of ships he served on. He was on the first landing ship tank, 308 in part of the Sicily evasion. Then, later part of the liberation of the Philippines, and he ended the war on the aircraft carrier USS Princeton. My dad never talked very much about some of the things he went through in battle. But after he died, my brother and sister and I were looking through some of his things and we found five medals he'd been awarded during World War II he never told us about. Tom Brokaw said that is so characteristic of this generation of heroes. They didn't come back bragging about what they had done, they just did a good job and came back and started living their lives again. This is the kind of generation we need to emulate. What made this generation the Greatest Generation? Let me answer that three ways.

I. THEY FOUGHT FOR THE GREATEST CAUSE—FREEDOM

Lately around the world, especially in the Middle East, there has been what some called “freedom fever,” as if this is something new but it's nothing new. That's what launched our

republic and it's even scriptural. Jesus said "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32)

This Greatest Generation didn't choose to go to war; they were forced into it when America was attacked without provocation on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. And if you are alive today and you living during that time, you remember exactly where you were when you heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. And that was the incident that brought our nation into the war.

Admiral Chester Nimitz, from Fredericksburg Texas, was attending a concert in Washington D.C. when he got a call from Franklin Roosevelt that evening telling him he was now the commander of the pacific fleet. He was instructed to go to Pearl Harbor and take over. It took a while for him to get there, but he arrived on Christmas Eve and on Christmas day, took a tour of the damage from the attack. In his mementoes, he wrote, "Such a spirit of despair and defeat existed that one would have thought that the Japs had already won the war." When he finished his tour, he turned to the young officer next to him and said, "The Japanese made three of the biggest mistakes an attack force could ever make or God was taking care of America, what do you think it was?" And then he went on to explain in his that he recognized the Japanese made three terrible mistakes.

A. Most sailors were on shore

First of all, they attacked on a Sunday morning when nine out of every ten sailors were on shore instead of onboard the ships. Had they attacked at a time when all the sailors were on board, the casualties, would have been 38,000 instead of 3,800.

B. Dry docks were spared

The Japanese were so focused on the ships; they ignored the dry docks. Had they destroyed the dry docks at Pearl Harbor, all the damaged ships would have had to be towed back to California, repaired and then sent into service. But because the dry docks were nearby, one single tugboat could tow the damaged vessels where they could be repaired. And they were repaired and put into service in less time that it would have taken them to be towed to California.

C. Fuel storage tanks were untouched

The third biggest strategic mistake was just five miles over the hill; every drop of fuel the pacific fleet had was contained in five huge storage tanks. A single Japanese pilot could have strafed those storage tanks and lit up an inferno that would have destroyed every drop of fuel. But they didn't. And so he turned to that officer and said, "Were those mistakes they made, or was it God watching over America?" And Admiral Nimitz said he chose that it was God taking care of America.

The Japanese thought they had rendered this nation helpless. But instead had awakened a sleeping giant. There were amazing leaders during this time. For instance, when Admiral "Bull" Halsey saw the damage at Pearl Harbor, he said, "When we get through with them, the only

place Japanese will be spoken will be in hell.” those are the kind of leaders we had that led us into World War II. There were fighting for the greatest cause, for freedom.

II. THEY MADE THE GREATEST SACRIFICES

My generation and younger generations don't know anything about sacrifice. This generation, truly, understood what it meant to make a sacrifice. And I'm not only talking about those 400 thousand American soldiers who paid the supreme sacrifice and died in battle, I'm talking about those soldiers who went to battle and returned. And I'm talking about the families left behind to fight the war on the home front.

Those of us who didn't experience it have no idea what it was to go through that time of rationing. Here's one of the posters popular during World War II, reminding Americans that you do with less so the soldiers, will have enough. Rationing gives you your fair share.

How many of you remember the rationing books? Sure, you might have had money but that didn't mean you could buy something in the store unless you had a ration book for it. Food was rationed, tires, sugar, meat, gasoline, nylon and other items. We don't know what it is to sacrifice like they sacrificed. One half of all cars in the United States got a little sticker that said "A" on the windshield, meaning you could get four gallons of gasoline a week, that's all. Those with a "B" had a more important job and could get eight gallons of gasoline a week. People had to plan their lives so they could help the war effort, but they gladly sacrificed.



Do you know what the speed limit was in the United States during World War II? Thirty five miles an hour. They called it the "victory speed limit," designed to save thousands and thousands of gallons of fuel so they could be used in tanks and airplanes and help our soldiers. How many of us today would be willing to drive 35 miles an hour if it meant defeating al Qaeda and defeating the dependence on the Arab oil?

We live in a nation of people who sometimes think just the opposite. They ask the question, "How much can my government give to me? My government owes me this much." And this Greatest Generation never said, "How much can the government give to me?" They said, "How much can I give to help the war effort?" Families planted victory gardens to help with the war effort. In 1945, there were 20 million victory gardens planted all over the United States. And in that one year alone, 40 percent of all the produce was grown in these victory gardens. Columnist Bret McKay commented on this spirit of sacrifice and compared it to our generation today: "They learned to live on less and be grateful for things they had, no matter how humble. It didn't take a new Wii to brighten their Christmas morning. An orange at the bottom of the stocking was enough to knock their socks off. This was not the generation that purchased Corvettes to sooth

their mid-life crises. Nor, the generation that acquitted success with the purchase of a McMansion. This generation was thrilled to move into a small house, which at 750 square feet, was as big as some people's garages are today. One of the mottos of the greatest generation was, 'use it up, wear it out, make it do or do without.' Of course it's hard to do if you don't know how to fix it, thus, handiness was also central to this generation's frugality."

"In our day, when men are obsessing about finding themselves, their holy grail of a woman and their passion, the Greatest Generation's uncomplicated approach to life is refreshing. They didn't go on diets, they simply ate whole foods. They didn't exercise, they stayed thin working on jobs and working around the house. They didn't obsess about their relationships, these men just found a gal they loved and married her and stayed married to her. They always look sharp but they never fussed with fashion trends. They didn't mull over which appliance better suited their personality and image, they just bought the machine that worked the best. They didn't think about how to get things done, they just got 'em done." There's a lot that my generation and younger generations can learn from this Greatest Generation because they understood sacrifice.

III. THEY HAD THE GREATEST TRUST IN GOD

I think the main reason this is the Greatest Generation is because they had the greatest trust in God. This generation really was part of a spiritual awakening that took place here in America during the war because never before has there been a higher percentage of Americans who attended church. Even though you were rationed to four gallons of gasoline a week, church was still a priority, and there were more prayers prayed.

There were very many important battles in World War II but perhaps the turning point, at least in Europe, was the Normandy Invasion. On June 6, 1944, the largest amphibious invasion in the history of warfare was launched, involving over 5,000 ships and over 160,000 troops. The night after the morning of the invasion, FDR went on the radio and did something no president has done since, he not only asked America to pray for our troops, he led our nation in prayer. "That night on radio, last night when I spoke to 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." He led the nation in prayer. He started by saying, "Almighty God, our sons, this day, have set upon a mighty endeavor. A struggle to preserve our republic, our religion and our civilization and to set free a suffering humanity. And O Lord, give us faith, give us faith in thee. Faith in our united crusade, with thy blessing we shall prevail over the unholy forces of our enemy." And he ended by saying, "Thy will be done, Almighty God."

What I think we need in America today is not only a president who says "pray for America," we need a president who will lead us in prayer for America. We need someone who will unashamedly say, "Let's pray to all mighty God and ask his blessings and protection upon our nation."

Steven Ambrose is a historian and he comments on, on the spirituality and the renewal that happened that surrounded praying for D-Day. He said, "The impulse to pray, during the time of the invasion, was overwhelming in America. Across the United States, church bells rang as a

solemn reminder to national unity and a call to prayer. Special services were held in every church and synagogue in the land. Pews were jammed with worshipers. The liberty bell rang on D-Day for the first day in a hundred and nine years.” And then the Philadelphia mayor led a prayer for that city. And then I continue to quote Steven Ambrose, he said, “Supreme Allied Commander, Dwight Eisenhower called D-Day a great crusade. President Roosevelt called for faith in our united crusade. And he said the media that crucified George w. Bush for uttering the word crusade in 2001, offered no criticism in 1944. Remember also that the 9,387 Americans are 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.” Thank God for that generation who prayed for America to protect our nation and protect our soldiers.

I’m somewhat of a student of presidential trivia. I’ve done an in-depth study of the inaugurations of the presidents. The typical inauguration speech is about 20 to 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. He was replaced by the Vice President, 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. Within three months of giving this speech, he was dead. Within five months of giving this speech, Europe would have surrendered. Within eight months of giving this speech, 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 reference to God and God’s blessing upon our nation eight times in that speech. Ladies and gentlemen, we need to go back and we need to recapture the values, the diligence, and the decency of this greatest generation if we’re long for this world.

CONCLUSION

Most people around the world don’t recognize “The Star Spangled Banner.” Most nations around the world believe “America the beautiful” is our national anthem. For instance, in 1972 when Richard Nixon made his historic trip to China, the choir sang “America the Beautiful” to him.

The Chinese word for America is *mei yan*, which literally translates, “beautiful land,” “beautiful land.”

In 1993 when we were in the former Soviet Union singing “America the Beautiful,” the opera house was filled 3,700 people who had been under the boot of godless Communism for 70 years. As we began to sing, they stood to their feet. And then as we choked up and couldn’t sing any longer, they began to sing the words to “America the Beautiful.”

Ours is a nation and a freedom that the nations of the world envy. You know the words, “O beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain. For purple mountains majesties, above the fruited plain. America, America,” And you know why America is great? Because “God shed his grace on thee.” But look at this next line, “and crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea.” The reason America has been blessed is because we have been a good nation with good biblical morals. President Reagan quoted that old adage that said, “America is great because America is good. But if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.” And on this day that we honor these world war two veterans, this Greatest Generation, let us commit ourselves that we will embrace the values, the priorities, the decency, the dignity of this Greatest Generation.” God bless you and God bless America.

OUTLINE

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he chose for his inheritance.” *Psalm 33:12*

I. THEY FOUGHT FOR THE GREATEST CAUSE—FREEDOM

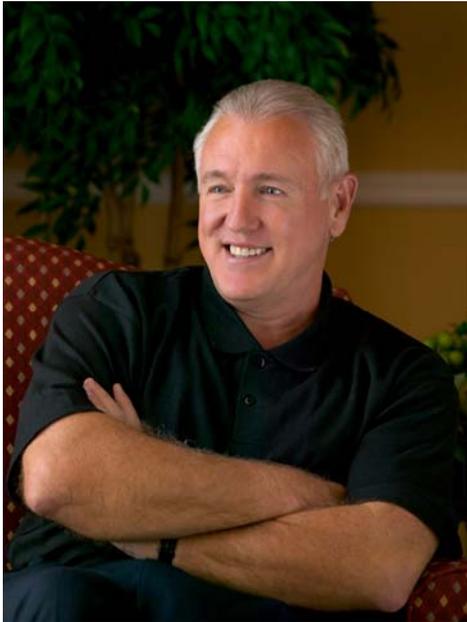
The Japanese made three strategic mistakes during the Pearl Harbor attack:

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- B. Dry docks were spared
- C. Fuel storage tanks were untouched

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes