

INTRODUCTION

This is the second and final message in a short series that acknowledges God has blessed our nation, because up until recently, He has always been a part of our national conversation. The Psalmist proclaimed, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he chose for his inheritance.” (Psalm 33:12)

Tomorrow we are going to celebrate the 240th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. They were claiming liberty and justice for all. They were declaring their independence from an earthly king and declaring their absolute dependence on a heavenly king.

We all know the Star-Spangled Banner is our official national anthem. But you may not know that it didn't become our official national anthem until 1931. There had been five previous attempts to pass the legislation but Congress was reluctant, because there were several much-loved patriotic songs some thought was just as deserving.

One of the most popular songs was “My Country Tis of Thee” also named “America.” It was written in 1831 by a twenty-four year old Baptist preacher named Samuel Frances Smith. Until 1931 many Americans considered this to be the unofficial national anthem. We sang it five times at I Love America last weekend. And the last stanza identifies America's King. “Our fathers' God, to Thee, Author of liberty, To Thee we sing; Long may our land be bright, With freedom's holy light, Protect us by Thy might, Great God, our King.”

Of course you know America has a President, but it's good to know that for many years Americans recognized that we have a King, and that our King sits on the throne of heaven.

In this message I want to speak about America's history, our present, and our future. First, a glance into our past:

I. DURING TIMES OF MORAL DECLINE GOD SENT SPIRITUAL AWAKENINGS

I spoke about this two weeks ago. From the time the pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock and the signing of the Declaration of Independence, there was a period of about 150 years and the colonists had grown spiritually dull. Only one out of ten went to church, drunkenness and violence was common. But God sent a spiritual awakening. It actually was the first of several. I want to give you an overview of four different spiritual awakenings in our history.

A. The First Great Awakening (1730-1743)

Because we were a colony of England, this awakening occurred in both locations. Three of the main preachers were John Wesley in England, who founded the Methodist Church. George Whitefield was an English preacher who made six visits to the colonies to preach. And Jonathan Edwards was a pastor who lived in Massachusetts.

George Whitefield is a good example of the new evangelical preaching style. He didn't use notes and he preached that people were wretched sinners bound for a bottomless pit. And he called upon people to repent and be saved.

Whitefield became a lifelong friend of Benjamin Franklin. Franklin printed Whitefield's books and sermons. Franklin was at one service where Whitefield was raising money for an orphanage. Franklin wrote that he had a pocket full of money, but he wasn't going to give a penny. By the time Whitefield finished, Franklin had emptied his pockets.

Here's his eyewitness report of Whitefield's preaching. "He had a loud and clear Voice, and articulated his Words and Sentences so perfectly that he might be heard and understood at a great Distance. He preach'd one Evening from the Top of the Court House Steps, which are in the middle of Market Street, and on the West Side of Second Street which crosses it at right angles. Both Streets were fill'd with his Hearers to a considerable Distance...Imagining then a Semicircle, of which my Distance should be the Radius, and that it were fill'd with listeners, to each of whom I allow'd two square feet, I computed that he might well be heard by more than Thirty Thousand.

It was wonderful to see the Change soon made in the Manners [behavior] of our Inhabitants; from being thoughtless or indifferent about Religion, it seem'd as if all the World were growing Religious; so that one could not walk thro' the Town in an Evening without Hearing Psalms sung in different Families of every Street."

It was this awakening that provided the catalyst for a desire for freedom that fueled the American Revolution. But after the victory of the Colonies, spiritual decline occurred again. Morality sunk to new lows as human beings kidnapped from Africa were bought and sold like merchandise.

That's when God sent

B. The Second Great Awakening (1800-1840)

This was the time of the great camp meetings. This awakening spread from New England into the growing Midwest. After farmers laid their crops by in August, they would travel to remote locations to join thousands of other pioneers. They would camp in their covered wagons and pack a year's worth of religion into one week. There would be non-stop simultaneous preaching going on all around the campgrounds and song services that lasting all night. Slave owners took their slaves with them and they had their own preaching. This was the first time large numbers of slaves converted to Christ.

The most famous preacher of this time was Charles G. Finney. He was a lawyer who was converted to an evangelist. He preached so many hell-fire and brimstone sermons in upstate New York that a certain area was called the burned-over district. It was said Finney could look at people and they would fall under conviction of their sins without a word being spoken.

And the two main social changes that came out of this awakening were women's rights and the abolition movement. Once God's Word was read and believed, a growing number of Americans

believed it was not only wrong, but also sinful in God's eyes to enslave any person. Even though women couldn't vote, many of the leading abolitionists were females. And of course in 1862 President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. A bloodied and reunited nation desperately needed

C. The Third Great Awakening (1870-1900)

As our nation gradually adjusted to the horrible carnage of the Civil War, there was a great need for a spiritual awakening. One of the leading preachers of this time was a former shoe salesman named Dwight L. Moody. He never received a Christian education or was ordained. He was an uncouth but passionate preacher of the Gospel. He preached in America and England and saw thousands of people come to Christ.

Moody was a rather large man around the middle. It is said when he first met the famous British Baptist Pastor Charles Spurgeon, Spurgeon was enjoying one of his daily cigars. Moody was a little offended and said, "How can you a man of God, smoke a vile cigar?" Spurgeon blew out his smoke and said, "And how can you a man of God, be so fat?" They both got a laugh out of that and became good friends.

This period saw the expansion of foreign missions. It also led to the expansion of YMCA facilities into many cities. The "Y" as it came to be known was a Christian evangelistic organization from its start. Young men could find room and board, and hear the gospel preached. The social movements that came out of this period were the right of women to vote, which happened in 1919, and the Temperance Movement, which led to Prohibition.

Many people believe we have only had three Great Awakenings, but more historians are agreeing that something unique happened at

D. The Fourth Great Awakening (1966-1975)

In 1972 almost 200,000 students gathered in Dallas at the Cotton Bowl and the areas surrounding it. It was called Explo '72, sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ. It was like the Christian version of Woodstock and a youngish Billy Graham preached six times during the week. This really gave birth to contemporary Christian music and to the mega church movement. Thousands of young people were baptized. Many of them were the hippies who became Jesus freaks, and they soon discovered they weren't welcome in the mainstream churches. Bill Hybels was a product of the Jesus Movement and his youth ministry got criticized for accepting these Jesus people. His church kicked the youth ministry out. Bill rented a movie theatre and moved his youth ministry there. Today that group of former Jesus freaks is Willow Creek Community Church outside Chicago with 26,000 people attending it.

I was part of the Jesus movement. How many of you were affected? As a youth pastor in Alabama, we led Jesus marches through the streets and opened a Christian coffeehouse to reach teenagers who wouldn't show up in church.

So what was the social movement that was affected by this Jesus movement? Can anyone in the South remember what was happening in our schools in the early 1970s? If you've forgotten, you need to see the movie "Woodlawn." Forced integration was a tough time, but for the teenagers like me who loved Jesus, we accepted our new black friends as equals.

Just studying and talking about these times of spiritual awakening that changed our nation, makes me want to say, "Do it again, Lord, please do it again." Spiritual awakening is a Biblical call. Paul wrote, "And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light." (Romans 13:11-12)

The Church in America is asleep. God keeps sending us wake-up calls and we keep hitting the snooze button over and over again. I'm ready for us to wake up, get up, dress up in God's army and stand up for Jesus. How many of you would like to see us return to America's spiritual heritage?

II. TO RECLAIM OUR SPIRITUAL HERITAGE WE MUST TRUST THE PLANS OF GOD INSTEAD OF THE PLANS OF MAN

I've been fervently praying for months asking God to give us a sign that we are entering an awakening. But the message I keep reading in the Bible is where God says, "Trust MY plans. Trust MY plans." The Psalmist says, "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." (Psalm 33:10-11)

God has a plan for your life. He wants you to choose to follow Him because His plan for you will bring good to you and glory to Him. God has a plan for the nations—this entire planet of people. And nothing can thwart His plans. Terrorist attacks don't thwart His plans. Global wars don't foil His plans. Economic slowdowns don't mess up His plans. So in an uncertain world, we must trust His plans.

In 127 days from today, Americans will go to the polls to elect a new President and other state and local leaders. That's all we're going to hear about for the next four months. Some of you are pretty scared. You are thinking, "If we don't get the right person elected, it will be the end of the world." Nope. Only God gets to say, "This is the end of the world." Or you're saying, "If we don't fix the economy or the immigration problem, it will be the end of the world." Wrong again, Sherlock. God is in charge.

Don't misunderstand me. Leaders matter, and policies matter, but neither of those matters as much as this one little word: FAITH, confidence that nothing in this world can change God's plans. Listen, Hillary Clinton isn't my savior or anybody's savior. Donald Trump isn't my savior or anyone's savior. There's only one Savior and His name is Jesus.

I agree with the colonial physician Benjamin Rush, the first Surgeon General. He said, "I have been alternately called an aristocrat and a democrat. I am now neither. I am a Christocrat. I

believe all power, whether hereditary or elective, will always fail of producing order and happiness in the hands of man. He alone who created and redeemed man is qualified to govern him.”

I’m a citizen of this land temporarily. But I’m a citizen of heaven permanently. That’s where my hope lies. So when it comes to our government what should we do? And we should be involved. Separation of Church and state was never intended to be a separation of God and government.

A. Pray for our nation

The very first thing you can do is to pray that our nation will return to God and His Word. I hope you’ll join the thousands of Americans who are praying at 7:14 a.m. and p.m. (www.714movement.com). We’re asking God to send a spiritual awakening. Our nation was born in prayer.

After the Revolutionary War, the leaders were trying to write a Constitution. At the Constitutional Convention in 1787, they were at a deadlock. The different size colonies were arguing for more power. This arguing went on for four or five weeks. Benjamin Franklin was there and remained quiet through several days of debate. Finally, the 81-year-old statesmen stood to speak, and the assembly grew quiet. He spoke for just a few minutes, and part of what he said was, “I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that God Governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid?” His final point was that the group should begin every session in prayer led by one of the local pastors. This was agreeable, and it was the turning point of the Constitutional Convention.

B. Participate in our government

Every believer should register to vote and vote in every election. After the 2012 election when President Obama was re-elected, Franklin Graham said his research revealed that half of the evangelical voters in America didn’t even vote.

But it goes beyond voting. If you find a candidate you like, donate, and help with their campaign. Don’t sit on the sidelines.

But there’s another way for you to help. We need Christians to run for elected office. It thrills me whenever I see a Green Acres member running for city council, county commissioner, Sheriff, or school board. What would our government look like in ten years if there were a massive influx of deeply committed Christians running for office? We’ll never know until we see it happen.

C. Persuade our leaders

Sometimes people call what we do organized religion. I’ve heard people say, “I don’t like organized religion.” But that’s an oxymoron. Christians are some of the most disorganized people in our culture. We’re often too busy arguing with each other than to join together and organize to change our culture for the good.

Let me give you an example of a group of people who have out-organized Christians. According to a recent Gallup poll only 3.8% of Americans self-identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transsexual. But the past twenty years the LGBT movement has changed our entire culture. And where was the church? Mostly on the sidelines yelling angry comments. You know my position on what the Bible says about homosexual behavior. But my point is that we have the greatest message of hope and when it comes to our nation, we're sitting on our hands.

We're living again in days of moral darkness and moral decay. It's not the first time in our history that our culture has slipped into moral decline. The impetus for every spiritual awakening is when God's people got outside the four walls of the church and showed their culture God's love in practical ways.

Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:13-16)

The church can no longer remain silent. We must let our voices be heard. One way you can do that is contacting your elected leaders and letting them know where you stand and what you want for our nation.

How many of you have written an email or a letter to your local, state, or federal leaders? Let's get more specific. How many of you have written a letter or email to Congressman Gohmert or Senators Cruz or Cornyn in the past six months? How many of you have written an email or letter to President Obama in the past six months?

Through the years, I've written to President Obama several times. I respectfully tell him I disagree with his positions on abortion and using American aid to force African countries to take certain moral position. I've written asking for an exemption for Christian companies who were required under Obamacare to provide contraceptives for their employees. And in every letter I tell the President that I pray for him often as we are instructed to do in the New Testament.

And he always writes me back. Or, at least I receive a form letter. But I guess there is one benefit of writing him so often. Several years ago, we started getting a Christmas card from the White House. So right there in the basket with Christmas cards from all of you is the Obama family.

Your attitude may be, "What's the use? I'm just one person. I'm a nobody. They wouldn't listen to me if I contacted one of my representatives." That's where you're wrong.

I talked with Congressman Gohmert's office this week. I wanted to know how seriously they take the hundreds of letters, calls, and emails they get each week. I learned they have several full-time staffers devoted to that task. They separate the communication from those who are constituents of Congressional District 1 from all the other communication. But they take them very seriously. Mr. Gohmert was in the Middle East, but he heard I was asking this question, so

he sent me a text that said: “When people call or email, we keep track. Even when people agree with their Senator or Representative, it’s important to let them know. Otherwise, we get the impression most disagree with our position. But it’s even more critical to contact Senators because they have less interaction with constituents. Tell people to make sure they let their voices be heard. Thanks! Louie”

CONCLUSION

So, our choice is clear. We can remain silent and apathetic, or we can get involved in prayer, participation, and persuasion. General Douglas McArthur was a deeply committed Christian. He was a student of history. He once said: “History fails to record a single precedent in which nations subject to moral decay have not passed into political and economic decline. There has been either a spiritual awakening to overcome the moral lapse, or a progressive deterioration leading to ultimate national disaster.”

OUTLINE

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the people he chose for his inheritance.” *Psalm 33:12*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
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