

INTRODUCTION

I love America, but I fear for our nation's future. Psalm 9:17 says, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." (NKJV) I fear we are guilty of forgetting that it is God who has made us a great nation. I wonder how long God will continue to be patient with a nation that kills the unborn and is the #1 exporter of pornography and violence around the world.

Have you ever been to an auction? When the bidding reaches a climax the auctioneer says, "Going ... going gone!" and he raps his gavel. That item is no longer up for sale. I fear God may be looking at our nation and saying, "Going ... going ..." and that we are only one word away from losing the blessings of God. The answer for America's problems isn't going to come from the White House; it's got to come from the Church House. But the problem is most American Christians are asleep and unaware of the dangers we face.

I wrote on my Facebook page asking my friends to tell me in one word the three greatest threats they believe we face as Americans. I got almost 100 responses. One person wrote the three greatest problems in America are "Obama, Obama, Obama." But another person wrote the three greatest problems in America are, "Me, myself, and I." I tend to agree with the attitude of the second one. But there was one word that appeared more than any other: Apathy. Do you know what apathy is? Do you even *care* to know what apathy is? Apathy is that attitude of just not caring. When we're facing a national crisis apathetic Americans are apathetic. It's time for us to wake up and start caring.

One of my favorite American patriots was a silversmith from Boston named Paul Revere. When the British were gathering to attack the Americans in New England, he jumped on his horse and rode throughout the countryside waking up people. His famous ride was immortalized in the words of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's famous poem many of us learned in grammar school: "Listen, my children, and you shall hear; Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere; On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five (that was 1775); Hardly a man is now alive; Who remembers that famous day and year." The poem has 12 verses describing his brave ride from Boston to Lexington. His job was to wake up everyone along the route that the enemy was approaching. Today, we need a 21st Century Paul Revere to wake up a slumbering nation to the dangers we face.

The Apostle Paul captured this idea when he wrote in Romans 13:1;11-12:

"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 ... 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."

As we think about the theme of "Wake Up, America," there are four challenges I want to issue to every Christian living in America.

1. WAKE UP TO A DIFFERENT WORLD!

Our world is changing fast and it is a much different world than it was at just the turn of the century. You might remember the TV commercial that said, “This is not your father’s Oldsmobile.” Ha. There isn’t even an Oldsmobile company anymore! But this *isn’t* our fathers’ and mothers’ world.

Many people have heard of Rip Van Winkle, but they don’t know the details of the story. Rip Van Winkle was a short story written in 1819 by Washington Irving. Rip was a man living in America before it was a nation. He had a nagging wife, so one day Rip walked out to the Catskill Mountains where he met some strange little men who gave him a drink. He fell asleep and didn’t wake up for 20 years. Meanwhile, the War of Independence had been fought and won. Rip wandered back into town and expressed his loyalty to King George and he was treated like a traitor. He woke up and didn’t realize the world had changed. I fear the church has been sleeping and we are unaware the world has changed drastically over the past two decades.

As much as we’d like to go back to the “good old days” when there was a national acceptance of the Judeo-Christian morality, we aren’t living in those days. There was a time when majority of Americans were Christians and those who weren’t had a healthy respect for God and the Bible. Those days are gone.

In many ways, America reflects whatever happens in Europe. One hundred years ago, Christianity was predominate in Europe, but now Europe is a post-Christian secular society. In London there are now more mosques than churches, and many more Muslims attend prayer on Friday than Christians go to church on Sunday. And this is a nation where just a little over 100 years ago the great Welsh revival sweep through Britain and churches were packed. It has happened in Europe and unless we wake up, it will happen here.

That’s the message Jesus spoke to the church in Sardis. He said, “Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent.” (Revelation 3:2-3) Jesus is saying we must remember what made our nation a great country and repent and return to those basic Biblical standards. President Woodrow Wilson said: “A nation which does not remember what it was yesterday does not know what it is today.”

We need to wake up to what’s happening right here in America.

2. LIFT UP PRAYER FOR OUR NATION!

We need to wake up and then lift up prayers for America. We should be storming heaven with our petitions for our nation. From the beginning of our nation God has been intervening on our behalf. There were miraculous stories of God’s protection during the Revolutionary War, and I’ll tell you about a specific instance of Divine intervention in a few minutes. Any honest student of history must agree that God was with our troops at Valley Forge, and He was with our men at Normandy.

But some have wondered how long we can depend on God's protection. After 9/11 and the devastation of hurricane Katrina, Billy Graham's daughter, Anne Graham Lotz said: "For years we've been telling God to get out of our schools, to get out of our government and to get out of our lives. I believe He has calmly backed out. How can we expect God to give us His blessing and his protection if we demand that He leave us alone?" God's Word is clear about His promise to answer prayer when a nation needs healing. 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) I love that verse. We love to sing it and quote it. But few people take the time to read the verses right after it. It's not nearly as pleasant, because it predicts what happens to a nation that doesn't repent and seek God. 2 Chronicles 7:19 says, "But if you turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you ... then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them ... I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples." What a promise and a warning!

Two hundred and twenty-two years ago when the members of the Constitutional Convention were struggling with the process of wording the Constitution, the delegates had reached an impasse. There was such disagreement that it looked as if the group would adjourn without taking any action. But the oldest man there, Ben Franklin, rose and said: "How has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our understandings? In the beginning of the contest with G. Britain, when we were sensible of danger we had daily prayer in this room for the Divine Protection. Our prayers, Sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered. And have we now forgotten that powerful friend? Or do we imagine that we no longer need His assistance? 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? ... I therefore beg leave to move—that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the Clergy of this City be requested to officiate in that service." Our nation was birthed with prayer and it will only survive by prayer. We need to wake up and lift up prayers, but we also need to:

3. WISE UP ABOUT HOW WE CAN IMPACT OUR CULTURE!

Most Christians are ignorant about the culture in which we are now living. We have used the church as a fortress where we hide from the world. We want to escape from the big bad world and its influences. But that's a defeatist approach. Jesus never told us to retreat, He told us to CHARGE into the world and to carry the good news. Jesus said, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." (Matthew 10:16) Some Christians have taken this advice to become as mean as snakes and as flighty as doves! But Jesus was telling us to wise up to the ways of our culture without conforming to the culture. Jesus didn't say to become snakes; He said we must become as *wise* as snakes while remaining as innocent as doves.

Daniel Webster said: "God grants liberty only to those who love it, and are always ready to guard and defend it." If we're going to guard and defend our liberty, we must understand those

forces that are threatening it.

For instance, most Americans are ignorant about the threat we face from radical Islam. That's why I have invited Dr. Jim Denison to come here next Sunday to give a presentation on the Threat of Radical Islam. Dr. Denison has been the pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas. He is not a wild-eyed fanatic; he is a brilliant intellectual who is now the President of the Center for Informed Faith. But if you come next week you will hear him say the spread of radical Islam is the greatest threat we will face in our lifetime. Come and invite your friends because everyone needs to wise up to how we can influence our culture.

4. STAND UP FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS AND TRUTH!

We must WAKE up; LIFT up prayers; WISE up, and we must be willing to stand up for righteousness and truth in a culture that is becoming more wicked by the day. The Apostle Paul wrote: "Become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life." (Philippians 2:15-16) Our world is struggling in moral darkness and Jesus has called us to be the light of the world. Our culture is rotten and getting more corrupt and Jesus has called us to be the salt of the earth.

For too long Christians have been guilty of the sin of silence. Martin Luther King, Jr. was only 26 years old with a one-year old daughter when he was called as pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. He had been raised in a rather affluent African-American family in Atlanta and had attended the finest schools available to him. The city was in turmoil because one of his members, Rosa Parks, had been arrested when she had refused to move to the back of a city bus. He had received a midnight phone call with this message: "We are tired of you and the mess you've caused. If you aren't out of town in three days, we're going to blow your brains out and blow up your house." As Dr. King thought about his one-year old daughter, he was greatly tempted to leave Montgomery and not get involved. But then he asked himself if this was the kind of world he wanted his daughter to grow up in and he decided he would take a stand. Dr. King later said: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

As Christians, we need to ask ourselves the same question. Is this the kind of nation we want our children and grandchildren to grow up in? If you think some changes need to be made, then it's time for us to be silent no longer. We must stand up for truth and righteousness because if we don't, nobody else will.

September 11 is an important date in our history. On September 11, a foreign enemy attacked America's largest seaport. There was smoke and fire that obscured the horrible loss of life from the explosions. But I'm not talking about September 11, 2001, I'm talking about September 11, 1814. British sea forces started bombarding Ft. McHenry at Baltimore, Maryland, America's largest seaport at the time. It is called the War of 1812, and most Americans don't realize how close we came to surrendering our tenuous independence that had been won only thirty years earlier. Three weeks earlier, British General Robert Ross made a tactical error. Instead of attacking Baltimore immediately, he attacked Washington D.C. which had only 8,000 residents,

half of whom were slaves. There was little resistance, and the British captured Washington easily. President James Madison fled earlier in the day, but Dolly Madison had remained at the White House setting her huge table with forty places for what she hoped would be a victory banquet. She stayed until she saw the British soldiers approaching the White House. She quickly took a painting of George Washington down from the wall, cutting it from its frame and an original copy of the Declaration of Independence. The enemy soldiers entered the White House and found the table set for a banquet with food in the kitchen. General Ross and his officers sat down and enjoyed a sumptuous meal, courtesy of the First Lady. Then they set fire to the White House and other public buildings. Dolly Madison watched from a nearby hillside as our nation's capital burned. However, the very next day, an unusual weather phenomenon occurred. Although hurricanes seldom make landfall around Washington, a violent hurricane roared ashore and two hours of torrential rain and winds extinguished the fires, and the White House wasn't completely destroyed. Tornadoes spawned by the hurricane killed more British soldiers than the battle of Washington itself! The weather was so bad General Ross decided to leave Washington rather than occupy it. As he was leaving he asked an American lady: "Great God, Madam! Is this the kind of storm to which you are accustomed in this infernal country?" The lady answered, "No, Sir, this is a special interposition of Almighty God to drive our enemies from our city." Indeed, you won't read this in the history books, but that storm probably turned the tide and made the difference between defeat and victory in the War of 1812. Had Washington burned to ground and the British troops not been decimated by the storm, we might be loyal subjects of Queen Elizabeth to this day! But God intervened.

Then General Ross moved what was left of his troops north toward Baltimore. On the fateful date of 9/11, (September 11, 1814) he launched the attack on the final American stronghold of Fort McHenry that guarded the Baltimore harbor. He sent orders for the ships in the harbor to start shelling the Fort. On the next day, September 12, General Ross was fatally wounded by an American teenage sniper as he led his troops. Ross was carried to a ship for medical attention and died there.

Meanwhile, a lawyer from Baltimore who was also a published hymn writer rowed out under a flag of truce to one of the British ships to discuss a prisoner exchange with the British officers. He successfully negotiated the exchange, but because the bombardment of the Fort had commenced since he had boarded the ship, he wasn't allowed to sail back toward Baltimore. It was a fierce attack on Fort McHenry. The British Navy was the strongest in the world and had the most modern weapons of the time. They fired over 1,500 shots at Fort McHenry including the new Congreve Rockets that left red trails of sparks as they streaked through the sky. ("the rockets' red glare") The ship cannons shot bombs with delayed fuses that often exploded in the sky before they reached the target ("the bombs bursting in air").

The commander of Ft. McHenry was Major George Armisted. He realized the importance of this battle for the future of the young nation. So to inspire his troops, he ordered a huge battle flag to fly over the fort. It was 40 feet long and 32 feet wide with fifteen stars and fifteen stripes to represent the 15 young states. To give you a feel for the size of the flag, each red and white stripe was two feet tall.

The young lawyer and hymn writer was forced to watch the terrible bombardment from the

British ship in the harbor. As the sunset and night fell, he caught glimpses of the huge flag. Throughout the night it was often obscured by the smoke of the bombing. He watched the rockets red glare and the bombs bursting in air, and he wondered if there would even be a fort, or a flag, or a nation by the next morning. Because of the constant bombing, it was impossible to sleep, so early the next morning the young hymn writer, Francis Scott Key, rushed to the rail of the ship to see the damage. The early eastern sun lit the fort and as the gentle breeze blew the smoke away, there was silence, because the British had expended all their ammunition. He saw an amazing sight. There fluttering in the morning breeze was the huge flag—tattered from shrapnel, but still proud. He was so moved he wrote down a hymn on the back of a letter he had in his pocket. That hymn later became our national anthem. Listen to his words again: “O! Say can you see by the dawn’s early light; What so proudly we hailed at the twilight’s last gleaming. Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight, O’er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming. And the rockets’ red glare, the bombs bursting in air, Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there. Oh say does that star-spangled banner yet wave O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave?” That hymn was sung and played for years after the War of 1812, but it wasn’t until 1932 that it became our official national anthem. All of us who love America also love the flag and the national anthem, but notice the first stanza ends with a question. DOES the star-spangled banner yet wave over our land? It does now, but for how much longer? Remember the verse I quoted at the beginning of this message? “The wicked shall be turned into hell; and every nation that forgets God.” (Psalm 9:17)

Francis Scott Key’s question is answered in the rest of his hymn. The biggest problem with our national anthem is that we stop singing with the first stanza and most people don’t even know there are four full stanzas. You should read all of them, but the last stanza is the best one. It doesn’t end with a question; it ends with a powerful declaration. And it is a declaration that America needs to wake up and rediscover. Let’s let it speak for itself: “O! Thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand; Between their loved home and the war’s desolation! Blest with victory and peace, may the heav’n rescued land; Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation. Then conquer we must, when our cause is just, And this be our motto: ‘In God is our trust.’ And the star-spangled banner in triumph SHALL wave o’er the land of the free and the home of the brave!”

America, wake up! Wake up and rediscover this simple truth, that as long as our motto is: IN GOD IS OUR TRUST, then we will remain a great nation. Ronald Reagan hit the nail on the head when he stated, “If we ever forget that we are one nation under God, then we will be a nation gone under.”

America needs some modern Paul Reveres. We need to rouse our culture about the dangerous threats we face. Will you commit yourself today to do everything within your sphere of influence to see that we always remain one nation under God?

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes