

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles to the book of Psalms. Psalms chapter 33, verse 10. Tonight I'm going to talk about what's right with America.

A Sunday School teacher asked her student one day in class, "What was the name of the first man?" And the student held up his hand and said, "I know. The first man was George Washington." And the teacher said, "No, the first man was named Adam." And the little boy said, "Well, I guess if you're including foreigners, you're right."

America is first in the hearts of all of those who are here tonight. I want to say about America, America is not perfect, but I *love* America. And so many times messages you hear and even messages I've brought have been about some of the shortcomings and the weaknesses and the failings of America. But tonight I want to talk about what's right with America. You know, it's like Tyler, Texas. Tyler isn't perfect, but I love it. Green Acres Baptist Church is not perfect, but I love it. My wife Cindy is perfect. And I love her. And America is not perfect, but I love her.

Now I don't have a lot of room to move around and I need to stay close to my notes tonight, because I've got a lot of great quotes I want to read to you.

Only in America can you buy a pizza and get it to your house faster than an ambulance can get to your house. Only in America are there handicapped parking places in front of a skating rink. Think about that one. Only in America do we award someone \$3 million for spilling hot coffee in their lap. Only in America do we have labels on baby strollers to remind people to remove the baby before folding up the stroller. Only in America do drug stores make sick people walk all the way to the back of the store to get their prescriptions. Only in America do people order double cheeseburgers, large fries and a Diet Coke™. Only in America do the banks leave all their doors open and then they chain those little pens to the counter as if you're going to steal it. Only in America do we use answering machines to screen calls and then have Call Waiting so we don't miss a call from someone we didn't want to talk to in the first place. Only in America do we buy hot dogs in packages of 10 but the buns only come in packages of eight. Now, have you thought about that? Only in America do we use the word "politics" to describe the process so well; "poli" meaning "many," "tics" meaning "blood-sucking creatures."

America is not perfect, but I love it. I want us to look here at Psalms chapter 33, verse 10. The Psalmist makes a great statement about national commitment. And I hope to God it's true of America. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. The people He chose for his inheritance." I'm here to say tonight that America is blessed, because by and large, Americans claim that God is our Lord. Now I don't want you to get uptight or anything tonight, there's not an outline to fill in. But if you want to take some notes, I'll be saying six things tonight that I believe these six things at least are right with America.

Number one, the first thing that's right with America is:

America was first settled by people who were looking for religious freedom

It was first settled by people who came to these shores looking to express their religious faith. They weren’t trying to get away from something, they were trying to find something, and that’s freedom to worship. You all are familiar, of course, with the Pilgrims who came there to Plymouth Rock on the Mayflower. Just as they landed, they joined together in what is called the Mayflower Compact in 1620. These are the words of the Mayflower Compact:

“In the name of God, amen. Having undertaken for the glory of God and for the advancement of the Christian faith, do solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, covenant and combine ourselves together.”

Some of the first settlers to set foot on America soil said, “We came here for the glory of God, and for the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In 1643, just about 23 years later, as more and more people came to the shores and up in New England, they formed a confederation called The New England Confederation, the first constitution, written constitution, of groups meeting together in 1643, this is how the New England Confederation Constitution began:

“Whereas we all came into these parts with one and the same end and aim, namely to advance the kingdom of our lord Jesus Christ, and to enjoy the liberties of the gospel in purity and peace.”

Our spiritual forefathers came here to worship God and to serve the lord Jesus Christ. Now contrary to what some people would have you believe, Baptists don’t go all the way back to John the Baptist. In fact, Baptists really came out of the Protestant Reformation in Europe. They were first labeled in derision, “anabaptists.” “Ana-” meaning “again” because they were the first ones who read the New Testament in the Reformation and said that even infant baptism and sprinkling was not biblical, and so they started baptizing each other by immersion. And they called them “anabaptists” because they said, “You folks are baptizing each other again.” Because most them had been sprinkled as infants. And they were the targets if such intense religious persecution and hatred over in Europe that some of them were literally taken out and drowned in the rivers of Germany, because they practiced their faith. They said, “You Baptists want to be baptized? We’ll baptize you!” And they held them under until they died.

These are our spiritual forefathers that came to the shores of America so they could worship and practice their faith without fear of persecution. And so the first thing that’s right with America; it was settled by people looking for religious freedom.

The second thing that’s right with America is:

America was protected and directed by God from the very start

From the very beginning, it’s obvious that the Hand of God was on this nation, protecting us and directing us. And when you think about our nation compared to other civilizations, we are still a youngster. We are a young civilization.

Think about this: Thomas Jefferson, one of our founding fathers, the day he died, Abraham Lincoln was 17 years old. The day Abraham Lincoln died, Woodrow Wilson was 9 years old. The day Woodrow Wilson died, Ronald Reagan was 15 years old and Ronald Reagan is still around today. Basically four generations have come and gone. That's a short span when you think about the course of human history. But yet, from the very beginning, God was here directing and protecting.

You know, it's sad that no longer in our history books do we read about some of the exploits of George Washington before he became president. Up until just about 50 or 60 years ago, in every history book, there was an account of how George Washington was divinely protected by God before he became the president. In the French and Indian Wars, before the American Revolution, he was leading a battalion against the French and the Indians. And they were outmanned and outgunned and George Washington was one of the few on a horse. Seven hundred soldiers died in this particular battle. And finally, when all the dust settled and when all the smoke and the gunfire blew away, George Washington was the only one still on horseback. George Washington looked down in his vest and put his finger in four bullet holes in his vest. He wiped shrapnel of bullets out of his hair, and yet he was not scratched. Years later, he returned to that battle site and one of the Indian chiefs who had been one of the warriors that day said, "You are the man who was divinely protected by God." Because this Indian chief said, "I directed my warriors to aim their muskets at you because we knew if we would shoot the leader, the troops would disband." He said, "I myself believe I shot you 13 times. And yet you never died." That's the Hand of God protecting and directing from the very beginning, folks. But isn't it sad that we don't read about that in our history books anymore? God was there from the very start.

What a beautiful picture it is for us to see in our mind and also see on canvas George Washington kneeling in the snow at Valley Forge praying for God to intervene and to protect and guide them. And if you know anything about the Revolutionary War, there were times when they were barely hanging by a thread. You studied the Revolutionary War, the British army was the strongest, most well-equipped army in the world at that time, perhaps except for the French. And here we were, just a bunch of rag-tag farmers. Not trained. But God gave us victory.

It would be somewhat like Puerto Rico rebelling against the United States and being victorious. At that time the colonies were such a tremendous underdog, it was amazing that they would be victorious. So to me, my friends, it is a testimony that from the start, God's hand has been on America, protecting and directing.

Here's the third thing that I think is right with America:

America was founded by men who acknowledged God's supreme rule over man

They weren't perfect. They weren't all fired-up Christians, but they all to a man acknowledged that God was the supreme ruler over man and over government.

Sometime you ought to take a moment and read again the Declaration of Independence that was signed on July 4, 1776. Most of you are familiar with the prologue that says, "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with

certain inalienable rights that among them are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." They were so smart. They didn't say happiness. They said "the pursuit of happiness." You know why? Because these founders were so wise, they knew that you never catch it. You always pursue it. But that's the right of every person and they acknowledged that these rights: life, liberty, chasing after happiness, came from God. It does not come from human government. It comes from God and they acknowledged it and that's why they said on the next line, "...and that to secure or protect these rights, governments are instituted among men." They're saying, "We want the form of government whose job is to protect and to guard what the Creator has given to each one of us."

Now take a moment and read the Declaration of Independence, because what follows the prologue are about 15 or 16 charges against King George of Britain, but as they come to the final, the closing, the therefore, this is what they said. And they make two more references to God. "We therefore, the representatives of the United States of America in general congress assembled [listen to this] appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the rectitude of our intentions." They said, "We're appealing to you, England, declaring our independence, but we're also appealing mainly to the Supreme Judge of the World, God himself." And then, the very last line of the Declaration of Independence is this, "And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence." Divine means God. God's protection and Providence, we mutually pledge our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

I've seen a painting of the first Continental Congress. And many of you have heard the story of how they were discussing and they were debating about how the Declaration of Independence would be written. And finally, one of them suggested they all get on their knees and ask God what should be done. And these 55 signers of the Declaration of Independence all went to their knees as one man and began to pray and seek the wisdom of God.

Wouldn't it be wonderful today if our congress, wouldn't it be wonderful today if our Supreme Court, if they would just get on their knees like our forefathers did and say, "God, what do you want for this nation?"

Samuel Adams, who was called the Father of the American Revolution, wrote four years after the Declaration of Independence was signed this:

"The rights of the colonies as Christians may best be understood by reading and studying the teachings of Jesus Christ, the head of the Christian church, which are found to be clearly written and promulgated in the New Testament."

That's what Samuel Adams said, who was called the Father of the American Revolution. John Adams, who later became president, of course, had a son, John Quincy Adams, who became president later. And this is what John Quincy Adams said later about the Declaration of Independence. He said:

"From the time of the Declaration of Independence, the American people were bound by the laws of God and the laws of the gospel

of Jesus Christ, which they all acknowledge as the root of their conduct.”

The President of the United States in 1821, John Quincy Adams, said “We all came together to obey the word of God.” And so that’s the third thing that’s right. America was founded by men who acknowledged God’s supreme rule over man.

Here’s the fourth thing that’s right:

America’s government is patterned after Biblical principles

Now you may not know this. America’s government is patterned after biblical principles. Now let me give you a couple of scriptures. Do you know where the framers of our government got the idea of three branches of government? You understand that we have an Executive Branch, we have a Legislative Branch that makes laws. And we have a Judicial Branch. You look in the Bible, write this reference down: Isaiah 33:22. Those who formed our government referred to Isaiah 33:22 which refers to God in those same three aspects as our government. “For the Lord is our Judge [that’s judicial], our Lawgiver [that’s legislative], and our King [that’s executive]. It is He who will save us.” And when the framer of our government got together and said, “How can we best organize our government?” They looked to the word of God.

What about another concept in our government that was totally revolutionary at the time? You go over to Europe today and you find that the churches are still subsidized by the state, controlled by the state. That’s why they’re stone cold dead. When the people in a lot of European nations pay their taxes, part of that tax money is going to keep those churches running. And the founders of our country said, “That’s wrong, we don’t want to do that.” And so they came up with an idea that was totally foreign to any government in the world and in the history of the world. They said, “We want to make the church separate from the government and we want to keep the church exempt from taxation by the government.” Where did they get that idea? Are you ready for a reference? Ezra 7:24. Listen to this, “You are also to know that you have no authority to impose taxes, tribute or duty on any of the priests, Levites, singers, servants, or other workers at this house of God.” And that is a right that our forefathers discovered in the Bible and said, “Let’s make it a part of our government.” And so I’m here to tell you I’m glad that America formed our government based upon the word of God.

Here’s the fifth thing that I think is right with America:

American law guarantees our religious freedom

American law, now the key is law here, guarantees our religious freedom. Now you all know from having taken government in high school that there are basically four kinds of government. Well, actually five, I guess. There’s a monarchy, which is a rule by one. There’s an oligarchy that is a rule by a few. There is a democracy, which is a rule by the majority of the people. There is a republic, which is a rule by law. And then I guess the fifth is anarchy, which rule by nobody.

Now, when I talk about America, are we a republic or are we a democracy? Now I'm not talking about political parties here. Are we a democracy or are we a republic? Ladies and gentlemen, we are a republic. That's why we say, "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the [what?] Republic for which it stands." We are a republic, which elects its governmental leaders through a democratic process; the vote of the people. Now you've got to understand that what that means is, that the laws of our nation run our nation, the people don't. What if a majority of Americans suddenly decided that they didn't want the church to be tax-exempt? Could they just say, "We vote that it not be tax-exempt?" No. You know why? Because our law protects it. They would have to go through a very intricate process to change the law, because it's not "majority rules," it's the law of the land. But it is we the people who formed the law. You see, it is the American law that protects our religious freedom.

Isn't it interesting that in modern France they have had 15 different forms of government? Italy has had 48 different forms of government. But our form of government has stood for over 200 years. Like David said, "It's revolting." I got it. That's a good pun there, brother.

Let me read to you the First Amendment of the American Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Now, much has been made in the last few years about this so-called "wall of separation" between church and state. And I challenge any true student of history to study the basic background of where that comes from. That so-called "wall of separation" that was erected by our Constitution was never to protect the government from Christian influence. It was never intended to protect from our culture from Christian influence. It was always, and originally and always must be to protect the church from governmental influence and interference.

Dennis Parrott told me today something that upset me. He said that the Post Office here in Tyler didn't want to mail some of our mailings here from the church just simply because they did not believe it was some kind of religious purpose. I didn't like that. We'll get to the bottom of it and find out what the problem is. But I don't like any way, shape, form or fashion where the government starts trying to interfere with what we're trying to do as the church of the lord Jesus Christ. Because the Constitution says, "They shall not prohibit the *free* exercise thereof." Well, it is the law that protects us so that we can practice our religious freedom.

But here's the sixth thing that's right with America:

As Americans we are free to practice and to proclaim our faith

Are you ready for this? Regardless of what the Supreme Court says. Amen. We are free to practice and proclaim our faith regardless of what the Supreme Court says. Because you know what? The Supreme Court comes and goes. They change. Did you know that just a little over one hundred years ago, 1892, listen to what the Supreme Court wrote about Christianity in America. The U.S. Supreme Court said in 1892, "Our laws and our institutions must necessarily be based on and must include the teachings of the Redeemer of mankind. It is impossible for it to be otherwise. To this extent, our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian." That's what the Supreme Court said a little over a hundred years ago. And today, you and I know that they have totally reversed themselves in the last two years. In fact, in 1963, the U.S. Supreme

Court ruled that this school prayer, this simple 22-word school prayer, was deemed unconstitutional. Here's that prayer that is so controversial:

To the Almighty God,
We acknowledge our dependence
On Thee, we ask by blessings upon us,
Our parents, our teachers, and our country.

I mean, it didn't even say "In the name of Jesus." Just a simple prayer like that was ruled unconstitutional. But I'm here to tell you, folks, that I say without any fear whatsoever. When our U.S. Supreme Court or any other body says that we cannot pray publicly, it is time for us to lovingly practice civil disobedience. And say that, "You can't stop us from praying any place, any time."

Clarence Schultz, who is a retired Navy chaplain, had a column not long ago and this is what he said:

"With all the gangs and increasing violence in our schools, what in the world is happening to our kids today?" He says, "Let's see. I think it started when Madeline Murray O'Haire complained that she didn't want any prayer in our schools and we said, 'Okay.' Then someone said, 'You'd better not read the Bible in school. Because the Bible says 'Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not steal and love your neighbor as yourself.' And we said, 'Okay.'"

Dr. Benjamin Spock said we shouldn't spank our children when they misbehave because their little personalities would be warped and we might damage their self-esteem. And we said, "Whoa. An expert should know what he's talking about. So, okay, we won't spank them anymore."

Then someone said that teachers and principals better not discipline our children when they misbehave, and the school administrators said to the faculty member and the school that they'd better not touch a student when they misbehave because, "We don't want any bad publicity. We surely don't want to be sued." And so we said, "Okay."

Then someone said, "Let's let our daughters have abortions if they want, and they won't even have to tell their parents." And we said, "That's a great idea!"

And then some of our top elected officials said, "It doesn't matter *what* we do in private as long as we do our jobs." And agreeing with them we said, "It doesn't matter to me what anyone, including the president does in private, as long as I have a good job and the economy is good."

And the entertainment industry said, "Let's make TV shows and movies that promote profanity, violence and illicit sex. And let's record music that encourages homosexuality, rape, drugs, murder, suicide and satanic themes." And we said, "Oh, it's just entertainment. It has no adverse effects, and nobody takes it serious anyway. So, okay, go right ahead." Now we're asking

ourselves why our children have no conscience, why they don't know right from wrong, why it doesn't bother them to kill strangers, their classmates, and themselves.

But this retired Navy chaplain finished by saying, "If we would think about it long enough and hard enough, we ought to be able to figure it out. The Bible says, "You reap what you sow." Well, I'm here to tell you folks, regardless of what the Supreme Court says, we *can* pray, we *can* practice our faith, we *can* proclaim Jesus Christ.

In May of 1991 the Supreme Court of the State of California ruled that no longer could high school graduations have a prayer or a blessing. And there was a Riverside County high school graduation service in which they had always pronounced a prayer of blessing upon the graduating class, but the Supreme Court said, "You can't do that this year." And so at the graduation exercise, student after student came to the microphone and gave a little speech, but the final speech was the final one that got a standing ovation. One of the students walked to the microphone at the high school graduation, and on a pre-arranged signal, he sneezed. And as one voice, the entire class stood up and said together, "GOD BLESS YOU!" There was their benediction, there was their blessing.

Maybe you read Cal Thomas's column just June 9, 1999, just a few days ago. This actually happened in Calvert County Maryland. There was one particular student, 17-year-old Nick Becker, who had lodged a complaint through the ACLU about an invocation being prayed at that high school graduation service. The ACLU had come and threatened that if a prayer was prayed at that graduation, they would be the target of a lawsuit. And so finally, they sort of came up with a compromise that they would observe a moment of silence. 17-year-old Julie Shea, who was one of the class leaders, stood at the microphone and requested that the crowd of 4,000 people stand to their feet and observe a moment of silence. The crowd stood to their feet. And one single student began to recite the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father, who art in heaven..." By the time he got the second phrase, everyone in that crowd picked it up and began to pray it with him. Until as one mighty voice like rolling thunder across that auditorium they prayed the Lord's Prayer. And they sat down.

Well of course, that made Nick Becker, the high school student who was lodging the complaint all upset, so he made a public display. He stood up and walked out the back door. Of course, later when he tried to be readmitted to the graduation, he was not allowed to come back in because school policy said, "Once a student leaves an assembly, he cannot be readmitted in." So he never got his diploma.

I just want you to hear what Cal Thomas said about that action that was spontaneous. Listen to this:

Those Maryland parents and friends discovered an authority they had forgotten they had. Frustrated by the aimlessness of Washington and its inability to do anything except focus on self-preservation and survival of the politically unfit, this audience at the Calvert County graduation, decided to practice what "We the People" actually means. As their forefathers did with immoral and

tyrannical British rule, they stood up and spoke out for and to an almighty power higher than the State. When those Marylanders were told that they had no right to speak of God publicly, they chose to speak *to* God publicly.

Ladies and Gentlemen, whatever the Supreme Court says, they cannot stop us from practicing and proclaiming our faith wherever and whenever we choose to do so.

This summer at Youth Camp, I talked to the high schools students about what happened at Columbine High School on April 20. People in America are shaking their heads and scratching their heads and wringing their hands saying, "What's wrong?"

Donald Scott is the father of one of the little girls, Rachel Scott, who was shot dead. He testified before the United States Senate hearing on school violence. And let me read a portion of what he said to this group of senators:

The death of my wonderful daughter, Rachel Joy Scott, and the deaths of that heroic teacher and the other eleven children who died must not be in vain. Their blood cries out for answers.

I'm here today to declare that Columbine was not just a tragedy, it was a spiritual event that should be forcing us to look at where the real blame lies [He's talking to senators]. Much of that blame lies here in this room. Much of that blame lies behind the pointing fingers of the accusers themselves.

Donald Scott said, "I wrote a poem just four nights ago that expresses my feelings. This poem was written before I knew that I would be speaking here today." Here's his poem:

Your laws ignore our deepest needs
Your words are empty air.
You've stripped away our heritage
You've outlawed simple prayer.
Now gunshots fill our classrooms
And precious children die.
You seek for answers everywhere
And you ask the question why.
You regulate restrictive laws
Through legislative creed.
And yet you fail to understand
That God is what we need.

And then Donald Scott concluded by saying,

“When something like this happens, politicians look for some scapegoat like the NRA. They immediately seek to pass more restrictive laws that continue to erode our personal and private liberties. We don’t need more restrictive laws,” he said, “Eric and Dylan would not have been stopped by metal detectors. No amount of gun laws could have stopped someone who spends a whole year planning this type of massacre. The real villain lies within our own hearts. The young people of our nation hold the key. There is a spiritual awakening taking place that will not be squelched. As my son Craig lay under the table in the school library and saw two of his friends murdered before his very eyes, he did not hesitate to pray in school. I defy any law or politician or court to deny him that right. I challenge every person in America and around the world to realize that on April 20, 1999, at Columbine High School, prayer was brought back into our schools.”

As I said, we can practice our faith. We can proclaim our faith. And when somebody says you can’t do it, you just smile at them and you practice your faith. You proclaim your faith. America is great, because America is good. America has been blessed because America has submitted to God. And the Bible says, “Blessed is the nation whose god is the Lord.”

1993, about 36 of us were over in the former Soviet Union. We dressed up in red, white and blue. We were really missionaries forming a choir rather than a choir being missionaries. We were presenting sort of an Americana concert to try to reach people for Jesus. And the first night of the concert, Yalta concert hall was filled with about 3,000 people. We came to the song “America the Beautiful.” And we were not prepared for what happened. Because as we began to sing “America the Beautiful,” this crowd of people, who for seventy years had been under the fist of godless Communism, stood to their feet in honor of America. Of course we began to just lose it. It got so hard for us that we couldn’t even sing. And then another amazing thing happened. This crowd of people who had been under godless Communism began to sing “America the Beautiful.”

America is not perfect, but it is the greatest nation on earth. And the reason it is the greatest nation on earth is because our forefathers acknowledged God and we must not lose sight of their heritage.

Did you know what the tallest structure in Washington D.C. is? The Washington Monument. Nothing taller than the Washington Monument can be built. Do you know what is inscribed at the pinnacle of the Washington Monument in our nation’s capitol? These words from scripture: “Let God be praised.” There may be legislators that don’t know that. There may be presidents who don’t know that. There may be Supreme Court justices who don’t know that. But at the top, the pinnacle of our nation is, “Let God be praised.” America, let’s lift up our eyes and let’s praise God for the greatness and the blessings of this country.

OUTLINE

Six things that are right with America:

1. America was first settled by people who were looking for religious freedom
2. America was protected and directed by God from the very start
3. America was founded by men who acknowledged God's supreme rule over man
4. America's government is patterned after biblical principles
5. American law guarantees our religious freedom
6. As Americans we are free to practice and to proclaim our faith



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes