

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA**

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Scripture: Various

***"What Makes America Great?" (part 2)***

**A GREAT NATION INDEED!**

Last week we began to look at the question, *What Makes America Great?* President Trump used the slogan "Make America Great Again" for his presidential campaign. He continues to convey this message for his presidency. It has undoubtedly been effective regardless of what the pundits say. Everyone agrees, Clinton had no message. It was one of the reasons she lost the election.

But as noted last week some have taken issue with the phrase "Make America Great Again." They say that America was never great or that America is great now and that such a saying is going back into the past filled with injustice and inequality. And so there are those who say Trump is out of touch! Of course, what many forget is that both Presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton both used the same or similar message when they ran for president!

The point is America has always been great. And we began to look at why it is great last week. Let me give you the three reasons why our nation is great and then we will look at the implications for all of us.

First, it is great because of God. God is the one who causes the nations to rise and fall. **Ps. 75:7** "***But God is the Judge; He puts down one and exalts another.***" But how are we exalted in the Kingdom of God? Jesus told us in both **Mt. 20:26** & **Mk. 10:43** that if one wants to be great (in God's Kingdom) then one "***must be servant of all.***" So that means if a nation is to be great, it must see itself as a servant of the Lord and of others. Hence, it is why we read in **Ps. 33:12**: "***Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD.***"

Therefore, such a nation's government will need to be based on the principles of God's Word. And that is what we found last week. The preamble of Our Declaration of Independence contains its most famous words - "***We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.***" Such a statement highlights the understanding that our equality comes from God, and that our rights come from God. They really are not self-evident (otherwise everyone would know them) but like Jefferson originally wrote, they are "sacred" and reflect the biblical understanding that God is a good God! Of course, one could argue that they are self-evident once one understood the reality of God and His nature. But again, they flow first from understanding that there is a God who created all things and who loves us!

We further read, "***That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.***" So there is an acknowledgment of our dependence on God *and then* there is an acknowledgment that governments are to serve the people. This is a radical departure from all government in human history! It is why in his November 19, 1863 **Gettysburg Address** President Lincoln declared that "***this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.***"

We know that the founders did not have in mind a generic God or the Muslim God or even the Jewish understanding of God. For when the **Second Continental Congress** convened in Philadelphia on May 10, 1775, with John Hancock serving as President, they not only authorized the formation of the Continental Army, and named George Washington the Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army on June 16, 1775, but they also called for

days of Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer on July 20, 1775 and again on May 17, 1776, that the Nation: "through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, obtain his pardon and forgiveness; humbly imploring his assistance...And it is recommended to Christians, of all denominations, to assemble for public worship, and to abstain from servile labour and recreations on said day."

And so that leads us to the second reason why America is Great – it was founded upon the principles of God's Kingdom. What are these principles that undergird our nation's founding and its government? 1) Acknowledgment of God, and ultimately the Lord Jesus Christ, 2) that our rights come from God and that government is created to serve its citizens, not to lord it over them, and 3) that in doing so the role of government to protect not only its citizens but the rights of its citizens - Hence our Bill of Rights.

And even the idea of being able to freely choose what philosophy or religion you will follow is biblical. God when He delivered His people from their bondage in Egypt said to them through Moses in **Dt. 30:19-20**: "*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, 20by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.*"

But there is one final component that we cannot overlook when speaking of our nation's founding. And this is the third reason why America is great. You see, you can have the right understanding of good government, you can know its role and purpose, you can have the right understanding of who God is and how we are to fear the Lord, but unless we put those principles into practice, it won't make a difference. We have to follow through with action if we are to see the blessing of The Lord.

It is why President John Adams said to our military on October 11, 1798, "*...we have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.*"

### **PUTTING THE KINGDOM OF GOD INTO ACTION**

And so when looks at our history, it is only when our citizens have put into practice the ideals of our nation's founding (ie. the principles of God's Word) that we have seen spiritual and moral growth, and greater equality, prosperity, and fairness. It is only then that we have seen the values of God's Kingdom reign. Hence, when we look at our history we find three and some would argue four - great awakenings or revivals, and all four have resulted in great good.

The **First Great Awakening** occurred in the 1730's and 40's and set the stage for the birth of our republic and constitutional government based on the principles of God's Word.

The **Second Great Awakening** occurred following the American Revolution and into the 1820's an increase in foreign missions as well as hundreds of other national and local organizations devoted themselves to tackling the social ills of society. Some notable examples included the New York Peace Society (1815), the American Anti-slavery society (1833), the American Temperance union (1826) and the Hartford Asylum for the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb (1816). During this period hundreds of colleges and secondary schools were founded by churches or church leaders.

But what this great awakening did was to set the stage for the abolition of slavery. And although it precipitated a terrible Civil War, the good that came out of that war was the ending of African-American slavery. The Thirteenth through Fifteenth Amendments to the U. S. Constitution were added as a result: to end slavery (13<sup>th</sup> - 1865), to provide equal protection to all that were defined as citizens (14<sup>th</sup> - 1868), and to grant the vote to former slaves (15<sup>th</sup> - 1870).

Following the Civil War, there was yet another revival in our land, the **Third Great Awakening** from which missionary zeal gripped our nation's college students and more organizations were founded to address the growing nation's ongoing social problems. Full-rights for women, better treatment of the mentally challenged, and work for the protection of children enabled the establishment of child labor laws and laws to protect women in the workplace. It also set the stage for our nation's strength to thwart both Nazism and communism. In fact, at the height of the Cold War, "*In God We Trust*" was formally established as the national motto of the United States of America on July 30, 1956 under President Dwight D. Eisenhower. The phrase appears to have originated in "The Star-Spangled Banner", written by Francis Scott Key during the War of 1812. The fourth stanza includes the phrase, "*And this be our motto: 'In God is our Trust.'*" The first circulating currency to bear the phrase In God We Trust was the one two-cent coin of 1864 and later all silver and gold coins the following year in 1865. I might add, that the belief and expression "*Nation under God*" in the Gettysburg Address later became part of our Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

While many debate whether or not it was as significant as the Three Great Awakenings mentioned above, a **fourth revival** occurred in the 1960s and 70s with the rise of the evangelical and charismatic movements and the moral majority. Many believe this set the stage for the election of Ronal Reagan as president and the slowing down of the liberal trends of the 1960's and 70s.

### **AMERICA NEEDS ANOTHER GREAT AWAKENING!**

And now we come to today. I think we can all agree we are in desperate need of another revival in this land. And this is where you and I come in. As goes the church, so goes the nation. When we speak of our nation's ideals and founding, it is more than just speaking of biblical principles, it is speaking of and from Whom, those principles arise. They arise from God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They arise specifically from the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, we cannot truly understand the principles of God's Word and we cannot put them into action unless we are in a personal relationship with Christ. There is a reason why **the vision of our church is *transforming lives through a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.*** Knowing Him is the only hope for our nation and the world.

Jesus said, "***to much is given, much is required.***" As American believers we have been given much. He told us to let our light shine (really His light) so that others may see our good works and glorify the Father. We are to point others to Christ. And we do that through our love – love in action. Jesus said in **Jn. 13:35**, that "***all men will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.***"

How do we shine this light? How do we love? One day at a time, and one person at a time.

Our Father's commands to love one another are clear:

- ***"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37, 39).***
- ***"Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13).***
- ***"Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection" (Romans 10:9–10).***
- ***"Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace" (2 Corinthians 13:11).***
- ***"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).***

Such love is vital to the blessing of God upon a community and a country. When we love as Christ loves, we show the way to the forgiveness and freedom found only in Him.

Archibald MacLeish, who received the Pulitzer Prize three times, was profoundly correct when he said: ***"There are those, I know, who will say that the liberation of humanity, the freedom of man and mind, is nothing but a dream. They are right. It is the American dream."***

Even more, it is our Father's dream. How will you help to fulfill it today?

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!