

A Certain Destiny Proverbs 14:34

I would like to begin by first of all saying our pledges this morning.

The pledge to the American flag

The pledge to the Christian flag

The pledge to the Bible

At the end of the service we will be singing one of my favorite patriotic songs “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee”. Let me give you a little history about the song from this book *Then Sings My Soul* (pg. 105).

This Wednesday, July 4, 2012, we celebrate the 236th birthday of the founding of this nation. In the relative scheme of history, we’re still a young nation compared to other nations of the world past and present, yet ours is a rich and godly heritage. Since the inception of this great nation over two centuries ago we have experienced quite a number of growing pains. We have encountered several major wars where our military has been called on to aid in defending against global hostility. We have endured our own internal strife when civil war threatened to split us apart. We have, as some of you know firsthand, weathered economic pandemonium through the Great Depression along with periods of economic recession.

The fortitude and stability of the nation to survive each crisis has come on the backs of its people and the knees of its churches. That we are a nation founded on godly principles can be seen in the Declaration of Independence – “**When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.**

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.”

The clarity of our godly heritage lies in those words. They understood that the laws of nature exist at the hand of God. They also understood that the laws of God were to govern mankind. They understood the link between God the Creator and mankind. Along with certain political rights they felt were being impinged upon, they also felt that the opportunity to exercise freedom of religion was also being undermined.

This upcoming election in November has all the earmarks of being an historic event of epic proportions that will further define us as a nation. While pundits can claim partisan issues related to this election continue to divide the nation and are at the heart of heated debate, clearly the issues at hand and the policies being drafted I believe are, at their core, based on Biblical principles, but they don’t want to believe that.

For example, healthcare reform isn’t just about providing benefits to everyone regardless of whether they can afford it or not, but rather about the usurpation of religious rights on faith groups who are mandated to go against their own religious beliefs in order to comply with provisions of the plan. It is a further erosion of religious freedom.

That there must be further adaptation and tolerance of groups whose lifestyles go against Biblical mandates is another example. Lobbyists are pushing to have homosexuality taught in all private schools. **Why is it they don’t want religion in government but they want government in religion?**

Some of the political issues that will be topics of debate during this election cycle are at their very core issues of faith. **How much longer can our**

nation sustain repeated blows to its historically biblical foundation before it will crumble? At stake are not political ideologies but rather Christian Principles. Please turn if you will to your Bibles and to the Old Testament to **Proverbs 14:34. “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.”**

In recognition of the founding of our nation as we celebrate July 4th this week, I have chosen this passage for today because in this one verse we see both the problem of our nation and its answer.

Consider with me these five thoughts:

The challenge for a nation to be faithful

The curse when a nation falls

The Constitution our nation framed

The cue to our nation’s falter

The call to our nation to follow

I. THE CHALLENGE FOR A NATION TO BE FAITHFUL – v. 34a

The writer here has in mind the scope of an entire nation, not just one pocket of people within the nation. It is advice for young and old, rich and poor, male and female, athletic and well, not so athletic, politicians and non-politicians, military and civilian, university professors, bank tellers, shop owners, stay at home moms, truck drivers, retired folks and well, as I said, it’s for an entire nation – all the people within her borders without exception.

Now notice as well that he is not singling out just the nation of Israel alone, as if should any other nation desire to be righteous that they would not receive God’s blessing. Any nation or all nations would be blessed by God who are faithful to godly principles.

Notice first an essential character.

A. An Essential Character

We begin with the fundamental premise for which we were all called – to be righteous, to live godly,

to pursue holiness after the pattern of God Himself. **Leviticus 11:44-45 “I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground. I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.”**

In Peter’s first epistle he summarizes it for all believers not just Israel – **“be holy because God is holy.”** The idea is that the people within the nation are to desire to live godly. We need a revival in this nation, a revival first within the hearts of all those who say they are Christian to live according to the principles of God’s Word, to be a shining light of God’s grace, recipients of His blessings so that secondly, there is a revival of those in this nation who need God. God will not bless a nation when its people intentionally circumvent His commands.

Now let’s define righteousness as it’s used here. It simply means being in a right relationship with God. It does not mean to be morally perfect, but rather has the idea that we are doing our best to live God’s way – that there is personal devotion to Him, a solid faith in His promises, and moral integrity.

I believe that when the boatload Mayflowerites stepped onto the shores of Cape Cod, they had that desire. Listen to the opening portion of the Mayflower Compact written November 1620 and explain to me if you don’t agree that they came for the purpose of pursuing righteousness. **“In the Name of God Almighty, we whose names are underwritten... having undertaken for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith.”**

Those early settlers believed three things.

1. They believed the new nation would glorify God.
2. They believed the new nation would extend Christianity, that is “the advancement of the Christian faith.” **How else could it be done if not through the righteous living?**

3. They believed their authority was from God. The colony was planted “in the Name of the Almighty God.”

In 1643 as more people came to these shores they formed what was known as the New England Confederation. “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...”

That sounds a lot like our mission to gather, grow and go. *Their aim was to live godly, grow spiritually, worship collectively, go aggressively and ensure that generations to come would do the same.* We couldn’t ask for a greater heritage on which to build a new nation – a nation that is one under God. They assumed that the sovereignty of God ruled over them. If God was sovereign over them, then as humble citizens of His Kingdom (both here on earth and in heaven), they were willing to obey His commands and live under the rules of His kingdom. These forefathers came to this land because of what John Phillips calls an “unquenchable thirst for God.”

Our verse should be a wakeup call to America. The character of a nation is to be righteous, to live as best we can by following the commands of God. When that happens, a nation experiences an exalted condition.

B. An Exalted Condition

Righteousness has a beneficial result. That nation who is righteous will be exalted and remember it is God who exalts. That simply means to lift up. God favors it because they favor God.

Psalm 33:12 “Blessed is the nation, whose God is the Lord.” It’s happy. It’s content. There is joy when a nation follows God. There is peace.

If a nation is to be blessed, God and government are inseparably bound. Our forefathers understood

that. A long time ago we lost our way as a nation. The pursuit of God became secondary and people began to clamor for separation of church and state. We forgot how important it was that God and government are to be fused together. They said the two should not be mixed. Keep God out of politics, but it doesn’t work that way. When a nation forgets God, sin runs rampant. Just look at Old Testament Israel.

An essential character of any nation is to be righteous. When you go back to the Old Testament and investigate the commands that God gave to Israel to live by, He did not establish two sets of guidelines for them to follow – one to govern the political aspects of the nation and another to govern the religious aspects. They were inseparably fused together into one set of commandments that would govern their nation all with the design to live righteously before God. Even before the establishment of the law, Moses was told by his father-in-law to find trustworthy, righteous men to handle the civil matters of the people.

For us to be a nation that is again truly blessed by God we must as a nation find our way back to Him by living righteously not just giving rhetoric to His commands. ***They are absolute not arbitrary. His commands are just not just if we want to obey when we feel like it or only the ones we want to.***

Righteousness has a beneficial result. The nation is exalted by God. Righteous living is a challenge for any nation to be faithful.

II. THE CURSE WHEN A NATION FALLS – v. 34b

A nation falls by its sinful character.

A. Its Sinful Character

Sin is the opposite of righteousness. Sin is the actions that are contrary to the character of God and to the commands of God. It is disobedience. It is

rebellion. Sin is the character of the people who aren't faithful to God.

The Lord and a couple of His angels came down and visited Abraham one day. They were headed over to Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord shared His intention of destroying the city because of its rampant sin. Abraham's nephew Lot lived there. He wanted to save Lot so he asked how many righteous people it would take to spare the city from destruction. 50? 40? 30? 20? 10? 5? Without God there is sinful character. There is a sorrowful condition when sin is a nation's character.

B. Its Sorrowful Condition

When a nation is characterized by sin, the curse of God is on it and will incur His wrath. He desires a righteous nation, one that follows Him. Read Amos sometime and see the nations God was pouring out His wrath on because of their blatant disobedience.

Sin is a disgrace to any nation. It brings shame and dishonor to any people. Sin tarnishes its reputation. Open sin becomes a chain of bondage to that nation. The more a nation sins or allows sin, the greater is their bondage. What's illogical is that a nation who begins to tolerate sin really believes that it is giving its people freedom, liberty, when in reality it is not freedom but bondage. Christ came to liberate people from the bondage of sin by giving them true freedom of the heart, freedom from sin.

There is a curse when a nation falls to sin. History is replete with examples of nations who have been disgraced by sin and no longer exist. **Proverbs 13:6** says that **"wickedness overthrows a nation."** A nation that sins will be overthrown, not that a nation will be overthrown by a nation that sins.

Understand what the simple message is here. If a nation follows a path of obedience, it will be exalted by God. If a nation follows a path of disobedience, it will be cursed by God.

We have looked at the challenge of a nation to be righteous.

We have looked at the curse on a nation who sins. Now, let's consider the Constitution our nation framed.

III. THE CONSTITUTION OUR NATION FRAMED

First of all let's look at its founders.

A. Its Founders

There were 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence. They understood the cost of freedom. **How many of us truly know that freedom costs something?** Those of you who have been a part of our military know the cost associated with freedom. Those of you who have fought in times of war especially know the cost and sacrifice associated with freedom. I don't really know about such things. I only know about it from reading books or hearing stories or seeing pictures of row upon row of military gravesites at places like Arlington Cemetery. I'll never know the anguish and fear of battle or the endless hours of training or the deafening sound of mortar shells exploding or guns firing. I don't know firsthand the loss of someone whose life was taken by gunshot or shrapnel or bayonet or the horrors of imprisonment.

How many know about the great sacrifice the co-signers made for freedom?

5 were captured and tortured

12 had their homes ransacked and burned

2 lost sons in the war of independence

1 had 2 sons captured

9 fought and died from wounds or the hardship of war

Carter Braxton, a wealthy planter and trader saw his ships destroyed by the British navy. He sold his home to pay the debts and died poor.

Thomas McKean was constantly hounded by the British and forced to frequently move his family to keep them safe. He served congress without pay and died poor.

Thomas Nelson's home was seized by the British at the Battle of Yorktown and used as a command post. It was later destroyed and he died bankrupt. There is a cost associated with freedom and our founders were willing to pay its price no matter what the cost was to them, even though it was great. Freedom was worth that cost.

Here are some other facts about our founders you may not have known, facts that reflect their godly heritage.

Of the 56 signers of the Declaration, 27 had degrees from seminaries.

Reverend John Witherspoon oversaw the printing of the Bible in Congress in 1782.

Charles Thompson, Secretary of Congress, was responsible for the first translation of the Bible in America and published the Thompson Bible.

Benjamin Rush founded the first Bible Society in America, the Philadelphia Bible Society.

The signers of the Declaration of Independence were responsible for starting 121 Bible Societies in eight years.

Francis Hawkins was responsible for printing the first hymnbook in America.

As John Adams and Benjamin Rush sat next to each other during the drafting of the Declaration of Independence in which 56 men proposed to overthrow the most powerful nation on earth at the time, Rush leaned over and asked, "John, do you think we can really win this conflict?" Adams replied, "Yes, if we repent of our sins and rely on God."

I think they clearly understood the principle of this verse that **"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people."**

That is a brief look at the founders of our nation. Now let's look at its foundation.

B. Its Foundation

Concerning the exchange between Rush and Adams, Rush later wrote in his diary what Adam's said in order to teach others that it was possible to be godly and in politics, that those two were not incompatible.

In 1813 John Adams wrote a letter in which he said "the principles on which the fathers achieved independence were the principles of Christianity. I will now avow that I did believe and now believe that those principles of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the general attributes and characteristics of God."

Let me quote from an article written by Kirby Anderson, president of Probe Ministries, Intl. and who holds a Masters in Science from Yale and a Masters in Government from Georgetown. He's a pretty smart guy.

The article is titled "The Declaration and Constitution: Their Christian Roots."

"Jefferson's initial draft left God out of the manuscript entirely except for a vague reference to 'the laws of nature and of nature's God.' Yet, even this phrase makes an implicit reference to the laws of God.

The phrase 'laws of nature' had a fixed meaning in 18th century England and America. It was a direct reference to the laws of God in a created order as described in John Locke's *Second Treatise on Civil Government* and William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*.

What Jefferson was content to leave implicit, however, was made more explicit by the other members of the committee. They changed the language to read that all men are 'endowed by their Creator' with these rights. Later, the Continental Congress added phrases which further reflected a theistic perspective. For example, they added that they were 'appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the rectitude of our intentions' and that they were placing 'firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence.'"

While there are some scholars who claim that documents produced during this time by those who framed the constitution have no support to substantiate their biblical foundation, clearly they are mistaken. There is plenty of

evidence that suggests otherwise. Their writings clearly link the tenets of the Bible with the founders and the foundation of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

In 1821 John Quincy Adams wrote “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. We all came together to obey the Word of God.”

“Righteousness exalts a nation.”

Remember I said earlier that *if a nation is to be blessed, God and government are inseparably bound.*

We as a nation have deviated from their intent. So for a moment let me discuss the cue to our nation’s falter.

IV. THE CUE TO OUR NATION’S FALTER

Sin destroys a nation and we are seeing that take place before our very eyes in this nation.

H.A. Ironside has said “When pride and vanity, coupled with greed and cruelty have been in the ascendant, the hour of humbling was not far away.”

In 1890, Frances Bellamy, who served on the staff of a kids magazine suggested the creation of a pledge.

In October 1892, President Benjamin Harrison proclaimed the first use of the pledge during a Columbus Day observance in schools.

“I pledge allegiance to the flag and to the republic for which it stands; one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

On June 14, 1924, an amendment on Flag Day was adopted so that the wording was changed to “the flag of the United States of America.”

In 1954, Congress jointly amended the pledge to add the words “under God.” As President

Eisenhower was signing the amendment he said, “This shows the transcendence of religious faith in America’s heritage and in her future.”

It has remained our Nation’s pledge until the 9th Circuit Court ruled it to be unconstitutional June 26, 2002 because of the words “under God.”

Here is a further erosion of righteousness in our nation. Since 1963 the Supreme Court took prayer out of the schools; Bibles were removed from the classroom; the 10 commandments were removed from the walls of the schools and public buildings. In 1973 abortion was legalized.

A teenaged girl wrote an essay for a class on the man she most admired and received an “F” for writing about the life of Jesus. “It was unacceptable in public schools.” The court upheld the ruling. A Gallup Poll that was done in 2002 showed that students between the ages of 12-18 who were involved in some type of prostitution to support a drug or alcohol addiction would fill the Rose bowl, the Cotton bowl, the Sugar bowl, the Orange bowl and the Fiesta bowl. In case you are wondering, those are college football stadiums. That’s close to ½ million kids.

1 million girls will become pregnant under the age of 17 outside of marriage and ½ will get an abortion, 40% of girls age 14 will get pregnant before their 19th birthday.

Nearly 60% of evangelical Christian kids between the ages of 12-18 are sexually active.

66% of America’s students have reported using illegal drugs or alcohol.

Since 1976 child abuse is up 240%.

The corruption and convictions of public officials is up 450% since 1973.

Since 1962 reported child sexual abuse is up 1,375%.

Only 4% of teens today claim to be Christian.

Our elected officials lie under oath, cheat on their families and are convicted of ethics violations, yet many remain in office. We are faltering as a nation.

A recent Focus on the Family article stated that atheists are seeking to have a chaplain appointed to the military. They want to have a voice for the non-believer. Opponents to this charade exclaim that “if atheism is the absence of religious belief, why would they want someone who doesn’t believe in God, in any form, to assume a role within their ranks?”

Our nation is on a quick decline when it no longer stands on the biblical principles on which this nation was founded. If we continue on this path of denying our biblical roots and clamor for a separation between God and government then like other nations that have come before us, we too will no longer experience the blessings of God through His exalting us, but instead will experience that sin disgraces the nation, even when there are those within that still strongly adhere to His commands.

“Sin is a disgrace to any people.” Yet they claim its freedom.

We have considered the challenge to be faithful.
We have considered the curse when we fall.
We have considered the Constitution framed.
We have considered the cue that falters.
We conclude with the call to follow.

V. THE CALL TO OUR NATION TO FOLLOW – II Chronicles 7:14

Let me share a statement by the father of one of the teens killed in the Columbine massacre that took place 13 years ago. He read this at a hearing before the U.S. Senate. **“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. Much of that blame lies here in this room. Much of that blame lies behind the pointing fingers of the accusers themselves. 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.”**

Your laws ignore our deepest needs
Your words are empty air.
You’ve stripped away our heritage
You’ve outlawed simple prayers.
Now gunshots fill our classrooms
And our 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!
If that was true then, how much more so today?

II Chronicles 7:14 “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.”

There are 5 calls to consider with 3 responses.
There is a call to the godly of the nation.
There is a call for the nation to be humble.
There is a call for the nation to pray.
There is a call for the nation to seek God.
There is a call for the nation to repent.
Then God will hear our prayer.
Then God will forgive our sin.
Then God will heal our land.

If we again want to see God’s blessings poured out on this nation, to see Him exalt this nation, we must heed these calls.

We must ask if we are righteous in His eyes, obeying his Word and not following our own way.
We must humble ourselves before Him.
We must be people of prayer who take seriously the admonition of Paul to pray for those in authority over us.
We must as a nation begin to seek God again.
We must as a nation repent for our nation’s sins.

John Phillips writes that “the handwriting is on the wall. What the United States of America needs is another Holy Spirit revival that will put conviction back into the pulpits and pews; conscience back into government; common sense, decency, and discipline back into the schools; integrity back into business; commitment back into marriage; shame back into sin; courage back into the courts; character back into our leaders; safety back into the streets; purpose back into our youth; and God back into our national consciousness. Such a revival is the answer to our shame.”

Let me share this video clip from Focus on the Family.

There is hope for America. That hope is found in Jesus Christ. He counted the cost for our spiritual freedom and came to deliver us from the bondage that held us captive. As we celebrate the independence of our nation 236 years ago, what a fitting day to remember the freedom that was fought for and won by our founder – Jesus Christ as we take together communion. **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.”** Pray hard for America.