

A Nation in Need

Proverbs 14:34

Please join me in the wisdom book of Proverbs this morning.

Proverbs 14:34

Let's read it together.

“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.” (NIV)

The Amplified reads like this: “Uprightness and right standing with God (moral and spiritual rectitude in every area and relation) elevate a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.”

Notice that the implication from the Amplified is that right standing is not only internal dealing with character but also external dealing with a person's relationships.

There is a parallel verse found in Proverbs 29. Proverbs 29:2 “When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan.”

That's true in the home, in business, and in government. There is tremendous joy when a ruler follows godly principles. There is a great sense of peace among people, an ease about them when there is godly leadership. On the other hand there is great pain and fear when the wicked rule. It's like carrying a great burden or weight all the time. Life just seems heavy. It is a great oppression. Work is drudgery and toil. Our strength is sapped from us.

I can't think of a better passage than the one we will consider today that underscores our need as a nation. To understand where we need to go we need to understand from where we came. Our founding fathers were intentional in their desire and pursuit of establishing a new nation by following godly principles and laying down the groundwork on how our country was to be governed. They had a clear understanding of what would happen should the nation stray from those guiding principles. From this passage I want to discuss:

A nation that is righteous
A nation that is a reproach

A nation that is repentant

I. A NATION THAT IS RIGHTEOUS

Let's take another brief tour in history as a reminder of our godly heritage and the commitment our founding fathers had to pursuing a nation under God and His Word.

About the Declaration, President John Quincy Adams wrote sometime after his presidency: “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.”

He stated that the root of conduct should be anchored in the Word of God. In other words, God's Word should be what guides us in our daily conduct, both in what we do and in how we treat one another. He went on to say that as a nation we should all obey God's Word. Think of the difference in this nation if that was practiced.

Jesus put it this way: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.

Adams believed that God's Word and His commands should impact daily life so that beliefs are integrated with behavior. In other words there shouldn't be a difference between how you act in private and how you act in public. As you read through the New Testament you see that in the gospels as Jesus taught or in reading the letters of Paul or the writings of Peter and John.

Unfortunately there are many who seem to think that it's okay to separate the two. One of the VP candidates has stated that he has learned how to separate his private life from his public or political life. Both VP candidates are Catholic which holds strongly to the sanctity of life and is against abortion. Yet one believes that he can hold to that doctrine as a Catholic all the while supporting abortion in his public life. I'm going to go ahead and say it: That's hypocrisy. James said, if you know to do the right thing and don't do it, it is sin.

When Daniel was confronted with that kind of compromise he chose remain faithful to God and resolved not to defile himself.

And when the Apostles were hauled before the Sanhedrin and told to be quiet about Jesus, they said it's better to obey God than man. The religious rulers said in essence they could keep their faith, but they had to live it privately. That my friend is what many would want of us. You can keep your faith, just keep it to yourself.

Live your faith at home or church, but it's okay to compromise out in the world.

This election is more than just about jobs, the economy, or immigration reform or any of the other political issue. It is about a way of life that was deemed the core of how we should live through what they believed to be an inalienable right. It is about being able to continue to openly live out our faith in public without fear or shame or reprisal.

Of all the people in this great nation, we as Christians should understand that righteousness exalts a nation while sin is a reproach to any people. There is a direct correlation between the absence of prayer, Bible reading, and the Ten commandments and student behavior.

In his farewell address to the nation President Washington remarked: "Do not let anyone claim tribute of American patriotism if they ever attempt to remove religion from politics."

I think if he were to wander the halls of congress today and listen to the debates over religious liberties he would call such actions and persons unpatriotic.

Patriot Patrick Henry who is famous for his "Give me liberty or give me death" speech is also quoted as saying "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded not by religionists but by Christians, not on religion but on the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Church, when are we as believers going to re-engage with the culture to take back what was believed to be necessary for this nation to functioning properly?

Responding to a concern by Danbury Baptist Church about the potential of government's infringement on religious liberty, Thomas Jefferson wrote: "The First Amendment has created a wall of separation between church and state, but that wall is a one directional wall, it keeps the government from running the church, but it makes sure that Christian principles will always stay in government." We have seen an infringement on that right.

It is quite obvious from these and many other historical documents that the founders of our nation, including the early settlers to this continent had in mind that God would have and should have a central place in its founding, its framing and in its following. That God's Word should be the guiding principles in how we live and interact with each other. If this nation was to last its people and its government must live by godly principles. I believe that the Scopes monkey trial of 1925 was the public beginning of denouncing the authority of God's Word. Then in 1962 and 1963 the Supreme Court removed prayer and the reading of the Bible in classrooms followed in 1980 with their decision to have the 10 Commandments removed. The authority of God's Word has been challenged.

Systematically righteousness is being removed and we are witness to its ramifications.

Without mandating morally biblical behavior the founding fathers wanted citizens to live by a code of laws that were greatly influenced by the Bible.

Government wants to throw more money into programs to re-educate and rehabilitate hoping that will curb the rise of crime, but I'm here to say that our verse holds the key to any lasting change – it is righteousness that exalts a nation.

A. Such A Nation Is Righteous In Its Behavior

I think most of you will remember a day when even if someone didn't go to church there was still a respect even an underlying belief that they should try to live by the 10 commandments. People knew the difference between right and wrong. They knew about moral character. But that's no longer the case. Right is now wrong and wrong is now right. America is losing its moral conscience.

In his book *Impossible People*, Os Guinness writes: “The West has lost its soul. It is no longer distinguished and admired for its ideals it once had, for these have either vanished or are viewed only as the spurious claims of a hypocrite. Increasingly now, if the West is admired, it is only for its technological prowess, its economic prosperity and its military power, all of which will soon fade too. Yet while the West is no longer Christian in its foundation, it is not yet fully non-Christian (secular or pagan) either, though the post-Christian phase may soon reach the point of no return.

“The blunt truth is that secularism and other alternative philosophies that claim to replace the Jewish and Christian roots have no adequate root system of their own with which to nourish the ideals. Witness, for example, the inability of the new atheists to provide for an adequate foundation for such notions as the sanctity of life, the dignity of the individual person, the responsibility of freedom, justice, equality and universality – let alone the antidote to the mounting inequalities and polarizations in society. Once rooted in the belief that every last human is precious and has an inalienable dignity because he or she is made in the image of God, and that freedom is the gift through which humans most resemble their Creator, such biblical roots have been cut and their fruits are withering.”

Even in the mid-1800s Russian author and philosopher Fyodor Dostoyevsky understood this when he wrote: “The West has lost Christ, and that is why it is dying; that is the only reason.”

The relative truth of human secularism has supplanted the absolute truth of God’s Word. We not only need God in America again, we need godly men and women in America who will live out godly principles, who live God’s Word with conviction instead of compromise or complacency.

Righteousness exalts a nation in its behavior, but whose righteousness? And who defines what righteous behavior is? The secularist would say they do. It’s what they believe at the time and it can change tomorrow. The God follower should say that the authority comes from God, but as I said a

moment ago, His authority has been brought into question even in many churches. So man’s authority has supplanted God’s. We have ousted God and made our own tower of Babel. We have stopped believing that God made this nation and have become like Nebuchadnezzar and claimed it as our own doing. We now make the laws not God. But it wasn’t so from the beginning.

From the opening words of Scripture we come to understand who defines righteousness. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” In that statement alone we see the sovereign power of God and the sovereign authority of God. His power and authority are not limited to heaven alone but to that which He would create on earth as well. He is the Creator not only of nature’s laws but of man’s as well. He is both its Author and Authority.

Our righteousness doesn’t measure up to His. We are told that our righteousness is like filthy rags in comparison to God’s standard of righteousness. We have all missed the mark.

Isaiah 64:6 “We’re all sin-infected, sin-contaminated. Our best efforts are grease-stained rags. We dry up like autumn leaves – sin-dried, we’re blown off by the wind.”

The Message

Micah 6:8 gives us God’s standard “He has showed you, O man, what is good and what does the Lord require of You? To act justly and love mercy and to walk humbly with Your God.”

In several of his letters Paul gives us a road map of what righteousness looks like. If we have no righteousness of our own, we must get it from somewhere or someone and that through Christ.

II Corinthians 5:17, 21

Colossians 3:1-17 What righteous behavior looks like.

Now when Solomon wrote his Proverbs, the kind of righteousness that he was referring to was not a righteousness that saves. The righteousness he is speaking of is the result of that faith. It is referring to right living or godly living.

Righteousness cannot be regulated by laws or policies, it must be lived out and lived out consistently with conviction through the

empowering and enabling work of God's Spirit who lives in the believer. Righteousness is not a suit that you take out of the closet one day a week or at certain times and when the event is over is hung back up so it stays nicely pressed and clean. Every day we rub shoulders with the world, a world that wants us to conform to its standards by compromising God's. Would you agree that when you compromise in one area, even if it's just a small thing, it will be easier to compromise something else? Pretty soon the line between what is right and wrong are so blended it's hard to tell the two apart.

Paul made it very clear. He listed characteristics of the new nature that were to be put off and then listed characteristics that were to be put on. They are the antithesis of the old nature. There was no cross over. What we put on is righteous behavior, characteristics our nation desperately needs. We point the way to what this behavior should look like

Paul says that letting the Word of Christ richly live in us is the key to right conduct. So folks, if we want to have a nation that is characterized by righteousness, then we need to be people of the Book.

Nations will come and nations will go.
Leaders will come and leaders will go.
Laws will be written and changed.
But one thing remains – God's Word.
It is our compass to godly living.
It is the signpost for a nation's righteousness.

When a nation and its people are righteous, that nation is exalted, that nation is lifted up.

Think of the safety and security that would ensue. There would be safety in our homes and on our streets.

About two weeks ago the daughter of former Olympic sprinter, Tyson Gay, was crossing a street with some friends when rival gang members shot at each other. She was caught in the cross fire and was killed.

Riots
Looting
Mugging
Murder

The answer isn't in stronger gun control or greater police presence. The answer is in Christ when hearts are transformed by grace through faith, when we then start living out godly character in everyday life.

There would be peace and joy instead of fear and sorrow.

We could walk around with trust instead of suspicion.

I am not the only one who will be glad when this election is over. I'm tired of the scandals, and negative news about what this candidate did or didn't do or what that candidate did or didn't do. I'm tired of hearing about corruption and deception, wondering what the next president may or may not do if elected. Here's what I know for sure – someone will get elected.

I cannot, should not and will not pin my hopes on the next elected government but will instead put my trust in an eternal God who is in control of it all. I refuse to be a fatalist thinking that we're all doomed if the person I don't vote for gets elected. But I will instead fix my eyes on the author and perfecter of my faith. If I must live in a pagan land, let me live as a Daniel. Let us hold our hope in the One who holds our eternal destiny in His hands.

Let me continue to pray for our nation and its leaders, that we might be a nation that is exalted by its righteousness.

There are a number of things we should pray about for our government and about our government and the greatest thing to pray about is their salvation. Think of the impact on our State and Nation if just five or ten of our elected officials come know Christ as their Savior. Think of the impact it would have on the laws they enact.

This past week I attended a pastor's luncheon joining other pastors who want to commit to pray for our officials and I'm encouraging you to do the same. Attending was a pastor who goes to Lansing every Wednesday to meet with and pray for the State legislators. Other pastors join him. He tells them he's not there to lobby for anything just to have 5 minutes of their time to pray for them. He

asks them what they can pray about. He doesn't meet with just those who agree with him politically or theologically. He has met and prayed with Debbie Stabenow and Gary Peters. He recently prayed with Dan Kildee from the Genesee County district and asked how they could pray for him. The response was to ask God to help him make wise decisions. He at least acknowledges God exists and is the giver of wisdom.

Last week there were a lot of people from the LGBTQ community at the State Capital. They were putting out some feelers on an upcoming proposal to see how those in Congress would vote. At stake is a measure that would keep someone infected by HIV from suing the person who infected them. It would be considered nothing more than passing on a common cold. One of the legislators was glad for their visit because he then asked what the Bible had to say about homosexuality so he would have a biblical understanding in opposing the measure.

I stand here today confessing that I have spent little time praying for our elected officials. I would much rather criticize and condemn their actions, policies and stand on issues than to pray for them. So we are going to look next week at I Timothy 2:1-8.

We include some of our government leaders in our prayer bulletin. I hope you don't skip over them just because you don't agree with them or didn't vote for them. One pastor sends their prayer bulletin to that state representative with a note saying they prayed for them.

No matter what you may believe about how the Governor handled the Flint water crisis, put any political differences aside and pray for that man. I had conversations with several people who say they are Christian but who had strong criticism for him. Our government officials desperately need our prayers not just for wisdom in leading, but more importantly in leading our nation in righteousness.

I'm convicted about how little time I pray for them.

If we want a righteous nation it must be evident in our behavior.

But it isn't only in our behavior as we endeavor to

live a God centered life that is evident in a nation that is righteous. We also see it in its benevolence.

B. Such A Nation Is Righteous In Its Benevolence

Benevolence is doing good to or for others, showing kindness, or being charitable.

Behavior results in benevolence and not the other way around. A righteous person will gladly and willingly share with others when there is a legitimate need. We are so weary and wary of scams that we are reluctant to give because we really aren't sure if it truly is a need whether it's someone on the corner or in another country.

I believe that the righteous are discerning. They can tell the difference between someone being deceitful and someone who is really destitute.

A person who is following God understands that what he has belongs to God and is willing to give to help others when there is a need.

This nation has been so blessed by God. We have been able to help out many less fortunate countries that have had a need. Following World War II the United States invested \$22 billion in aid to rebuild war torn Europe.

God's people through agencies like Samaritan's Purse have stepped in to aid where countries have been hit hard by natural disasters.

Benevolence is the natural outpouring of hearts that are right with God, lives that are truly transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Israel was given instruction not only to give aid to widows and orphans but when there were "foreigners" in need as well. In that way they were a witness to them of God's mercy.

Warren Wiersbe writes "In a democracy, where leadership is elected and not inherited, the Lord's remnant must exert as much influence for righteousness as possible. If the church obeyed the Word and prayed, national leaders would have to take God into account in their deliberations." Influence can come through acts of benevolence.

Righteousness lifts up that nation. Other nations will speak well of it. They look to that nation because of its integrity and generosity, but woe to that nation the nation that is not righteous.

Our text tells us that nation without righteousness is a nation where sin runs rampant making it a reproach.

II. A NATION THAT IS A REPROACH

A. Such A Nation Is A Reproach In Its Behavior

Reproach is a word that means shame, disgrace or scorn.

Daniel 9:16 “Our sins and the iniquities of our fathers have made Jerusalem and Your people an object of scorn to all those around us.”

Sin disgraces a nation and its people. Other nations lose trust and confidence in that nation.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God told Israel that because of their sin they would become a reproach and a ruin among the other nations around them.

Jeremiah 24:9-10

Jeremiah 29:18-19

As I said earlier, quoting Fyodor Dostoyevsky, we are a nation that has lost Christ. We have lost our soul.

J. Vernon McGee wrote that “The pathway of history is strewn with the wrecks of nations that didn’t follow that principle” of being a righteous nation.

Our nation is groaning from its wickedness.

Old Testament scholar John Oswalt writes: “In order to justify their own behavior, they must, in the most sophisticated reasonings possible, demonstrate that their evil behavior is good, their darkness is light, and their bitterness sweet. This attitude is the end result of refusal to admit the absolute authority of a revealed Word. For sin is not content to live alongside righteousness any more than disease will coexist with health. Sin can only be satisfied when righteousness is destroyed.”

Though not a Christian that I am aware of author George Orwell wrote “The further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those speak it.”

We are seeing the reality of that today in our nation. The more we try to speak the truth from the Bible as the answer to our national moral dilemma the more we are branded as racist and bigots. We are hated all the more for it.

Romans 1:18-19, 20b “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them... so that men are without excuse.”

Billy Graham penned a letter expressing his dismay over the moral decline of the nation, declaring that his “heart aches for America and its deceived people.”

“The farther we get from God, the more the world spirals out of control,” Graham wrote, noting that the nation seems to be going out of its way to remove God from the public arena. “...in a prominent city in the South, Christian chaplains who serve the police department were ordered to no longer mention the Name of Jesus in prayer,” he wrote, noting that officers were only allowed to pray to “the being in the room.”

“Our society strives to avoid any possibility of offending anyone -- except God,” he continued.

We ask God to bless America, but we elected a president whose pastor asked God to condemn it. We ask God to bless America, but we kill millions of unborn babies in the name of choice. We ask God to bless America, but we silence His children. Can God bless a nation when His people are no longer on their knees, who refuse to stand in righteousness in the public square, who refuse to proclaim His gospel, who refuse to repent of their own sins and the sins of the nation? We need to once more return to our knees in prayer and repent of the sin that has brought reproach to this nation and to God Himself.

It is time that people of faith erected once more an

Ebenezer stone. It was a stone that the prophet Samuel erected after a long period of trouble brought on Israel for their disobedience to God. I Samuel 7:2-12

That stone became a public testimony of God's faithfulness to His people and the promises He had made with them. It was a reminder of their repentance and restoration. It represented a new beginning, a renewal, a revival, a restoration. Let us once again remember that God's mercies are new every morning and repent of our nation's many sins so that our reproach may be removed.

But no matter how difficult the days have been in the past or may be in the future let us never lose heart or hope in the Lord. Let us fix our eyes on Him. Let's remember the words of Jesus who told His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion not to let their hearts be troubled, but to believe in God. The political issues this nation is facing are only symptomatic of what is really wrong. The real problems cannot be fixed by Congress but only at the Cross of Calvary.

Sometime after the murderous spree of two students at Columbine High school, Donald Scott, father of Rachel Scott, one of the victims, spoke before the US Senate and said the following:

"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 express my feelings. This poem was written before I knew that I would be speaking today."

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 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!

We need God's people to live God's way and shed His light in dark places.

If benevolence is a direct result of righteous behavior we can assume then that sin leads to a lack of benevolence.

B. Such A Nation Is A Reproach In Its Benevolence

Where there was generosity there is instead greed. Instead of being selfless we become selfish. Instead of what is a privilege there is entitlement. Instead of giving more we only want to get more.

There is not a more vivid contrast between a nation that is righteous and a nation that is a reproach. We see it in both its behavior and its benevolence.

We can return to a nation that is righteous, but it takes repentance, repentance of God's people to live their faith with conviction and not compromise.

III. A NATION THAT IS REPENTANT

A. Such A Nation Repents of Its Iniquity

B. Such A Nation Repents of Its Indifference

We have talked about these over the past couple of weeks so I only mention them as reminders of what we need to do on behalf of our nation. Regardless of the election outcome we have a responsibility to live godly lives in a world that ignores or rejects Christ. They may deny our words but they cannot dispute our behavior when it is different than their own. Our life through character, convictions, and contributions will speak to them of their need for Christ.

What are we, God's people, doing to be salt and light in a world of darkness?