

**Blessed is the Nation Whose God is the Lord**  
*Independence Day Thoughts*

**Ps 33:1-12**

As we celebrate our nation's 238<sup>th</sup> birthday over this 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend, it's a birthday that finds our country facing many challenges both domestically and internationally. From the crisis at our southern border to Russia's annexation of Crimea to the insurgency in Iraq to the scandals rocking Washington, to the unsustainable national debt, we as a nation face many serious issues that threaten our nation's stability and way of life.

The reason I chose this psalm isn't because I necessarily believe that verse 12 which says, *Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord* is descriptive of America. It's true that America was founded on a Judeo-Christian heritage and that Judeo-Christian heritage has affected the fiber of this country and guided the tone and ideology of this country more than we could possibly imagine, and we are deeply blessed because of that. But as blessed by God as we are, we have never been a nation that monolithically calls the God of the Bible our God. Honestly I'd be uncomfortable with making that our goal because I think the best we could do is forge some kind of "religious right" attitude and then impose it on people and that makes me shudder. When the church has tried to consolidate political power, the result has been a disaster. This verse isn't talking about some kind of religious political power rising up and taking over in the name of God – it's talking about a nation who joyfully and voluntarily see the Lord as God and love and worship Him alone! It would also be wrong to identify America as God's chosen people, chosen as His heritage. This verse only directly applies to the nation of Israel, and even they didn't have a very good track record of walking with the Lord throughout their history.

The reason I chose this psalm is because it puts the nations of the world (including our country) in their proper proportion to the Lord. God is great, and the nations are small. God is great and America is small. But this psalm isn't saying that the nations of the earth are therefore unimportant to God. Rather it reminds us that God sees and loves all the nations of the earth and that any nation will be blessed that bends towards the Lord. Verse 12 is an invitation that is purposely open to any nation, not just Israel. So while America has never been a nation whose God is the Lord, we have been a nation that bends towards the Lord – and I believe that it should be the church in America's desire to be salt and light to help bend this great nation towards the Lord. Not through legislation or some nation-wide political movement, but through our witness for Christ in towns and cities across America, winning one heart at a time, not to a political movement or party, but to Christ. Because blessed is the person whose God is the Lord!

When it comes to how believers in Christ should engage with our country and what kind of citizens we ought to be, I think there's a lot of room for diversity. Questions like, "how should a Christian view politics and how involved should he or she get in the political process?" or "Is there a particular political party that Christians should be affiliated with?" Or even "should Christians (and the church) just avoid politics altogether?" don't necessarily have a "one size fits all" answer. But Psalm 33 does give us a compass for our perspective to help us be good citizens without blending in so much we look and sound and think the same as everyone else and have no impact for the gospel.

**I. Let's thank God for the grace that He has shed on America**

This psalm opens up by calling God's people to serious praise and thankfulness. Shout for joy in the Lord, O you righteous! This isn't talking figuratively, he is saying that God is SO good the joy ought to rise

up in us and make us shout! And then after shouting, we should grab some instruments and start singing. This is describing an overflow of thanksgiving. Thankfulness should characterize those who know the Lord.

But why should we be so thankful? Because of God's goodness and love displayed in His creation:

*...the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord. By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; the puts the deeps in the storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him! For He spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm. (vv. 5b-9)*

We should see the goodness of God all around us in His creation and it should lead us to be thankful. That includes the goodness of living in this country. I know it isn't perfect, but as far as I'm concerned it's still the greatest nation on earth. We are surrounded by so many blessings that would boggle the minds of so many people from other nations – and I'm not just talking about material blessings, though they are abundant. I'm talking about the very fabric and fiber of this country and the people who live in it.

I know there are serious problems and challenges that we are facing as a nation, and being thankful doesn't blind us to those problems of our country or paralyze us from being involved and engaged citizens who want to do our part to fix those problems. I can complain about the state of this country (and particularly our politics) as much as anyone. And I would encourage everyone to exercise our privilege to make our voice be heard through the democratic process. Being thankful doesn't stick our heads in the sand or ignore issues, but it is an attitude that sees the good and thanks God for it. As Christians God calls us to be a thankful people no matter where we live or what conditions we live under, so we who are blessed to live in the US of A should definitely be thankful for all the blessings we enjoy. On this fourth of July weekend, it's good to see the beauty and goodness of this country and give God thanks for it!

## **II. Let's walk in a fear of God that trumps both patriotism and political correctness**

This psalm hinges on this truth: God is great and the nations aren't.

*The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He frustrates the plans of the peoples ...[But] the counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations. (vv. 10-11)*

In other words, all the plans and intentions that nations have can be brought to nothing if the Lord so desires. Hitler intended to take over Europe and it seemed like nothing could stop him...but God orchestrated events to occur that frustrated his plans and brought his counsel to nothing. Nations rise today and fall tomorrow. The greatest, strongest nation is a temporary blip on the screen. God is eternal.

America might seem so strong that it's hard to remember a world before she existed or imagine a world where she wasn't a superpower. But think about this – our history barely spans 4 generations. This weekend we celebrate that day 238 years ago when the Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence, declaring its independence from Great Britain. When the principle author of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson died fifty years later on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1826, Abraham Lincoln was a young man of 17 years of age. When Lincoln was assassinated, Woodrow Wilson was a boy of 8. When Wilson died, Ronald Reagan was a boy of 12. Four generations from a recent president to the principle author of the Declaration of Independence. And in case Reagan is ancient history to some of you, Reagan died only ten years ago. When Reagan became the governor of California, Barack Obama was 3 years old.

Our nation is a baby on the stage of world history, and yet, I think there are signs that we are on the decline already. If we keep going in the direction that we are going in, our place in this world may look drastically different a few decades from now. God raises up nations and establishes their counsel. And He puts down nations and frustrates their plans. The wise walk in the fear of the Lord:

- *Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him! (vs. 8)*
- *Behold the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him...(vs. 18)*

**a. Gives us faith to pray for our nation and our leaders**

Knowing that God holds the nations in His hands and can frustrate the plans of one nation and establish the plans of another fuels our faith to believe that prayer can have powerful consequences because God hears our prayers and moves when His people pray. We can strongly disagree with our leaders, in this country we have the freedom to voice that disagreement, and I believe it's healthy that we do so. But along with that we should pray for our country and our leaders. We live in a dangerous world, and there are threats and challenges all around us, and our leaders have a tremendous weight on their shoulders. Paul instructs us:

*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, <sup>2</sup>for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. <sup>3</sup>This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup>who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 1 Tim. 2:1-4*

We should pray and intercede for our leaders, knowing that God holds our nation in His hands.

**b. Gives us courage to speak truth when it's not popular**

Walking in the fear of the Lord also gives us courage to go against the strong currents of our culture when it's necessary. I don't think Christians should be picking fights over every national issue out there, and I don't think Christians should be confrontational in spirit. But there is a time, and there are issues, when Christians should courageously stand for truth. Some issues aren't political, they're bigger than politics. They have to do with justice and compassion and truth and righteousness.

Abortion is such an issue in my view. Politics may be intertwined with abortion policies coming out of Washington, but the issue is the taking of an innocent life and that transcends politics. But there is tremendous cultural pressure to not rock the boat over it. And there are many such issues of righteousness and justice – we should stand against oppression and injustice in any form it takes, whether against the poor, against a particular race, against a particular religion. We should do so respectfully, civilly, compassionately, and with Christian love, but still we need to stand for righteousness and justice. John Piper says it well,

*I'm not thinking there should be another party, just truth. It seems that the Christian church should not--as a church--join partisan politics. Rather, we should be speaking prophetically to issues that relate to what Christ's will is. Then we should just let the chips fall as they may. If it sounds Republican or Democratic or Independent, so be it.*

*Gather the issues together and meditate on them. Weigh them in the balances of the Bible. And then speak prophetically about them...Ultimately we want to communicate--even while engaging in politics--that politics are not the main issue on this earth. Knowing the Creator is the main issue, as well as being*

*reconciled with him and glorifying him in all that we believe and say and do. That's what the church needs to constantly be calling people to. ~ John Piper*

Walking in the fear of the Lord rather than the fear of man will empower us to speak the truth, be prophetic voices, and let the chips fall where they may.

### **III. Let's be faithful to preach the gospel, not politics, as the only thing that can save**

Psalm 33 then goes on to dismantle the false hope of trusting in man for salvation.

*The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.  
The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue.*

*Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine.  
(Psalm 33:16-19 ESV)*

When the psalmist says the king isn't saved by his army or the warrior by his strength, he's saying that if we trust in anything other than God's salvation, we are trusting in a false hope. Politics are false hope. Military strength is a false hope. Economic booms are a false hope. Only the Lord can save our souls, and He has done that once and for all through Jesus Christ's atoning death on the cross. The great need of humanity is for the Savior.

Politics and policies are needed, and sometimes good policies can help slow the moral decline of a nation and promote justice. But laws and policies can only govern behavior, it can't change the heart. The gospel works to change hearts which then results in lasting change in a culture and nation. It's the cross, not the voting booth, that is ultimately the only hope for our nation and the world. It is a tragedy when the cross gets displaced by politics.

**ILL:** there is a church in San Francisco called the Glide Memorial Methodist Church – one of the more liberal churches in the Methodist denomination. In 1967 the pastor ordered the cross removed from the sanctuary, telling the congregation to celebrate life and living. The cross has been missing from Glide's message and ministry ever since.

In Wichita, Kansas, there is a Baptist church that until recently was led by a pastor famous for his politically charge messages. For nearly 3 decades he railed in the pulpit, on the radio, and on cable TV against the political ills of the nation. He proudly announced his allegiance to the Republican Party, urging fellow pastors to make the same "confession" and calling them "sissies" if they didn't. "We are the religious right," he liked to say. "One, we are religious. Two, we are right."

Finally, after almost 30 years in the pulpit, this pastor was pressed to resign from his pastorate by the board of deacons because, as they said, his activism was getting in the way of the gospel. My point is that if we aren't careful, the cross can be displaced from the church by conservatism as much as by liberalism. We aren't to be angry conservatives or idealistic liberals – we are to be loving, praying, godly, Christ-exalting Christians. When people see our lives, may they see the light of Christ shining through us, not a particular political leaning.

It's fine to identify with a political stance. It's healthy to be engaged in our political and national debate. It's important to be involved with our community and civil rights available. But it's our great priority to lift the cross, and Christ, and the word of God, high through our lives and witness.

And that leads us to a larger perspective than a nationalistic, patriotic fervor. God loves the world, not just a nation or two in it. I love this country. But Jesus calls us to love the world and the precious souls around the world for which he also died. The beauty of the gospel is that it is for every nation, every tongue, and every tribe. Heaven will be full of people from all nationalities, all colors, all cultures, and all walks of life.

**IV. Finally, on this Independence Day, let's not forget our dependence on God (vv. 20-22)**

God's hand was with this nation 238 years ago as we fought for our independence, and most of the nation's fathers knew and acknowledged that. Let's celebrate our nation's birth and rejoice in the amazing country we live in, but as we do, let's also remember our deep dependence on God and pray, as the psalmist does,

*Our soul waits for the Lord;*

*He is our help and our shield.*

*For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name.*

*Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us,*

*Even as we hope in you. Amen. (vv.20-22)*