

To God Alone Be The Glory

Blessed are the people of whom this is true: blessed are the people whose God is the LORD. Psalm 144:15.

Listen to some of the nice things that presidents of the U.S. have said about the Bible. “It is impossible to govern the world rightly without God and the Bible” (George Washington, 1st President).

“The Bible is endorsed by the ages. Our civilization is built upon its words. In no other book is there such a collection of inspired wisdom, reality, and hope” (Dwight D. Eisenhower, 34th President).

“Within the covers of the Bible are all the answers for all the problems men face. The Bible can touch hearts, order minds, and refresh souls” (Ronald Reagan, 40th President).

From the earliest days of America’s history, continuing to the present, the Bible has played a prominent role in American life. The principles of God’s Word guided many of the decisions on which this nation built its foundations. Throughout our history our presidents have borne eloquent testimony to this fact. “That Book, sir, is the rock on which our republic rests” (Andrew Jackson, 7th President). “I believe the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to men. All the good from the Savior of the world is communicated to us through this Book” (Abraham Lincoln, 16th President). “There are a good many problems before the American

people today, and before me as President, but I expect to find the solution of those problems just in the proportion that I am faithful in the study of the Word of God. I ask every man and woman... that from this day on they will realize that part of the destiny of America lies in their daily perusal of this great book” (Woodrow Wilson, 28th President). Based on the nice things these presidents have said about the Bible, one might be led to conclude that the sermon text for today applies to us—the U.S.A. We are blessed because the Lord is our God.

But if you keep up with current events, you might conclude that our nation ought not lay claim any longer to the Lord as our God. Americans by and large prefer not to think of God as he reveals himself in the Bible. Americans favor a more generic god, one which fits all religions so that no one can claim to have God at the expense of any other group.

‘Everyone goes to heaven,’ they say. ‘No one is bad except for people who hurt underdogs or children.’ For this reason many Americans are willing to steal whatever they can get away with (as if everything does not really belong to God), push for physician assisted suicide (as if God has no right to allow any suffering), detach sex from God’s revealed plan for hetero-marriage, make abortion convenient (except for the unborn baby), disassociate gender from X and Y chromosomes, and blame religion for more woes than it has

actually caused. I expect to see polygamy and polyandry legalized in my lifetime. See, it all boils down to the common but erroneous idea that each of us should determine our own moral outlook, because no one, not even society, has the right to impose any moral standards, except for a few basics such as 'cheating is never ok,' and humane treatment for humans and animals, well, at least for animals.

So which is it? Are we a people whose God is the Lord, or not? Only the Lord knows for sure how many of our fellows citizens have saving faith in Jesus, the world's only Savior from sin. But even though we believers are a minority in this country, that doesn't change the validity of what the Psalmist wrote. *Blessed are the people of whom this is true: blessed are the people whose God is the Lord.*

People whose God is the Lord know what he expects of them. And this shows up in the way they behave. Consider something that I'll call "civic friction." I'm thinking of how well people get along with their neighbors. How many police, judges, and trials are needed to maintain a sense of security and fairness? Is common decency as common today as it was a century or two ago? How much civic friction existed back then compared to today?

We know that the overwhelming majority of our nation's founders and citizenry were Christian. It can easily be demonstrated from the writings of the times that many lay-people back then

were at least as familiar with the Scriptures as many pastors are today. Although there were fewer neighbors to get along with in those days, it seems a larger percentage of the people knew how to behave and cooperate and negotiate with their neighbors.

Consider civic friction today. Maybe it's just that we are putting so much bad behavior on TV so that more people get to see it and be aware of it. But boys behaving badly isn't even a shameful thing anymore. And how many people today are arrested and then turned loose on the streets because there's no room for them in the jails? I suspect that one of the reasons civic friction remains at a tolerable level in many places is that so many Americans have their own cars, their own homes, and financial independence from each other. We don't really have to deal with each other.

But there's definitely a spiritual component to the problem. George Barna publishes survey after survey which show how ignorant most Christians are of the Bible today. That's a problem. But when people read the Bible and learn about their Lord God, they also learn what he expects of them. This reduces society's level of civic friction as believers conduct themselves kindly towards others.

When a people whose God is the Lord know what he expects of them, they also know when they've messed up. After the

experimentation of the 60s & 70s a new generation of kids arose in the 80s that were somewhat more conservative in conduct. At the same time there was a small surge in overall attendance at worship and thus in hearing what the Lord expects. Could it be that as these people discovered what the Lord says in his Word, they saw where they were messing up in their lives and took steps to fix the problem?

I can't prove it because I'm not enough of a student of history, but it might be interesting to study whether this same relationship could be seen throughout the history of our nation. Could it be that when our nation began to rot spiritually during the middle 1800s, we were ripe for some discipline from the God we claimed to have, and as a result, He sent the Civil War to wake us up? After the Civil War something happened in America called a "Great Awakening" where a large percentage of our people started hearing God's Word again. And God blessed our nation richly.

But there seems to have been a cooling of the spiritual fervor of our people in the years before WWI and again in the years before the Great Depression. When times are bad, God's people take a look at their lives in the light of God's Word to see, "Am I acting and talking as though the Lord is my God?" And when honest soul-searching leads people to confess, "I am a part of the problems that my country is facing. I want to mend my ways for the

sake of my country and especially to honor the Lord my God," then we see again the blessings of the Lord flowing on our land, at least in pockets.

What blessings? Well especially that the people whose God is the Lord enjoy his forgiveness. Now don't misunderstand. It's not as though the Lord says, "Oh my, you've done such a good job of seeing the error of your ways, I'll just ignore these mistakes you've made." No, instead he looks at us through Christ-colored glasses. And because Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins, the Father sees no stain or wrinkle or blemish in us. For Jesus' sake he pardons us. That is the foremost reason why the Psalmist can say: *Blessed are the people of whom this is true: blessed are the people whose God is the Lord.*

But there are plenty of other ways this Psalm verse is true. When our founding fathers were working on the formation of our government, the backstop behind all the freedoms they wanted to safeguard was the personal responsibility of each individual citizen not only to obey God but to support the union, to be a moral people. According to Will and Ariel Durant (*Lessons from History*), "There is no significant example in history, before our time, of a society successfully maintaining moral life without the aid of religion."

The people whose God is the Lord find that he blesses their country when they put their country ahead of selfishness,

when they ask not what their country can do for them but what they can do for their country. This is one of the reasons General Robert E. Lee was such a highly respected man throughout the whole United States, even though he was the leading general of the southern states in our Civil War. Lee's favorite Bible verse was the one where Jesus taught us, "*If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*" Lee demonstrated what many Christians have discovered, that when you serve others and deny your selfish motives, God's blessings come to many. People could see this self-sacrifice in Lee's life despite his participation in the Civil War, despite his being on the losing side.

If you study WWII, you can't help but be impressed by the amount of self-sacrifice our nation displayed for the war effort. The people at home conserved, recycled, donated, bought war bonds. WWII is often cited as the greatest victory of the previous century.

What about us? Have we become cynical enough about the state of our union that we have stopped serving the national good? Have you developed any double standards in your nationalism? Lots of people, for instance, get upset about income tax evaders. But they are happy to take money under the table for services rendered. Never mind what Jesus said in today's Gospel about taxes (Luke 20:20-26).

Does it bother you that shop-lifting has raised the cost of the goods you buy? Do we return the money that the store undercharged us?

Are you sick and tired of the filthy language so many people use? Do we use our tongues to build up others, defend them, speak well of them, and take their words and actions in the kindest possible way?

Are you upset with the violence and immorality available on screen? Do we turn it off and read a book instead? Or better yet do we let the producers know where we stand on issues?

I'm not insinuating that we can turn all of America into a Christian nation. But as forgiven children of God, let's at least do what we can to influence those within our sphere. Let's at least spend some time thinking and praying about how we can talk to specific people and encourage them to read the Scripture for themselves or accompany us when we come for worship.

You see, if it's true (and it is) that "*blessed are the people whose God is the Lord,*" then the best thing we can do for our country as we celebrate Independence Day is to read the Bible for ourselves and share the Lord with others. *Blessed are the people of whom this is true: blessed are the people whose God is the Lord.*