

Righteousness exalts a nation!

It's the 4th of July weekend. Independence Day. We think of phrases like: *"Give me liberty or give me death!;" "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."* We think of George Washington crossing the Delaware with his ragged army of men. We see red, white and blue found everywhere. It means the oohs and ahs of fireworks, picnics, parades and family get-togethers. Patriotism is stepped up a notch. We sing "America the Beautiful," "My Country tis of Thee," even verse 2 of our National Anthem. God bless the United States of America!

Yet, even with all that patriotism, someone will eventually get to the question: *"What will eventually bring the mighty United States to its knees?" "What is wrong with the United States today is...."* People have many different answers to that question. I would imagine that each of you here this morning has an opinion as to what is wrong in our government today. Will it be the division between liberals or conservatives? Will it be the struggle between the state government and the federal government? Is it the fault of Facebook, Twitter, or any other platform of Social Media? Is the media to blame? Or will it simply fade away into history like every other nation that has ever existed on the face of the earth?

Through the wisdom of Solomon, God gives an answer to all those questions. And the answer is: *"None of the above."* God's answer from the pen of Solomon is simple and clear: **"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin condemns any people."**

Sin is a disgrace. Sin condemns people. The word that Solomon uses here for **"condemn,"** is only used only in one other place in the Bible. It is in the book of Leviticus, where Moses writes: **"If a man marries his sister, the daughter of either his father or his mother, and they have sexual relations, it is a DISGRACE. They are to be publicly removed from their people. He has dishonored his sister and will be held responsible."** (20:17) That's a pretty disgusting picture of sin, isn't it? Sin is a disgrace. Sin condemns and sin destroys. All sin is completely disgusting to an almighty God. There is nothing that WE can do about it.

The biggest problem facing the human race is not knowing what we need to do to make ourselves right with God again. We know that. Most people on the face of the planet know that we need to be perfect in following our God. The problem is that we can't, and we won't do it.

To see how impossible it is to meet God's standard, imagine you had an invisible recorder around your neck and all of your life, all it ever did was record whenever you said to somebody else *"you ought."* It only ever recorded your voice when you told somebody else how they ought to live. In other words, it only recorded your own moral standards, the moral standards that you impose in other people. It didn't record anything else but what you believe was right or wrong. Then on Judgment Day you stand before God and he says: *"Hey, I'm a fair-minded God. Let me show you what I'm going to judge you by."* He takes that recorder off your neck. He says to you: *"I'm going to judge you by your moral standards."* Then he plays it. There is not a single person on the face of the earth that will be able to pass the test. We can't even pass a lower standard than God's standard. The Bible tells us clearly that we are going to fail. Sin is not an *"oops"* or an *"oh well."* It is completely disgusting to God. Sin, my sin, always has a ripple effect throughout society. Sin brings down nations.

So, if that is true, what needs to change? Do we need a change in politicians? Do we need a change in laws? Do we need to go back to the *"good old days"* or *"the way things used to be?"* If all we need to do is make some changes, it would be easy. Listen to what the wisest politician in this world once again says: **"Righteousness exalts a nation."**

There needs to be a change in the heart for righteousness to exalt a nation. Righteousness means righteous with God. We get right with God only through Jesus Christ. In other words, when it comes to meeting all of God's demands, when it comes to being holy before God, it comes through Jesus. Our hearts are changed by Jesus Christ alone.

God says to faithful and righteous Christians, *"you are the light of the world;" "you are the salt of the earth."* All of society feels the benefit of righteous people. It is not always easy to measure the effects of Christians living in Society, isn't? We don't always see the effects that a Christian worker has on that company because he is honest and hard-working. We don't always see the farmer who prays for a bountiful harvest so that a loaf of bread might stay a few sense cheaper for all of us. We don't always see the immediate effect that a Christian parent has on a child, as they read a devotion or pray with them. We don't always see the effect that hundreds of people of St. Paul's, Franklin, have on the society around us.

You see how that changes how we view people around us. Complaining about all the symptoms of national decay around us doesn't really change anything, does it? Whining and complaining how bad things have gotten, and how much we would like to go back to how they used to be makes little difference. Hoping that we can get the right political leader in the right place, isn't going to solve all the problems.

The underlying problem is sin. If the underlying problem is sin, a person needs a heart to be changed – a change that can only be changed by Jesus. Sin can have a ripple-effect on a nation, but righteousness can also have a ripple-effect. God has placed us into all kinds of different places to begin those ripple-effects. Will we fall short at times? Yes. Then we stand before God and confess our sins. He assures us that he has changed our hearts. By his grace, righteousness exalts a nation. May God help us each to be his lights in a dark world. Amen.