

“GOD BLESS AMERICA?”
(Psalm 33:8-19)
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[East Cobb U.M.C.; 7-3-11]

-I-

1. [BOTH Services (9:30am MSG; 11am NRSV)] Read Text Psalm 33:8-19 and Pray.
2. From its beginnings, America has been a country shaped and formed by a profoundly spiritual heritage:
 - A—Many of our state constitutions (including Georgia's) acknowledge God as the divine force in their histories.
 - B—Prayers invoking God's power and guidance have always opened each session of Congress and the U.S. Supreme Court.
 - C—One of Congress' first official acts as a body was to authorize the printing of Bibles for the poor back in 1777.
 - D—George Washington established the precedent of having public officials sworn-in with their hand upon a Bible.
 - E—And even our currency at least outwardly acknowledges the fact that “*In God We Trust.*”
3. Now, there *were* factors and forces *other than* religion at work in the formation of America: economic prosperity; politics; greed; and a desire for glory.
 - A—But I for one don't really believe that these others could have made an impact on our history/heritage at all had God not allowed (and perhaps even encouraged) them to be so.
 - B—In fact, we can just look at America's success in the world arena throughout history, and it's reasonable to argue that our “greatness” is attributed to God's guiding hand.
 - C—In a very real sense, God *has* (in the words of a song we love to sing) “*blessed America.*”

-II-

4. And yet, along with blessings given to *any* nation often come challenges and dangers.
 - A—For example, let me read you a list of symptoms that marked the decay of one civilization:
 - #1—The undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home;
 - #2—Increased taxes and spending of public money for food, necessities and entertainment;
 - #3—A mad craze for pleasure, with sports becoming every year more exciting, more brutal, and more immoral;

#4–The building of gigantic armaments, and the decline of individual responsibility;
And #5–The decay of religion, with faith fading into mere form, losing touch with
life, and losing power to guide the people.

B–Do any of these sound somewhat familiar? Well, they’re actually the top five reasons
given by historian Edward Gibbon for the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. ¹

5. And all in all, I find it troubling to think about how similar many of these are to symptoms
found in our own nation today! Consider, for example, that...

A–Prayer (including voluntary prayer) is increasingly being banned in public places and at
public ceremonies like school graduations, courthouses, & other government buildings. ²

B–Teachers and public officials are being reprimanded and fired simply for expressing their
own spiritual beliefs. ³

C–And despite the progress that’s has been made in the last 10-15 years, many school
textbooks still either *exclude* or *minimize* the actual role that Christianity played in
our nations’ founding (as if it wasn’t a factor in our history *at all!*) ⁴

D–(And if you don’t believe me about these, read my Endnotes or “Google” the topics for yourself!)

6. And of course, many of these are happening because they supposedly violate the so-called
“*Separation of Church and State.*”

A–But I hope most of you realize – first of all – that that phrase does not exist *anywhere* in
our Constitution or in any act of Congress,...

B–...And that the politician who coined it (Thomas Jefferson) never intended for it to be
interpreted as the *exclusion* of religion from *government*, but instead the exclusion of
government from *religion.* ⁵

1–For him, all that “Separation of Church and State” meant in its original context was
that the Federal government could not mandate one “official” Christian
denomination here America.

2–But it had absolutely *nothing* to do with excluding Christianity (or any other
religion) from public life – that’s a myth we have since added to its meaning.

7. So, the irony here is that we sing “*God Bless America*” at our baseball games, but then we
turn right around and prohibit Him from being involved in many other public arenas.

8. Now, don't get me wrong. I love my country, and I'm just as much a patriot as any of us here.

A–But I love America enough to remind us that if we're serious about our future, then we can't simply rest on the “greatness” or “blessings” of our past.

B–No. Not only our leaders, but we as a people need to be called to account for, and be reminded of, the words of today's scripture from Psalm 33:

1–(MSG) “*Blessed is the country with GOD for God*” (NRSV) “*Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord*” (Verse 12)

2–(MSG) “*No king succeeds with a big army alone, no warrior wins by brute strength.... [Instead,] God's eye is on those who respect him, the ones who are looking for his love.*” (NRSV) “*A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength,... [but] the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love*” (Verses 16-18).

9. You see, I believe that America has been a “*blessed/happy*” nation up to now *not* because of our great leadership, military might, or some kind of inherent moral superiority.

A–No. We've been “*blessed/happy*” because we've not been afraid to acknowledge the Lord as our God – throughout our history, we've “*respected him [and] looked for his love*” / “*hoped in His steadfast love,*” rather than to / in our own strength, might & wisdom

B–And yet, when “*In God We Trust*” decays into being merely a hollow motto stamped on our currency or even on a car tag (as we're trying to do today here in Georgia), then I fear that America may go the way of all other great civilizations that ignored God.

C–So, as we sing “*God Bless America,*” perhaps we who're people of faith need to step up and challenge our people to also sing (and to live by) the phrase “*America, Bless God!*”

1–You see, as people of faith, *we* are the ones who can call our nation back to its true heritage, and to the God who blessed us with that heritage to begin with.

2–Nineteenth-century politician Carl Schurz once addressed the U.S. Senate with these words: “*My country, right or wrong; When right, to be kept right; when wrong, to be put back right.*”⁶

10. So that calling, you see, doesn't just mean sitting back on the sidelines and *complaining* about what's *wrong* with America. No. It means that we Christians have to *get involved*:

A–For one thing, as God's people we can **Pray** – pray for our country and for its leaders (whether we agree with them or not!)

B–We can also **educate ourselves** about national issues that affect us all.

C–It also means we need to **learn about the candidates** running for public office (what they stand for and believe), and then exercise our right to **vote** when the time comes, rather than leaving that to others and then *complaining* when we don’t like who gets elected!.

D–It also means we should take time to **learn the truth about our religious heritage** and not be gullible to the myths that are so popular today, and then to **teach that truth to our children** so that *they* (like our founders) grow up understanding the importance of having God in the public life of our nation.

E–And if you don’t like the choices on your election ballot, then it means that perhaps God might be calling *you* to **consider serving in office yourself!**

11. Now, there are many other ways to “get involved”, but my point is that we all need to find ways to remember from where we’ve come as a nation, and from where our future help will come, as well: ...from the Lord God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.⁷

–IV–

12. “*Blessed / Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord*”, says our scripture today.

A–*That* has been a *description* of our nation to this point. But I believe it’s also a *challenge and a warning* for our future, as well.

B–Yes, we *can* (and should) sing “*God Bless America.*”

C–But my prayer is that as we celebrate our heritage this July 4th, we would also commit ourselves to being people who’ll challenge our nation to live by the motto: “*America, Bless God!*”

13. [PRAY]

ENDNOTES:

1. Taken generally from Gibbons’ six-volume work The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire (1788).
2. Consider, for instance, the recent example of prayer being banned at a Medina Valley High School 2011 graduation ceremony near San Antonio, TX (www.mysanantonio.com/news/local_news/article/Appeals-panel-overturns-Medina-Valley-graduation-1408548.php). Though the ban was overturned by a Federal appeals court, the ruling was essentially ignored, the school saying that the programs were already printed without prayer being referenced. Consider also the May 5, 2010 example of a school class being escorted off grounds by security for attempting to have private/silent prayer on the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court on an educational tour to Washington, D.C.

(www.sonorannews.com/archives/2010/100616/frntpg_WCA_Praying.html; Also <http://www.ohiofreepress.com/tag/wickenburg-christian-academy>).

3. For example, consider the 2008 case of one Ohio teacher who was fired for refusing to remove a Bible from his classroom desk (www.lifesitenews.com/news/archive/ldn/2008/jun/08062407), or the 2010 case of a New York City teacher who claims she was harassed, then eventually fired for her Christian faith (www.theblaze.com/stories/nyc-teacher-claims-she-was-harassed-then-fired-over-her-christian-faith).

4. For example, consider the 1987 Federal court case of Smith v. Board of School Commissioners of Mobile County, where judges ruled that the textbooks in question during the case “*omitted numerous significant facts about religion and religious contributions to American history,*” that “*religion was so deliberately underemphasized and ignored that theistic religions were effectively discriminated against and made to seem irrelevant and unimportant within the context of American history,*” conveying a “*historical picture biased against theistic religions*” (www.belcherfoundation.org/smith_v_board.htm; or a short summary here: <http://churchvstate.blogspot.com/2008/07/textbooks-leave-out-religious.html>). For a great overview of this subject, read the resource Religion in the Classroom: What the Textbooks Tell Us, by Gilbert T. Sewall (American Textbook Council, 1995) found in PDF format here: www.historytextbooks.org/religion.pdf.

5. After all, in one of his inaugural addresses as our third President, Jefferson himself publically acknowledged that without God's “favor” and assistance, he would not be able to govern: “*I shall need the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our fathers, as Israel of old, from their native land and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessities and comforts of life*” [March 4, 1805 in Saul K. Padover, ed., The Complete Jefferson, Containing His Major Writings, Published and Unpublished, Except His Letters (NY: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1943), p. 412].

6. Schurz, remarks made in the Senate February 29, 1872, The Congressional Globe (Volume 45, p. 1287).

7. Read Psalm 121:2.