Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Can God Bless America?
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 80-245

Obviously over the last number of weeks we have on Sunday nights been addressing issues that are on our minds and hearts at this time in our nation when we had been subjected to terrorists' attacks. I'm trying to keep up with all of the nuances, all of the twists and turns in the road as we go and try to shed some biblical light on the issues at hand.

One of the new features in our country in recent weeks is this obsession with "God Bless America." In itself certainly a nice tune and a well-crafted song that was sung on many occasions for many years in our country, but now has become our sort of new national anthem, if not, our national prayer. And apparently from all that I can tell, as I see the emotion that is attached with the singing of the song, there is not just symbolism here. There is not just shallow sentimentality. I get the feeling that Americans really want God's blessing, and by that they mean protection. Blessing means, "God, don't let me die." It means, "Don't let my children die...don't let my spouse die." It means, "God, don't let the stock market keep going the way it's going." "God, stop the decline in unemployment." "God, maintain our freedoms, don't put us in a position so we have to make all kinds of laws against terrorism that wind up impinging upon our cherished liberties."

I get the feeling that blessing then is associated with protection, it's associated with safety, it's associated with freedom and it's associated with prosperity. And it is such a loud cry currently that even the usually vocal atheists and militant agnostics have somehow sunk into the shadows, aware that if they were vocal they could actually invite a self-defeating national backlash. Even the bold and counter-productive destructive group known as the ACLU is making very meager and unsuccessful efforts to take down "God Bless America" signs in schools. And they, rather than the people who put them up, are being vilified by the populous.

Americans are to one degree or another in a state of fear. They're afraid. And they're crying out to heaven for an invisible means of support against an invisible enemy by an invisible God. And they hope that God is not only omnipresent, not only omniscient, not only omnipotent, but even more importantly that He's interested. Cry "God Bless America" seems to be getting louder and louder every day and commanding more and more emotion.

And as I was listening to this, it struck me as an interesting issue. The prayer is simple, "God, bless America. Keep us protected. Keep us long-term safe. Keep us free. Keep us prosperous." And I began to think about the fact that if God were to bless America as everybody seems to want Him to

do, it might look very different than we would expect.

Will God bless America? Can God bless America? Should God bless America? Are we blessable? There's a new word for your dictionary. And if God did bless America, what would He be saying about His holiness? If God did bless America, what would He be saying about our morality? About our spiritual condition? Could God bless America and protect His reputation as holy God?

Now, of course, God can always do whatever He wants, whenever He wants. But when it comes to blessing, He has clearly and repeatedly set down conditions. I've listened carefully to that song, "God Bless America," there is no verse in there that identifies the conditions. Nor do Americans seem to be opening their Bibles to try to find out what the conditions are. I don't hear anybody say, "God, what do we need to do to be blessed?" So I'm going to answer the question nobody's asking.

In fact, I think this is a serious intrusion. I don't think they want to know the conditions. It's sort of like don't ask, just bless. We'll ask, don't ask anything of us. We just want blessing. Don't impose any conditions. Don't ask for anything from us. Give us protection. Give us safety. Give us freedom. Give us prosperity. But don't meddle with our morality. I don't hear any national cries of repentance, do you? I don't hear any national affirmations of the law of God, the Word of God. I don't hear any cries for virtue and forgiveness. I don't even hear preachers preaching like that.

We're in, frankly, no position at all to be blessed. It seems to me that this prayer is futile. We're actually in a better place to be unblessed...cursed, if you can handle that word, because blessing has always had its conditions...always. And the conditions are not hard to find, you just need to go to Scripture. So let's do that.

A good starting point is the eighth chapter of Nehemiah, Nehemiah chapter 8, just to the left of Esther, Job and Psalms. At this particular point in the history of Israel they were coming to the end of a long curse. They had experienced divine judgment. That judgment had come to an end. They were ready to be blessed. They went back to the land of Israel from their captivity in Babylon where they had been for a minimum of seventy years. They went back to the land and they wanted God's blessing. Their land was a rubble. Their city was torn down. They engaged in rebuilding it, and rebuilding its wall, as you know, under Nehemiah. They needed to rebuild the temple to reconstitute their worship. They desperately wanted the blessing of God and began to move in the right direction in chapter 8. They all gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate...a particular gate in the city. And they asked Ezra, the scribe, here's the key phrase, "To bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel."

If there was going to be blessing after cursing, if there was going to be a future of blessing, they had to go back to the book. Bring the book. "And Ezra the priest brought the law, the Torah. He brought it before the assembly of all the men and women, all who listen with understanding, the first day of the

seventh month and he read from it before the scroll which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning till midday in the presence of men and women, those who could understand and all the people were attentive to the book of the law."

He read for hours and hours and hours, just read the books of Moses. He was standing, in verse 4, at a wooden podium, just like this one, they had made for that purpose. The first pulpit in the Bible. "And Ezra, in verse 5, opened the book in the sight of all the people, he was standing above them all and he opened it, all the people stood up. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God and all the people answered, Amen, Amen while lifting up their hands. Then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground." Verse 8, "And they read from the book from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they could understand the reading." This is the beginning of expository preaching. They read it and they explained it.

If there's ever going to be blessing, the first thing that has to happen is you have to go get the book. Bring the book. In verse 18, "He read from the book of the law daily, from the first day to the last day. They celebrated the feast seven days. On the eighth day there was a solemn assembly according to the ordinance." Day after day after day after day they read the Word while the people stood and listened.

And then in chapter 9 verse 1 it says, "On the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel," this is indicative of the collective people of Israel gathering together, "assembled with fasting, in sack cloth and dirt upon them." That is a posture and an attire of penitence and humiliation. Verse 2, "The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers." Now we're getting something done here.

You bring the book. The book reiterates the law of God in no uncertain terms. The people hear the law of God, they now are very much aware of why they have been cursed. They recognize their sin, the very sins for which they endured this prolonged captivity. They posture themselves as penitents. They confess their sins and the sins and iniquities of their fathers.

"And while they stood in their place they read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a fourth of a day and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped their God."

This sets up the pattern for blessing. In verse 5, "Arise, bless the Lord your God forever and ever. O may Thy glorious name be blessed and exalted above all blessing and praise. Thou alone art the Lord, Thou hast made the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all that is in them." And they go on to recite the fact that God is the great sovereign creator. And then in the rest of chapter 9 you can see is a reiteration of God's powerful, sovereign work in Israel. It talks about Egypt and the Red Sea and how they were led by a pillar of fire by night and on and on it goes all the way down through that chapter.

Go down to verse 29 and they're reminded again that they were admonished to turn them back to Thy law. Yet they acted arrogantly, didn't listen to Thy commandments, but sinned against Thy ordinances by which if a man observes them he shall live. But they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not listen. However, and this is characteristic of God who is patient and gracious, "Thou didst bear with them for many years and admonished them with Thy Spirit through Thy prophets, yet they would not give ear. Therefore Thou didst give them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless, in Thy great compassion Thou didst not make an end of them or forsake them for Thou art a gracious and compassionate God." And they're just going through reciting the history of the people who had the law of God, had the Word of God, didn't obey the Word of God and were therefore cursed.

"Now therefore...verse 32...our God, the great, the mighty, the awesome God who dost keep covenant and lovingkindness. Do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before Thee, which has come upon us, our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and on all Thy people from the days of the kings of Assyria to this day. However...and I love this...Thou art just in all that has come upon us; for Thou hast dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly."

Here you have a people putting themselves by the prompting of God into a position to be blessed. Bring the book. Read the law of God. Confess that you have disobeyed it. And God will bless you.

Israel knew there was no mystery to the standards for blessing. Israel knew that even though they were a covenant people that possessed the covenant that was eternal, they had been given everlasting promises that God will fulfill eternally, they knew that God is a faithful God but they also knew that God was just to punish them because He is a holy God. Blessing begins when you admit your sin and you admit your violation of the law of God. Israel had to start there and they were a covenant people with everlasting promises. We're not. America is not a covenant nation. We are not an elect nation. We're just another nation like many nations that have come and gone through human history. We bear no eternal covenant with God as a nation. America is not a Christian nation, as such. We have no covenant to protect us. We have no eternal promises nationally that God must somehow keep.

And so, if Israel who has those covenants and those promises cannot be blessed unless they obey the law of God and repent for their disobedience, why would we assume that the standard for us would be any different?

And, in fact, listen to a few other Scriptures from the Old Testament so that there's no mistake in your mind. Second Kings 17, this again reiterates in terms that cannot be mistaken the standard for blessing, 2 Kings 17, let's go down...well, we'll start at verse 14, we'll let's go back to verse 13. He's talking about idolatry in the prior verses. In verse 13, "Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah through

all His prophets and every seer saying, 'Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments, My statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers and which I sent to you through My servants, the prophets. However, they did not listen but stiffened their neck like their fathers who did not believe in the Lord their God.'"

This is the problem, unbelief and disobedience. Verse 15, "They rejected His statutes, His covenants which He made with their fathers, His warnings which He warned them, they followed emptiness, or vanity, and became empty, went after the nations which surrounded them concerning which the Lord had commanded them not to be like them." In other words, they just sucked in all the idolatries of all their surrounding nations.

Verse 16, "They forsook all the commandments of the Lord their God, they made for themselves molten images, even two calves, and made an Asherah, which is a form of an idol, worshiped all the host of heaven, served Baal. They made their sons and daughters pass through the fire, literally incinerating their children in sacrifices to the idols. They practiced divination and enchantments and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him. So the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them from His sight; none was left except the tribe of Judah." And that's talking about the captivity of the northern kingdom, the kingdom in the north called Israel, the kingdom in the south called Judah...the northern kingdom taken captive by Assyria.

Verse 19, "But also Judah did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God but walked in the customs which Israel had introduced." In other words, Judah, the more resistant to idolatry because in Judah was Jerusalem, in Jerusalem was the temple, and so because of that there was a stronger influence to stay true to the Scripture in Judah. But eventually Judah caved in. The northern kingdom taken captivity in 722, the southern kingdom taken into captivity in 586. So a hundred and some years later Judah caves in, same thing, didn't keep the commandments of the Lord their God, began to imbibe the same things which Israel, the northern kingdom, had introduced. You remember, the kingdom was divided after Solomon. "The Lord...verse 20...rejected all the descendants of Israel, afflicted them, gave them into the hand of plunderers until He had cast them out of His sight."

The bottom line is very simple, even if you are a covenant nation, even if you are the recipients of the eternal, everlasting promises of God, you still must meet the conditions of blessing or you will be cursed. If that is true for a covenant people, it is true for a covenant-less people, which we are.

Look at 2 Chronicles, and again this is very clear and unmistakable instruction from Scripture. Second Chronicles chapter 7, for the moment look at verse 19. The Lord has reiterated the promises of the Davidic covenant. The people are aware of the promises of the Abrahamic covenant, these eternal promises, "But...verse 19...if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you and shall go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will uproot you from My land which I have given you and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will

cast out of My sight." That's the temple. "I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. As for this house which was exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?' And they will say, even the strangers will know, 'Because they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers who brought them from the land of Egypt and they adopted other gods and worshiped them and served them, therefore He has brought all this adversity on them.'" And again I reiterate the obvious point, when Israel turned away from God, when they turned away from the Word of God, when they forsook His statutes, forsook His commandments, began to establish other idols, they forfeited God's blessing and they ended up with curses.

Now this had been instructed to them back in the Torah, back in the Pentateuch, back in the books of Moses, Deuteronomy 28, listen to two verses, verse 58 and 63. "If you're not careful to observe all the words of this law which are written in this book, to fear this honored and awesome name, the Lord your God, it shall come about that as the Lord...listen to this...delighted to bless you and multiply you so the Lord will delight over you to make you perish and destroy you." If you meet the conditions, God will be delighted to bless you. If you don't, He will be equally delighted to curse you.

What do you mean, is He delighted in that? He's delighted in the sense that He finds satisfaction enduring what is consistent with His holiness. It's a simple principle. You ascribe your life to the truth of God, to the Word of God and where you fall short, you repent, you seek His forgiveness, you then put yourself in a place of blessing. Apart from a national penitence, a national brokenness, a national contrition for having turned their backs on God, on His Word, lived in sin, disdained to worship the true and living God, there is no basis upon which God would bless a people.

Psalm 81:11 and 12, "But My people did not listen to My voice and Israel did not obey Me. So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart to walk on their own devices." If you disobey God, you'll never be blessed. That's true individually, and therefore it's true collectively.

You say, "Yeah, but that's the...that's the Old Testament standard." No, that's the universal standard. God said, "I am the Lord, I change not." It is pointless really, no matter how well intentioned to keep on saying "God bless America, God bless America, when it is crystal-clear that America is not interested in meeting the conditions of that blessing. God bring America back to the truth of Scripture. God bring America to true penitence. Pray that.

When I was speaking to this group of Jewish people on Sunday night, I said two things have to happen for God to bless America. One, we have to return to God and two, we have to return to guilt. I put them on a God trip and a guilt trip.

What am I saying by that? I'm saying we have to return to a true understanding of God and a true understanding of ourselves. We have to look up to God and His truth, we have to look in to our fallenness and our wretchedness and our sinfulness. While we're seeing the truth of God's morality,

we have to see the truth of our immorality.

We have a long way to go to return to the true and living God. Wouldn't you say? You want blessing? God repeatedly said in Leviticus, "Be holy for I am holy...be holy for I am holy...be holy for I am holy." Jesus repeated it in the Sermon on the Mount. Peter repeats it in his epistle. You want blessing? Then you have to go back to the holy standard.

Joshua, turn to Joshua 1...1:8, this is such a great statement. It should be marked out in your Bible. Joshua chapter 1, Moses is dead and the people of Israel are ready to cross the Jordan and come into the land God had promised them. Verse 3, "God says every place on which the sole of your foot treads I'm going to give to you, just as I promised Moses from the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites as far as the great sea toward the setting of the sun will be your territory." The Mediterranean, all the way back to the middle of the Mesopotamian Valley, the Tigris/Euphrates valley, north to Lebanon all the way south down to Egypt, that's exactly what God had pledged to Abraham, reiterated that pledge to Moses, is recorded in the books of the law. And now God reminds them as they go into the land of that promise, I'm going to give it to you.

I'm not only going to give it to you, "But nobody...verse 5...is going to be able to stand before you all the days of your life, just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you, I will not fail or forsake you. Nobody is going to be able to overthrow My ultimate purpose for you." Verse 6, "Be strong and courageous," this is speaking directly to Joshua, nobody is going to be able to withstand Joshua who was a godly leader, God's going to be with him. "Be strong, courageous, you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them." Verse 7, "Only be strong and very courageous," and here it comes, "be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right, or to the left so that you may have success wherever you go. If you turn from the law of God, I guarantee you will not have success. You will not have prosperity. You will not enjoy safety, protection or well-being."

What's the key? Verse 8, here's the key. "This book of the law, the Word of God, shall not depart from your mouth. You shall meditate on it day and night. Learn it, absorb it, make it your own so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it for then you will make your way prosperous, then you will have success."

The principles haven't changed. America wants success, if American wants prosperity, if America wants well-being, safety, protection, all of these things that are bound up in this particular fear, then the standard is established, go back to the law of God and meet the God of the law.

I mean, it's obvious, we have God in our salute, we have God on our coins, we have God in our songs, we just don't have Him in our minds or our hearts. This is a serious situation because we

have turned so seriously against God that we are far, far away from a return. We are in a kind of desperation that I think is best defined by Romans 1.

Turn to Romans 1. This was pretty shocking to the pupil I was speaking to on Sunday night in this meeting because they were not familiar with Romans 1. Many of them not familiar, because they were Jewish, with the New Testament at all. Those who were Christians not familiar with the real intent of Romans 1. But here's what you have in Romans 1, verse 18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...here's the key phrase...who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." You want to put yourself as an entity, as a corporate group of people, you want to put yourself in the worst possible condition, suppress the truth...suppress the truth. Verse 19 says, "That which is known about God is evident within them, for God made it evident to them." God has revealed His truth in the human heart, man is created in the image of God, he's created with rational capabilities, moral capabilities, a conscience and built into the fabric of man, according to Romans chapter 2, is the law of God written in his heart and the attendant conscience that on the knowledge of that law accuses or excuses man. So that everybody has the knowledge of God to some degree in his heart. It's evident.

How did God make it evident? Verse 20, "From the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen being understood through what has been made so that they are without excuse." Nobody has any excuse for not believing in the true God who is the creator, no one. The evidence is massive, and we've just recently gone through it in our series on Genesis. It's available to you if you want information in the new book Battle for the Beginning. Every culture can look at creation and by virtue of the simple principle of cause and effect know that there had to be a cause for this massive effect that we call the world.

The problem is, man suppresses the truth. Verse 21, "Even though they knew God because God had planted that knowledge in them, they didn't honor Him as God, they didn't give Him thanks, they were futile, empty in their speculations and their foolish heart was darkened, professing to be wise they became fools and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man, of birds, and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

Now that's a lot to absorb. Let me make it very simple. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against people who suppress the truth. The knowledge of God is in the human heart, it's a very part of being human. God as He's given you physical senses, the five senses, have given you spiritual senses and a rational mind so that you can reason from effect back to cause, back to cause until finally you come back to the ultimate cause and your mind demands that there be a creator God who has the capacity to create not only a material universe, but a spiritual universe who has the capacity to think and to reason and relate the way humans do. The greater cannot come from the lesser. Clearly God is revealed and certainly beyond His revelation in the physical world, He has revealed Himself in Scripture.

America, we not only have that physical revelation, that theologians call natural revelation, we have special revelation, verbal revelation, the Scripture, our country has always had the Word of God. Our problem is, when we knew God, we glorified Him not as God. We have taken God out, forced Him out in the name of political correctness, in the name of conventional wisdom, in the name of tolerance, in the name of not offending somebody we have blasphemed God, the creator. We don't honor Him, verse 21. We don't give Him thanks. And we are empty in our ideas, our foolish hearts are darkened, we think we're smart, we're actually moraino, the word from which we get morons, worshiping dolphins, or spotted owls, or the new religion, eco-feminism, or whatever other bizarre kind of idolatry we can concoct in the place of the true God, or just worshiping money, power, prestige, worshiping our own physical bodies, whatever it is.

So that's the problem in America, but it's not just us, it's everybody. Acts 14 says, "God has allowed all the nations to go their own way." That's the whole history of the world. Every nation goes this way...people are born, they know God exists, God is part of the fabric of their very being. They can know God through the law written in their hearts. They can know Him through reason. They can be responding to the revelation through their conscience. The knowledge of God is there. Every society suppresses that because of fallenness, because of wickedness, because of blindness, because of the love of iniquity. They crush the knowledge of God. They crush it lower and lower until it disappears out of their view. And that turns loose the wrath of God.

Now go back to verse 18. "For the wrath of God is revealed against all who do this." Every once in a while I hear a suppose a well-intentioned and hopeful preacher say, "We're on the brink of a great revival in America." I don't know what they're looking at. I don't know why they would ever come to that conclusion. I believe America is currently experiencing the wrath of God. The wrath of God is the general reality in our nation.

Am I saying it was an act of God's wrath to allow terrorists to kill people? I don't know why God does what He does. We've already said that. I do know that for some they were catapulted into eternal wrath. But I also know for some who were believers, they were taken into glory. God may have many purposes in what He does. I'm not talking about an incident. What I am telling you though is on a national level, I believe America is experiencing the wrath of God. And I think you'll see that here because the wrath of God is defined for us in verses 24 and following and it's very specific.

The wrath of God, verse 18, is revealed, and then it tells against what it's revealed. But down in verse 24, you go to the therefore. Therefore, let's go back to the wrath. Here is the definition, "God gave them over." Verse 26, "God gave them over." Verse 28, the middle of the verse, "God gave them over."

That's an interesting phrase. God gave them over, or God gave them up. God abandoned them. That's a fascinating statement. There are, as I would count them, five forms of God's wrath. First is eternal wrath, that's everlasting punishment in hell, that's one form of God's wrath, that's not in view here. Second, there would be what we could call eschatological wrath, that's the wrath of God that unfolds at the end of the age, during the time of the Great Tribulation when the wrath of God is poured out on the earth and all the things that are described in the book of Revelation take place. That's a future eschatological wrath.

Thirdly, there is a cataclysmic wrath, that's the wrath of God that comes on Sodom and Gomorrah when God destroys those cities and the cities of the plain and when God destroys Bethsaida, Chorazin, Capernaum in the New Testament, there is that cataclysmic wrath that falls on Pompeii or through some massive disaster brings about the death of tens of thousands of people, cataclysmic expressions of God's wrath often on cultures that have found themselves in this position, having rejected the knowledge of God.

And there is, fourthly, what I call natural wrath. God has built into the fabric of human life consequence to sin, and some of that consequence is natural. If you sin against your body by becoming an alcoholic, the natural effect, the natural wrath that works could be called sclerosis of the liver. If you sin in a life of immorality and you get involved in homosexuality or promiscuous sexuality, you could wind up with a sexually transmitted disease, you could wind up with AIDS and that is a built-in act of wrath. That's the sowing and reaping principle.

We're not talking about eternal wrath here. We're not talking about eschatological wrath, cataclysmic wrath or natural wrath...there's a fifth kind of wrath, it's the wrath of abandonment...the wrath of abandonment.

This is such a frightening thing. This is when God gives you up, steps back, let them go...let them go. No more restraining grace. Turn them over. They want their sin, let them go. We know this is going to happen in its consummate sense in the time of Tribulation when the restrainer is removed, remember? The Holy Spirit and hell belches forth the previously bound demons and all the demons of the universe come down to earth and aid the Antichrist in his satanic efforts to finally conquer the world and the Kingdom of God.

But we get a foretaste of that, previews of that as nations turn against God and He gives them up. This is the wrath of abandonment that is true in the Old Testament. Judges 16, Samson found a Philistine woman by the name of Delilah. I never met anybody who named their daughter Delilah, such an infamous person. Well, you remember the story. She seduced Samson and so he told her that his strength was connected to his Nazarite vow which had to do with his hair. And she made him, according to Judges 16:19, sleep on her knees. She called for a man and had him shave off the

seven locks of his hair, then she began to afflict him somehow, not in some severe sense, but to jostle him and his strength left him.

And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson," and he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." He had defeated the Philistines on many occasions and by the thousands. He had defeated them single-handedly, so he said, "I will go out as at other times." Verse 20, "But he didn't know that the Lord had departed from him." Wow. So when the Philistines came, they seized him, they gouged out his eyes, they brought him down to Gaza, bound him with bronze chains and he was like a mule, grinding in a prison." God left. Turned Samson over to the consequence of his choices.

Judges chapter 10 verses 13 and 14, it says, speaking of Israel, "Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods, therefore I will deliver you no more." I'm done with you. I'm not going to rescue you, I'm not going to protect you. So verse 14 says, "God and cry out to the gods which you've chosen." You've chosen your gods, let them deliver you in the time of your distress. You leave Me, I leave you.

Proverbs 1, "Because I called and you refused, I stretched out My hand and no one paid attention, you neglected all My counsel, you didn't want My reproof, I will even laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your dread comes, when your dread comes like a storm, your calamity like a whirlwind, and distress and anguish comes on you, then they will call on Me but I will not answer." Is that America? Are we saying futilely against a vaulted sky, "God bless America" and God is not going to answer?

Why? "Because they hated knowledge, did not choose the fear of the Lord. They will seek Me diligently, they will not find Me. They would not accept My counsel, they spurned all My reproof so they shall eat of the fruit of their own way and be satisfied with their own devices. I'm letting them go." They can have the meal they cooked.

Hosea 4:17, the prophet said, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone." Amazing, let him go. Let him go.

Jesus said about the Pharisees, "They're blind leaders of the blind. Let them alone. Let them go. I'm done with them."

That's the frightening wrath that God just steps back and lets sinners to the consequence of their choices. You say, "How do you know that's going on in America?"

Follow the sequence. Verse 24, you're familiar with this, first thing that happens, "God gave them over to the lust of their hearts to impurity that their bodies might be dishonored among them for they

exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator who is blessed forever, amen." They turned their back on God. God gave them over to...what?...sexual immorality. They operate on lust. They function in impurity. They dishonor their bodies.

You look at America, you look back at 1960, you see the sexual revolution. That's...when God lets a people go, that's the first step down...they become preoccupied with illicit sex. Here we are a few decades later, drowning in a sea of pornography, now pumped into every person on the Internet everywhere. But that's only step one.

Step two is in verse 26, "God also gave them over to degrading passions for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural," that's Lesbianism, "in the same way also the men abandoned the function of the women and burned in their desire for one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own person the due penalty of their error."

First, when God lets a nation go, they sink to immorality. And then they sink to homosexuality. First it's heterosexual sin and then it's homosexual sin. Does anybody question that we're there?

And then in verse 28, the third step, "God gave them over to a depraved mind." What is that? Adokimos, useless mind, the mind is morally incapable of making a right judgment. And when you get to that point, there's no recovery. You can be moral, heterosexually, you can be immoral homosexually, and still somebody can be sane enough to call you back, but when you get to step three and the mind is morally incapable of making a right judgment, there's no way back. And you know a society has reached this when that society will not tolerate anyone making moral judgments.

You want to be an enemy of our culture? Start making moral judgments. Once you don't make any moral judgments, what happens? Verse 29, "Unrighteousness fills everything, wickedness, greed, evil, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents with understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful, everything breaks loose and the Jerry Springer show becomes funny to the degraded mind.

I was speaking at chapel at the college this week and I leaned over to Mark Taklot(?) and I said, "Mark, do you think there's anything that could happen that would shock these young people? Anything?" But if you step up and call a halt to the moral insanity and place the law of God in the public eye, believe me, you will be rejected. The same America that keeps saying "God bless America, God bless America, God bless America," is not anyway near ready to hear how God will bless America and that is, first of all, by establishing His law against which every life is measured, and against which an appropriate repentance is required. And even though people, verse 32 says, know that death is the result of these kinds of behaviors, they do them anyway. And they give hearty approval to those who practice them.

People always used to say to me, "How could the President...when President Clinton...how could his approval ratings be so high?" And I said, "Because he's a Romans 1:32 person and he appeals to people who are Romans 1:32 people, they approve of that."

That's where we are in this country. So if we're saying "God bless America...God bless America," on the basis of what? We've turned our back on God, we've blasphemed God, we've rejected God. In His place we've made our own idols. And now we're saying "God bless America?" I'm quite sure that if He were to bless America in the way people are now asking, it would be hard for Him to maintain His reputation as a holy God.

So, folks, I'm not the prophet or the son of a prophet, but I will tell you this. I can't see any reason at all why God should bless this nation and a myriad why of having let go of the nation He should turn it over to the consequence of its own wickedness. We can sing that song until we're blue in the face, and it doesn't compel our holy God at all.

Listen to what Scripture says again. Second Chronicles 7, familiar text, we looked at the later part of the chapter, let's go back to the earlier. Second Chronicles 7, Solomon in verse 11 finished the house of the Lord and the King's palace, successfully completed all that he had planned on doing in the house of the Lord and in his palace. And, of course, the Solomonic temple and palace were the greatest ever. "Then the Lord appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, 'I have heard your prayer, have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land or if I send pestilence among My people." In other words, He says I'm going to come here, I'm going to live here, but I'll tell you this, if the people sin and I have to bring judgment, drought, devastating locust plague, some other pestilence, some deadly disease, if I have to bring that, then remember this, verse 14, "My people who are called by My name, if they humble themselves and pray, seek My face, turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and heal their land."

You say, "Is that a covenant promise for Israel?" Well, it's a promise from God to a covenant people, but the standard applies to anybody. God doesn't bless people who reject Him.

Psalm 81 again, verses 13 to 16, God says, "O that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways. If My people would just listen, and obey, I would quickly subdue their enemies." I suppose we could extrapolate from that that the best hope for any nation to be protected and safe and secure and free and prosperous is to have God fighting their battles, subduing their enemies. And in verse 16 He says, "If My people listen to Me and walk in My ways, I will feed you with the finest of the wheat and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you." That's blessing, that's just a way to express blessing, I'll give you the best I've got, I'll give you the best blessings I have.

There are conditions. The condition is the law of God must be put back as the standard and obeyed. That's a return to God and His Word. But secondly, there has to be a return to guilt. I have to measure my life against that law and repent. Let me use David as an illustration.

Saul was king. He had been chosen by the people but confirmed by God. And Saul was hunting David to kill him cause he was threatened, of course, by the fact that David was going to be king. On one occasion Saul is hunting David and David stumbles across Saul in a very compromised condition. He is in a cave doing what the Old Testament very delicately calls "covering his feet," relieving himself. David could have killed him. His...his enemy, he could have killed Saul. And his men said, "Kill him...kill him...look, kill him." He wouldn't do it. He went over and he cut off a little piece of his robe, Saul's robe, to let him know he could have killed him.

And then it says in 1 Samuel 24:5, "David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe because Saul was the Lord's anointed." I'm telling you, folks, that's a sensitive conscience, isn't it? That is a hyper-sensitive conscience. With all of David's failures, he sinned greatly but is there anybody in the Old Testament who had such a sensitivity to his sin as he had? David compromised again with Bathsheba and engaged in adultery with her. She was the wife of Uriah, one of his soldiers. Not only did he sin with Bathsheba, but he arranged for Uriah to be left isolated in the middle of a battle, have the ones around him retreat so that he would die and he did. David was guilty then of adultery and murder. And in response to that he came to Nathan the prophet in 2 Samuel 12:13 and he said, "I have sinned against the Lord." And he was so smitten in his conscience that he wrote two Psalms, Psalm 32 and Psalm 51. And in Psalm 32 he said, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away and through my groaning all day long, night and day Your hand was heavy on me, my vitality, my life's juices were drained away." It restricted his blood flow, it restricted his saliva, all the functions of his body were thrown out of whack because of the terrible guilt that he felt.

Later on in 2 Samuel 24 he numbered Israel which essentially was a way of being proud and a way of sort of counting on the sheer force of your army to win a battle, rather than God. He numbered the people when he was told not to number the people. Second Samuel 24:10 says, "David's heart smote him." Something went through him like a spear. I hate that David sinned, I love that David responded so sensitively to it. A spear went through his heart and he said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I've done, please, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Your servant, I've acted very foolishly."

That's what it takes. That's what it takes. It takes a recognition of the standard of God, the law of God and then an instant severe pain over having violated that law. If America, if you want to be blessed, that's the path. Return to God, return to guilt.

We don't want God in our society, except as a sky-hook, a parachute. And we certainly don't want guilt in our society. That great, outstanding theologian Ann Landers wrote, I quote, "Guilt is a pollutant and we don't need any more of it in the world." Really? Charles Dyer(?) in his book Your Erroneous Zonessaid, quote, "Guilt must be exterminated, spray cleaned and sterilized forever." MTV said, "No sin is as evil as the killjoy attitude of those who think someone's behavior is an offense to some holy God." We want self-esteem, not guilt. Guilt's intolerable. The psychologies of self-esteem and victimization are designed to silence the voice of conscience to remove guilt. That is damning and destructive. Generations are being trained that their consciences are liars and that they're really good and not evil. Psychologists have been the purveyors of that damning anthropology.

John Owen who was Cromwell's chaplain wrote, "If you want to kill sin, load your conscience with the guilt of it. Generations are being trained that conscience is a liar, they shouldn't feel guilty, and you can do whatever you want because you have the freedom to be yourself. And don't let anybody put some guilt trip on you or make you feel bad about it.

This is the depth of the morass of twisted thinking that America is in. We've abandoned God and He's abandoned us. We've plummeted down the path from immorality to homosexuality to degraded thinking. We've slaughtered our conscience. We don't have the Word of God to inform conscience and when conscience tries to speak even weakly, we crush it into silence and tell it it has no right to tell us anything. We're good, the Twinkies made me do it. Your child has ADD, HDP, ODD, or whatever other psychologization of morality.

We have a long ways to go in this country to expect blessing, don't you think? Just getting back to God is a huge, huge trek and getting back to guilt is another one. We want God but we want Him on our terms. Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord. In His law he meditates day and night."

You want to be blessed, get back to the book. Go back to the book and the God of the book. And the book will reveal God in all His magnificent, holy morality and it will reveal you in all your ugly immorality. Yes, there is blessing for the one who walks in the Word. Psalm 32, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity." Blessed means that you've come to the Lord, you've come to the truth, you've embraced His Word, you've sought forgiveness. And you've been justified, that is no longer is iniquity imputed to you, your sin has been covered, covered, in fact, by the very righteousness of God through Christ. Blessed, Psalm 34:8, is the man who takes refuge in the Lord.

You want to be blessed? Return to the Lord. I'm just reading you a few that come to my mind. Psalm 40 verse 4, "Blessed is the man who has made the Lord his trust and has not turned to the proud, nor to those who lapse into falsehood." I think it's Psalm 112, a good place to sort of conclude these references from the Psalms, yes, "Praise the Lord...this sums it up...how blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in His commandments. Wealth and riches are in his house. He will never fear evil tidings. His heart is steadfast. Trusting in the Lord, his heart is upheld. He will not fear." That's blessing.

But there are conditions. Walking in the truth, knowing God, repenting, confessing sin. Isaiah 55, "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He's near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return to the Lord and He will have compassion on him and to our God for He will abundantly pardon." There is blessing, but that blessing is attached to repentance for sin and obedience to the Word of God. And that's not a national thing until it's an individual thing. The only way God could bless America as an entity is if it was dominated by individual who had stepped into His blessing.

There's one other thing that I have to say. Believing the Bible, repenting of sin--the standard of blessing. But there's one other absolutely critical reality and that is that blessing is provided through Jesus Christ and Him alone. In 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 20, "There is many as may be the promises of God, all His promises of blessing, obviously, as many as may be the promises of God, in Him, that is in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, mentioned in verse 19, in Him they are yes." All the promises of God in Christ are yes. "Wherefore also by Him is our amen to the glory of God through us." Paul is saying, all the promises of God become reality in Christ.

Galatians chapter 3 and verse 14, "In Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham comes to the Gentiles so we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." The ultimate blessing of forgiveness, eternal life originally given in the Abrahamic covenant comes to us in Christ Jesus.

And then a passage to end on, Ephesians 1 verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...what are the next two words?...in Christ."

We have a message for America. God bless America, well He will bless America if the conditions are met. But before we can be concerned about America, we need to be concerned about those who are America, that's us. And the way to blessing is back to the book, to know the truth of God and the God of the book, to repent of sin and to come to Him for forgiveness and new life and new capacity for obedience through faith in Jesus Christ. All the promises of God are yes in Christ. All spiritual blessings are ours in Christ.

I wish that all the people saying God bless America were willing to acknowledge God, His Word, their own sin and the Savior Jesus Christ. That's the only way anybody will ever be blessed by God. This is our message, folks, not just mine to you, yours to everybody else.

Father, thank You for our time tonight. So much can be said about this and Your Word is so clear on it, perhaps it is enough tonight to be reminded of the path of blessing and the folly of expecting You to bless on terms that people establish. Bless only in a way, Father, that glorifies You. Bless, yes, we ask You to bless, bless many souls by bringing them to faith and repentance, obedience through Jesus Christ. And those who are in this nation don't come that way, then vindicate Your holiness even in Your judgment from which we will be delivered and hence have no fear. This all to Your glory in Christ's name. Amen.

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