

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

THE DECLINE OF A NATION
Psalm 12

Keywords: sin, wicked, judgment ungodly, justice, perseverance, trust, faith

PowerPoint Presentation included: NONE

SermonAudio Blurb: There is much to be concerned about in America as we continue in our headlong race toward destruction. Not all share in this pessimistic perspective but the bible is clear regarding the way God works among the people and nations. This sermon is designed to stir the hearts of God's people to consider what they believe. What do they believe about God? What do they believe about sin? What do they believe about the Word of God? And what is their hope? It is an introductory sermon to prepare Missio Dei Fellowship for a series that considers if the bible is true or only partly true.

I. Introduction.

- A. I have planned to preach through Genesis 1-11 with the goal of challenging us as a church as to what we believe is true. And as I wrote my first sermon I came to Psalm 12 in my preparation. That led me down a path that I decided was worth going down and this sermon is the result.
- B. Read Psalm 12.
- C. Two ways to approach this Psalm:
 - 1. David is looking out upon his nation and seeing the decline of a people who once were a people of God.
 - 2. Or, David is looking at the nations around him and seeing their supposed prosperity and seeing the affliction of his own people, Israel.
 - 3. I lean toward the first. David was a pastor, a shepherd-king. He was concerned for his people and was keenly aware of their ups and downs spiritually speaking.
 - 4. This was a nation that was God's nation, they had the law of God, the prophets of God, the priests of God, and the only way of grace through sacrifices. Yet, often they would forget God and pursue evil. Religion was still there, just not the thought of God.
 - 5. And I believe that David is seeing a point in time such as this in his rule and is aching over it.
- D. This is a lament Psalm.

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1. It is lamenting the loss of the godly and the rise of the ungodly.
 2. It is written in such a way as to apply to any and every age. Few, if any, could read this and not see their time as being applicable to it.
 3. Most certainly there is much in way of application for us today as we watch our nation in the throes of self-inflicted harm.
 4. This is not, though, a sermon on how to get America great again. It is not on how to fix our society. And certainly it is not on how to find our way back to the good ol' days, for those days were the fertile soil from which grew the many evils you see around you.
- E. What we shall do today is examine this Psalm and observe how a nation declines and where our hope ought to lie as Christian who are in this world, but not . . . of it.
1. We will do this by approaching this psalm in two ways:
 2. First, we will ask what are the marks of a nation in decline?
 3. Second, we will ask how a Christian is to live in the midst of a declining nation?

II. How Does a Nation Decline?

- A. First, there is a decline of godly people (1).
1. David cries out, "help."
 - a. No direct object, "help me" or "help them" or "help us."
 - b. Just this quick, heart-felt plea. Very abrupt, almost like a sudden realization comes upon him and he realizes that he is in a very precarious position.
 2. When we look at a nation in decline we see it most clearly in the lack of godly people. They become less and less.
 - a. And therefore, by a natural correlation, the ungodly rise to prominence.
 - b. The term "godly" comes from the same root as *hesed* which is the word "lovingkindness."
 - (1) As I have said many times, "lovingkindness" speaks of God's loyalty and faithfulness to His promises in the covenants He makes.

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- (a) When God is *hesed* he is showing that love that resulted in His making a covenant, filled with promises.
 - (b) They are not sterile promises, but promises that arose out of love.
 - (2) Those who are godly are those who are faithful to God. They are not merely religious, but rather, are lovers of God.
 - (3) We see this in the second line of verse 1, “faithful.”
 - c. They are ceasing to be! They are in the retreat. David is looking around and there are none that he can see.
3. Religion is still going on.
- a. But the godly people are not there anymore.
 - b. The light that is to be the godly has grown very, very dim.
 - c. This is a good reminder for us all to not confuse religious activity and speech with true godliness.
 - (1) **Titus 1:16** They profess to know God, but by *their* deeds they deny *Him*, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed.
 - (2) **2 Timothy 3:1-5**, “ But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these.”
 - (3) **Isaiah 29:13** Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned *by rote*,
 - d. We have fools who lead us and fools who teach us.
 - (1) Our schools are filled with foolish, ungodly teachers.

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- (2) Our offices are filled with ungodly men conducting ungodly business practices.
 - (3) Our courtrooms are filled with judges who call evil good.
 - (4) And sadly, the ungodly fill the pews weekly of our churches professing to be Christians, but denying the Lord.
4. Churches are filled across our land. Sermons are downloaded. Books are published regarding the Christian faith. And yet somehow Christian no longer can agree on the most basic of things.
 5. Our nation is exceedingly prosperous. And sadly too many see that as an indication of God's blessing.
 6. Godly people are the indication of God's blessing.
 - a. That is a call to you and me to examine our lives daily to see if we are a people committed to pursuing God or the things of this world.
 - b. Are we a people focused on growing in our love and obedience to God or are we merely performing religious works with no thought of God in our minds?
 - c. And this is why I decided to preach from this Psalm as my introduction to my introduction to Genesis 1-11.
 - (1) Godliness doesn't just happen while you are on your way to buy new shoes or look at a piece of property.
 - (2) It happens by people who are converted to following Jesus Christ as Lord, indwelt by the Holy Spirit and committed to the uttermost to a life under the Word of God.
 - (3) And it is that last part, being committed to the Word of God in our life that is lacking too often.
 - (a) Much talk about the bible in the evangelical church today. Much in the way of blog posts and books and sermons and conferences.
 - (b) And as long as we keep the conversations at a high altitude everything can seem to be quite nice. But begin to descend into the actual text of the bible and problems abound.

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- (c) For today it is hard to know exactly what conservative, evangelical Christians actually believe about what the bible teaches.
 - (d) And the result is a lack of godliness. Because the lives of too many are simply not conformed to the Word of God. As a people of God in this nation we have become a people who too often hear the Word but are not doing it.
 - d. This is why the church is slipping more and more into social issues as a mark of godliness rather than personal holiness and personal evangelism.
 - (1) A social driven agenda that models itself on the latest outrage by the public is no agenda the church should pursue.
 - (2) A minimalist agenda that claims to be centered on the gospel while eschewing the interconnectedness of all things biblical never will produce a lasting heart and life change.
 - (3) This is now how to promote godliness in the church. And as a result the church stops being a help to the greater society.
 - 7. So the first step in a decline of a nation is a decrease in godly people.
- B. Second, there is a rise in evil speech (2-3).
 - 1. First, there is lying.
 - a. As the godly decrease lies will increase.
 - b. The godly bring with them the truth. And there is a delight and expectation that truth shall be upon the lips of the people.
 - c. Christians are called the salt of the earth. One aspect of that is a preservative, and that is what godly people do when they are in abundance. And a key mark of a true believer is a love for truth.
 - (1) Liars and fools go into hiding.
 - (2) They don't disappear, they just can't trumpet their lies so easily.

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- d. But when the godly decline, so does truth. It is not a part of the unbeliever. Truth becomes a tool to leverage power and wealth. Truth becomes a topic of debate rather than a dividing line of right and wrong.
 - e. And lies are so painful and so destructive that Spurgeon said that it is better to be among lions than among liars.”
 - f. Liars are self destructive for they do not lie only to those who love truth, but they lie to one another.
 - (1) I saw a saying once that went like this: “If someone gossips to you, they are also gossiping about you.”
 - (2) So too with liars.
 - (3) What are we to do when lies abound in the pews of America? When we reject the clarity of what the Scripture says on life and truth?
 - (4) Worse yet, what are we to do when the pulpits of America abound with men who are double-tongued, living lives of deep deception until finally they are caught?
 - g. “Double heart” literally reads, “heart and heart.”
 - (1) A good word picture.
 - (2) There is that “heart” that we hear on the lips of liars. “Really, I promise!”
 - (3) But in their heart of hearts there is the evil smile of the deceiver who sees his hearer begin to believe him.
 - h. So we can say that a nation is in decline when truth is not the issue anymore.
 - (1) And this is what David saw.
 - (2) And it is what we see in America and there is simply a shrugging of shoulders by the masses as they eagerly binge on the latest Netflix series. And the church sits happily alongside holding the popcorn.
2. Not only lies, but its close cousin, flattery.

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- a. Not only lies but flattery arises in a nation on the decline.
 - b. Image is all that matters. A verbal scratching of one another's back's as we seek to feel good about ourselves.
 - c. This comes in so many packages, most of them accepted by the church today. The most subtle might be found in the term, "self-image."
 - (1) We seek to make people feel good about themselves when there is little to feel good about.
 - (2) All of this is flattery and it shows itself in a multitude of other ways as well.
- C. Third, there is the self-exaltation of man (3-4).
1. When truth no longer matters then the people begin to lift themselves to heights of greatness that are only in their minds.
 2. They speak great things, they don't do them, but they do speak them.
 3. And one of the areas that they quickly go is to reviling the name of God.
 - a. No one is going to Lord over me!
 - b. I don't care about hell, that is where all my friends are anyhow!
 - c. I shall say what I want and do what I want, no one, even your God isn't going to stop me.
 4. Yet they do not know that a household or a nation or even a single life is built only by the gracious will of God.
 - a. The glory of that nation is like a flower, easily faded and easily killed.
 - b. Some flowers are there but a day or so, while others will bloom for an entire summer, but they will die away. We expect them too.
 - c. And in the same way the foolish and arrogant speech of those who reject God shall lead them to destruction.
- D. Fourth, the godly are afflicted (5).
1. Those who love truth and love God and love righteousness shall be hated by those who don't. It really is that simple.

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2. And the result is an ever growing affliction and persecution.
 3. In some nations this is done openly and with no shame. Great violence is done against our Indonesian, Sudanese, Ugandan, Chinese brothers and sisters.
 4. Meanwhile, in our nation, there is less and less stigma attached to attacking Christians and as a result it is becoming more prevalent.
 5. A nation is in the decline when those who are the preservative within the nation are being attacked.
- E. Fifth, there is a glorying in vileness (8).
1. The evildoer is always present in this world, but when the nation sinks ever deeper into the slime of its sin, then they come out in all their glory.
 2. The wounds of the nation begin to fester and become noxious the nose of those who can smell the sickness.
 3. I used to think that perhaps one of the greatest examples of the wicked strutting is in Gay Pride parades. There, sin is exalted in every possible form.
 4. But now it is just another normal day in America where Drag Queen Story Time is a real thing and puberty blockers are dispensed to children because they can't decide what gender they might be.
 5. But all of this is a result of the decline of the godly in the nation.
 6. And this is why David is crying out.

III. Conclusion—How Then Do We Live?

- A. By Prayer (1a and 3).
1. As we watch our nation decline it must drive us to pray more.
 2. Only in prayer shall we be able to lay our needs and fears before the Lord.
 3. Only in prayer shall we be able to draw near to God and cry out to Him.
 4. Only in prayer shall we have the peace of God that surpasses all understanding.
 5. Only in prayer shall the needs of the afflicted rise up to the Lord.

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6. But it is to be a prayer of repentance. A prayer crying out for true justice and wise leaders and faithful judges.
 7. It is to be prayers that are burdened more for the name of God than the comfort of your life.
 8. Prayers that are dangerous because they threaten to upset our many idols of leisure and pleasure.
- B. By the Word of God (6-7).
1. We stand by the Word of God. We do not abandon the Word of God.
 2. The worse thing we could do is see the evil approaching and begin to capitulate and allow ourselves to become conformed to this declining world.
 3. We need to drive ourselves deeper into the Word, understanding that it alone is pure.
 - a. No dross, such as lies and flattery. In the bible you shall hear the truth, even if it hurts.
 - b. David writes this to remind those who are the godly to not lose heart.
 - (1) God's words are not merely words with no meaning.
 - (2) David is speaking of the covenants and promises of God. And he is reminding them that these promises shall come to pass, regardless of what they see before their eyes.
 - c. Do they fear? Are they lacking hope? Then go back to the flawless words of their Lord.
 - (1) Words to strengthen the weak, give hope to the hopeless.
 - (2) For God's Word is rooted in God's faithfulness.
 - (3) And God's faithfulness is rooted in his power and authority.
 - (4) **Psalm 103:17-22**, But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children, To those who keep His covenant, And who remember His precepts to do them. The LORD has established His throne in the heavens;

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And His sovereignty rules over all. Bless the LORD, you His angels, Mighty in strength, who perform His word, Obeying the voice of His word! Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, You who serve Him, doing His will. Bless the LORD, all you works of His, In all places of His dominion; Bless the LORD, O my soul!

- (5) **Isaiah 40:1-11** "Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God. ² "Speak kindly to Jerusalem; And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, That her iniquity has been removed, That she has received of the LORD's hand Double for all her sins." ³ A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ "Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley; ⁵ Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, And all flesh will see *it* together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." ⁶ A voice says, "Call out." Then he answered, "What shall I call out?" All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades, When the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever. ⁹ Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; Lift *it* up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" ¹⁰ Behold, the Lord God will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him, And His recompense before Him. ¹¹ Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs, And carry *them* in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing *ewes*.

- C. By the work of the one, true God (5).
1. If you want to read stern words then read the ones where the prophets of old speak against Israel when she looked to the strength of the nations around her for her protection and life.

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2. As we pray and as we commit ourselves to the utter trustworthiness of God's Word, our heart cry must be that God would arise and change the heart of our wicked nation.
3. And this brings us to the gospel. For only in the gospel can hearts be truly changed.
 - a. It means we need to know the gospel.
 - b. It means we must believe the gospel.
 - c. It means we must model hope in God through the gospel in our lives.
 - d. It means to rise and take up the Church's responsibility to be a light upon a hill and a beacon of truth in an age of lies.
 - e. It means that we are to be constantly transformed in our minds through the Word of God so that we will not be conformed to this age, the thinking of this age, nor the god of this age.

Small Group Questions

- **Read Genesis 18:20-33 and consider what is being taught there in light of this sermon. What are some conclusions or applications you might come to?**
- **What are ways you find the current state of our nation affects you personally and how do you respond to it? What perhaps needs to change?**
- **At the core of everything going on in our nation consider the following passages and the central issue in each of them. What are some things we can each do in light of these passage? Romans 1:18-32; Amos 8:11-14; Jeremiah 23:16-31; 2 Peter 3:1-4; 1 Timothy 4:1-8.**