

How to Keep It
7/2/23
Patriotic Service
Sunday AM

As one who's been privileged to have traveled/lived in a number of countries outside of the U.S., I'm truly grateful to be a citizen of our remarkable country. And like you, while I'm not always pleased w/ what takes place in our nation – **I'm proud to be an American.**

I have an honest question and I'm looking for a thoughtful reply. **Is our nation broken?** Do you think the U.S. is going in the wrong direction – and why? Is it our *politics, immorality, and plurality, or our arrogance, greed, and gluttony* – or all of the above?

If your answer is we've drifted from our Christian beliefs/values, you may be on the right track, yet the truth is, we may've never truly been a Christian nation, a nation under God, but just a nation framed on a Judeo-Christian ethic. After all, would a *Christian* nation have racism, child abuse, mass shootings, and a lack of respect for life? Would we have had Roe vs Wade, slavery, a sex revolution, or a Civil War?

When I think of the condition of our country, I'm reminded of the story of when Ben Franklin was leaving Independence Hall at the close of the Constitutional Convention in 1787. As he was leaving, a Ms. Powel inquired, "Dr. Franklin, what have we got – a republic or a monarchy?" Franklin replied, "***A republic... if you can keep it.***"

If you can keep it – maybe the question we should be asking is *what were the essential ingredients our framers used to create our Constitution/Bill of Rights?*

Recently, I came across an interesting read by Os Guinness, entitled, ***The Magna Carta of Humanity***, which I believe offers some intriguing insights into answering this question.

The premise of his book is that the uniqueness of the American experiment stems from our founders' recognition that God created all people to live in freedom and that the Sinai Covenant (10 C's) is central to any society that desires for its citizens to be able to experience *life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.* In fact, Guinness suggests that the very fabric of the U.S. revolution was predicated on the 10 Commands.

The idea holds that a society founded on reasonable moral boundaries based on a higher standard, cares for the whole while allowing each person, under God, to live freely w/ accountability so the whole seldom suffers b/c of the abuse/misuse of freedom by a few.

It's a society that recognizes that b/c of the existence and rule of God, there is right/wrong and good/evil in our world – and even w/in us. So, whether a person ever desires to ***bend*** their knee, ***bow*** their heart, and ***believe*** in God – they're still bound to a nation that embraces a rule/morality of a good God and operates for the betterment of each individual.

Thus, our framers, many of whom were Christian, although some were deists, and even atheists, agreed that there was something significant in the *Sinai Covenant* that was essential to create a successful, free society where all men could be considered equal and afforded the opportunity to pursue life to the fullest.

It almost sounds utopian – that is until we add in the human element of sin. *Sin always messes things up.* It's always consumed w/ self – whether it is the sin of others or our own sin. ***Yet when the righteous lose their way in silence, the nation as a whole soon fades.***

Guinness suggests that what has occurred in the U.S. is that instead of remaining true to the beliefs/values of the American Revolution, the U.S. has drifted towards the tenets of the French Revolution which was built on enlightenment/humanism (void of God).

The idea Rob Peters referred to last week when we were discussing the secularization of society:

*But know this, in the last days perilous times will come – men will be **lovers of themselves** (humanism), **lovers of money** (materialism), boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, w/out self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, **lovers of pleasure** (hedonism) rather than lovers of God, having a form of spirituality but denying its power. 2 Timothy 3:1-5*

That is – a self-centered society driven by the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.

This brings up what I believe is one of the great challenges to our nation. *The farther we drift into a post-truth, enlightened culture, absent of God, the deeper we will plunge into depravity/despair.*

Yet just like w/ Israel, the solution isn't some brand of Christian Nationalism desperately holding onto the fallacy that we were once a Christian nation or hoping our politics (or some individual) will rise up to save the day. Rather, individually/collectively, we must realign our lives w/ God's Covenant trusting His truths to be a guiding force for our nation – using our relational influence to point others to God's ways.

This brings me to my 2nd thought and hopefully an encouragement to us all. As w/ every other message so far in this series, this is nothing new. It's happened before, and b/c of the human condition, it'll occur again. But we can learn from the past. (see **Exodus 32**)

Set the stage. Israel had been in Egyptian bondage for roughly 430 yrs. *At that time, they had become immersed in Egyptian culture in every way.* After Joseph passed and was forgotten, and a new Pharaoh came to power, the Israelites, although immersed in Egypt) became a threat to the Egyptians and were soon subdued into slavery – *and they began to cry out to God b/c they didn't enjoy this new way of life.*

BTW – Isn't it uncanny how we only seem to turn to God when we don't like how life is treating us...

AYK – God hears their cry and raises up a man who'd He'd been preparing long before the Israelites were even asking – a child who was rescued in the thicket of the Nile and raised in Pharaoh's household – Moses.

Moses, after being prepared by God on the backside of nowhere, confronts Pharaoh for the release of the Israelites – and 10 plagues and a Red Sea miracle later, the Israelites are on their way to the Land of Promise. The problem was – ***Egypt was still in their hearts.***

Fast forward 45 days to Mt. Sinai – and God begins to give Moses new direction for the people in preparation for them to become a nation. He gives them the 10 foundational commands along w/ a few other rules to begin to establish them as a people and to begin the tedious process of stripping Egypt from their hearts.

As we pick up the story here in Exodus 32, Moses has gone to the top of Mt. Sinai for a 40-day encounter w/ God to receive the details of God's expectations for Israel. While he's away, the Israelites grow impatient (not that we ever do this) and do something really stupid... they convince Aaron, their temp. leader, to make them an earthly idol to worship. Since the people having been immersed in Egyptian culture were familiar w/ having a visual representation of gods, Aaron acquiesced, and taking their golden earrings, crafted for them a golden calf. And even though they named that idol after YHWH, the people began to worship the calf the only way they knew, by offering sacrifices and engaging in pagan rituals.

When the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, they gathered together w/ Aaron, and said, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons/daughters, and bring them to me." So, the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron – and he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it w/ an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" So, when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it and made a proclamation saying, "Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord." Then they rose early the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. And the Lord said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" Exodus 32:1-8

W/out a doubt, our nation has many challenges w/ no easy solutions, but today – I want to address the one solution that each of us can attend to today – and that is the condition of our own hearts.

Is it possible we may've exchanged the Biblical Gospel for an American Gospel to please "the Egypt" in our hearts? Have too many Christians baptized their faith in the golden calf of the aspirations/values of the American Dream, and now our faith looks more like the world than the Word?

SEE – whether people profess faith in Christ or not, if we're being honest, the real god in our nation is some form of the *American Dream* – and this ideology is juxtaposed w/ the heart of God. As a result, when we pursue the AD first, we've done exactly what the Israelites did – we've mixed a self-centered, idolatrous idea w/ our faith and have justified our actions all in the name of worship. We substituted conviction and communion for comfort/convenience thinking it's okay b/c it's the accepted norm of our culture.

Is it possible one of the major reasons our nation has drifted so far from the foundations of the Sinai covenant upon which our nation was built is b/c professing Christians have plunged so deeply into the gratification of the American Dream that we have exchanged the immortal God for a *golden calf* of personal gain all in the name of God?

As I have wrestled w/ this thought over the past several weeks, I have been led to consider the stories of Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when they had been taken in Babylonian captivity – along w/ a couple of passages in the N.T.

Although immersed, and even *indoctrinated* by the Chaldeans – these men remained faithful to God.

Each of them was so convicted about the reality of YHWH they were willing to face the consequences of remaining faithful to God. Mind you, they didn't go looking for a religious fight, yet they also didn't back down in their faith/trust in God – and as a result, not only did God show up – He showed out on their behalf.

As we step into the N.T. where Christianity wasn't in vogue, the N.T. writers offer a great perspective to Christians on how to live for God in a fallen world.

For example, in Romans 12, Paul writes – *I urge you, brethren, in view of God's mercies, to offer your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual form of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove that good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.*

conformed – do not be stuffed into the mold. IOW – if your beliefs/values look more like the world than God's Word – **YOU'VE BEEN DUPED!**

Instead – *Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.* Colossians 3:1

WHY? *Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it, we await a Savior, Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him to subject all things to Himself.* 3:20

James warns of the struggle – *You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship w/ the world is enmity w/ God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* James 4:4

So, John explains how in 1 John 2:15-16 – *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that's in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not from the Father but from the world.*

And he gives us the key – *Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for greater is He who is w/in you than he who is in the world.* 1 John 4:4

Point – As followers of God, it is imperative that we deal w/ the plank in our own eyes and *the Egypt* in our hearts understanding that the solution to the problem begins w/in us. Then from there – we are to seek to influence the people our lives intersect w/ on a daily basis to point them to the truth of God.

One thing is certain – no matter if the world (or our nation) turns adamantly away from God – it should NOT impact or impugn our pursuit of God. Just like w/ the saints who've gone before us, our faith can survive and thrive in a faithless world.

In fact, the more faithless our world becomes – the more faithful our trust in God must be.

Be steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord knowing your labor isn't in vain.