

**Losing Our Religion**  
***The De-Christianization of***  
***America***  
**July 2, 2017**

**Pre-Service Video**  
**Worship Songs – Promises / Death Was**  
**Arrested**  
**Prayer**  
**Announcements – Shannon**

**Feature – “Let Freedom Ring”**

Good morning everyone.

“Let Freedom Ring” (or as it is better known, “My Country Tis of Thee”) was written 1832 by a Baptist pastor, Samuel F. Smith. It was first performed on July 4<sup>th</sup> of that same year by about 500 children from the Sunday School program of the Park Street Church in Boston, Massachusetts.<sup>i</sup>

And I love that song, especially its final verse:

God, to Thee,  
Author of liberty,  
To Thee we sing;  
Long may our land be bright,  
With freedom's holy light,  
Protect us by Thy might,  
Great God, our King.

But times have changed since then. The idea of God as “our King” (ultimately) and the idea that we owe our heritage of freedom *to that God* is completely foreign to an increasing number of our citizens (especially those 30 and under) because today, as a nation, we are rapidly “losing our religion.”

Let's watch.

**Video Clip – “Losing Our Religion” (3 mins)**

B – Anchorwoman: “Now to surprising new findings ...”

E – Researcher: “I see no reason to think this is, in the immediate future, going to turn around.”

As Shannon said, today we are beginning a brand new series called “Losing Our Religion.” And we’re doing so because of trends revealed in surveys like the one we just heard about; surveys that show an accelerating decline in religious affiliation, belief and practice; a decline that, in the immediate future, is probably not going to turn around.

And my goal in this series is look at some of the reasons why it’s happening, what the implications might be and what can be done to address the issue.

Of course, all of that assumes that you believe the issue *ought to be addressed* because, obviously, there more than a few people who are happy about this trend:

- People who honestly think that religion and religious people are *part of what’s wrong* in our country and in the world.

- People who believe that the best way forward for our culture is for religion and religious practice to continue declining and diminishing.

Now, I don't think many here today have that opinion. However, it would not surprise me that there are at least a few who do. After all, we're a church for people who have doubts and questions about the faith. From the very beginning, one of our goals has been that anyone at any stage of faith (including no faith or little faith) can come and be loved and accepted at that stage. Skeptics are welcome here.

In addition, I'm quite certain that, for all of us here today, there are at least a few people in our relational circles who have a negative disposition towards Christianity and the church. They've come to believe ...

- That Christianity is repressive and “the church” at large does more harm than good.

- That it's anti-intellectual, anti-scientific and anti-progress.
- That Christians are hypocrites who try to force their beliefs on others but then “don't practice what they preach.”
- And that the whole thing is based, at best, on mythical stories and tall tales; at worst, on outright falsehoods written down in a book we call The Bible.

And in this series I'm going to address those specific criticisms (one per week beginning next Sunday) because I want you to know – whether you're a skeptic or a Christian who loves a skeptic (or skeptics) ...

- I want you to know that there is a well-reasoned, logical and *gracious* response to those criticisms which are rarely presented by media sources, entertainment icons and

secular institutions of education.

- And I want you to know why Christianity and Christians and the church are not only *not* part of the problem; they're also an indispensable part of the solution ...

... which, back in 1832 when Sam Smith wrote that little song, would have been old news but, these days, is a pretty bold claim to make.

So how did we get here? How did we get from “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” to a rapidly increasing rejection not just of Christianity but to the belief that faith is a bad thing?

## **In the Beginning**

To answer that question, we need to go back to the very beginning. And by “beginning” I don't mean the beginning of our country, although we will look at that in just a bit.

By “beginning” I’m referring to something that *Jesus* said which, pretty much, is at the root of the tension we’re experiencing (and likely will continue to experience) around this issue of whether religion is good or bad and how much influence it should have in our culture. If Jesus hadn’t said *this one thing* to His original followers, we wouldn’t be having this discussion!

So what was it that He said?

**Matthew chapter 28, verses 18 and 19 record it for us.**

*“I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.”*      *Matthew 28:18-19 (NLT)*

To His very first followers Jesus said, “all over the

world, tell the story of what I have done and offer people the opportunity to join my movement and to become my followers” (which is what “make disciples” means) “and when they join, teach them to live the way I’ve taught you to live – the way I, myself, have lived while I have been in this world.”

And that’s what they did. They took Jesus’ instruction (which is sometimes known as “The Great Commission”) seriously and literally. All over the world they went.

And as people all over the world believed in Jesus, little communities of faith (known as “churches”) sprang up for the purpose of teaching and encouraging one another to obey Jesus.

And this process continued for decades and then centuries until today, two millennia after Jesus walked the hills of Palestine, there are huge communities of faith (such as the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church and many other major

denominations) and 2.3 billion people worldwide are identified in some way as “Christian.”<sup>ii</sup>

And many of those communities of faith and those 2.3 billion people *still* take that command of Jesus seriously and literally: “as you go into the world, tell others about Me. Invite them to join My movement. And teach them to obey what I’ve commanded.”

Now, here’s a question to ponder: *why would someone do that?* Why would the average person believe it was a good idea to personally or as part of a community of faith – a church ... why would someone think it a good thing to influence others concerning Jesus and the way He says to live?

You might speculate it’s because they’re afraid if they don’t, then God will be angry and rain down divine judgment on them. But people who truly know Jesus and understand what He taught – the Gospel which literally means “good news” – are not fear-driven. They don’t think that way.

Instead, people who evangelize (which is what this process of trying to gather disciples is sometimes called) ... people who evangelize and who become part of churches that evangelize do it because they have come to believe that the way of Jesus is *the* best way to live.

And not just for themselves, personally, but also ...

- For their families and friends
- For their community and for their state
- For their nation and for the world.

And that has been true for the past 2,000 years. The motivation has been the same – “this is how my life will be better and how the world will be better: *obey Jesus.*”

## **Religion in Early America**

Now, as to *why* people believe that, we'll talk about that next Sunday. All I'm trying to do right now is to explain how we went from "My Country Tis of Thee" to 35% of the young adults in this country having no interest in Christianity or thinking of it as a *negative* force – a process of de-Christianization that was unimaginable even 30 years ago.

And to understand the magnitude of that shift, we need to look back to the beginning of our country, specifically about 100 years before "My Country Tis of Thee" – the 1740s. Something incredible happened in the 13 colonies that were still under the rule of Great Britain.

Historians call it "The Great Awakening" – a time in which vast numbers of men and women of all ages, races and backgrounds throughout the Colonies heard the Gospel of Jesus and made the decision to believe in and follow Jesus. They became convinced that the way of Jesus was *the* best way to live.

Lives were changed. Church attendance and participation soared. In fact, in the days leading up to the Declaration of Independence in 1776, church attendance in general was between 60 and 70 percent.<sup>iii</sup> This morning in our community it's only about 20%.

But, more importantly (at least for our purposes this morning), the Great Awakening (in essence, *evangelical Christianity*) had a profound effect on the mindset that led up the American Revolution and, later, a great influence on that formation of a “more perfect union” described in the Declaration of Independence and then, *prescribed* by the Constitution and Bill of Rights.

While it is clearly a distortion of history to say that the Founders (and the people) intended to create a “Christian Nation” it's no exaggeration to say that ...

## **1. The Founders were informed and guided**

## **by Christian theology and principles.**

Back in the late 1990s, political-science professors at the University of Houston collected and cataloged 15,000 writings by the founding fathers. Their goal was to determine the primary source of ideas behind the Constitution by identifying the sources quoted most often in their writings.

Guess what that primary source was? It was the Bible. It was quoted four times more often than the runner up, the French philosopher Charles Montesquieu. 94% percent of the quotes of the founders were based upon the Bible.<sup>iv</sup>

## **2. In addition, our founders believed that our nation's birth was an act of God.**

It wasn't something that people decided to do. It was an event that happened as the direct intervention of God in history – the Divine Hand of Providence.

That's why the Continental Congress issued *nine*

proclamations calling for days of thanksgiving to God. For example ...<sup>v</sup>

- In 1778, after the victory at Saratoga and the formal alliance with France, Congress set aside December 30, 1778 as “a day of public thanksgiving and praise, that all the people may, with united hearts, on that day, express a just sense of his unmerited favors; particularly in that it hath pleased him, by his overruling providence, to support us in a just and necessary war” by causing King Louis of France to enter the war on the American side and giving the Americans victory over British troops.
- In 1780, after the discovery of Benedict Arnold’s betrayal and plans to surrender West Point, the Congressional Thanksgiving proclamation thanked God for “rescuing George Washington and the army from imminent dangers, at the moment when treason was ripened for execution.”

At the Constitutional Convention on June 28, 1787, 81-year-old Benjamin Franklin delivered his most famous speech in which he said: “In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in this room for Divine protection. Our prayers were heard and graciously answered.”<sup>vi</sup>

Almost 30 years later, President James Madison issued a Thanksgiving proclamation that read, “No people ought to feel greater obligations to celebrate the goodness of the Great Disposer of Events of the Destiny of nations than the people of the United States.”<sup>vii</sup>

**3. Finally, and most importantly, our founders designed our government to rest on the pillars of morality and religion.**

They believed that our form of government – of the people, by the people and for the people – could only be successful as long as those people remained moral and religious.

For example, in his Farewell Address, George Washington reminded his countrymen that “religion and morality” are the “firmest props of the duties of men and citizens” and therefore are “indispensable supports” of “the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity.”

In addition, he said that morality depends on religion: “Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.” Religion, he thus suggested, is necessary to the preservation of “free government.”<sup>viii</sup>

John Adams, 2nd President of the United States, co-drafter of the Declaration of Independence, echoed Washington when he said “We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion ... Our Constitution was made only for moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any

other.”

That’s why just after the Revolution, in 1782, this statement appeared in the Congressional Record:

“The Congress of the United States approves and recommends to the people, the Holy Bible ... for use in schools.”

By the way, when that recommendation was challenged several years later, the Supreme Court ruled:

“Why should not the Bible, and especially the New Testament, be read and taught as a divine revelation in the schools? Where can the purest principles of morality be learned so clearly or so perfectly as from the New Testament?”

Morality and religion were at the root of our system of government. And, as the Supreme Court ruling implied, that religion *was the Christian*

*religion.*

John Quincy Adams, the 6th President of the United States, noted that “The highest glory of the American revolution was that it connected the principles of civil government and the principles of Christianity.”

150 years later, Chief Justice Earl Warren (who was not known as a political conservative) echoed that same idea in a speech where he said:

“I believe that no one can read the history of our country without realizing the Good Book and the Spirit of the Savior have from the beginning been our guiding geniuses. Whether we look to the First Charter of Virginia, or to the Charter of New England, or to the Charter of Massachusetts Bay the same object is present: A Christian land governed by Christian principles.”

Recent scholarship, again from the University of

Houston, confirms Warren's conviction. Three-fourths of the provisions of the U.S. Bill of Rights were outlined in the 1641 Massachusetts Body of Liberties, written by Puritans, complete with Bible verses attached to each of the rights.

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Again, none of that is to argue that the intention of the founders was to create a "Christian nation." It wasn't. That's why there is no mention of God in the Constitution. That's why the federal government is forbidden from interfering with the practice of religion and from establishing a state church (which is how it was in Europe).

But make no mistake about it, friends. Something spiritually significant happened in the formation of the United States.

- Our leaders were spiritually oriented and influenced by Christian theology and principles coming out of the Great

Awakening.

- They believed God had ordained the birth and existence of this country.
- And they built our system of government on the pillars of morality and religion.

Bottom line, in the beginning of our country, at least one of the predominant thoughts was “our lives and our country will be better *if we obey Jesus.*” And for about 200 years, that thinking in general characterized our nation.

## **What Happened?**

So what happened? How did we go from that foundation to where we are today – to gradually losing our religion as a people; to the increasing de-Christianization of America?

That’s a hard question to answer because there

are several ways to look at it depending on whether or not you think it's a good thing that religious influence and involvement is declining.

**Possibility #1. The truth is finally out about Christianity and people are rightfully rejecting it.**

In this line of thinking, the Church and Christianity were once the powerbrokers of our culture and were therefore able to control information – especially negative information.

However, in recent days, with the rise of the Internet and the ability for information to freely flow among individuals, it's finally becoming clear:

- That Christianity is repressive and “the church” at large does more harm than good.
- That Christianity is anti-intellectual, anti-scientific and anti-progress.

- That Christians are hypocrites who try to force their beliefs on others but then “don’t practice what they preach.”
- And that the whole thing is based, at best, on mythical stories and tall tales; at worst, on outright falsehoods written down in a book we call The Bible.

The truth is out this position holds. And, in a somewhat ironic twist, the words of Jesus (if He really did exist and really did say them) apply: “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free” ... ergo ... more and more people know the truth about religion and are being set free from it.

Now, I would not argue for a second that Christianity and Christians have throughout history been without fault. In our day alone, Christianity and Christians in America have clearly fallen short of the ideal and have contributed to the negative perception in at least

three ways.

1. Neglecting in our churches to consistently focus on the gospel ... which is about Jesus and what he did.
2. Putting too much energy into politics: legislating morality instead of teaching people to obey Jesus.
3. Being drawn into pointless arguments with one another and the culture about trivial matters instead of keeping the main thing the main thing – which is Jesus and obeying Him.

And I know that all of that has happened because I've done all of those things myself. I've contributed to the problem.

And if you're a Christian, it's quite likely that you have, too.

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But having said that, there is a second possibility which is the exact opposite of the first.

Instead of the down and dirty truth about Christianity finally being revealed, it says that ...

**Possibility #2. The truth about Christianity is actually being hidden and what is being rejected is actually just a “strawman.”**

And you know what a strawman is, right? Actually, it’s called “a strawman argument.”

It’s when you take something an opponent has said or done and you exaggerate it or twist it just a little bit into something they never said or done or intended to say or do; something that’s clearly outrageous or wrong or offensive and cannot be defended without looking like a fool. And then you beat on that. You pummel that.

And, because there’s no possibility of defending that position, there’s no way for your opponent to

fight back because strawmen *can't* fight. After all, they're made of straw!

Of course, the obvious question about this possibility is “so, if the truth about Christianity is being hidden, who is doing the hiding?”

Oh boy ... what I am about to say is probably going to sound crazy if you haven't heard it before or if you're a skeptic so try to hang with me to the end of this. Please don't turn me off prematurely.

One of the things Christianity claims is that what we see is not all there is to this world; that there is a host of unseen spiritual beings constantly interacting with humans without our knowledge.

Some of those beings are good – they're called angels and they are from God.

But some are not good. They're called demons and they are under the command of a great fallen angel by the name of Satan who, for a time, has

been allowed to have dominion over this world.

And part of what Satan does is ...

**Well, let's let the Apostle Paul explain it:**

*Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.*

*2 Corinthians 4:4 (NLT)*

**Then Paul says:**

*You see, we don't go around preaching about ourselves. We preach that Jesus Christ is Lord, and we ourselves are your servants for Jesus' sake. 2 Corinthians 4:5 (NLT)*

In other words, “this is not about us. This is about Jesus being Lord.”

And that's important because whenever a person is blinded by the forces of darkness, he or she wants to focus on anything but Jesus Himself.

- In Paul's day, they wanted to focus on Paul and how he was only in it for himself, only in it for the money and for his own personal glory.
- In our day, they want to focus on Christians and how they don't measure up.

Now, I realize that this "possibility #2" that I am presenting is not only a little "out there." It's also highly offensive. To say that someone is negative towards Christianity because Satan and his minions are doing a number on them sounds totally arrogant and condescending.

It sounds like we're saying, "Well, because *I'm* so good and *I'm* so bright and *I'm* so special, *I* see the truth. But *you* do not because *you've* been blinded by the devil."

But that's not what I am intending to say nor is Paul ...

**... which is why he continues:**

*For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. 2  
Corinthians 4:6 (NLT)*

In other words, Paul is saying "if I see anything of the truth in this, it's not because of how good *I* am but because of how good *God* is. He is the one who made the light shine in my heart so that I could see."

See, the truth is that everyone who now "sees" and believes has at one point been in this situation. All of us are blinded by Satan's lies. It's what he does. It's why Jesus called him "the father of lies."

And his strategy is the strawman strategy. He takes what God says and twists it just enough so that it still sounds like what God says, and then uses that to denigrate God.

“Did God *really* say you shouldn’t eat of *any tree in the garden*, Eve? Wow, I knew He was a killjoy but I got say that surprises even me.”

But God *didn’t* say that. God told Adam and Eve they could eat from the fruit of *every tree* except for one. But what Satan said was just close enough that Eve began to doubt God’s goodness. And then she rebelled.

And I know that one of the objections of skeptics is that Adam and Eve and the Garden didn’t really happen. But whether it did or didn’t, the point is the same: *this is how Satan works*. This is what he does.

So, whether a literal Eve was tricked or not (and then Adam), the lies of Satan are still at work on

millions and millions of Eves and Adams – just like you and me – all over the world.

And, again, by saying that people might think the way they do because they are blinded by Satan, I don't mean to be arrogant or condescending or judgmental. I'm just saying that this is a possibility that fits a clearly observed pattern throughout history up until this very day.

And over the next four weeks, I want to try and make the case that people believe these negative things about Christianity – that people (especially our young people) are losing their religion and America is rapidly being De-Christianized – because they have been blinded by the evil forces of darkness.

And when people are blinded – when they do not see the truth – one of the first things that happens is they forget their history. They forget where they came from and how that was the foundation for every good thing they now for granted. Or if

they *do* remember it, they then try to scrub it from their collective memories.

That happens all the time these days. Watch almost any historical fiction set in the past and there is rarely any mention of church or Christianity and the positive influence it had on the culture in those days.

I first noticed this after Jetta and I watched several episodes of *Downton Abbey* (which as you know, is not a show about American history but British history – but at that point in time, the early 1900s, the British were very religious just like Americans).

In every show, you see the entire family sit down to dinner but you never see them say “grace” which was a common practice in those days.

When the question was raised as to why not (and many people did raise it), Alastair Bruce, who served as the show’s historical advisor, said that

executives in charge of the series had ordered producers to “leave religion out of it”, for fear of alienating an increasingly atheistic public.<sup>ix</sup>

They just scrubbed it.

- Same thing happened with the movie 42, the story of Jackie Robinson.
- And with *The Revenant* which was the story of Hugh Glass.

Both of the protagonists in those movies were Christians in real life and their faith was a huge positive influence. But you wouldn't know it from the movies. And the list could go on and on.

And the problem with that? A whole generation of kids who don't want to read boring history but would rather watch something are not being told the whole story.

**And the problem with *that*, as the biblical proverb puts it, is that ...**

*When there is no prophetic vision the  
people cast off restraint ...  
Proverbs 29:18 (NET)*

When people lose sight of what God has done – when they are blinded – they do all kinds of things that would’ve never considered doing before.

And that’s exactly what’s happening in our culture today.

## **What Can Be Done**

So, as I said, in the next four weeks, my goal is to make the case – logically I hope and graciously I promise – that many of the negatives that people believe about Christianity are in fact, a strawman argument that ultimately comes from “the father of lies” ... “the enemy of God” ... who is also *their* enemy.

And this is very important for those of us who are

Christians to understand because it says so much about how we are to respond which is, first of all, to ...

**1. Listen and love – because “they” are not the enemy.**

They are being attacked by the enemy – *our* enemy Satan. They are being deceived by him. This is not an “us vs. them” thing.

Practically what this means for Christians is that we have to show that we are the ones who believe in tolerance, diversity, and respect. And we have to demonstrate the sincerity of this commitment by ...

- Listening rather than silencing our opponents;
- Explaining rather than demonizing;
- Affirming people’s right to be different instead of demanding uniformity;
- Turning the other cheek when assaulted by

activists.<sup>x</sup>

- Offering grace instead of condemnation when they are wounded from being led astray. (As we say all the time around here, “church isn’t a museum for saints, it’s a hospital for sinners.” It’s a place to teach people who don’t know how to obey Jesus to obey Him).

Listen and love – they are not the enemy.

Secondly (and finally), if you’re a Christian in this time of upheaval you must ...

## **2. Trust in the Lord for protection.**

When King David of Israel was being attacked unjustly, his friends told him he should go hide for his own safety. But his response to them (and this is recorded in Psalm 11) was ...

*I trust in the Lord for protection. So why do you say to me, “Fly like a bird to the mountains for safety!”*

*For the wicked are stringing their bows and fitting their arrows on the bowstrings.*

*They shoot from the shadows at those whose hearts are right.*

*The foundations of law and order have collapsed. What can the righteous do?"*

**And David reminded them (and himself and us, if we're Christians):**

*But the Lord is in his holy Temple;  
the Lord still rules from heaven.*

*Psalm 11:1-4 (NLT)*

All of this stuff we're seeing is a blip on the timeline of eternity. It's just a little static in the line. The Lord still rules. The Lord's will will still be done in the end. So, fear not. Fear not.

And we want to close our service this morning with that thought. Sing a song to remind us of that, if we're Christians. After we're finished, we'll be dismissed.

- Ushers will receive offering at door.
- Prayer down front.

Let's stand and sing together.

## Worship Song – “Whom Shall I Fear”

### NO CLOSING COMMENTS

### Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.allabouthistory.org/my-country-tis-of-thee.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/05/christians-remain-worlds-largest-religious-group-but-they-are-declining-in-europe/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.facinghistory.org/nobigotry/religion-colonial-america-trends-regulations-and-beliefs>

<sup>iv</sup> David T. Moore, *Five Lies of the Century*, pg 10.

<sup>v</sup> <https://allthingsliberty.com/2015/11/the-revolutionary-war-generation-and-thanksgiving/>

<sup>vi</sup> Norman Cousins, *In God We Trust* (Harper & Bros., 1958), 42.

<sup>vii</sup> James Madison, *A Proclamation by the President of the United States of America*, March 4, 1815.

<sup>viii</sup> See <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2016/03/tocqueville-on-christianity-and-american-democracy>

<sup>ix</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/media/11997169/God-banished-from-Downton-Abbey-says-shows-historical-advisor.html>

<sup>x</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/june-web-only/turning-world-upside-down-down-under.html>