

Gut Check: Are You Thankful? – Various Scriptures

Acts 17:26-27; We're in the middle of a series called Gut Check, where we're looking at qualities to live by, and doing an internal evaluation
An assessment of our commitment and resolve; Just like boxers place a punch to the stomach to test the resolve of their opponent; It's a gut check

And this week I want to talk about gratitude; Especially as it relates to the country in which we live on this 4th of July weekend
B/c quite often, maybe even more often than not, we focus on the bad, instead of the crazy amount of good, and get cynical, or complacent, or even numb to it all

So I think a gut check is appropriate, and I'd like to start with this – Are you thankful . . .

For our nation? (Acts 17:26-27)

Even if this isn't your home or country of origin; Are you *thankful* for it?

You should be; Not only does God tell us to *give thanks in all circumstances* (1 Thess 5:18), including the nation in which you find yourself – but he actually *established* it
And I don't mean that in some sappy, overly spiritual, patriotic way that you most often hear it – as if the United States is God's chosen country and the apple of his eye
I don't mean it that way at all

When I say that God established our nation, I mean that he marked off the boundaries, both in time and geography; B/c that's what Acts 17:26 says
He made from one man [Adam] every nation of mankind [as in every people group, every culture] *to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods* [time] *and the boundaries of their dwelling place* [geography], *that they* [the people in those nations] *should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him.*

God has not only determined the *time* in which we exist as a nation, but our borders as well – the boundaries of our dwelling place (26); He established it
Which ought to make us thankful; We're a part of something explicitly ordained by God

➤ And, it's been *used* by God; It was established by God, and it's been used by God
That we *should seek* him and *find him*, v27; And nobody would argue *that* hasn't happened in these United States
People have come to Christ and/or matured in Christ, in droves the past few centuries
Including most of us

Which once again, ought to lead to an attitude of gratitude
Especially when you consider that we could have born or lived in any *number* of countries; From the bloodshed and struggle of a nation like Eritrea . . .
To the oppression and persecution of North Korea, or no nation at all like the West Bank or a refugee camp
If you're a follower of Jesus, and you live and work in these United States, thank God right now; B/c you're benefiting from something he established, and continues to use

➤ And thank God it was founded on biblical principles
One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all; Those are *biblical* principles; Not to mention the right to life and pursuit of happiness
It's cause for thanks

As is the affluence of our nation; And the opportunity we have here
We are *ridiculously* wealthy; Even the poor among us are wealthy in comparison to the world; And our *natural* resources are mind-blowing; As is our infrastructure

All of which affords us the opportunity to better our lives like no other nation on the face of the earth; To *truly* enjoy the goodness of God in the land of the living (Ps 27:13)
To make something of ourselves that's so far outside the scope of most people in this world, it doesn't even occupy their dreams

This nation may not be perfect, but it's *ridiculously* good; And for that, I hope you're thankful

Here's the 2nd question – Are you thankful . . .

For the people who founded it? (John 15:13)

Those who laid the groundwork for what we have – a groundwork of godliness, hard work, honesty, and integrity; B/c those aren't the norm in this world
And are you thankful for those who gave their life or livelihood to make it happen?
I hope so; B/c Jesus said in **Jn 15:13** – *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.* And they did; Both figuratively *and* literally

The question is – Are you thankful?

Or is the 4th of July just another holiday; A day off work; An opportunity to binge on video games, or get hammered with your friends*****

Honestly, I fear that it is for most; From what I've seen, most people don't even *think* about the significance of this weekend . . .

Let alone give thanks to God for those who made it special; Those who founded this country (**Photos of Founding Fathers**)

➤ People like John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Washington
Considered by most, to be the most prominent and influential of our Founding Fathers

And the things they did, and the efforts they led, were nothing short of extraordinary
Like John Adams; A passionate, principled, and godly man who worked *tirelessly* to get this thing off the ground; Probably doing more than anyone else
Or how about Benjamin Franklin; A brilliant man before his time, and an influencer like no other; Serving both here *and* overseas
And then there's Alexander Hamilton, who literally set up our nation's financial system
And John Jay, who was the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
And Thomas Jefferson, who penned the Declaration of Independence
And James Madison, who authored the Bill of Rights
And George Washington, who was a statesman, general, and president rolled into one

You don't have to know these people to be thankful for them*****

You just have to give credit where credit's due, and realize what a monumental task it was, to not only establish a brand new *nation* . . .

But give of their blood, sweat, and tears to pull it off

And we're the beneficiaries; Which ought to evoke *immense* feelings of gratitude on our part; Do a gut check

3rd, are you thankful . . .

For the government we have? (Rom 13:1)

The government we're under? Including those who lead it; Are you?

I hope so; B/c once again it's a work of God

Rom 13:1 – *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.*

And **1 Pet 2:13-14** says – *Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.*

Every government that's ever existed, has been instituted by the sovereign hand of God; Even the bad ones; Like the one in 1st century Rome when Peter/Paul were writing *God* put it in place; And for that reason alone, we ought to not only submit to it, but thank him for it; Why? B/c God knows best*****

We ought to be thankful for the government we have, b/c God has a plan, and he's working it out

Does that mean there's no room for disagreement with those in authority? Not at all
There's even a place for civil *disobedience* – like when David opposed King Saul; Or Daniel refused to stop praying
But short of being asked to do something wrong, something sinful – we need to comply
And do so with an attitude of gratitude, b/c it's of the Lord

➤ And, it's a *representative* form of government; We're not dealing with a dictatorship, we're subject to a *republic* – a political system with *elected* representatives
One that has not only stood the test of time, but has been *extremely* effective
Not without gridlock, or politics, or the snail's pace of bureaucracy; Totally
But compared to *other* governments, there's no comparison
And short of a theocracy, where God *himself* would rule as a *benevolent* dictator – it's the best form of government in the entire world

So instead of chaffing against it, we ought to appreciate it; Instead of hating it, we ought to love it; Or at the very least, have a good *attitude* toward it
Especially as believers – who trust in the sovereignty of God
Instead of obsessing on all that's *bad*, we ought to be thankful for all that's *good*

4th, are you thankful . . .

For the freedoms we enjoy? (James 1:17)

Like freedom of speech; Or the freedom to exercise our religion; Or the freedom to assemble; Or bear arms; Or be secure from unreasonable searches
We enjoy an *amazing* amount of freedom in this country

The problem is, we've enjoyed it for so long, we take it for granted; We take our freedoms for granted; And we must not do so; For at least 5 reasons:

1. They're gifts from God

James 1:17 says – *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above; From God*
And the rights we enjoy in this country would certainly qualify as good; Which means they're from God; And the last thing we should do regarding something from God . . .
Is take it for granted; Or fail to thank him for it

2. They're not universal

Not *everyone* enjoys the freedoms we're so accustomed to; Especially our religious freedom; In fact, ¾ of the world lives under some sort of censorship
Where they have to be careful of what they say and do
Video (One Generation Away – 1:04:54–1:06:35)*****

The freedoms we enjoy are not universal

Just this past week, one of the churches in our Fellowship was threatened by an angry mob of religious leaders, right in front of their church; As they were meeting
And then influenced the authorities through bribes and intimidation, to call the pastor to the police station for several hours of questioning
And though he was allowed to return home late that night, it's not over

And right here in our own backyard, in some of our southern states . . .

No less than 7 black churches have been burned down in the last 2 weeks – since the Charleston shooting; The most recent of which was a Baptist church in S. Carolina
The same one that was burned down in 1995, for the same reasons – racism, white supremacy, and class hatred; Things that are evil, wicked, and shameful
The freedoms we enjoy are not universal; Even in these United States

3. They're not guaranteed

There's no guarantee that the freedoms we enjoy today, will be here tomorrow; None whatsoever; History is *filled* with examples; Especially for believers
Talk to the church in Russia; Talk to the church in China; Or Iraq; Or Egypt
The freedoms we enjoy are not guaranteed; And to think they are, to think we're exempt from such miscarriages of justice, is naïve to the core

4. They're slipping away

Our freedoms are slipping away, as we speak; Especially our freedom of religion
Video (One Generation Away – 42:44–44:40)*****
Our freedoms are slipping away

And lest you think that's a bunch of Chicken Little talk, to say that the sky is falling when it's not – think again; B/c it's already happening; Here's just one example
Video (One Generation Away – 55:02–58:33)*****

And that kind of freedom seems about as American as baseball, hotdogs, and apple pie
But it's slipping away; And Julea Ward isn't the only one feeling it

Hobby Lobby is as well, in their battle to live out their faith at work, instead of parking it at the door
And then there's Catholic Charities in Washington DC, who chose to shut their doors after 100 years of existence . . .
Instead of violating their beliefs by being forced to place adopted children in homosexual households

And how about Melissa Klein, the owner of Sweet Cakes in Oregon, who had to close *her* business recently, b/c she didn't want to make cakes for same-sex marriages
Or Barronelle Stutzman who owns Arlene's Flowers in Washington State, and is facing the same thing; And that's just the short list

A growing number of people and businesses are losing their rights and freedoms –
sometimes due to *government* interference, and sometimes due to cultural pressure
They’re slipping away

And here’s the thing . . .

5. They’re worth fighting for

The freedoms we enjoy, are worth fighting for; And we ought to; B/c we’re never more
than one generation away from losing them

I’m not talking about taking the law into your own hands, I’m talking about taking a stand
before it’s too late

I’m talking about influencing anyone you can; And engaging in conversations

I’m talking about educating yourself, and staying *up* on what’s going on

Like getting a subscription to World Magazine (**WorldMag.com**) – news and editorial
from a *biblical* worldview

Or bookmarking a link to **LibertyInstitute.org** – an organization dedicated to
defending our *religious* freedoms

Or picking up a copy of **One Generation Away** – the documentary from which I pulled
the video clips; And *The Family Leader* right here in Iowa

Our freedoms are God-given, and worth fighting for; B/c if we lose them – our ability to
share the gospel, preach the Word, and live for Jesus, will be severely limited*****

So whatever you do, don’t do nothing; Pray, educate yourself, and speak up

Supporting those whose rights are being infringed, even if it *doesn’t* affect you

B/c sooner or later, it will; The loss of freedom for 1 person, will affect us all (**Summ**)

Thank God for our nation this weekend, and while you’re at it, resolve to take a stand for
the freedoms that make it great

Pray – Lord, thank you for the nation in which we live and move and have our being;

Thank you for the people who gave of themselves so sacrificially, to found it; Thank
you for the government we have; And thank you for the freedoms we enjoy; May you
find us ever vigilant to protect that which you’ve given us

Receive our tithes and offerings now, for the glory of your name and the joy of you hearts