

The Nation God Blesses

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Happy Birthday! Our country is celebrating a big birthday this weekend! This monumental milestone is known as our Semiquincentennial, or if that's too hard to pronounce, our 250th birthday!

We're going to take a one-week pause from the beasts and the battles of Revelation 13 to pause and reflect on God's grace and goodness to our nation. Didn't Pastor Chris do a great job last weekend when he preached on Revelation 12? I cheered him on while we were on vacation when he made this powerful point:

"There is a raging spiritual war being battled. A cosmic conflict is currently underway for souls. Satan will stop at nothing to kill, steal, and destroy. He is like a prowling lion seeking to devour. There is no sitting out of this war. You can't run from it, you can't hide from it, you can't be indifferent or neutral to it. You have to pick a side...for now, the dragon still rages because he knows his time is short. But, Church, we do not fight FOR victory — we fight FROM victory. Satan is defeated and Christ has already won."

As I thought about the significance of our country's birthday, I wrote down ten ways God has shed His grace on us.

1. **The foundation of faithfulness in America's early story.** While not perfect, there is a clear acknowledgment in our founding documents of God, truth, and human accountability before Him.
2. **The dignity of every human being as made in the image of God.** This biblical truth has shaped laws, movements, and ongoing efforts toward justice, equality, and the sanctity of life.
3. **The freedom to worship without fear or coercion.** We can gather openly, worship freely, preach boldly, and witness publicly.
4. **Gratitude for those who have served in our military.** Edgewood has many vets and many in our country have given their lives for liberty and the protection of others. That sacrifice deserves deep honor and remembrance.
5. **The ongoing mission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.** God has blessed the American church with resources, missionaries, and sending churches who have helped carry the gospel to the unreached nations in extraordinary ways (Matthew 28:19–20).

6. **The impact of churches, ministries, and Christians on local communities.** I think of how God is using Celebrate Recovery, Safe Families, Pregnancy Resources, Youth Hope (summer camps are going on now), Child Evangelism Fellowship, InterVarsity at Augie and Blackhawk, One Eighty, and Fellowship of Christian Athletes (39 got saved at camp). I'm eager to hear how God uses VBS later this month and am grateful for all the gospel-focused churches in our country as they provide a stabilizing and hope-giving presence in our communities.
7. **Revival movements that have swept across our land.** The first and second Great Awakening and other renewal movements similar to what happened at Asbury remind us that God continues to revive His church and awaken His people.
8. **An abundant access to God's Word.** Scripture is widely available in homes, churches, and digital platforms. This is not the case in every country.
9. **The freedom of conscience and public expression of faith.** Believers in our country are not compelled to deny Christ in public life and can live out their convictions openly.
10. **And ultimately, we're reminded that our hope is not in a nation but in a kingdom that will never end.** Earthly blessings are real, but temporary. Our ultimate allegiance is to Christ, whose kingdom cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:28), and whose return we eagerly await.

Years ago, Chuck Colson wonderfully described patriotism as a way of loving God and neighbor:

The Christian position is beautifully balanced. On one hand, we don't deify our country. We don't wrap the flag around the cross. Our ultimate citizenship is in heaven, and that's where our ultimate allegiance is. But the only place for expressing that allegiance is in the concrete loyalties God calls us to here on earth—including loyalty to country. We can't love mankind in the abstract; we can only really love people in the particular, concrete relationships God has placed us in—our family, our church, our community...and our nation. So brush up on your civics, dust off your U.S. history books, and celebrate this July Fourth by thanking God that He has not only called us into His kingdom but that He's also allowed us to live in—and yes, love—this land of liberty.

As I reflected on our nation's milestone this week, I went back and reread the Declaration of Independence and was struck by how often those who signed it appealed to truths beyond themselves, which come not from government, but from the Creator Himself.

Here are some highlights:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness... and for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor."

It's good to remember that freedom always requires courage and conviction. I took our sermon title, "The Nation God Blesses" from Psalm 33:12: ***"Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD."*** As we celebrate our independence and think about our country's amazing heritage, we can't help but be thankful for the courage and vision of our founding fathers, and the freedoms we enjoy. At the same time, as we look at how our country is doing right now, we can't help but wonder what went wrong. Proverbs 14:34 says, ***"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."***

I'm convinced that when God's people follow God's plan, they will receive God's promises. When we do what God says, we will enjoy His blessings.

At both of his inaugurations, Ronald Reagan's Bible, the one his own mother had given him, was open to 2 Chronicles 7:14: ***"If my people, who are called by my name, humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."***

This verse is often quoted in reference to the need for revival in America and is the best known and most loved verse in all of Chronicles. In fact, it may be the only verse we know from these two books! As we percolate on this section of God's Word, let's keep the context in mind so that we interpret and apply it accurately.

The second book of Chronicles records the construction of the temple under the direction of King Solomon. In chapter 6, Solomon knelt, spread his hands toward heaven, and broke out into an amazing prayer of dedication. 2 Chronicles 7:1-2

tells us what happened next: ***“As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD’s house.”***

I love how the priests were out of a job because God showed up in such a mighty way! In this amazing display of God’s power and glory, the people worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord. In verse 3 they declare, ***“For He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.”*** This phrase is found five times in 2 Chronicles.

After offering a huge sacrifice of 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep, Solomon and all the people dedicated the temple to God. Everyone stood up, the priests took their positions and sounded trumpets, and the Levites played their instruments. After celebrating and praising God for over two weeks, 2 Chronicles 7:10 says that the people went back to their homes ***“joyful and glad of heart.”***

The Lord then appeared to Solomon in the night and gave this invitation in verse 14: ***“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”***

Here’s the main point: *If we want to receive God’s promises, we must follow God’s plan.* God’s promises are not detached from God’s purposes. He calls His people to respond in obedience before they can expect His blessing.

The word ***“if”*** introduces a conditional clause. The next phrase identifies whom He is addressing: ***“my people, who are called by my name.”*** This literally means, *“upon whom my name is called.”* God is extending a gracious invitation, but His promises are connected to a response from His people.

God originally spoke these words to the nation of Israel as part of His covenant relationship with them. However, while the promise was given specifically to Israel, the principles revealed here reflect God’s unchanging character and His call for His people everywhere to be marked by humility, prayer, wholehearted devotion, and repentance, as we pray for God to show mercy to our communities and our country.

Having said that, this certainly has application to us because 2 Timothy 3:16 says, ***“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”*** Romans 15:4 adds: ***“For***

whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” The Old Testament is given to encourage us, to give us examples (both good and bad), and to exhort us.

In essence, this verse is calling for revival. I think of Revelation 3:2-3: *“Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.”*

The psalmist, in Psalms 85:6 earnestly requests revival when he recognizes that spiritual sleepiness was taking place in his heart and in his nation: *“Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?”*

I like what the evangelist Billy Sunday once said, *“A revival does two things. First, it returns the Church from her backsliding and second, it causes the conversion of men and women; and it always includes the conviction of sin on the part of the Church.”*

This verse gives us 4 conditions to follow.

Follow God’s Plan

1. Be dependent and humble. The first condition is to *“humble ourselves.”* The root of the word humility comes from “humus,” meaning dirt or soil. It has the idea of *“bending the knee and neck in deference to another.”* James 4:10 says, *“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.”* I heard someone put it like this: *“Humble yourself before the Lord...or He’ll do it for you.”*

This is the right place to start because we know that God does not hear the prayers of the proud. James 4:6 says, *“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”* Many of us overestimate our goodness and underestimate the pervasiveness of sin in our lives. If the truth were known, many of us think our sins don’t smell as bad as other people’s as we look down on those who sin differently than we do.

D.L. Moody once said, *“God sends no one away empty except those who are full of themselves.”* Isaiah 66:2 says, *“But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.”*

2. Be disciplined in prayer. After humbling ourselves, God's people are commanded to ***“pray.”*** This means, *“to intercede”* and was the most common Hebrew word used to describe the general act of prayer, often employed when someone was in distress.

Brothers and sisters, if we want revival then we must humble ourselves and pray. *If we want to receive God's promises, we must follow God's plan.*

Let's be dependent and disciplined. That leads to the third principle...

3. Be devoted to God. To ***“seek God's face”*** was used to describe someone searching earnestly and with great diligence. When you seek something of value, you rearrange your schedule and priorities until you find it.

Jeremiah 29:13 says that when we seek God with our whole heart, we *will* find Him. We're called to make God our primary focus and first priority.

Would you notice we're not to seek God's hand but rather His face? Too many of us want what God can give us when He wants us to seek Him for who He is. Psalms 27:4 says, ***“One thing have I asked of the Lord...to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.”***

In the Bible, this phrase is used of someone desiring an audience with a prince or with God Himself. This is how it is used in Psalms 27:8: ***“You have said, ‘Seek my face!’ Your face, Lord, do I seek.”*** The idea is that we align ourselves with His will and His ways.

Are you rearranging your priorities so that you can come into His presence? As God's people we are to follow God's plan as we *dependently* humble ourselves, as we *discipline* ourselves to pray, and as we *devotedly* seek God's face. There's one more condition – we're to be *different*.

4. Be different in how you live. We're called to ***“turn from our wicked ways.”*** The word ***“turn”*** is used over 1,000 times in the Bible! The order here is significant. As we humble ourselves and pray and seek God with all that we have, our hunger will be satisfied by the sight of God's face and we will no longer want to hold on to those things that grieve God.

The idea is to change the direction in which our heart is inclined. King Josiah is a good model of this in 2 Kings 23:25: “...***who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might!***” There’s really no way to soften the command to turn from our wicked ways. God accepts only one response to sin, not rationalizing, not excusing, and not comparing ourselves to others. He demands that “***we turn from our wicked ways.***” Proverbs 28:13: “***Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.***”

Receive God’s Promises

If we want to receive God’s promises, we must follow God’s plan. Let’s look briefly at the promises that come after the word, “***then.***” *If God’s people do these 4 things, then He will do these three things.*

1. God will hear. When we pray the way God directs us to pray, He promises to hear our prayers. Isaiah 65:24: “***Before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear.***”

2. God will help. The second promise is that God will forgive our sins. To forgive means to “*send away*” or “*to let go.*” Psalm 103:12 says, “***As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.***”

3. God will heal. The last promise has to do with national blessing for the nation of Israel. When God’s people committed to God’s plan, God sent healing to their land. During the reign of King Ahab the land experienced a bad famine, and only in response to the prayers of Elijah did the rains come. The word, “heal” means “*to repair, to restore, to stitch back together.*”

While this particular promise is to the nation of Israel, many of us are in need of repair and restoration, and our nation is certainly in need of healing.

Revival always starts among God’s redeemed people. It goes from the *Christian* to the *Church* to the *Community* to the *County* to the *Country* and then to the *Continents*. Are you willing for it to start with you? If so, *be dependent* by being humble, *be disciplined* in prayer, *be devoted* by seeking God’s face, and *be different* by turning from your wicked ways.

This passage ultimately points us to Jesus Christ. Solomon was the son of David but Jesus Christ is sitting on the throne of David right now. Solomon slaughtered

thousands of animals in sacrifice but Jesus Christ is the final sacrifice. If you have not yet been saved, cry out to Him right now.

When I think about the fifty-six men who signed the Declaration of Independence 250 years ago, I'm struck by their courage. They pledged "*their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.*" They knew the cost, yet they signed anyway.

Since most of us are Americans, we're called to live out our citizenship. While we thank God for our country and pray for its flourishing, our ultimate citizenship is in heaven, and above all, our allegiance belongs to Jesus Christ as we deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him.

So, as we celebrate America's 250th birthday, let's thank God for His providence, let's pray for our nation, and let's recommit ourselves to the only King whose kingdom will never end.

Tradition says John Hancock signed his name in a big and bold way at the bottom of the Declaration of Independence so that King George could read it without his spectacles on! Whether every detail of that story is true or not, one thing is certain: those courageous men signed their names knowing they could lose everything.

On July 4, 2004, Chuck Colson's Breakpoint commentary was entitled "A New Declaration of Dependence." Here's how he ended it.

"Our nation's founding document declared independence from Britain, but, with equal fervor, declared dependence upon God. Expressing 'firm reliance on the Protection of divine Providence,' the signers committed the American experiment to their Maker. The Spirit of 1776 was reverence and trust. So, as we mark this solemn occasion, let us seek a rebirth of true liberty, which is possible only when governed by divine law. For, without God, we can never have 'liberty and justice for all.'"

His words are no less true today. Instead of declaring our independence today, let's declare our dependence upon God like never before. As we humble ourselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from our wicked ways, we can trust Him to hear our prayers, forgive our sins, and accomplish His purposes in and through His people for His glory, for our good, and for the sake of the gospel.

And this hope stretches beyond one nation's story. The final chapters of Revelation remind us of where history is headed. One day, King Jesus will dwell with His

people, He will wipe away every tear, and He will make all things new, as we cry out, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”

Until that day, may we live as faithful earthly and heavenly citizens by declaring our complete dependence upon the Lord. May God revive His people, renew His church, and reinvigorate us to live on mission by sharing Christ in our homes, among our neighbors, and to the nations...and that will make us a nation God blesses.

Abide Song

Communion

Announcement

Closing Words/Prayer

Doxology and Dismissal