

“Blessed is the Man Whose God is the Lord”

Psalm 33:12

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Sunday Morning Sermon

#43360

Thank you so much, friends of Briarwood, what a joy to be with you. We are thrilled for your love for the Lord Jesus Christ and your kindness that you've showered upon God's work in so many ways, including Westminster Seminary. We're thrilled that the Frank Barker Chair is now fully funded, and your leadership in that is extraordinary. We're so grateful that we've been able to plan in our new building the Harry L. Reeder Preaching Lab to honor our brother Harry. That was a unanimous vote of our board when we heard that the Lord had called Harry home. We said, “We need to honor our brother.” We're so grateful for Cindy, and we continue to pray for you and your family. Our hearts are heavy. It was it was hard for me to come to the church this morning, to the pastor's office. I wanted to give Harry a big bear hug and I said, “I've got to wait till Heaven.” He's part of that great cloud of witnesses, he's watching now and he's making sure. I think the word is I'm supposed to preach a long sermon to be in his tradition. So, I'm not sure if Harry told me that, but I heard it whispered somewhere so....

Well, it's great to be with you today. Thank you for the honor. We are here together on the 4th of July weekend. This is a wonderful celebration as we've already been reminded. We are at the 247th birthday of our nation. It's an extraordinary milestone. And to celebrate this appropriately, we want to turn to the Word of God and recognize that the scriptures have a lot to say about God's role in the nations. In fact, I'd like you to turn with me to Psalm 33, verse 12. Now, this is only one verse, I'm going to read it and then I'm going to ask you to repeat it. After I repeat it, we're going to repeat it a few times because you're going to memorize this little phrase today. You're going to walk home and I'm going to give you a memory device to keep it in your mind.

So please hear now, the reading of God's holy and infallible Word from Psalm 33 and verse 12. The Word of God says, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” Now repeat that with me. “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” Now, without looking, repeat it with me. “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” One more time. “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” Okay, now you can keep that in mind, you've got it. Now the problem is, how do you find it again once you close your Bible? Well, I've got a little memory device for you. How many years did Jesus live on earth? 33. How many disciples did he have? (inaudible answer) Well, 33 and 12. We want all of Jesus and we want all the apostolic teaching on our side. And this brings us together to the verse that we need on this 4th of July. In fact, I hope that in your mind you're going to leave today and say, “Whenever I think about July 4th, I'm going to think about Psalm 33:12. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” I want to look at this verse with three main points. Number one, the promise. Number 2, the promise claimed. And then thirdly, the promise forgotten with a question mark. The promise, the promise claimed, and the promise forgotten.

As we look at the promise in this verse, the Hebrew language here gives us five words that are translated in English, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” The word blessed is fascinating. It can really be translated as happy. In fact, we find it in the name of one of the patriarchs of the nation of Israel. Do you remember Asher? When Asher was born, his mother said, “His name is going to be happy because I’m happy. I’ve had a male child.” Happy, blessed. They’re the same word. In fact, that also appears in a double form when the Queen of Sheba many years later comes and sees Solomon in all of his glory is king with the Temple in his kingdom and all of its wealth before the Queen, she said, “Happy are the people that serve you. Happy? They are happy...blessed.” In fact, it’s the same word that opens the Psalter in verse 1. “Blessed is the man who walks not...” you know that verse. It could be translated as happy. So let’s keep that word happy in mind. Blessed or happy is the nation.

Secondly, in the Hebrew language, the word nation is singular. It’s really *ha goy*. You might say, “Who cares?” Well, maybe if you know some Yiddish friends or a little bit of Hebrew people you’ve heard of the *goyim*, that’s their word of contempt for all the non-Jewish people, all of us unclean people outside of the covenant, the Gentiles, the *goyim*. But when this word *ha goy* is used, it’s basically saying, not Israel, it could have said “Blessed is Israel whose God is the Lord.” It says, “Blessed is the nation,” and in saying that it holds out the invitation for other nations to say, “Would you claim this as your God? Would your God be this God? You’ll be happy. You’ll be blessed if you have this God. Blessed, happy is the nation whose God is the Lord.” Now, the Hebrew will actually put the word The Lord first. We could translate it this way.... “Blessed is the nation, the Lord who is their God.” In other words, He wants to emphasize the Lord. So let’s emphasize that word. You know that word is the “I am that I am.” It first appears in that great story of Exodus chapter 3. You remember the aged Moses now running away, been on the wilderness, raising sheep on the desert for 40 years, and he sees a sight he had never seen before. There is a bush and there’s a fire that’s blazing in it and the bush doesn’t disappear and the fire keeps burning. He understood, as we all do, that if there’s a fire, it needs to have fuel to continue to burn. But this fire needed nothing. It just simply burned and did not need the bush. It was self-sustainable, self-contained. And the one that speaks out of that fire says, “I am, that I am. That is my name. I am outside of time. All time is within me. Past, present and future do not exist for me. I am that I am.” Theologians call that aseity the *from him-selfness* of God....self-existent outside of this world. The world is under His sovereign control. This is the one who comes, The Lord. The I am that I am, the One whose name is pure ultimate existence. This is the One who is the God. Happy, blessed is the nation when this I am that I am is their God. Now that’s the promise. There is a happiness, a blessing to the nation that recognizes that the transcendent, eternal God of the universe is their God in covenant with them. That is the promise.

Now, that promise was understood by our founders. I want to share two examples with you of this. There is an interesting moment on Flag Day, 1790. You remember Flag Day is June 14<sup>th</sup>? It’s June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1790. George Washington is now President. He’s writing a letter to the *mikvah* Israel Jewish Synagogue in Savannah, Georgia. It had been founded in 1733. It had been in existence for many years, and he writes to them, and I’ll paraphrase, he says, “The same wonder working deity that long ago rescued the Jewish people from their oppression and bondage has lately been conspicuous in working in the American cause to give us our freedom as a nation. How blessed is that nation whose God is Jehovah?” Let that sink in. George Washington said, “My God, the God of my country is the I am that I am.”

Theologians today use the more literal Yahweh, but the old English, it's Jehovah. The God who revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush, the God of the Covenant of Israel. Washington said, "That is America's God."

Now let's go a few years before Washington is president. He's now at an extraordinary moment in this time, he's the victorious general of the war that had beaten the most powerful empire on the planet, that had all the wealth that you could imagine, and an army that was bigger than one could count by bringing in others to fight, and somehow the American cause prevailed. And in that context, George Washington writes a magnificent letter to all 13 of the newly independent governors, and he signs it with this magnificent signature each time. 13 times each of them receive it. And in that, he concludes with a prayer, which I will give you part of it now. He says, "I now make it my earnest prayer that God would demean you such that you would do justice, love mercy..." now, wait a second. You know what he's going to say next, right? Because, you know, Micah 6: 8, "do justice, love, mercy and walk humbly with your God." But it's almost as if George Washington had studied at Westminster Seminary. He knew how to interpret the Old Testament in light of Christ. And he says this "I now make it my earnest prayer that God would help you to do justice and to love mercy and imitate the divine author of our Blessed Religion in His Love, his charity in his humility, and his peaceful temper of mind. Without this, we can never hope to be a happy nation." Washington says that the nation that is now going to come out of the victory, each of the independent governors in this public witness, he said, "The God of America is Jehovah, who has revealed himself in the divine author of our blessed religion, and we must imitate Him if we would hope to be a happy, a blessed nation." Blessed, happy is the nation whose God is the I am that I am, Jehovah the Lord. Now that's the promise.

Now, on this 4th of July weekend, I would like you to understand that we are going to look at how our Founding Fathers claimed this promise. We've looked at the promise and now we're going to look at the promise claimed. As we understand it, by the way, do you realize that this really is Independence Day? We're actually on the real one, July 2<sup>nd</sup>? If you go back into history the vote for independence was on July 2<sup>nd</sup>. In fact, John Adams said, "This is the day, July 2<sup>nd</sup>, when there's going to be fireworks and bonfires and celebrations forever." He didn't understand the power of communications because the release was July 4<sup>th</sup>. That's the press release date. Do you realize we should be rejoicing today? This is Independence Day. But two days from now is the day that it was put the address on it. But that's just an interesting curiosity of history. Let's talk about how this all came about. One of the great founders that our beloved Harry Reeder loved to speak about was John Witherspoon, the president of the College of New Jersey. We call it Princeton today. And he was there. He was a direct lineal descendant of John Knox. John Knox had been the great reformer of Scotland. This was a Scottish Presbyterian who was invited to become the president of the College of New Jersey, and he's now preaching in May, just six weeks before the Declaration of Independence. He's a delegate to the Second Continental Congress. He is going to go and he realizes that it's all coming to a crescendo. That the vote for independence is probably going to happen. And it means almost certainly that there's going to be clashing and war. There had already been conflict up in New England. And so he gathers together the congregation that he preaches, and it's on the day of prayer and fasting called by Congress. And he preaches a message on the dominion of providence over the passions of men based on Psalm 72: 10, "The wrath of God shall praise thy name." And he says, "God is in charge of all the things we're going

through.” And in that extraordinary message, which, by the way, you can find online to this day, he says this, I normally don't bring politics into the pulpit. Look, he's a seminary college president. He has a theologian and he's a pastor, but he's also been elected to Congress. And he says, “I need to bring politics into the pulpit today.” Basically he says, “I believe a war is going to come. I need to make sure you're right with the Sovereign of the heavens and not worry so much about the sovereignty of England. The Sovereign of England may bring an army here and some of you are going to die. The battles will wage. And I'm worried about your destiny, about your soul.” He said, “We cannot have you just as a cultural Christian. If you die in battle for your country, what is your eternal destiny?” And he preaches the gospel saying, “You need to have the blood of Jesus Christ to take away your sins. You must be born again.” It almost sounds like he's a PCA minister preaching. He's a politician preacher, a Presbyterian preacher. And he says, “You better be ready because it's going to be costly.” Now he leaves. He shows up in Philadelphia. And as you know, July 4th is coming the day we call Independence Day. And as they come, they receive a document that had been labored over by a committee of five, but the main penman was Thomas Jefferson. Thomas Jefferson was a brilliant writer. He had worked for some weeks to compose this document. It's presented before Congress and it's discussed and debated, and by the end Thomas Jefferson is fuming because Congress keeps editing his perfect draft. Did you know they made over 80 changes to the Declaration? In other words, it really is Congress' document written the draft by Thomas Jefferson. But the final form is different. In fact, one of the great changes is that Jefferson's document only had one reference to God, but now there are four. By the way, there's another memory device. July 4<sup>th</sup>, 4 references to deity in the Declaration. Do you know them? That's your homework assignment. Go home and find them. I'm going to help you in case you don't know them. If you do know them, review them. Do you remember how it starts off? In the Declaration God is seen as a legislator. It speaks of the laws of nature and of nature's God. In other words, the laws of physics but the law is given at Mount Sinai, the Ten Commandments. It says that God is the Creator. “We are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights. Among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” God is not just a legislator, He's a creator. Thirdly, he is a judge. And it says, “And for the rectitude of our intentions, we appeal to the supreme judge of the world.” Well, everyone in that day knew, and I hope you know, the supreme judge of the world is Jesus Christ. Do you remember on that great day when the Son of Man will separate the sheep from the goats and judge the nations? He seated upon his throne? Do you remember what John Chapter 5 says? Jesus is speaking, He says “All authority has been given out to me. All judgment is given out to me so that you will honor me just as you honor the father.” He is the judge. Our declaration refers to Jesus Christ. You probably don't know that, but you need to know it. It's there. He is the supreme judge of the world. So our declaration tells us that we have a God who's a legislator. We have a God who's a creator. We have a God who is, in fact, a judge. And then at the end, it speaks of a sovereign executive who has divine providence. You know those words. “And for the defense of this declaration, with a firm reliance upon divine providence, we mutually pledge to one another our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.” That was not in Jefferson's statement. Somehow, I can't prove it historically, but it makes total sense. John Witherspoon, who had preached in Princeton six weeks later, had to come in and say, “Do you realize, fellow delegates, we are going to be fighting the world's most powerful army and navy that has vast wealth and we don't have an army. We don't have a Navy. We don't have a government, let alone currency. How can we possibly prevail unless we have the

providence of God on our side? And therefore, I beg leave, that we might amend the document by saying, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to one another our lives, our fortune and our sacred honor.” Isn't it wonderful that great Presbyterian doctrine of providence is the last word of America's first word about freedom? We're depending on liberty. It's a marvelous thing that we have as Americans. The providence of God. By the way, when our founders decide to create a government, they became creators. They were framers. You know what kind of government they gave us? One with the legislature, one with the judiciary, and one with an executive, just like the God that they worshiped.

Now, as we think about this, we need to realize that it's easy to say things. It's very easy to say, okay, “We're going to be free. We must now determine that the British King is a tyrant, we're seeking justice, we've appealed to heaven. Now we're free.” But guess what? The battle now ensues. It costs something. We have heard it said, and it's been true since the beginning, “Freedom is not free.” It costs an extraordinary sacrifice. And on this July 4th, imagine what it was like when they stood up and said they were free. And then what would they say next? Well, they referred to God because they realized what they would need to do. We've already mentioned John Adams, that he mentioned July 2nd. He was off by two days. But he said this, “This Declaration of Independence ought to be commemorated as a day of deliverance by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations from one end of this country to the other from this time forward, forevermore.” He was including Alabama in that. He didn't know it would be here, but he said, when Alabama joins the union, there better be some fireworks down there.

All right. Samuel Adams. Samuel Adams is famous for a certain malt beverage, but Samuel Adams has been called properly the last of the Puritans and the first of the Americans. He was given the privilege to stand up in front of what we today call Independence Hall in Philadelphia, and he gave a speech. And in that speech, he said, “We have this day restored the Sovereign to whom alone men ought to be obedient.” He's saying not King George. It's the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. “He reigns in heaven. And from the rising to the setting sun, may his kingdom come.” Now, those words were extraordinary. He was saying, “I am declaring that we have no king but King Jesus.” That was one of the mottos of some of the Puritans in the American Revolution.

John Hancock, you know his name. You know, his name means a signature because he wrote it so big on the declaration. And according to the story, he said, “I'm writing it so big so that King George can read it without his spectacles on.” He said, “Let the noose come around my neck.” Well, this is what he really said. “Let us humbly commit our righteous cause to the great Lord of the universe. Let us joyfully leave our concerns in the hands of Him who raises up and puts down the empires and kingdoms of the Earth as He pleases.” There is this reliance on God. But let a little over a year pass and imagine now that you're Samuel Adams in 1777, the man who said, “Forget about the sovereignty of England, let's trust the Sovereign of the universe.” By this time, this is now September 1777, a year or so later. Plus, the British had retaken New York, Ticonderoga had been taken back. There was a first September 11th in American history. You know, September 11th, this is the Battle of Brandywine, where Washington was outflanked. He couldn't defend the city of Philadelphia, and that meant that Philadelphia would fall into the hands of the British. It meant that Congress would have to

flee. The Liberty Bell was taken down, the statehouse bell, and it had to go into hiding because it would have been melted down and turned into cannonballs and musket balls to kill patriots. The only good news of that is that it spent six months in Old Zion Reformed Church in Allentown. Our Liberty Bell has a little reform theology in it, so that's the only good thing that came from it. The Bell has been preserved, of course, but it shows you how desperate it was. And just before the British took Philadelphia, they made a surprise attack in the night. They overpowered the guards and they bayoneted many, many soldiers in a town called Paoli. To this day it's called the Paoli Massacre. Here's Samuel Adams watching all of this and he realizes he has to flee. He hears that Washington is going to have to go to Valley Forge where there's nothing but wilderness and some fields, and they're going to have to build their houses out of logs and they're going to have to survive the winter without rations. There's no way to support them. They're going to have to make it on their own. And the evidence of history shows that one out of every nine of Washington's troops had no shoes. When Washington said it, it was true. "You can tell where my men march in the snow by the bloodstains their naked feet leave behind." The sacrifice was great. Congress flees. They end up traveling 100 miles into the frontier of Pennsylvania to a little town of York. They are there realizing the soldiers are fatigued. It's been raining so much that their gunpowder won't fire. There's no help from abroad, from France. They are there and there's only 20 of them. 56 had signed the declaration. There's only 20 left in New York. They are wondering what's going to happen. And they ask the question, "Is there any hope?"

Now if you're Sam Adams, what would you have said? Oh, it's amazing. We have the words of what Sam Adams said. I want you to hear his words. Sam Adams looks at this beleaguered group of people where his own cousin, John Adams, had written on that very time in his diary. "The prospect is chilling on every side, gloomy, dark, melancholy and dispiriting." Samuel Adams, the last of the Puritans, the first of the Americans. The Sparkplug of the American Revolution. The one who envisioned the Declaration of Independence years before it ever happened and had prayed and worked assiduously that it might occur. He speaks to his fellow beleaguered congressmen and says, "Let us awaken then and evince a different spirit, a spirit that shall inspire the people with confidence in themselves and in us. A spirit that will encourage them to persevere in this glorious struggle, until their rights and liberties shall be established on a rock. We have proclaimed to the world our determination to die free man rather than to live slaves. We've appealed to heaven for the justice of our cause, and in heaven we have placed our trust. Numerous have been manifested actions of God's providence in sustaining us in the gloomy period of adversity. We've had our cloud by day and pillar of fire by night." There's that Jehovah, the God of fire and cloud with his beleaguered people. I think here he may have been referring to the extraordinary victory earlier in Boston. He said, "We have been reduced to distress and the arm of omnipotence has raised us up." I think he might be here thinking of the extraordinary Christmas Eve victory at Trenton that had happened to [unintelligible.] He may have been really thinking of something else, but he said, "Good tidings will soon arrive." And amazingly, presciently, apparently this turned out to be the great victory at Saratoga, where an entire army was captured of the British. And it was so successful that it convinced, ultimately, France to enter the war on the side of the Americans. But at this point, it had not occurred. He says, in this situation, "We shall never be abandoned by Heaven while we act worthy of its aid and protection." Can't you hear ringing "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord?" This God is our God. He's the I am that I am. He's a pillar of cloud. The pillar of fire. He led his people in the past, He'll bless us. But with the news of

the victory of Saratoga, he was given the privilege to write a prayer of Thanksgiving for the nation. Listen to the faith of our Founding Fathers, because this came from Congress. This is their thanksgiving with the victory that they surprisingly experienced that Samuel Adams said, "I know it's going to come because we've trusted in the I am." He says, "We need to give thanksgiving to God." In his address, it says particularly "And that He has been pleased to support our troops and to crown our arms with signal success. That with one heart and one voice the good people may express the grateful feeling of their hearts and consecrate themselves to the service of their divine Benefactor, and that, together with their sincere acknowledgments and offerings, they may join the penitent confession of their manifold sins." Wow. They're confessing their sins as they give thanks. "Whereby they forfeited every favor and their humble and earnest supplication, that it may please God through the merits of Jesus Christ, mercifully, to forgive and blot them out of remembrance." Sounds like a worship service, doesn't it? It's a national worship service and to prosper the means of religion for the promotion and enlargement of that kingdom, which consists in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Did you know there was a Trinitarian worship service Thanksgiving that was from our Congress at the start of our country? Why? Because they believed, "Blessed is a nation whose God is the Lord." Who's revealed himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Divine author of our blessed religion. At Valley Forge in that very bleak winter it finally came to spring in May 2nd, 1778. General Washington gave a general order. This was an order for every soldier, everyone in his camp. He declared, "While we are zealously performing the duties of good citizens and soldiers, we certainly are not to be inattentive to the higher duties of religion, to the distinguished character of patriot. It should be our highest glory to add the more distinguished character of Christian." Washington then went on to call his men to be Christian soldiers. That's what the first year was like for the Declaration of Independence that we celebrate so many years later. It would not be our celebration today if it weren't for the men of faith that looked to the sovereign God of the Bible as the source of their hope.

As we look back after that war, there are others who began to speak about it. Don't you love Patrick Henry, the Virginian? "Give me liberty or give me death?" Well, here's what he said as he looked back. "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that the great nation was founded not by religionists, but by Christians. Not on religions, but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For this very reason, peoples of other faiths have been afforded asylum, prosperity, and freedom of worship here." It's Christians who've discovered religious liberty and welcome others and they created the nation. That's sure sounds like I'm a right-wing fundamentalist conservative. I'm talking about one of our founding fathers, Patrick Henry. That was his view.

How about Benjamin Franklin? Most of us know Benjamin Franklin was not an ideal Christian. Some think he didn't make it to being a Christian. By the way, our great reformer, George Whitfield, according to Benjamin Franklin, said, "He never thought I was born again." So where he stood, I don't know. But isn't it amazing that now, 11 years after the Declaration of Independence, as America's struggling and they believe "Blessed is a nation whose God is the Lord," but they don't have a very good nation yet. The Articles of Confederation are creating chaos. They need to do something. They gather again in Philadelphia and they discover that things aren't working well. They're at loggerheads. And it's clear that they had already forgotten God. Blessed is a religion that is Christian. "Blessed

is the nation whose God is the Lord.” How do I know that? Well the aged sage of Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin, stands up and his incredible call for prayer has been preserved. And he basically reminds this Congress on the Constitution that they had not bothered to pray. Listen to his words. Franklin addressed the convention, and the one he spoke to who was at the helm was none other than George Washington, who is now the moderator of the of this constitutional gathering. And he said, “I have lived, sir, a long time.” He was the oldest one there. He could hardly walk. He had serious arthritis and gout. He had to be carried in and out every day in a sedan chair imported from France, carried by prisoners from the local Philadelphia jail so he could get home and in. And the reason we have his prayer is because you're required to stand up and give your speech. But he couldn't stand and so he had to write it out. And that's why we have his words. So his gout preserved this one, so thank God for gout for at least one reason, we got... it gave us Benjamin Franklin's prayers preserved. It says this, “I have lived, sir, a long time. And the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth that God governs in the affairs of man. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, sir, in the sacred Writings that except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. I firmly believe this. And I also believe that without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builder of Babel. We shall be divided by our little partial local interests. Our projects will be confounded and we ourselves shall become a reproach and byword down to the future ages. I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven and its blessing on our deliberation be held in this Assembly every morning, and that one or more of the clergy of the city be requested to officiate in that service.” It's amazing. A less than religious person realize this country is not going to make it without God, without prayer. And he used the scriptures to call all of his fellow delegates to pray because they understood that this American experiment was built on “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” Benjamin Franklin had written already in 1778, “Whoever shall introduce into public affairs the principles of primitive Christianity will change the face of the world.” And that was the American experiment.

There's so much more we could give here. But let me now really turn into high gear in my last few minutes. We could multiply examples. Benjamin, Russia's signer of the Declaration, said “We should have the Bible as our schoolbook. Why do we spend so much money on prisons instead of teaching them the Scriptures that will create people that are moral and want to honor God?”

Francis Scott Key. The one who gave us our Star-Spangled Banner, gave us the motto in his song. We never sing that stanza “and let this be our motto and God is our trust.” One of the stanzas talks about the great providence of God. We should sing all the stanzas.

Abraham Lincoln, as you know was assassinated, and his last act before he died was to put “In God we trust” on all of our coins. The Supreme Court in 1892. That's just only a little over 100 years ago. In extraordinary unanimous decision in the Holy Trinity Church case declared, “Our laws and institutions must necessarily be based upon the teachings of the Redeemer of mankind. It is impossible, that it should be otherwise.” And in this sense, and to this extent, our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian. This is historically true from the discovery of this continent to the present hour. There's a single voice making this affirmation that this is a Christian nation.



Well, there's so much more. Woodrow Wilson. America was born a Christian nation. Franklin Delano Roosevelt on the battle carrier, said, "Let's sing 'Onward Christian Soldiers.'" Having described the United States as seeking a lasting concord between men and nations founded on the principles of Christianity. Harry S Truman wrote to the Pope in 1949, "This is a Christian nation." Dwight Eisenhower amended our national our Pledge of Allegiance by saying it doesn't recognize God. It says "One nation under God" by act of Congress. It under his leadership that was added. President Gerald Ford put it so beautifully. "Without God, there can be no American form of government, nor an American way of life. Recognition of the Supreme Being is the first, the most basic expression of Americanism. Thus, the Founding Fathers of America saw it, and thus with God's help, it will continue to be."

Wow. I could fill in a lot of gaps. We've talked about the promise. We've talked about the promise claimed. I must conclude now with, has the promise been forgotten? On this 247th celebration of America's independence, we should remember that the Book of Deuteronomy chapters 4, 6, and 8 continued to say, "Do not forget God." In the midst of Ronald Reagan's wonderful, interesting leadership he was in a prayer breakfast in 1984, and he gave this quite memorable line. "If we ever forget that we're one nation under God, then we will be a nation gone under."

Is it possible that's where we are today? That we're afraid to say, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord?" That we're unwilling to remember the history? I'm not making it...it's everywhere. It's in all the history books. It can be found, but we won't speak it. In fact, it's very much like the call to prayer that Lincoln gave in 1863. "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We've been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity. We've grown in numbers, wealth and power, but we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us. And we have vainly imagined in the deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us."

If we have forgotten God, what do we do? Well, each of these next points could be a sermon, so I'm sorry I can't preach them. I'll just have to give you the summary. One..we need to reclaim Hebrews 13:7. "Remember those who taught you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their life and imitate their faith." We're going to consider that verse tonight as we consider George Washington.

Let us think, not only must we remember, we must exercise active influence for the Kingdom of God. That was Jesus's point in Matthew chapter 5. You are salt. You are light. What do you do if you turn on the light and there's no light? You throw the light bulb out. What do you do if you pour salt on something and no salt comes out? You throw out the container. We're salt and light. We're designed to be influencers. We're to dispel darkness. We're to stop decay. We are to make things taste better. We're to bring the joy of the Lord. We are to bring the happiness that comes when a nation has God as the Lord.

The Kingdom of God needs active influencers. Mark Hatfield, former senator, once put it this way. "For the Christian man to reason that God does not want him involved in politics because there are too many evil men in government is as insensitive as for a Christian doctor to turn his back on an epidemic because there are too many germs." America, friends at

Briarwood, you need to be salt and light. We are called to make a difference. So we need to remember, we need to exercise our influence.

Thirdly, we need to seek and instill and teach a clear Christian worldview. II Corinthians 10 says, "We must learn to take every thought captive." We need to hear what the world is saying and evaluate it by God's Word.

Fourthly, we need to be faithful in evangelism and in discipleship, as the Great Commission tells us. And I can just hear Harry Reeder right now, "Are we on message on mission in ministry?" Are we doing what we're supposed to do in evangelism and discipleship? Teaching our children?

Are we educating our youth? Which is number five, faithfully in the truths of God? Read again, Deuteronomy chapter 4 and 6 how it insists that we teach our children.

Number 6. Exercise our rights and duties as citizens. The Apostle Paul was not afraid to appeal as a citizen to the higher courts for the rectitude of his actions and freedom. In Acts 25:11 we see it. He tells us that, "We should remember that the Magistrate at his best is to be there to judge the evil doer, not to harm the one who does what's right." Peter Marshall, the former Senate Chaplain, put it this way. "The choice before us is plain... Christ or chaos? Conviction or compromise? Discipline or disintegration? I'm rather tired of hearing about our rights and privileges as American citizens. The time has come, it is now when we ought to hear about the duties and responsibilities of our citizenship. America's future depends upon her accepting and demonstrating God's government. Where are we? Are we standing up? Are we becoming active public theologians as teachers and preachers? I want to praise God for the extraordinary leadership this congregation has had in Frank Barker's unparalleled evangelism. In Harry Reeder's bold preaching of the Bible and its application to culture. We need to be praying for a generation of leaders that will stand up and say, "Thus says the Lord," and then engages our culture as salt and light. Alexis de Tocqueville said, "The thing I noticed when I came to America, that its pulpits were aflame with righteousness." Has that flame extinguished?

Well, finally, as we wrap it up, I came across an interesting quote that's attributed to Chrysostom, one of the great teachers of the ancient church, about '83, '87. Now, I can't prove he said it. You know, sometimes that's incorrect. So we'll say it's attributed to him. If he didn't say he should have said it. But listen to this. "If you knew how quickly people would forget about you after your death, you will not seek in your life to please anyone but God." Who are you trying to please? When our life is done here.... I like to do this homework.... can any of you tell me the middle names of your great grandmothers? Now a few genealogists might be able to go back and get the records, but they're part of your life. We don't know their names, and they belong to us. Their DNA is in our very bodies, and we don't remember them. Can you tell the story of their lives? We are going to be forgotten. The only thing that we can do that truly matters is not pleasing what other people think of us, but saying, I want to serve the God whose word declares "Blessed is the nation, whose God is the Lord."

I must conclude. I have a little more time since I'm preaching the second service, there's no Sunday school, so I'm going to indulge in one more quote and then I'll be finished. On January 27th in 1838 in Springfield, Illinois, a young, unknown debater by the name of

Abraham Lincoln made a point and he said this. “At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant to step the ocean and crush us at a blow? Never. All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa, combined with all the treasures of the earth, our own excepted, in their military chest with a Bonaparte for a commander could not by force take a drink from the Ohio or make a trek on the Blue Ridge in a trial of a thousand years. At what point, then, is the approach of danger to be expected? If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher as a nation of free men. We must live through all time or die by suicide.” And the surest way for America to die by suicide is to forget “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.”

Would you pray with me? Father, we would ask that you might graciously stir our hearts to say, here we are, Lord, use us for your sake. Lord, we think about the unborn generations that will follow us. Lord, may we preserve the legacy of faith, of liberty, of ordered liberty that has come to us through our Founding Fathers, even as we remember the very first day of Independence. Lord, would you please hear our prayers and bless us now as we worship? We ask this in Christ’s name.