

July 7, 2013

*America the Good*

Joshua 24:11-15

**Joshua 24:11-15** <sup>11</sup> “Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Gergashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. <sup>12</sup> I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you—also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow. <sup>13</sup> So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.’

<sup>14</sup> “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. <sup>15</sup> But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

---

What makes America great? That was the question historian Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) tried to answer when he came to America in 1830. This is what he wrote in 1831.

“I sought for the greatness of the United States in her commodious harbors, her ample rivers, her fertile fields, and boundless forests--and it was not there. I sought for it in her rich mines, her vast world commerce, her public school system, and in her institutions of higher learning--and it was not there. I looked for it in her democratic Congress and her matchless Constitution--and it was not there. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great!”

Those should be familiar words to you. I am sure preachers have read them to you in the past. We are revisiting those words because they are still true today. America is great because America is good. Let me ask you a hard question. Do you believe America has lost some her goodness?

We are in the twenty fourth chapter of Joshua. So much has happened prior to this chapter. They had been through so much. They had experienced so much. They remembered so much. Just think about it for a moment. They remembered the cruelty of Egypt. They remembered how Moses summoned the pledges. They remembered the day they walked out of Egypt. They remembered how God broke natural law just for them and parted the sea.

They remembered the Golden Calf and the Ten Commandments. They remembered the long years in the wilderness. They remembered the day they buried the great law-giver, Moses. They remembered so much, yet they longed for something new. The prize that had been waiting for them the whole time was now within reach, the Promised Land. Everyone was excited about entering their new home. That brings us to the text for today.

In the text for today, Joshua is standing before the people and challenging them to build a new kind of nation. He is challenging them to be a better nation. He is challenging them to build a nation which would be built on God himself. It sounds impossible, but it is possible. For Joshua, it all distills down to a personal choice. Each person must decide for themselves. Are you going to be satisfied by being like the rest of the world, or are you determined to be different kind of nation? Are they going to serve the gods of their world or are they going to serve the one true God? It is not just a question for that particular generation of Hebrews. It is a question for us. In contemporary America we are facing the same choice. Are we going to be satisfied with being just another nation in the world, or are we going to strive to be something different, something better? Are we going to be a nation built on God?

Today, I want help you make the right choice. I am going to talk about three temptations that America is facing in our time. This is the truth. If we fall to these temptations then we will look like many other nations in our world. If we stand strong against these temptations then we will be unique. If we stand strong against these temptations then we will remain a good nation. What are the three temptations? The first temptation deals with our **citizenship**. The second temptation deals with our **capitalism**. The third temptation deals with our **Christianity**. So if you are ready to beginning looking at these temptations, say, "**Amen!**" I will be brief - I know this is a holiday weekend.

### **Citizenship**

This is temptation number one. **There is the temptation of enjoying citizenship without upholding our responsibility as citizens.** Is our country a better nation because you are a citizen?

My father's side of the family has been in this country prior to the American Revolution. They tell me my mother's side of the family came during the Irish Potato Famine (1845-1852). They did not just walk into the country. They went through Ellis Island. They had to prove their worth to become citizens. There was a certain procedure that had to be followed. Their personal history was examined. They didn't want criminals to enter the country. They were given a physical. They had to be healthy enough to work. They had to have a skill that would benefit society. And I think this is correct. They had to be able to speak English. You could be rejected for any of these reasons and be sent back to Europe. In those days the emphasis was more on what was best for the country than what was good for the individual.

The other night someone said to me, "I think we need to enforce those standards for citizenship today." Maybe you feel that way? I am not sure how I feel about immigration. It is a complex topic and the times have changed.

How many people do you know wouldn't be granted citizenship if they applied today? How many people do you know aren't an asset to our society? How many people do you know want to reap the benefits of being an American without shouldering any of the responsibility? I have to ask this next question. What are you doing to benefit our country? John Kennedy said it best: *"Don't ask what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."* There is the temptation of enjoying citizenship without upholding our responsibility as citizens. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

### **Capitalism**

Several weeks ago, I attended Annual Conference at Lakeside. The highlight for me is always visiting old friends. One of the people I visit annually is Mark. He is an elder, who serves God beyond the local church. When he was in High School he visited Washington DC with his youth group. They stayed at a church and discovered during their first night the pop machine was unlocked. He was just a teenager, so he fell to temptation. He stole all the cans of pop and took all the money. During this past year he revisited that church and confessed to the minister about his youthful crime. He confessed he had felt guilty about that prank for years and wanted to make amends. He said to the minister, "I don't know how much money I stole or how many cans of pop I took. I think this will cover it." He handed the minister \$200 and ask him to put it toward the youth mission trip. Mark says he now feels better. Did you know that ever since 1811 (when someone who had defrauded the government anonymously sent \$5 to Washington D.C.) the U.S. Treasury has operated a Conscience Fund? Since that time almost \$3.5 million has been received from guilt-ridden citizens.

Throughout his administration, Abraham Lincoln was a president under fire, especially during the scary years of the Civil War. And though he knew he would make errors of office, he resolved never to compromise his integrity. So strong was this resolve that he once said, *"I desire so to conduct the affairs of this administration that if at the end, when I come to lay down the reins of power, I have lost every other friend on earth, I shall at least have one friend left, and that friend shall be down inside of me."* Do you consider yourself a friend? Are you a person of high integrity? Do you listen to your conscience?

This is temptation Number Two. **There is the temptation of enjoying capitalism while ignoring conscience.** Capitalism means "Free Market." I am glad we live in a free market society. We have the right to buy and sell products so we can make a profit. The problem is, when profit becomes the driving force people get hurt. Profit without conscience is a dangerous combination. Do you know of anyone who is more concerned about money than people? There is the temptation of enjoying capitalism while ignoring conscience. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

## Christianity

This is temptation number three. **There is the temptation of enjoying Christianity without commitment.** Is our church a better fellowship because you are a member?

Did you know fifty-six men signed the Declaration of Independence? No one could question their commitment to America. Their commitment resulted in untold sufferings for themselves and their families. Of the 56 men, five were captured by the British and were tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons in the Revolutionary Army. Another had two sons captured. Nine of the fifty-six fought and died from wounds. Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships sunk by the British navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts but died in poverty. At the battle of Yorktown, the British General Cornwallis had taken over Thomas Nelson's home for his headquarters. Nelson quietly ordered General George Washington to open fire on his own home. The home was destroyed and Nelson died bankrupt. John Hart was driven from his wife's deathbed bedside. He never saw his thirteen children again. How can you question their commitment?

Can anyone question your commitment to Christ? Is your commitment altering the way that you spend your time? Is your commitment altering the way that you spend your money? Is your commitment influencing the relationships in your life? If you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then you know you are going to heaven when you die. You should find a new way every day to thank God for saving your soul. How have you thanked God today? Is the faith influencing the way that you live? There is the temptation of enjoying Christianity without commitment. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

If you use your sanctified imagination you can picture him. Joshua is standing before the crowd. It is all he can do to hold them back. After all, they had waited their whole lives for this moment. They are about to enter the Promised Land and it is going to be great! However, before they enter their new home, Joshua is forcing them to make a simple choice. Are they going to be satisfied with being just another nation in this world, or are they determined to be something different? Joshua understands it all distills down to a person's choice. It isn't just a story about ancient people. It is really our story. What choice are you going to make? Is anyone here going to choose **citizenship without responsibility**? Is anyone here going to choose **capitalism without conscience**? Is anyone here going to choose **Christianity without commitment**? Abraham Lincoln once said, *"America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we will have destroyed ourselves."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**