

WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT AMERICA

Jeremiah 29:7

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. On July 4 the United States will be celebrating our 247th birthday as a nation.
2. We have a lot to celebrate.
3. The United States is the most free, prosperous, and benevolent nation in the world today, and in the history of the world.
4. It's funny. The only people who hate the USA are the people who were born here and don't know what it's like anywhere else in the world. It's the people who lack a historical perspective, and a geopolitical perspective. But there are billions of people around the world who would love to live in America, and as we speak, thousands of foreigners from around the world are risking their lives on a daily basis to sneak into America through our southern border.
5. **William Bennet** (*America the Strong*) calls this the Gates Test. "There's a simple test for a country. It's called the Gates Test. Every country has gates of some kind. When it raises its gates, which way do people run? Do they rush to get in, or do they run to get out? When the United States raises its gates, people rush in."
6. After he defeated George Foreman for the heavyweight title in the African nation of Zaire, a reporter asked Muhammad Ali, "Cham, what did you think of Africa?" Ali replied, "Thank God my granddaddy got on that boat!" Ali was saying that even though slavery was a terrible thing for those who endured it, their descendants are in many ways better off today than if they lived in Africa.
 - i. **Dinesh D'Souza** "Blacks in America have a higher standard of living and more freedom than any comparable group of blacks on the continent of Africa."
7. Bennet goes on to describe what makes America so great: The U.S. military is the greatest defender of freedom in the world. No other country has done a better job of establishing equal rights for all citizens. No other country has welcomed and united so many people from so many different shores. American companies have made the United States one of the most powerful economic engines the world has known, and one of the most prosperous countries in history, with one of the world's highest standards of living. The USA is the world's greatest marketplace for the free exchange of ideas and information. America is a world leader in scholarship and invention. America is the planet's largest source of humanitarian aid.
8. America is truly a great nation, and it is a privilege to live here.
9. What is our responsibility as Christians to our nation at large? Should we get involved in politics or stay out of it? Is it okay to just mind our own business and focus on family, church, and work?
10. Turn to Jeremiah 29:7.

II. TEXT

1. **Jeremiah 29:7** “Pursue the well-being of the city I have deported you to. Pray to the Lord on its behalf, for when it thrives, you will thrive.”

III. COMMENTARY

1. In 586 B.C., the Lord decided to punish the Jews for their unfaithfulness. He did so by sending the mighty Babylonian army into Israel to destroy Jerusalem and Solomon’s temple. About ten years later, the Babylonians forced many Jews to leave their homes in Israel and to resettle in the city of Babylon. Some of the most famous of the exiles were Danial, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Nehemiah, Esther, and Mordecai. Their stories occur during the Babylonian exile. Some Jews were left behind in Jerusalem, such as the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah wrote his prophecy down, and he sent it to the Jewish exiles in Babylon. His message to them was that there stay in Babylon was not going to be brief. God was going to keep them there for seventy years. And while they were in Babylon, they were not to act like visitors; they were to treat Babylon like home. They were not to treat the Babylonians like enemies, but like neighbors.
2. Jeremiah’s Two Commands: Jeremiah told them to do two things in this verse:
 - i. Pursue the well-being of the city.
 1. The word pursue means “seek,” or “work for.” It means effort, time, energy, interest, focus.
 2. The word “well-being” is a very important Hebrew word: *shalom*. Today Jews use it to say “hello” and “goodbye.” The word is found over 250x in the OT. It is usually translated peace, but it means much more than the absence of strife. It means peace, prosperity, wellness, health, completeness, wholeness, safety. This is why the NLT translates it “peace and prosperity.” “Work for the peace and prosperity of the city.”
 3. God wanted them to do whatever they could to bring shalom – peace and prosperity – to their new home. God was calling them to be a blessing to their city.
 - ii. Pray to the Lord on its behalf.
 1. Pray for what? Pray for its shalom; its peace and prosperity; its leaders; its economy; its morality; its spiritual well-being; etc.
3. Then Jeremiah tells them why God wants them to work and pray for the well-being of the city: “For when it thrives, you will thrive.”
 - i. By the way, the Hebrew word for thrive is the word *shalom* again. God wanted the Jews in Babylon to thrive; to flourish; to prosper. And He knew that the only way for that to happen is if Babylon itself prospered. He commanded them to work and pray for the shalom of Babylon and that would in turn impact their own shalom.
4. What does all of this have to do with Christians in the United States today?

- i. These same principles apply to us. God calls us to work and pray for the well-being of our home – the United States. Why? Because the more our nation thrives, the more we personally can thrive. And the more we personally can thrive, the more the church can thrive. And the more the church can thrive, the more God’s purposes of evangelism and discipleship can be advanced.
 - ii. Some say Christians avoid politics. They say, “I don’t care about politics.” You may not care about politics, but politics cares about you. You may want to stay out of politics, but it won’t stay away from you. It affects you. Politics affects how much of your hard-earned money you get to keep; it affects what kind of work you can do; it affects how hard it is to start and run a business; it affects whether you can live out your faith without persecution; it affects how you can educate your kids; it affects how you can treat people; how you can defend yourself; it affects the quality of the roads, and the water we drink, and the air we breathe; it affects how safe our streets are; it affects whether men can use the women’s bathroom; it affects what kinds of things are taught to children in school, even what can be shown on TV.
 - iii. Some people say that Christians shouldn’t be involved in politics.
 - 1. **Jerry Falwell**, founder of Liberty University, the largest Christian university in America “The idea that religion and politics don't mix was invented by the Devil to keep Christians from running their own country.”
 - 2. **Plato** “One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors.”
 - iv. Someone is going to run the country. Someone is going to determine our laws. If not Christians, then who? Satan. We are turning the country over to Satan.
5. So, as Christian citizens of the United States, God wants us to work and pray for the well-being of our nation.
 6. Not just work, and not just pray. We need to do both. We need to work like it all depends on us, and pray like it all depends on God.
 7. How do we do this?
 8. As I said earlier, in less than 250 years, America has quickly become the most peaceful, prosperous, and morally good nation in the world. So, work for the well-being of our nation, we need to find out why America is so great, and then stick to those principles.
 9. Why is America so great? It has to do with the first principles upon which our nation was built. Our nation was built upon a set of principles – called first principles. These can be found in our founding documents – the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution. Where we have abided by these first principles, we have prospered; where we strayed from these first principles, we have stumbled.

10. To be a good citizen and work and pray for the shalom of the United States, every Christian must know and understand the first principles.

IV. AMERICA'S FIRST PRINCIPLES

1. The principle of equality.

- i. **Declaration of independence** "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..."
- ii. This principle comes from the Bible, that all people are made in the image of God, and therefore all people are equally valuable. People don't have equal abilities, but they have equal dignity.
- iii. This principle has three implications:
 1. Government by consent.
 - a. If all people are equal, then no man has the right to rule over another man without his consent.
 - b. Thus, democracy.
 - c. **Declaration of Independence** "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."
 2. The law governs everyone.
 - a. For most of human history, mankind operated by the principle of power – "might makes right." Whoever had the biggest gun or sword got to tell everyone else what to do.
 - b. In America, everyone is equal, so nobody is above the law. Nobody gets special treatment.
 - c. The president, congressmen, supreme court justices, policeman, and military generals all have to abide by the same laws as you and me.
 3. All people deserve equal treatment under the law.
 - a. The principle of equality is what led to the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, and the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s. All of these movements based their argument on the principle that we are all created equal.
 - b. However, today there are still some people who have forgotten the principle of equality, or who ignore it.
 - c. For example, there are many people today who believe that the way to overcome racism is with more racism. Ibrim X. Kendi, the author of *How to Be An Anti-Racist*, has said that the only remedy to present discrimination is future discrimination. Thus, instead of correcting the inequalities of the past by promoting the principle of equality, they promote affirmative action policies (or diversity policies) in which black people are intentionally given privileges and advantages in

hiring, enrollment, and many other areas. This is both un-American, and it is unjust.

2. The principle of inalienable rights.

- i. The founders believed that God created people with inalienable rights, or natural rights.
- ii. **Declaration of Independence:** “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”
- iii. **Matthew Spalding** (*We Still Hold These Truths*) “[A right] is something that justly belongs to someone and creates a claim against those who deprive one of that right. One person’s right implies an equivalent duty in others not to interfere unjustly with that right.”
- iv. The word “inalienable” refers to the idea that rights cannot be given away or taken away. They are ours by virtue of being human beings.
- v. If rights are derived from God, not the government, then the government cannot take them away.
- vi. In fact, the very purpose of the government, and the sole reason for its existence, is the protection of inalienable rights.
 1. **Declaration of Independence** “...That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men.”
 2. The instant that government fails to protect or itself violates inalienable rights, it has become a failed government.
- vii. In the past, people’s rights and freedoms were granted by the king. If the king wanted to kill you, or take your property, or invade your privacy, or force you to do something, he could because he decided what rights you had. But the founders believed that there is an authority higher than the government – God – and that God has given us certain rights that no government can justly take away.
- viii. This applies even to a democratic government. Even if a majority of the country voted to take away our inalienable rights, that wouldn’t be just. For example, even if the majority of the country voted to make slavery legal, it wouldn’t be just, because slavery violates the inalienable right to liberty.
- ix. One way that our nation is currently betraying this principle is with abortion. All people have the right to life – even the unborn. Any law that violates that right, even if enacted by a majority vote, is unjust.
- x. We must make sure that the laws of our nation are in accordance with natural law and natural rights.
- xi. This principle leads to the next principle – that of limited government. The government is not unlimited; it cannot do whatever it wants, even with a

majority vote, because people have certain inalienable rights which cannot be justly take away.

3. The principle of limited government.

- i. The founders were heavily influenced by the Bible, and therefore had a Biblical understanding of human nature. Not only does the Bible teach that we are all created equal, with inalienable rights, but human beings are sinful. In other words, people are prone to violate one another's inalienable rights. This understanding of human nature leads has two implications.
- ii. Because people are sinful, government is necessary. Because people are sinful, government must necessarily be limited in power.
- iii. On the one hand, if people were not sinful, then government would not be necessary. Everyone would be responsible for themselves and respectful of their neighbor. As we know, that is not the case. Sin is very real, and very dangerous. Therefore the government is necessary to keep people from destroying each other. As Christians we are not anti-government. God came up with the idea of government to foster human flourishing. We need government or people would devour each other.
- iv. On other hand, if people were not sinful, then government would not need to be limited. We could give our rulers unlimited power, and they would never abuse it; they would only use their power to benefit the citizens. But as we know, sin is real, and therefore limits and restrictions must be placed on the government. An unlimited government will abuse its power and tyrannize its people.
- v. Therefore the founders put in place several safeguards to prevent the government from abusing its power.
 1. Enumeration: The limited duties and responsibilities and powers of the federal government are enumerated or specified in the constitution. The founders did not worship the government as many do today. They did not see the government as the savior, the answer to every question, the solution to every problem. They wrote in the constitution that the federal government was only supposed to do a few, specific things, such as national defense.
 2. Federalism: Federalism means the federal government shares power with the state governments. Any power and authority not enumerated in the constitution for the federal government is by default given to the states and the people.
 3. Separation of powers: The federal government itself is divided into three co-equal branches, all designed to keep each other in check. The three branches are the executive, legislative, and judicial.
- vi. This is one of the main principles that we have forgotten as Americans. As time has passed we have looked more and more to the federal government

to take care of us and solve our problems – for example, the problem of poverty, or retirement, or healthcare. We have traded our liberty and money in exchange for the promise of more security.

- vii. But the founders believed that it would be better for the government to stay out of people's lives and let people take care of themselves with the help of smaller, more localized institutions like family, church, business, and school.
- viii. The founders knew that any time you ask the federal government to solve a problem, you give it more power, and it takes away more of your money and more of your freedom.

4. The principle of freedom.

- i. The founders believed that people have the inalienable right to freedom, or liberty.
- ii. The Constitution was written to “secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.”
- iii. Many of these freedoms are spelled out in the part of the Constitution known as the Bill of Rights:
 - 1. Freedom of religion: the government cannot punish people for exercising or not exercising a certain religion.
 - 2. Freedom of speech: the government cannot punish people for saying or not saying something.
 - 3. Freedom to bear arms: the government cannot prevent people purchasing firearms to protect themselves.
 - 4. Free enterprise: Also known as capitalism, free enterprise simply means economic freedom. People have the right to buy, sell, and own property. People have the right to keep their hard-earned money, and the government cannot take it away.
- iv. All of these freedoms are being criticized by some circles today.
 - 1. Some say religious liberty is just a weapon used to discriminate against gays and transgenders. But religious liberty is not just the right to believe, it is the right to exercise one's religion, and that means, for example, not being forced to create artwork or perform a medical procedure or sell a pharmaceutical drug that violates one's religious convictions.
 - 2. Some say that free speech only applies to non-offensive speech. But their definition of offensive speech is speech they disagree with, and the only kind of speech that needs protection is offensive speech, or speech that we disagree with.
 - 3. Some say that the freedom to bear arms is the cause and not the solution of so much murder, but the only people who adhere to gun-restrictions are law-abiding citizens, who then get preyed on by gun-wielding criminals.

4. Some say that capitalism leads to income inequality. But income inequality is not in itself an evil. It is the natural and necessary consequence freedom. If you use your freedom to work hard and live a morally upright life, you will do far better than financially than those who are lazy and immoral. The only way to achieve income equality is to confiscate money from those who earned it and give it to those who didn't. That's called theft. We should take care of the poor, but not through the government, and not through forced income redistribution.

5. The principle of morality and religion.

- i. The final principle has been called the golden triangle of liberty. The founders believed that there is a crucial relationship between liberty, morality, and religion. Liberty requires morality, and morality requires liberty. For liberty to be possible in a nation, morality must be deep and wide. For morality to be deep and wide in a nation, religion must be have substantial presence. To put it another way, religion encourages morality, and morality enables liberty. However, as a nation becomes less religious, it becomes less moral, and liberty becomes impossible.
- ii. Let me explain with one example. The founders recognized that the right to bear arms is an inalienable right. You have a right to life and to property, and therefore you have a right to defend it. However, as our nation has drifted from God, more and more people are abusing the right to bear arms, and more and more innocent people are being murdered. As a result, many gun control laws have been passed around the country, and one of the greatest debates in our nation today is the call for even more gun laws.
- iii. While they recognized the importance of religious liberty, the founders also recognized the importance of a thriving church in America.
- iv. For freedom to continue to ring, most people need to be morally upright, and for that to happen, Christianity must thrive.

V. CONCLUSION

1. Back in 2006 Dinesh D'Souza wrote an article for the Heritage Foundation called "What's so Great About America?" D'Souza is an immigrant from India. He told about a friend of his from Mumbai who has been trying unsuccessfully for ten years to move to the United States. Dinesh asked him, "Why are you so eager to come to America?" His reply: "Because I really want to move to a country where the poor people are fat."
2. America is great. It is the best country in the history of the world. Do you know why America has risen to the top? It's because of our first principles.
3. This July 4th, thank God for America, and renew your commitment to work and pray for its peace and prosperity.