

"GOD BLESS AMERICA"

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance" (Psalm 33:12).

Perhaps a number of you remember listening to the Kate Smith Hour on the radio during the forties. If so, you recall that as the program was nearing its end that she sang "God Bless America." As she came to the close of the song, you were thrilled with a new sense of love for America, and gratitude to God for His blessing upon your native land. Since that time you have heard this song sung by many people and in many places. Many have sung it because they have felt the need of God's blessings upon our country. In a world that is torn to pieces, where it seems that so many good things are deteriorating or going down, many are feeling that they want to reach out and touch the Lord's hand, to know that He is standing there in the shadows, that He is watching over us, and blessing us, and keeping us to the end of the way.

The history of our nation has been enwrapped with the blessings of God. In humility and love we can truly say that God has had a peculiar love for America. From the day that this nation was founded until the present, His hand of blessing has been upon our native land. Surely every true American is grateful for the privilege of being one. "Breathes there a man with soul so dead -- who never to himself has said: 'This is my own, my native land?'" It is right that we should love the land which gave us birth.

Is there such a thing as a religious nation? In the strictest sense, there is not. To be a Christian means to be born again; to be regenerated and given a new nature. The only thing which can be born again is an individual; not a home, nor a group, nor a nation. Regeneration is confined to individuals, and only those who are old enough and wise enough to believe.

For a man or a group of men to say that a nation is Christian does not make it so. Some of the most unChristian nations on earth have been called Christian. They are neither Christian in ideal nor in fact. Giving a country a state religion does not make the nation Christian. The most Christian nation under the sun does not have a state religion. Religion is a personal matter, a holy bond between God and the individual soul.

We can be grateful for and rejoice in the fact that America was founded on Christian principles. Pericles built a civilization upon culture, and it failed. Caesar built a civilization upon power, and it failed. Our forefathers founded our nation upon the principles of Christianity, and America will live as long as God is the Lord of our citizens. Our forefathers left a land where they were persecuted in order to find a land where they could be free to worship God according to the dictates of their consciences. When the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, they knelt upon the shore and thanked God for giving to them this new country. A church was established at the center of every new settlement in this new land. When the Continental Congress, faced with great problems and difficulties, knew not which way to turn, Benjamin Franklin asked the members of the Congress to fall upon their knees and pray. How much better it would be if our great legislative bodies today prayed more and talked less!

The picture of Moses was upon the first coin that was made in America, and today we still have on our money the words, "In God We Trust." Our forefathers knew that they were building on a firm foundation when they built upon God and Scriptural principles.

A South American president was right when he said to Mr. Roger Babson, "South America was settled by men who were seeking gold, but North America was settled by men who were seeking God."

The Medo-Persians had a great nation, but they drank their way to doom in one drunken orgy after another. That civilization came crashing to the ground and they perished from the face of the earth. Egypt flourished under Joseph. Four hundred years went by and the people had forgotten Joseph and his God, and Egypt went down. Greece, under Alexander the Great, conquered the known world but Alexander could not conquer himself. He died in a drunken orgy and the civilization of Greece came tumbling down. Rome was the proud ruler of the world, but luxury and lust ate at the center of her life, and she too perished. If America continues to build on these things, she too will be ruined. For a nation to survive her people must put their roots down deep in God and live for Him.

Visualize George Washington at Valley Forge. His little Army was almost starving and freezing to death. Everything those brave men held dear was at stake. They were fighting against seemingly insurmountable odds -- but out in the snow George Washington was down on his knees praying. That is the spirit that built America. She was founded on God, and if she is to live, she must keep building on that solid foundation.

One foundation stone of the greatness of our land is the providential purpose of God for America. His world-girdling purpose for us has been emblazoned upon the sky of history. It does not take a technical student of history to discern how God's providences have prepared our country for a great task among the nations of the earth.

Another foundation stone of America's greatness is the set of principles upon which our national life was built. When Roger Williams established his colony in Rhode Island, in 1636, declaring absolute religious freedom to all who should come there to live, it was the first time in the history of mankind that any government had given complete soul liberty and absolute freedom of conscience to the governed. That principle is written idelibly into the Constitution of the United States. Along with it we have the attendant rights of separation of church and state, freedom of speech and of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of worship, freedom to read and interpret God's Word, the sovereignty of the people whereby they have government by the consent of the governed, and many other inalienable rights.

God has richly blessed America. He has given us wonderful natural resources. Practically every commodity that man uses can be found in America. In her fields, every crop is grown; from her trees all kinds of fruit and wood are secured. We can go into our mines and find almost every mineral that man uses, and upon her vast prairies we find every kind of meat that is good for food. God has given all of these things to our people.

God has given us wonderful natural beauty. Every type of scenery that can be found in the world can be found in our country. When they talk to us about the beautiful coast of the Mediterranean Sea, we can tell them about the Atlantic Coast line, and the Pacific and Gulf shores. When they talk to us about the Danube and the Rhine and the beautiful rivers of Europe, we can tell them about the beautiful Ohio, the St. Lawrence, the Colorado, and the mighty Mississippi. When they talk to us about the mountains of Switzerland, we can point them to the rugged Rockies, the Alleghenies, the Adirondacks, and the Smokies. When they talk to us about the interesting spots of the old world, we can tell them about Niagara Falls, the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone Park, the Redwood Forests of California, Carlsbad Caverns and Silver Springs. God reached out His hand and painted a beautiful picture, and we call it America.

God has given us religious freedom. Whatever may be your belief, no one can close your church because your religion does not coincide with theirs. A few people, meeting in a little shack or under a brush arbor worshipping God as they believe in Him, have the same right of religious freedom that the people do who worship in a great cathedral on an avenue. In the constitution of the state of Rhode Island, Roger Williams wrote down the decree that every man should be permitted to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience. Then when Thomas Jefferson and others were forming the Constitution of the United States, they borrowed this principle and inserted it as an undying law in that sacred document. Baptists originated religious freedom in our land. They have fought throughout the years that all men might enjoy that freedom. Even though others believe exactly the opposite of what we believe, we would fight to give them the right to believe as they please. This is our conception of religious freedom for all men, and that freedom is enjoyed in this country as in no other.

God has given us a country where everyone has an opportunity. Edison was a poor boy, but the whole world today uses the 1,150 inventions that came from his mind and hands and heart. He became a great inventor because he lived in a land where a boy could have an opportunity in life. John D. Rockefeller was a poor boy, but America gave him his chance, and he became a millionaire, giving away fortunes to religious causes, benevolence, and progress. Henry Ford was a poor mechanic, but he became the world's greatest industrialist because America gave him an opportunity. Abraham Lincoln lived in a log cabin in our state and studied books by the fireside, but he rose to the White House and to fame. Thank God for a country where nobody can hold a man down if he is made of the right stuff.

God gave to us this wonderful country, and our forefathers fought, bled, and died to make it what it is today. We should be willing to do the same to keep it "the home of the brave and the land of the free." If there are those in our midst who don't like it, then self-respect and right would demand that they leave it and go where things are to their liking.

Insidious enemies are cutting away at the foundations of America's greatness. The forces of unrighteousness and iniquity are at work undermining our security and our service. Nothing is held sacred in their sight, and they are attacking from every direction. The social order is beset by evils which are enemies of all that is holy and heavenly in our life. Officials and statisticians say that crime is continually on the increase. Such a record of crime is inevitable when alcohol is flowing freely and when the liquor traffic enjoys the favor of so large a percentage of the people. Our nation is losing some of its sensitiveness to wrong, some of its eager responsiveness to duty, some of its uncompromising attitude toward disloyalty, some of its regard for man, and some of its reverence for God. Our decline as a nation is evident in the home life, the church life, the social life, the economic life, and the political life. Our nation will never return to the peace of sobriety, sanity, and righteousness until our people repent of their sins and conform to God's will for them. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." Our only hope is in the recognition of the Lordship of Christ.

Our people are trying everything else except God. We have pursued pleasures and profits, but it is only through our people turning to God that we can find lasting satisfaction and security. One of the great tragedies in our nation took place when we went off the gold standard, but an even greater tragedy took place when so many of our people went off the God standard. There has never been a time in our history

when we needed God as much as we need Him today. God has said: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall 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 heal their land."

What is your part, as an individual? Humility, prayer, supplication and reformation constitute your part. The best thing that you can do for your country is to give her a genuine Christian life. Live for Christ, for country, for church, and for home, and God will bless you and use you to the end of your life. God has been and always will be with His obedient children. Let us give ourselves completely to Him and then earnestly pray:

"God bless America, land that we love,
Stand beside her and guide her
Thru the night with a light from above.
From the mountains to the prairies,
To the ocean white with foam,
God bless America, my home, sweet home."