

A CITY SET ON A HILL

America used to be a beacon of light to the world, but over the years the character of the nation has changed. Should we care? Today, civil disorder arising from mass acts of civil disobedience has revealed a nation in turmoil struggling to govern itself. The flood of lies and false information has turned the nation against itself. Even the righteous are feeding into the world's talking points. I think we should care, because as standard bearers of the truth, we should be spreading light into the darkness at such a time as this.

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost its taste (purpose), how can it be made salty? It is no longer good for anything, but to be thrown out and walked on by people [when the walkways are wet and slippery]. “You are the light of [Christ to] the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house” (Matt. 5:13-15 AMP).

This prophecy speaks of two cities. From the hill of Calvary, Jesus saw a city without walls, standing upright with its arms extending to the world, as a lighthouse that could not be hid. We are that city. Jesus saw another city, this one with walls, that would emerge from the spoils of His cross, and it would become a great nation, for it would be rooted in colonial covenants embedded with the principles of Christianity. Its light would be so bright, it would draw the oppressed from all around the world.

A future governor, John Winthrop, caught the Lord's vision for a city set on a hill for the Massachusetts Bay Colony he would establish. On June 11, 1630, he put it into his “Model of Christian Charity”—words that would be echoed down throughout the generations by future presidents and historians. In a speech to the General Court of Massachusetts 331 years later, President-Elect John F. Kennedy quoted Winthrop, “We must always consider,” he said “that we shall be as a city upon a hill—the eyes of all people are upon us.” Then applying it to that day, Kennedy said, “We are committing ourselves to tasks of statecraft no less awesome than that of governing the Massachusetts Bay Colony, beset as it was then by terror without and disorder within. History will not judge our endeavors—and a government cannot be selected—merely on the basis of color or creed or even affiliation. Neither will competence and loyalty and stature suffice in times such as these. For of those to whom much is given much is required.” It's not the messenger, but the message.

The covenant in which God was the faithful Partner kept passing down. Nineteen years later, the words of a “city set on an hill” so inspired President Ronald Reagan that he referred to the city set on a hill in his Election Eve address, and later took the message of religious freedom and self-governance to other nations. One more time as if to memorialize this “city set on an hill,” leaders from all over the world heard these words from John Winthrop's “Model of Christian Charity” at President Reagan's funeral on June 11, 2004—exactly 374 years to the day that Winthrop delivered them before his shipmates on the flagship Arbella enroute to America! Again it is not the messenger, but the message. Little is much when God is in it.

What a great heritage our Christian forbearers left us. Unfortunately, so many books attribute America's greatness to the genius of the Founding Fathers, and we can get lost in America's heritage and see it only through secular eyes. But if you pull back the pages of history, you'll see that they built upon a moral foundation that was laid by the Pilgrim Fathers in covenant with God. Starting with the cross that liberated them from dictatorial rule, they gave us a foundation for self government we can fall upon in times of trouble that is unshakable, because the inscrutable power of God undergirds it! [See ["Standing upon the Unshakable Foundation,"](#) in the three part series, “Winning the Battle for the Soul of America.”]

When America was losing its way, Abraham Lincoln stood upon the foundation laid by the Founding Fathers, hammering away on the Biblical principle of equality they put in the Declaration of Independence! He essentially took that Declaration and turned it into the nation's moral compass—saying in so many ways that “all men are created equal.” Inequality is not compatible with freedom and liberty for all. This is why it was so egregious to Lincoln, and why he could not keep his light under a bushel.

One Governor—John Winthrop—and three American Presidents—Lincoln, Kennedy and Reagan—stood on the moral foundation established in covenant with God and were unafraid to speak its light into the nation! Clearly, it is not the messenger that matters, but the message, because decades later, we are still reading their words and drawing inspiration from them.

In spite of our rich heritage, this nation we love has drifted away from its founding principles. With arrows flying in all directions against truth, we may think it judicious to refrain our tongue from speaking to the issues that divide us, but the Bible says there is a time to keep silence, and there is a time to speak (Ecc. 3:7). And the time has come to stop walking around the issues that divide people and speak to them, not in political talking points, but in spiritual principles. At the root of most issues dividing the people today is unforgiveness. Therefore, the principle the nation most needs to hear is forgiveness. It is the spark of light that will cut into the oppressive darkness of the worldly system and free people lost in the whirlwind of its deception. They will not have to walk in darkness any more, tossed about with contrary winds blowing in all directions, for Jesus said, *“I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life”* (Jn. 8:12 NLT). On the other hand, clinging to the secular will separate us from God (Col. 2:8; 1 Cor.2:6, 2 Cor. 11:3). If we feed on its wisdom, we can take on a bitter and contentious spirit and interpret things through a dark lens, and not the light of revelation, because if we did, we would speak another language that reflects *“... the wisdom from above that is “...first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without favoritism and hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace”* (Jas. 3:17-18 HCSB).

The Spirit of Reconciliation. Imagine what impact we could have in the world around us if the spirit of reconciliation flowed through our lips. Instead of condemning people for their missteps, we might see the good they do. Lincoln was one who cultivated peace “with the wisdom from above.” Seeming to embody the spirit of reconciliation, he tolerated people who disagreed with him and was patient when reproached, but he remained steadfast to his core values. With the same spirit of reconciliation, he spoke light at the close of the Civil War to the irreconcilable factions with words heard around the world, “malice toward none; with charity for all,” setting the stage for racial reconciliation. This is emblematic of the spirit of reconciliation God wants us to take to the nation beginning in our discourses with one another and in our faith community. Words travel and can spread in the wrong direction. It's not the messenger that will be remembered, but the words. God said we will be a light to the world if we change our language:

“...If you take away from your midst yokes of oppression [wherever you find them}, the finger pointed in scorn [toward the oppressed or the godly], and every form of false, harsh, unjust and wicked speaking. And if you pour out that with which you sustain your own life for the hungry, and satisfied the need of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in darkness and your obscurity and gloom be as the noon day” (Isa. 58:9-10 AMP).

Just like in the days preceding the Civil War, the civil disobedience, the breakdown of the rule of law, the strife, the vitriol today speak to America's need for national reconciliation. As a principle of spiritual warfare, you can see that by not addressing root causes, the enemy has the advantage, and he is tearing people and families apart. A simple Biblical truth is if you hate people and deny them their equal rights under God, you cannot be free. When you fight and devour one another and forsake God's grace to forgive, you cannot do the things you want (Gal. 5:15, 17). Someone controls you against your free will, and you become so preoccupied with the struggle to break free that you cannot govern yourself rightly and in time lose its power (Matt. 18:32-35). Martin Luther King said we do not get rid of hate with hate; we get rid of hate by getting rid of enmities. This will break the arm of the oppressor over the nation. The answer is to reconcile old trespasses that recycle from generation to generation.

Restoration of the Family. First, restoration must come to God's people before they can take it to the nation. Wounds can bleed from the past producing behaviors and attitudes that fracture bonds of affection, cause division, and destroy many families. So important is reconciliation to restoration in the church that the Lord put it in the Gospel as a principle of prayer: *"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift"* (Matt. 5:23-24). **There is no principle of prayer that has greater impact upon unity than reconciliation for it crushes enmities, and this strengthens the bonds that connect us to God and each other.**

If we reconcile old grievances, healing and restoration will come. Compassion and empathy will then begin to flow to love one another and those outside of the covenant of Jesus Christ. The real breakthrough comes when we begin to identify with the common humanity we share with our fellow man—especially those on opposing sides of our political/ideological beliefs. We find that not everyone opposed to our views is driven by evil. At the core of many disputes are moral issues that drive most people, including ourselves—love, justice, equality, freedom, liberty, but crucibles along the path of life drove us apart and against each other. When we treat people the way we want to be treated based upon our shared humanity, we are loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 7:12, 19:19). Jesus said when we do this, we are not far from the Kingdom of God (Mk. 12:33-34). The Spirit of the Lord will be upon us to raise the foundation of many generations, opening the prison doors (of broken families) and delivering them out of the hands of the oppressor into the hands of their Savior (Isa. 61:1; Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:38).

I've witnessed wonderful born again Christians in one dysfunctional family battling generational strongholds that passed unto them from the sins of the fathers. I have seen the devastation it has brought to three generations. What or who can stop the cycle of unforgiveness? Martin Luther King had the answer: "...the forgiving act must always be initiated by the person who has been wronged, the victim of some great hurt, the recipient of some tortuous injustice, the absorber of some terrible act of oppression." In accord with the prophecy of Malachi to turn the heart of the fathers to the children and children to the fathers, I watched God turn the heart of the father in this family to his children with acts of kindness (Mal. 4:6), but it was the abused son's repentance and painful confession to his father, himself a victim, that will break the cycle of unforgiveness in his generation. The picture that God wants the rest of the family to see in the son's plight is their own bitter root judgements going back to the sins of the fathers, to bring them to a place of healing. Then the whole family can be restored and the curse of unforgiveness broken over it.

The launching pad for God to “heal the land” (2 Chr. 7:14) is reconciliation in the churches. Forty-five years ago, revival broke out in the Baltic state of Estonia, a nation brutally occupied by the Soviet Union for 50 years! In his book, *The Great Soviet Awakening*, Tom Kraeuter describes how faith of the Estonian Christians brought it about. Recognizing their need for a deeper reconciliation with God, in accordance with the Biblical model for healing (Jas. 5:16), they began to confess their sins to one another in their prayer meetings and reconcile relationships from the top on down. Miraculous deliverances and healings followed, but perhaps the greatest miracle was the healing in their heart of their hostile feelings toward their much hated Russian neighbors. When they welcomed them to their revival meetings with open arms in spite of severe persecution, they put aside their fear and decades of animosity to love their enemies. *“But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you”* (Lk. 6:27). This laid the foundation for a great Soviet awakening. And they came, thousands of Russians hungry for God from all over the Soviet Union, some by the word of mouth and others by dreams and visions!

Ultimately, the forgiveness planted by Estonian Christians toward their Russian enemies would free their nation from Soviet domination through the power of God. The answer for America and other nations fighting for their independence is found in this principle—you must forgive to be set free and find your freedom. The same principle applying to individuals and families applies to nations.

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