

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



Psalm 33:10-22 The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. ¹¹ The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations. ¹² Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage! ¹³ The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man; ¹⁴ from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, ¹⁵ he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds. ¹⁶ The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. ¹⁷ The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue. ¹⁸ Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, ¹⁹ that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine. ²⁰ Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. ²¹ For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. ²² Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

When I was in school, we would start every day the same way, and maybe your experience in school was the same. You'd stand up at your desk, turn and face the flag, put your hand over your heart and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. I don't know how many schools do that anymore. There has been lots of backlash in recent years over forcing children to say the Pledge of Allegiance, and of course much of the anger is over that one little phrase in the middle: "One nation under God."

That phrase wasn't always in the Pledge; in its original form it read, "the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." It wasn't until President Dwight Eisenhower's input in 1954 that the words "under God" were added to the Pledge. His desire was to separate America out from the communist nations of the day with their state-mandated atheism. America was a Christian nation, and we ought to declare it.

Well, I must admit, I am in agreement with those that say America is not a Christian nation. For one thing, the most recent Pew Research study on America's religious landscape found that only 65% of Americans identify as Christians; which doesn't sound terrible, but it is down 12% in the last decade. Of that group, only 45% of those who identify as Christians go to church at least once a month. Breaking it down by generation, the group of the religiously unaffiliated gets larger with each passing generation. And in my own generation, the millennials, only 49% identify as Christian.

"One nation, under God." Can we really claim that anymore? Our text this morning describes the nation that can claim to be God's nation. And that's not describing America, but it is describing us. The theme we'll be considering this morning is:

The Nation Whose God is the Lord

- I. Not the "one nation under God"
- II. But the One Nation under God

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD," says the Psalmist. Of course, with that wonderful promise, the question follows, "What nation is he talking about?" I found this rather interesting. I did a Google image search of that exact passage, and the first twenty-six results were all images with that passage superimposed over a US flag. And then just scrolling down the page from there, the images were much the same—bald eagles, stars and stripes, ***"Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD."***

While this particular nation exists, God is not describing the United States of America here. Even so, I would still contend that it is true when we claim to be a “nation *under* God.” You see, in the first verse of our text, we read, **“The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.”** Every government on earth belongs to a nation “*under*” God because they are all at His mercy and under His power. It’s just as the prophet Daniel declared to the King of Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar, **“God changes times and seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings.”** (Daniel 2:21)

And King Nebuchadnezzar is a prime example of God’s authoritative power; God showed him that the kingdoms of this world are *under* God. In the book of Daniel, you can read about how Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and then Daniel came to interpret the dream and told him, **“O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom He will.”** (Daniel 4:31-32) And Nebuchadnezzar himself declares in that book that it happened. He lost his mind, he was driven outside the city, his hair and nails grew long, he ate grass; God took his kingdom from him—until the day when his sanity returned. And on that day he lifted his eyes to heaven and praised the one true God, saying **“His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth.”** (Daniel 4:34-35) Nebuchadnezzar learned that he was a king *under* God and that he belonged to a nation *under* God.

I believe our country could use a similar wake-up call. How often, as Americans, are we conditioned to feel secure, and maybe even superior, because we belong to the “greatest nation on earth.” We have the most advanced weapons, we have the most powerful armies, we have the greatest economy—we are the best! This very common American mindset reminds me of the attitude of the Edomites in the Old Testament. In the book of Obadiah, God declared that they were very prideful, dwelling high up in the mountains, feeling secure and saying, **“Who will bring me down to the ground?”** And to their pride, God declared, **“Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD.”** (Obadiah 1:3-4) And He did. Soon after these words were spoken, God flexed His authority, and the same King Nebuchadnezzar brought in his armies of Babylon and completely destroyed the nation of Edom. Another powerful reminder, that God is in control; the nations are not. Not ours, not any other. And that’s good for us to remember.

God gives us another reminder in the middle of our text: **“The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue.”** As great as it is to belong to a nation that has military satellites and nuclear submarines and for whom national security is of primary importance—none of these things can save us. As the rulers of this world sit in their war rooms plotting and strategizing, God declares in the Psalms, **“He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.”** (Psalm 2:2)

And so we need to be wary of the very American mindset, which holds pride for country over everything else. It is good to pay attention to the goings on around our country; it is good to be thankful for the freedoms God has afforded us here; it is good for us to have keen interest in elections and cast our votes. Those are all blessings that God has given us. But the danger, as with anything else, is that we become so mentally entangled with our nation that we lose sight of God. There is a most-blessed **Nation Whose God is the Lord**, but it is not the one that makes that claim in the Pledge of Allegiance.

As we come up on another election, it is often said by those on both sides of the political aisle, that “our country is doomed if such-and-such a candidate is elected this November.” Our country is doomed only if the Lord of heaven and earth declares it. As the world focuses its attention on political quarrels and squabbles, we must not lose sight of the one in control. It is easy for even Christians to become overly consumed with the powers of this world and forget the One who holds all power. God says through the prophet Isaiah, **“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.”** (Isaiah 40:28)

Now, I’ve not actually explained why the United States of America isn’t really that **Nation Whose God is the Lord**. I sited some statistics by the Pew Research group earlier, but that’s really a pretty weak argument on my part. The real reason why I wouldn’t consider our country or any other country a Christian nation has to do with the nature of their authority. Remember when Jesus was on trial before Pilate, and Pilate asked if He was a king? Jesus responded, **“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”** (John 18:37) Jesus’s Kingdom, the true Nation of God, is not a worldly nation at all.

God gives governments authority and puts people in power, but it’s a very limited power. Paul writes about that form of authority in his letter to the Romans, **“Rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. . . . if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer.”** (Romans 13:3-4) The only power the nations of this world have is the power of the sword. The kingdoms of this world use power and intimidation and threats and the rule of law to get their way. And that is not how God’s kingdom operates.

Now, as a nation whose earliest settlers had Christian values, we have historically had some Biblically based laws. It is certainly good when we have leaders in our country that work to enact such moral laws: fighting for the lives of unborn babies, fighting for marriage as God intended it, fighting the sanctity of the family. But even if all of these things were on the books, that would not make the United States a Christian nation. If we called it that, we’d be equating Christianity with just a series of moral laws. But Christianity isn’t rules or laws, Christianity is sinners having peace with God by His good grace.

And the peace which God brings through His rule is so much greater than the peace any earthly nation can create. There is a **Nation Whose God is the Lord**, and it’s the One true Nation that is Under God: His church. When Jesus was talking to Pilate, and Pilate asked Him if He was a king, Jesus replied, **“You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world-- to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”** (John 18:37) And so the true Nation of God on earth is the one that lives, not by the sword, but by the truth of Jesus Christ crucified. That’s what the true Christian nation is all about. It is of this nation, the church, that it can be said, **“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!”**

That word, **“Blessed,”** it’s an interesting word in Hebrew. It’s spelled the same way in English as “blessed” but notice I’ve been pronouncing it “bless-ed.” And that’s because those are two different words. We can be blessed by God, which we all are with all of the wonderful freedoms and riches that we have. But to be “bless-ed” means something else. This word can also mean, “Happy.” Or as one of my seminary professors liked to explain it, when you see the word “bless-ed,” think “better off.” **“Better off is the nation whose God is the Lord.”**

I think we've all been blessed by God to be citizens of this country. Our nation and its freedoms are blessings to us. But we are "bless-ed—better off" by being citizens of a different country. That true nation of God; we are truly better off because He has made us to be citizens of His church on earth. This is where true happiness is found. I put it as an announcement in the back of the bulletin, but I have some really close friends about my age, the Naumann brothers, who are pastors in our synod. Their dad is a pastor too, and their mom is a teacher, her name is Desirae. And it was very recently discovered that she has brain cancer, very advanced stages, and by everything we can see with our limited point of view, it looks like she has about 15 to 17 months to live. And that's been a tough pill to swallow.

And I am thankful that she lives in a country that has very advanced medical care; we pray this is going to afford her ample time yet to see her kids and her grandkids. But as great as that is, that's no real source of hope for her. Her only hope right now, is in the Lord. And while the blessings of her nation can do a little for her, she is much better off as a member of a different nation, the nation of believers. The blessings that come with being a resident of that kingdom are described here in our text, starting in verse 18: ***"Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine. Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you."***

We can think not only of Desirae, but of our sisters-in-Christ that passed away this year. JoAnn Sedberry, Delores Seger—they were both members of that bless-ed nation. They were among those who hoped in the Lord's steadfast love. They knew that even as their health failed them that God would deliver their souls from death! Even right down to the end, with their own words and in their own ways they both said their hearts were glad, and it was because they trusted in the forgiveness of their Savior.

He is the one who sits on His throne above, ruling over the kingdoms of this world. He directs the times and the seasons, he establishes kingdoms and sets up kings. And He's also keeping watch over you. Our text says, ***"The eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His steadfast love."*** God is watching out for His chosen, precious people on earth—that's you and me. It seems incredible that the God of all power and might would show such interest in us. That's what David expressed in his Psalm, ***"What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?"*** (Psalm 8:4) We wonder, why would the God who sits on the throne of heaven care about little old me? And I can't really answer that! But I know He does. He speaks of His love for us throughout Scripture, like in John's first epistle, ***"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."*** (1 John 4:10)

It's that unconditional, sacrificial love of God into which you can place all your hope. No matter what changes in our earthly country, these facts of our spiritual country will remain. That the Lord is in control, that He is concerned primarily with our salvation, that He watches over us, and that He will deliver us. Even when the United States or any of the other nations of this world meet their demise, in the end, you will be better off. For God has called us out of this world to be members of the nation of blood-bought souls who trust in the grace of the Lord. In the end, you and I will be left standing, the saints of God surrounding His glorious throne. May the Lord help us each to find fulness of joy in being members of that holy nation, and may He help us to keep our eyes focused on Him. Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."
(Philippians 4:7) Amen.

Pastor Sam Rodebaugh
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