

# THE NATION WHOSE GOD IS THE LORD

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God's Word speaks to individuals and God's Word speaks to nations (for nations are simply collectives of people—originally ethnic, now also geographic or political). The promises God makes to a nation, any member of that nation may claim for himself or herself (God does not require 100% buy-in). He regards the faith of individuals, as our morning text affirms:

Psalm 33:13-22

*<sup>13</sup> The Lord looks down from heaven and sees the whole human race. <sup>14</sup> From his throne he observes all who live on the earth. <sup>15</sup> He made their hearts, so he understands everything they do.*

*<sup>16</sup> The best-equipped army cannot save a king, nor is great strength enough to save a warrior.*

*<sup>17</sup> Don't count on your warhorse to give you victory—for all its strength, it cannot save you.*

*<sup>18</sup> But the Lord watches over those who fear him, those who rely on his unfailing love. <sup>19</sup> He rescues them from death and keeps them alive in times of famine.*

*<sup>20</sup> We put our hope in the Lord. He is our help and our shield. <sup>21</sup> In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.*

*<sup>22</sup> Let your unfailing love surround us, Lord, for our hope is in you alone.*

The United States of America may be the only nation in our world which was formed for other than an ethnic purpose—America was formed with a multi-ethnic purpose, based on Christian principles, as it says in our Declaration of Independence, “All men are created equal, endowed by their Creator.”

The initial purpose that drove our ancestors to risk the journey across the Atlantic, was religious freedom—freedom to practice their faith according to conscience rather than dogma. Of course, that was quickly followed by material greed and other base desires.

Nevertheless, as a result of the faith and wisdom of many of our founding fathers, God has blessed this nation beyond anything we could deserve. Isaiah offered a response that would be appropriate to such grace:

Isaiah 26:12-15

*<sup>12</sup> Lord, you will grant us peace; all we have accomplished is really from you. <sup>13</sup> O Lord our God, others (mere men) have ruled us, but you alone are the one we worship.*

*<sup>14</sup> Those we served (whether they led us or oppressed us) before are dead and gone. Their departed spirits will never return! You attacked them and destroyed them, and they are long forgotten.*

*<sup>15</sup> O Lord, you have made our nation great; yes, you have made us great. You have extended our borders, and we give you the glory!*

I do not suggest that we are great and have no needs. We have many needs. I do not suggest that we are great and have no shame. We have many things for which to be ashamed. I do not suggest that we are great and have no conflicts. We have many conflicts, within and without. But God *IS* great, and deserves our allegiance, even above our allegiance to this blessed nation. Too many Americans depend on our culture and its systems and even our Constitution and codes of law, as if they are responsible for our greatness (wherever “greatness” may be found).

In fact, there is only one document that is holy and genuinely responsible for humanity’s blessings: the Holy Bible, especially the New Testament.

### **Give Your Attention**

Throughout the ages, God has wrestled for our attention—to His Word and, ultimately, to Himself. It is essentially no different today than it was thousands of years ago, when Isaiah prophesied.

Isaiah 65:1-2

*The Lord says, “I was ready to respond, but no one asked for help.*

*I was ready to be found, but no one was looking for me.*

*I said, ‘Here I am, here I am!’ to a nation that did not call on my name.*

*<sup>2</sup> All day long I opened my arms to a rebellious people. But they follow their own evil paths and their own crooked schemes.*

God is looking for our response—as a nation, as an individual. Our sins He will forgive. Our shame He will wipe away. Our conflicts He will resolve. Our destiny He will assure.

Jeremiah 12:16-17

*<sup>16</sup> And if these nations truly learn the ways of my people, and if they learn to swear by my name, saying, ‘As surely as the Lord lives’ (just as they taught my people to swear by the name of Baal), then they will be given a place among my people. <sup>17</sup> But any nation who refuses to obey me will be uprooted and destroyed. I, the Lord, have spoken!”*

### **A Door of Repentance**

We often think and speak of God’s will as something solid, unchangeable—like a rock. Some aspects of His will—those large and general issues concerning Christ and His Kingdom—are just so, because Christ has accomplished His work. But for you and I, where mercy may apply, or judgment, God’s will is fluid, like a river. Jeremiah illustrated what I mean to say:

Jeremiah 18:1-10

<sup>1</sup> The Lord gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, <sup>2</sup> “Go down to the potter’s shop, and I will speak to you there.” <sup>3</sup> So I did as he told me and found the potter working at his wheel.

<sup>4</sup> But the jar he was making did not turn out as he had hoped, so he crushed it into a lump of clay again and started over.

<sup>5</sup> Then the Lord gave me this message: <sup>6</sup> “O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand.

<sup>7</sup> If I announce that a certain nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed,

<sup>8</sup> but then that nation renounces its evil ways, I will not destroy it as I had planned.

<sup>9</sup> And if I announce that I will plant and build up a certain nation or kingdom, <sup>10</sup> but then that nation turns to evil and refuses to obey me, I will not bless it as I said I would.

The door of repentance has been opened to us. We are not doomed to remain as we have been. We are not “stuck in a rut” for the rest of our days. We can “renounce” our evil ways. We can turn back to God. We can repent. And God will rebuild and restore.

And if we should turn in the other direction, God is not powerless to act.

## **Responsibly Fruitful**

Does Jesus address this theme of national, as well as personal, responsibility to God? Indeed He does.

Matthew 21:33-46

<sup>33</sup> “Now listen to another story. A certain landowner planted a vineyard, built a wall around it, dug a pit for pressing out the grape juice, and built a lookout tower (this was a complete package, built and secured for production). Then he leased the vineyard to tenant farmers and moved to another country. <sup>34</sup> At the time of the grape harvest, he sent his servants to collect his share of the crop. <sup>35</sup> But the farmers grabbed his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup> So the landowner sent a larger group of his servants to collect for him, but the results were the same.

<sup>37</sup> “Finally, the owner sent his son, thinking, ‘Surely they will respect my son.’

<sup>38</sup> “But when the tenant farmers saw his son coming, they said to one another, ‘Here comes the heir to this estate. Come on, let’s kill him and get the estate for ourselves!’ <sup>39</sup> So they grabbed him, dragged him out of the vineyard, and murdered him.

<sup>40</sup> “When the owner of the vineyard returns,” Jesus asked, “what do you think he will do to those farmers?”

<sup>41</sup> The religious leaders replied, “He will put the wicked men to a horrible death and lease the vineyard to others who will give him his share of the crop after each harvest.” (See how quickly and sternly they judged those farmers?)

<sup>42</sup> Then Jesus asked them, “Didn’t you ever read this in the Scriptures?

‘The stone that the builders rejected

*has now become the cornerstone.*

*This is the Lord's doing,  
and it is wonderful to see.'*

*<sup>43</sup> I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will produce the proper fruit. <sup>44</sup> Anyone who stumbles over that stone (that chosen Cornerstone) will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone it falls on."*

*<sup>45</sup> When the leading priests and Pharisees heard this parable, they realized he was telling the story against them—they were the wicked farmers. <sup>46</sup> They wanted to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowds, who considered Jesus to be a prophet.*

"A nation (a people) that will produce the proper fruit." And what does that fruit, for which God is seeking His share from His servants, look like?

Galatians 5:22-23

*<sup>22</sup> But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, and self-control.*

I want to substitute the word "giving" for the word "love." For two reasons: (1) because God's measure of true love is the gift of Christ Himself—that He came and gave His life as a substitute for our unrighteousness, and (2) because "love" needs to be rescued from the notion of a mere inner feeling and restored to its pragmatic reality—it is an act of kindness made on behalf of another person (often regardless of our "inner feeling").

I want to substitute "giving" for "love," because love is not something you "have"; it is something you do, something you give away, as are all the fruit of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: GIVING—giving joy, giving peace, giving patience, giving kindness, giving goodness, giving faithfulness, giving gentleness, and giving self-control.

It is not in having, but in *giving* what is yours because of your relationship with Jesus—*sharing* the fruit of the Spirit with others—THAT is when the Holy Spirit is working effectively and having His way with you.

God is looking for a people, or a person, who will produce this proper fruit.

Is it you? Will it be you?