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WHY A NATION NEEDS GOD

All of us are familiar with the story of Humpty-Dumpty, the figure from the children's nursery rhyme whose world was shattered after he had a great fall. He called on the best his world had to offer to address his problem—"all the king's horses and all the king's men." We would say today that Humpty had the White House, Congress, the military, and any other human power or authority you can think of coming to his aid in his brokenness.

But the tragedy of the story is that none of these governmental powers could put Humpty-Dumpty's life and world back together again.

Now it's one thing when a nursery rhyme character cannot find the help he needs to repair his shattered world, even

when his problem is being attended to by the highest authorities the culture has to offer. But it's another thing altogether when real people in the real world discover that all the king's horses and all the king's men—human institutions of power and influence—can't fix society's deepest problems and address people's deepest needs.

While the government is never to be looked to in order to solve all of the existing problems, politics and governments were established to, at a minimum, address the needs of those governed. Surely all of the king's horses and all of the king's men ought to maintain an environment conducive to Humpty-Dumpty being put back together again.

But that is difficult to do when the foundational core of national health and stability is precisely what has been broken. Anyone who reads the headlines on a tablet today or who turns on the national news knows that something is slowly destroying America. Some kind of hideous virus, some sort of deadly disease, is racing through our cultural bloodstream.

A SPIRITUAL SICKNESS

When you pass America's problems through the filter of faith and the screen of Scripture, it becomes painfully clear that the problems spring from a common cause, from a spiritual problem deep within society's veins. What we are struggling with as a nation today is very similar to the disease that

took the world by storm when it first presented itself on the global scene in the 1960s and then in America in the 1980s, having since claimed over 35 million lives¹—AIDS.

As you know, AIDS occurs as a result of a breakdown in the body's immune system. As the virus known as HIV attacks and incapacitates the immune system, the body is rendered vulnerable to a host of other diseases. A cold can become pneumonia. An otherwise minor infection can become an aggressive, life-threatening disease. In fact, an AIDS sufferer usually does not die of AIDS itself but of AIDS-related complications due to the body's inability to fight off even the most minor of physical intrusions.

What is true of the AIDS virus is true on every level of our society as well. The core of our spiritual immune system has been badly damaged, with the result that cultural colds have become societal pneumonia, and minor cultural infections have now become life-threatening, to the extent of closing down our government for some time.

Yet none of the medications being used are correcting the problem. At best, they may simply suppress some of the symptoms temporarily. Psychiatric drugs and counseling are not filling our personal sense of emptiness. Workshops, conferences, and even presidential calls for renewed unity are not solving our crime problems. More condoms and sex education are not solving our moral problems. And more activism is not solving our social problems.

Virtually every institution in our culture has been affected, whether that be the instability of the home, reduced educational test scores, a higher crime rate and drug usage, heightened racial tensions, poorer quality in the job market, or an often inadequate and overpriced health care system.

Add to these issues the growing awareness that the government is unable to fix the problems of poverty and social decay, and it quickly becomes apparent that all the king's horses and all the king's men cannot spend enough money or create enough programs to put the Humpty-Dumpty of our nation back together again.

A multitude of books, seminars, workshops, and symposia have not enabled us to fortify our nation's foundational structures. Our technological advances have far outpaced our sense of personal and national responsibility. We can send a robotic probe to examine the surface of Mars, but we cannot manage to pay our bills or wisely choose, as a country, which bills to incur. As a result, our society has declined economically, materially, educationally, morally, and even from the standpoint of our health, all because it has declined spiritually.

Since our national problems and cultural threats are fundamentally spiritual at their core, it is the church that is called on by God to address them. However, despite possessing majority numbers of people professing faith, cultural trends and policies frequently reflect the stronger voice of nonreligious

minority groups. One reason for this stems from their unified tenacity in intentionally influencing and utilizing the prominent systems, bodies, and establishments that form our culture.

THE NEED FOR KINGDOM-MINDED LIFE

While the church has done an admirable job of cursing the darkness, we have done a poor job of spreading the light. Thus the church itself has contributed to the spiritual decline of American culture and increase of cultural risks by failing to produce kingdom-minded citizens and entities willing to work together for the greater good.

The tragedy today is not that sinners sin—that's what they're expected to do, since mankind is born in sin and shaped in iniquity (Psalm 51:5; Ephesians 2:1–3). The real tragedy is that the church as a whole has failed to positively transform society and serve as the conscience of the government.

When Christians fail to live out their faith, then their families fail to function as Christian families. Failed Christian families make for ineffective churches. And ineffective churches make no impact on the communities they have been called to serve and change. You can find a church building on nearly every corner in most large cities in America, yet these communities in particular are being systematically destroyed by violence as people languish in poverty and despair. It's

obvious that the church is not having the influence that God created and intended it to have.

If we who name the name of Jesus Christ are going to do something for our nation, it must begin with the household of God (1 Peter 4:17). After all, the purpose of the church, in light of the nature of the kingdom, is to develop kingdom-minded citizens and leaders who not only impact the nation from a kingdom perspective but also seek to make legislative decisions based on biblical principles.

The kingdom, simply put, refers to the theocratic operation and implementation of the rule of God over every part of creation. The kingdom agenda is *the visible demonstration of the comprehensive rule of God over every area of life*. The kingdom is not referencing so much a location as it is a source. It is talking about heaven's presence, and operation, in history. Submission to God's kingdom agenda opens up the flow of heaven's involvement in our lives on earth as well as in the life of a nation.

There are four aspects of every kingdom: First, a kingdom must have a king or a ruler. God is the King. Next, a kingdom must also have subjects of the kingdom, the rulers. We are God's subjects. Then, a kingdom also has rules that the ruler oversees. These are biblical principles and truths. And lastly, a kingdom has a realm—a scope over which the king rules. David tells us in the book of Psalms,

The earth is the LORD's, and all it contains,
The world, and those who dwell in it. (Psalm 24:1)

The scope of the whole world is God's kingdom.

The rules by which we are to abide in God's kingdom, if we are to receive the blessings and the benefits of the kingdom, are the biblical principles and regulations given to us by the King. God's Word contains everything we need to know and follow in order to enjoy success in our nation.

Yet success has become increasingly elusive to us as a nation because we live in a world where people's first priority isn't aligning their thoughts and actions under biblical principles, but rather they are focused on themselves. We can't solve marriage problems because husbands and wives care more for themselves than they do for each other. We can't solve community crises because many ethnic and special-interest groups care only for their own agendas. We can't solve health and disease epidemics because the bottom line drives pharmaceutical companies to promote more sales rather than promote better health through nutrition and lifestyle choices. We can't put an end to deficit spending because many politicians insist that the cuts take place in somebody else's district.

When we apply a biblical diagnosis to the problems in our nation, the selfishness around us should not surprise us. Paul told Timothy that in the last days, people would be "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:4). Our

world is addicted to pleasure. For many, life is a constant quest for something that gives them that good feeling. And Satan is happy to oblige.

MOVING FROM A ME-FOCUS

As long as we remain *me*-focused we will remain divided, unable to move toward a common goal. When people talk about what's wrong with our nation, the problem they say most often is the government, the media, or the White House—anyone or anything but themselves. The refusal of people to take personal responsibility for their actions has, in and of itself, become a national epidemic.

The root cause of our societal chaos and breakdown is found in this clash of worldviews, those presuppositions that determine how we look at and interpret life.

The worldview of “me-ism,” or humanism, puts man at the center of the universe so that he attempts to define man and his relationships solely from naturalistic presuppositions. Theism, on the other hand, puts God in His rightful place at the center of the universe as life's highest Authority by whom everything else must be measured.

Both of these worldviews are religious in nature since both require faith—faith in man or faith in God. Both views also produce a set of principles and standards—an agenda—to be used in determining how life is to be lived. The direction of a

society is decided by whichever worldview prevails. It should be obvious, judging by the way our society makes decisions, which worldview prevails. It should be obvious, judging by the direction our society is heading, that we need another agenda—God’s kingdom agenda.

WHEN GOD IS ABSENT FROM SOCIETY

I believe that the absence of a cohesive and authentic kingdom agenda, as well as its resulting outcomes, is best captured and summarized in the book of 2 Chronicles, a passage talking about ancient Israel. Chapter 15 reveals why we are failing both spiritually and socially because it reveals three internal elements that plagued Israel, and plague us as well today. I have taken the liberty of substituting America for Israel:

For many days *America* was without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law. . . . In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for many disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of *America*. Nation was crushed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every kind of distress. (vv. 3, 5–6)

Scan these few verses, and you will see a picture of great spiritual and social chaos, the breakdown of a society. What

went wrong? Three crucial things were missing in Israel's national life, and I believe they are missing today in America as well.

In the situation of the Israelites, the first problem was that they wanted a convenient God, one they could control—a kingdom without a king. It was not that the majority had become atheists or snuffed out their sacrificial fires. Religion continued and rituals remained. It was, rather, that they had resorted to paying homage without alignment, reinforcing the culture's false view of a God who is harmless, distant, and has nothing significant to say about the educational, scientific, entertainment, racial, civic, political, familial, legal, or governing issues of the day.

The issue with a convenient God, one you can control, is that you wind up playing god instead. Any god you can boss around isn't the true God. The true God does not adjust to you. You adjust to Him. The Israelites didn't want the true God messing around in their national life, reminding them that He had an agenda greater than their personal interests and desires. Our culture doesn't want a God like that either.

The world wants a nice little prayer before public meetings, but its people don't want to hear about the true God. And I'm afraid that sometimes the church isn't very interested in the true God anymore either.

The second problem in Israel was a loss of teaching priests. Again, the text doesn't say there were no priests. But the

priests had stopped teaching the truth. They had traded enlightenment for entertainment. Worship had degenerated into a social club. The church was no longer the epicenter of all life and conscience of the culture, calling people to take God seriously.

I'm not saying we cannot or should not enjoy worship. There's nothing wrong with celebrating God and expressing our emotions in worship. But emotion is never to replace truth. Israel was suffering from an absence of spiritual leaders who took seriously the authority of Scripture for all of life. Have you ever wondered how we can have all these churches on all these corners with all these preachers and all these choirs and all these deacons and all these ministries—and still have all this mess?

Someone will say, "Well, I didn't like that sermon." Wrong response. The issue is whether it was true, not whether it was popular. Politicians need to be popular. Preachers need to tell the truth.

WHEN TRUTH IS ABSENT

The issue of truth is all-important. Our society is schizophrenic because people want certainty in the important, everyday stuff, but nobody wants to admit that there is such a thing as a reliable body of truth; so relativism rules.

This lack of truth has led to a "conscienceless" society, in

which people can sin in large and ongoing ways and yet feel no emotional or spiritual pain. God created pain, whether physical or spiritual, to tell us something is wrong and to keep us from going as far as we wanted to go.

But when people do not have truth, they do not have anything to give them pain when they make wrong decisions. They become “seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron” (1 Timothy 4:2). They become anesthetized, losing their sense of right and wrong. In such a society every person becomes a law unto himself or herself, so chaos rules.

The process starts early these days. It used to be that most people’s consciences didn’t get anesthetized until college, where the professor in Philosophy 101 was at best an agnostic, or even worse, an atheist. So he would announce, “There are no absolutes.”

But now, kids in middle school and high school are learning that one person’s answers and ideas are just as good as anyone else’s. However, in a world where everybody’s answers are right, nobody’s answers wind up being right. When a society loses truth, it loses meaning, because people are never really sure about anything.

The third missing ingredient in Israel was God’s law.

When a culture has a false view of God built on bad information, God begins to remove the restraint of His law, allowing evil to grow and spread unbridled. Even sinners who respect God’s law won’t do certain things. But once God’s

precepts are removed from or marginalized in a culture, then the standard for a society is gone, and the culture faces the consequences of turning against Him.

In Israel's chronicles, God was the cause of their distress, not the sinners in that culture, and not even Satan. It said, "God troubled them." In a situation like that, it doesn't matter who you elect or what programs you initiate. Until God's anger is assuaged, you will not be able to fix what is wrong or spend enough money to buy a way out of the dilemma.

As long as God is kept at a distance, He will not take over the control center of a nation, and unrighteousness will rule. He will be close enough for invocations and benedictions but not part of the decisions in between.

The net result will be the devolution of mankind and the resultant devolution of a nation, as we are currently experiencing. The more we demote God, the worse things will get. This is what Paul referred to when he wrote, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Romans 1:18). What America is witnessing today in the rapid deterioration of our culture is the reality that God is removing more and more of His restraint and revealing more and more of His wrath.

Israel was minus a proper view of God, the teaching of His truth by the priests, and the restraint of His law. No wonder there was great turmoil in the land, as we saw earlier in 2 Chronicles 15:5–6. Let's talk about what was going on as a

result. “There was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for many disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants” (v. 5). That sounds like a high crime rate. “Nation was crushed by nation, and city by city” (v. 6a). What a picture of conflict on both the local and the international level. Wars and urban conflict marred Israel.

But what I want you to notice is the end of verse 6: “For God troubled them with every kind of distress.” In other words, God was behind the chaos in the society. He identified Himself as the responsible party.

Here is a crucial principle we so often miss. When God is your problem, only God is your solution. If God is the One who is offended, you had better address Him.

The root problem is always spiritual, even though the symptoms of it seem social. Israel’s problem was God, but there was no one around to say so and to point to God as the answer.

Do I need to say that America’s problem is also with God? It is. That’s why we’ll never see solutions until we appropriately repent and align with God. But it’s easier to blame the Devil for our troubles. Verse 6 is surprising because it’s not what you would expect to read. You would expect to read, “For Satan troubled them with every kind of distress.” When you see disturbances in the land, you would expect somebody to say, “The Devil is messing up America.” The Devil is busy, for sure, but he isn’t our real problem.

To put it another way, when God is forsaken, unrighteous-

ness dominates. When God is included, righteousness dominates. When God is on the outskirts of all, instead of in the center, we experience His judgment rather than His blessing, and deterioration sets in.

Now here's where the church could be making all the difference if we were really on top of things spiritually. The unregenerate don't know that God is their problem and their only solution, so they go around trying to fix problems using earthly means and earthly wisdom.

But we, the people of God, know that you can't use human, physical, secular means to bring about spiritual solutions. In 2 Corinthians 10:4 Paul writes: "The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."

WHAT IS GOD'S APPROACH?

We are supposed to offer a whole different approach, a whole different agenda. We know the first issue that must be addressed is, What is God's approach to solving this problem? We as the people of God are called to bring the presence of God to a society that desperately needs Him. So what are we doing using the same feeble, human approaches to our problems that the world uses?

God has made it unmistakably clear that He must be pre-eminent. He must be brought downtown in a culture if that

culture would be preserved. But when a culture leaves God out, it deteriorates. God will always judge the culture that ignores Him. That's why the Bible says,

Righteousness exalts a nation,
But sin is a disgrace to any people. (Proverbs 14:34)

The church has let the world dismiss God. We can't blame the schools for going downhill if righteous parents are never involved there. Their absence means the unrighteous can now dominate. We can't complain that prayer and the Ten Commandments have been removed from schools, when a large number of Christian homes don't acknowledge either on a regular basis at all.

We can't blame the government for deteriorating if the church hasn't spoken up for righteousness in the public arena. We are the ones who take God to the culture. If we sit back and let the unrighteous dominate, they will control our lives. It is our role to bring God to the culture so that righteousness will pervade and God's blessing will be on the culture.

So what are we to do to get us to the point of being one nation under God? Well, let's go back to our text in 2 Chronicles 15 and pick up verse 4: "In their distress they turned to the LORD God of Israel, and they sought Him, and He let them find Him." Israel didn't seek God until they were in distress. God will let you hit bottom, land flat on your back, if

that's the only way you will be ready to look up.

Our nation is declining. Our culture is collapsing. But we're still not looking up. And until we do, we'll keep going down. That's where the church comes in. The church must penetrate the culture with the message, "You're going down, but look up. In our distress, let's cry to the Lord. Let's seek Him, and He will let us find Him."

It's not that God is playing hide-and-seek with America. He is wondering how long it will take us to look to Him, how long it will take us to come to Him. He's there, but we can't see Him until we seek Him.

Our nation's pledge describes what we are to be. It says:

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, *one nation under God* . . .

For some people, this pledge could very well read, *one nation under the Supreme Court*. Or *one nation under me*, or even *one nation under nothing at all*. That, in fact, is our problem.

Politicians often say, "We must change the system." But the last time I checked, what made the system "the system" were the people running it and affected by it, thus contributing back to it. What it comes down to, no matter how many ways we examine it, is that if we are no longer a nation comprised of people seeking to align themselves—and the institutions

they belong to—under God, then we have forfeited the blessings, rights, liberty, and privileges that come from being one nation under God.

A nation that refuses to remain under God is a nation that will inevitably go under.