TODAY'S ORDER OF WORSHIP

Welcome by: Don Taylor/Opening Prayer by: Craig Girard
Morning Assembly Song Leader: Bobby Rader

#959 Just a Little Talk with Jesus
#881 Mansion Over the Hilltop
Scripture Reading by: Rock Cary
#867 To Canaan's Land I'm On My Way
Communion Devotional by: Don Lynn
Lord's Supper and Contribution

#162 All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name
Sermon: "Paul in Jerusalem"
Acts:21:17-36

#945 Kneel at the Cross
#859 When All of God's Singers Get Home
Closing Prayer by: Tommy Cary

Tonight is our
2nd Sunday Evening
Service Project

Other Opportunities For Spiritual Growth

Sunday: 9:00am — Bible Study Classes, 10:00am — Worship, 5:00pm — Worship
Wednesday: 6:30pm — Bible Study Classes

Nov. 13, 2022

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"

Galatians 5:1

On Christian Nationalism

We have heard a lot over the last few years about "Christian nationalism." But it is probably not always clear what is meant by that. For one thing, it is usually used as a pejorative rather than a self-description. For another, it is not so much a cohesive ideology as it is a mood. But a good working definition comes from Baylor historian Thomas Kidd (quoting another historian, Matthew McCullough): Christian nationalism is "an understanding of American identity and significance held by Christians wherein the nation is a central actor in the world-historical purposes of the Christian God."

That expresses pretty clearly a problem that I have been increasingly concerned with for many years now, long before the contemporary discourse on "Christian nationalism": essentially, we give America an unwarranted place in divine history. That is not new; it goes back to before the foundation of the country. You see it in John Winthrop's designation of the Puritan colony in Massachusetts as a *city on a hill*, appropriating Jesus' language for his disciples; in Samuel Sherwood's 1776 sermon, pitting the colonies vs. Britain as God vs. antichrist; it is what lies behind talk of the Founders being Christians who intentionally established a Christian nation and uncritical application of passages meant for Israel or the church to the USA.

This sort of philosophy came to the public forefront with the actions at the capitol on January 6, 2021, and it shows the strange juxtaposition in sharp relief: a wooden cross erected near a wooden gallows, Jesus saves signs scattered throughout the crowd, a Christian flag carried into an empty legislative chamber, Christian music blaring from loudspeakers, as people prayed and stormed the capitol and evidently saw no conflict in all this. That's precisely because, for many, they had been led to believe that this was necessary to accomplish God's will.

Whatever your opinions of the actions that day, so you do not think I am singling out any one group of people, this type of thinking is pervasive: it infects those who are even diametrically opposed politically. We have for so long identified the United States with God's chosen people that we frequently conflate the 2 in both directions. Consider in the aftermath of that same incident, when Congress came back into session, these words from Speaker Pelosi:

On Sunday, it was my great honor to be sworn in as Speaker and to preside over a sacred ritual of renewal, as we gathered under this dome of this temple of democracy to open the 117th Congress….To those who strove to deter us from our responsibility, you have failed. To those who engaged in the gleeful desecration of this, our temple of democracy—American democracy—justice will be done.

Family News & Notes

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH YOUR CHURCH FAMILY

Our Sick

Gary Nielsen is in Methodist Hospital.

Joe Edd Stifflemire will be having a full body scan on Monday and heart workup on Wednesday

Kristy Favro, Lydia Mallernee's daughter is having health problems.

Continued Prayers
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Geri Cryer, Steve Ward, Tina Garcia, Oscar Cantu, Caitlin Smith, Virginia Cole, Ka'Leisha Jones, Linda Frank, Ken Coleman, Joe Edd Stifflemire, Susan McCain, Gary Nielsen, Howard Duhon, Bubba Pearson

Shut Ins
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Jim Smith, Winona Angelle, Myrtle Sheffield, Catherine Parker, Peggy McIntosh, Lois Watts, Willo Dean Ellis

Our Missionaries

Aaron & Marisa Bailey in Montepuez, Mozambique , Rod Kyle in the South Pacific

Upcoming Activities

Elders, Minister meeting Monday, Nov. 14th at 5:30 p.m..

We will have a **Blood Drive** on Monday, Nov. 14th from 4-8 p.m. in the fellowship room. A signup sheet is on the bulletin board.

We will have a meal Wednesday, evening, Nov. 16th at 5:30 p.m. in the family life center.

We will have a Houston Food Bank truck on Thursday, Nov. 17th at 8:00 a.m.

We will **not** have a meal on Wednesday, Nov. 23rd.

Elders	Deacons	Minister
Ken Coleman	Zach Arthur	Bryant Perkins
Bobby Rader	Daniel Balch	
Don Taylor	Danny Balch	
Robert Ward	Walden David	
	Gus Tristan	

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"
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Sacred. Temple. Desecration. That is religious language. Its imbuing our governmental institutions with holy significance. And that language isn't uncommon: we apply the language of sacrifice to our soldiers all the time. By no means do I wish to demean any of those establishments or individuals. But if we believe that words have meaning, then there's a word for all of this: blasphemy. Idolatry is another if you'd prefer it.

In **1 Peter 2:9fff**, Peter exhorts his audience, Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor, by reminding them of their identity as *a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession…Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people* **(v. 9-10).** In light of that, they were to live in a certain way: *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation* **(v. 11-12).** Peter points out our alien status, as sojourners and exiles; the center of identity for a Christian is God's nation.

That makes the identification of any earthly nation as a "Christian nation" problematic. That is what we often hear about the United States. On one level, that is just bad history. As the historian John Fea has said, "it depends on what you mean, where you look." But the problem I care about is Scriptural. God rules over the nations, utilizing them for his purpose. It is fairly audacious to imagine America as specially favored by God because of its supposed founding Christian principles. We were founded through rebellion (a violation of **Rom 13**), fomented largely because of onerous taxes (a violation of **Mk 12).** That's not much of a Christian beginning—especially when you consider that rebellion was against a King who claimed to rule by "the grace of God" as "Defender of the Faith." So do we have *two* Christian nations at war with each other? Do we not see the numerous problems in this narrative?

Instead, as Peter points out, the true Christian nation is the church. Our allegiance is to God and his Kingdom as Jesus says (**Mt 6:33**). God's people are called out from every earthly state to it. As the 2nd century Epistle to Diognetus put it, "Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign" (**Diogn. 5:5**). Or, as Peter put it, we are *a holy nation, a people for his own possession*, but in this world, we are *sojourners and exiles*.

Thank God we live in the United States! We enjoy a great many freedoms in this country that the rest of the world does not have. In some places on earth, we could not freely gather this morning; writings like this one might even be suppressed. But don't elevate our nation to a place that only the church deserves. *The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will* (**Dan 4:7**). America is no different from Babylon, Persia, Rome, or any other nation-state we might name. But Jesus' Kingdom—the one that shatters all others and fills up the entire world, the one that is indestructible—that one is unique.

By all means, let's be Christian nationalists! But not unless and until we understand that there is only one Christian nation. And building it looks dramatically different than building the kingdoms of the world.

Bryant Perkins