TODAY'S ORDER OF WORSHIP

Welcome by: Daniel Balch / Opening Prayer by: Bobby Rader
Morning Assembly Song Leader: Bryant Perkins

#797 Lord, We Come Before Thee Now
#827 Sweet Hour of Prayer

Scripture Reading by: Pierce Balch
#364 Come Share the Lord

Communion Devotional by: Daniel Balch
Lord's Supper and Contribution

#1014 Jesus Loves Me!
Sermon: Guest Speaker: Jonathan Oliver

#943 Do You Know My Jesus?
#705 A Common Love
Closing Prayer by: Walden David

We are watching the Chosen series
tonight at 5:00 p.m.

Other Opportunities For Spiritual Growth

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

June 29, 2025

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"

Galatians 5:1

Celebrating the Fourth

Later this week, this nation will celebrate Independence Day; in fact, we will gather here in the Family Life Center on the evening of July 3 for "Fellowship and Fireworks." There is obviously nothing wrong with that insofar as it goes.

But I have always found it rather contradictory that we sometimes have questions about how we ought to observe religious holidays like Easter or Christmas, yet we seldom if ever think about how we should recognize secular holidays. But if our faith is not going to be compartmentalized, if it is going to permeate every aspect of who we are and what we believe and what we do, then I suggest we should consider it. And this day is particularly relevant for how we understand ourselves in contemporary society.

I am convinced that far too many professing Christians 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.

In short, we have for so long identified the United States with God's chosen people that we frequently conflate the 2 in both directions. We apply words like "sacred" to our institutions and "sacrifice" to our soldiers. We imbue our government with holy significance. And the word that comes to mind for me in this is blasphemy. Idolatry is another.

In **1 Peter 2:9ff**, Peter exhorts his audience, Christians scattered in 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 *as sojourners and exiles* in a particular way (**v. 11-12).** The center of identity for a Christian is God's nation.

That makes the identification of any earthly nation as a "Christian nation" problematic. God rules over the nations, utilizing them for his purpose. 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*.

So how is this relevant for thinking about Independence Day? We have to be careful not to conflate God's kingdom with our earthly country. A good many church services likely send mixed messages. Lifeway published a study of 1,000 Protestant ministers in 2022. 56% said patriotic elements should be incorporated into worship this week; only 15% said that their services were no different. That means that more than 8/10 church services will have things like special music, recognizing veterans, ceremonies to honor America—it goes into detail breaking that down. Thankfully, respondents from churches of Christ stood out as a minority; but even there, there are exceptions, some I am familiar with personally.

Family News & Notes

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH YOUR CHURCH FAMILY

Our Sick

Steve Lunceford has cancer and not doing well.

Anthony Semien, Lori David and Lisa Orebo's brother, had stroke. He is in Memorial Hermann MICU.

Continued Prayers
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Steve Ward, Caitlin Smith, Virginia Cole, Ken Coleman, Joe Edd Stifflemire, Donna Wilson, Jo Ella McKewen, Oscar Cantu, Jennifer Stelly, Steve Ward, Geri Cryer, Gloria McKelroy, Scott Overton, Rickey Lucas, Debbie Lynn, Kim Berka

Shut Ins
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Jim Smith, Catherine Parker, Peggy McIntosh, Lois Watts, Willo Dean Ellis

Our Missionaries

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

Upcoming Activities

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

We will have a Houston Food Bank truck on Tuesday, July 1st at 8:00 a.m.

Fellowship & Fireworks on Thursday, July 3rd from 6:30-9:30 p.m. We will have hot dogs, games, homemade ice cream contest and then the city fire works. It will be in the parking lot of the flc. Remember to bring your lawn chair. A signup sheet is on the bulletin board.

Children's Summer Movie Series

The youth will be watching Kings of Kings in the family life center while adults attend Wednesday night services. There will be a discussion, memory work, and food will be provided. This will be part of a 4 night series. So make sure you don't miss a night! Contact Emily Nance for more information.

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All this seems totally out of place in a worship service. It is exclusive rather than global: we are all made one in Christ, called into his people from every nation. It honors the wrong sacrifice; we do not need to be focused on soldiers who lost their lives, but come together to remember the body and blood of Jesus. We are supposed to be assembling together to worship God, not to honor our country; what does it say about our priorities if we give the Lord's Day to the nation?

I think C. S. Lewis offers us some helpful guidance here from his work *The Four Loves.* We are probably familiar with *agape, eros, phileo*. But the fourth Greek word for love is *storge*—affection. He locates patriotism in this last love, and he describes it as having several components. Some are benign, virtuous even; some are potentially dangerous:

First, there is love of home, of the place we grew up in or the places, perhaps many, which have been our homes; and of all places fairly near these and fairly like them; love of old acquaintances, of familiar sights, sounds and smells. Note that at its largest this is, for us, a love of England, Wales, Scotland, or Ulster…With this love for the place there goes a love for the way of life; for beer and tea and open fires, trains with compartments in them and an unarmed police force and all the rest of it; for the local dialect and (a shade less) for our native language… It would be hard to find any legitimate point of view from which this feeling could be condemned. As the family offers us the first step beyond self-love, so this offers us the first step beyond family selfishness…

This is not only right—I love so many things about Texas, the food, the places, the people (everything but the climate!)—but it also seems to be to be Biblical. **Romans 13** implies default support for our country; we are to pray for our leaders (**1 Tim 2);** we are to love our neighbors, which begins with those around us. So in this sense, when we can live in a nation that allows us to *lead a peaceful and qiet life, godly and dignified*, we should be thankful!

But Lewis recognizes this can lead to more problematic attitudes. To whitewash the past, so that we think we are always good, virtuous, noble, heroic. *The actual history of every country is full of shabby and even shameful doings.* And then more dangerous: *Firm, even prosaic belief that our own nation, in sober fact, has long been, and still is markedly superior to all others. I once ventured to say to an old clergyman who was voicing this sort of patriotism, "But, sir, aren't we told that every people thinks its own men the bravest and its own women the fairest in the world?" He replied with total gravity—he could not have been graver if he had been saying the Creed at the altar—"Yes, but in England it's true."* Have we not seen both of those at work?

I would add finally, the identification of Kingdom with country so that we no longer see any practical difference between them. We might not claim that, but that is where many are; we must avoid that.

Thank God we live in the United States! 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. And that is where our true allegiance should lie.

Bryant Perkins