

KEEP AMERICA CHRISTIAN!

A Sermon By Dr. Walter A. Maier

(1942)

Similarly, if we ask ourselves, What is the worst disaster that can overtake our beloved land?That deadliest danger is unbelief, ingratitude toward God Almighty, the blasphemous ridicule of His Word, the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the denial of the cleansing blood, the contempt for the Gospel, and with this, the carnival of crime, the sweeping rule of sin, the glorification of evil. God's truth, majestic in its plain, unalterable force, warns, "The nation and kingdom that will not serve Thee shall perish," and every time an empire has collapsed - review this parade of fallen kingdoms: Egypt, Babylonia, Syria, Media, Persia, Greece, Rome, and above all, Judah - the truth of that warning is fulfilled.

The most vital necessity for America today is, therefore, trust in the Lord Jesus Christ's power to forgive sins and restore us to God. That truth was recognized when the United States was founded; but because the opposition to our Lord and his Church is steadily increasing, while sinister anti-Christian forces attempt to destroy the faith which has been the heritage of millions, I appeal to you in Christ's name:

Need I remind you that a similar, lamentable contrast exists between the American of today and of our founding fathers; that we, too, must pray with deep-souled appeal, "O God, 'renew our days as of old!'" The Book of Judges points to grave national calamities which began when "another generation: arose "which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel." Similarly a new generation has now arisen within our boundaries which does not know the God who made America great (*MAGA) nor recognize His overbounteous mercy toward our country. Despite everything radicals may try to tell you, keep this basic truth firmly implanted in your mind: Our colonies, later the States, were settled by men and women who were Christians, who came to our shores, among other reasons, because they could here spread the Gospel, erect Christian churches, and worship the Savior according to His Word! Those early pioneers had their faults, of course, and I am not endeavoring to glorify something so far distant from us that its frailties cannot be seen; but for the most part, the people who built America were outstanding in their devotion to Christ. The Charter of Virginia assures its colonists the right to live together in "Christian peace" and instructs them to help "in propagating . . . the Christian religion to such people as yet live in ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God." The Plymouth Charter specifies that the colony is established "to advance the enlargement of the Christian religion, to the glory of God Almighty." The Delaware Charter defines one purpose of that settlement as "the further propagation of the Holy Gospel." Maryland's Charter explains that its first settlers were moved by a "pious zeal for extending the Christian religion." The Massachusetts Bay Charter emphasizes that Boston was founded by men who wanted to bring the new world "to the knowledge and obedience of the only true God and the Savior of mankind." The early settlers of Pennsylvania came to America, according to their own declaration, for the spread of the "Christian religion." The Rhode Island Charter commits its people to the "true Christian faith and worship of God," and in the Rhode Island Compact the signers declare, "We submit our persons, lives, and estates unto our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings, and Lord of lords." The Connecticut Constitution in its preamble pledges the settlers to help "preserve the liberty

and purity of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ." The first article in the New Hampshire Charter begins: "We . . . in the name of Christ and in the sight of God." The oath that this instrument requires was to be administered in the name of "the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Savior of His people."

Similarly, in the early days of our War for Independence, although freethinkers sometimes occupied high places, an unmistakably Christian note rang through the official proceedings. The closing words in the Declaration of Independence confessed the nation's dependence on God. The first American day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer, in 1776, was appointed by Congress so that the colonies might "through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, obtain His pardon and forgiveness." The first Thanksgiving Day, ordered by Congress in 1777, asked the people's prayers for God's solemn blessing and "the penitent confession of their manifold sins . . . and their humble and earnest supplication that it may please God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, mercifully to blot our sins out of remembrance." President John Adams proclaimed a country-wide fast, asking the citizens to admit their sins before the "Most High God" and with the sincerest penitence implore His pardoning mercy through the "Great Mediator and Redeemer for our past transgressions." In the midst of the Civil War, 1863, the United States Senate passed a resolution suggesting that our people seek God's help "through Jesus Christ." In a hundred different ways, it could be shown, the America of yesterday exalted Almighty God as the Supreme Ruler of our commonwealth, taught that in the Scriptures His will is revealed for the infallible guidance of men, and that Jesus Christ is the divinely appointed Mediator between God and the men who make up nations.

I am not now discussing the relation of Church and State nor pleading for intolerance or religious discrimination, both of which are condemned by true Americanism and true Christianity. I am trying to show you that the founding fathers in America were not atheists, skeptics, unbelievers, pantheists, freethinkers, Mohammedans, Buddhists, but (despite their denominational differences, which I would in no way minimize) Christians who built their hope on the Lord Jesus Christ. Here and there, in the course of years and with the freedom American offered all men, a settlement of unbelievers and atheists did spring up. For example, when the city of New Ulm, Minnesota, was planned, its founders boasted that in this community the folly of religion would be revealed by the success of irreligion. Yet New Ulm and a few other similar experiments failed dismally to function as centers of antireligious agitation. Today a Lutheran college and church steeples show Christ's victory over unbelief. On the whole, the pioneers along our Eastern seaboard, the men and women who built cities and towns in the Colonies, the first to cut down forests in the Northwest Territory, to cross the Alleghenies, to sail down the Ohio and up the Mississippi, the early farmers on our Midwestern plains, the hardy adventurers who drove covered wagons to the Rockies and then fought their way over desert or mountain passes through blister of heat or blizzard to the slopes that drop into the blue Pacific, were close to the Almighty in those days when most of our congregations were established, most of our mission groups, Bible societies, Christian charitable and educational institutions founded.

Now, however, the scene is changed. We have more churches, but not stronger churches. The clear-cut acknowledgment of the Lord Jesus Christ which marked the original American way of life is subdued. Public orators speak of God, it is true; but have you noticed how woefully infrequent is the reference to "the Name which is above every name"? In some instances men of prominence deliberately refuse to

mention Christ. Certain fraternal organizations, called "Christian," systematically bar His name, perhaps because they are afraid of incurring the disfavor or losing the support of anti-Biblical elements. Even some religious groups which during the hard, formative periods of this country were outspoken in their loyalty to Jesus have gone over to the left wing of Modernism. They have imposing buildings, well-paid choirs, celebrated pulpit orators, elite membership, social halls, gymnasiums; but they are without Christ, the Son of God, the one Savior. They have lost the faith of their fathers, they have compromised when God's Word demanded opposition to error and warned, "Whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven."

At the same time, other countermovements have been set in motion against our Lord. Atheism has been systematically organized. Communism - and I mean the Bible-ridiculing, Christ-blaspheming sort - has made startling headway in the United States during the last two decades, and we may well expect that it will go forward in greater strides after the war. American Christians should realize that every atheistic Communist has sworn hostility to the Gospel of Jesus and that the higher his rank, the greater his influence, the more dangerous his hatred of the Savior.

When we thus behold the denial of the Lord Jesus in this blessed nation, generations ago dedicated to faith in His redemption; when we see the America in which, while strange, foreign sects and cults become firmly rooted, half of the entire population belongs to no church whatever and, therefore, comes under Christ's verdict "He that is not with Me is against Me," do you not agree that the prayer to be spoken from our innermost hearts must repeat Jeremiah's plea "O God, 'renew our days as of old' "? Bring back the America that was not ashamed to confess the Lord Jesus; the America that had days of fasting, humiliation and penance; the America in which Sunday was a time for church attendance by the whole family; the American that wanted sermons instead of sermonettes, that listened to preachers who called sin sin; the American in which frontier settlers shared their homes with circuit riders or traveled for days to hear a preacher expound the Gospel; the America that had no streamlined trains, no airplanes, no radios, no electric power, no steam heat, no modern plumbing, no production lines, yet that had the Savior, and, having Him, was victorious over its enemies!

"Renew our days as of old!" we repeat as we recall the startling change which has overtaken American education. The first schools founded on this continent taught the Christian religion and were based on the Scriptural maxim "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Today much of public education is pointedly antireligious, with a deep-rooted determination on the part of many teachers (whose salaries are paid from public funds) to poison young minds against the Bible. Most of you have no idea of the startling extent to which textbooks used in many public schools feature an away-from-God tendency. While recent years have witnessed a remarkable increase in school building and enrollment, on a steadily mounting scale we have been forced to erect more prisons in the battle against juvenile crime. In many cities we are training children to be mentally shrewd rather than morally good, cute and cunning instead of honest and straightforward. Because the collapse of morality and reverence constitutes a serious menace to the future of the nation, we ought constantly to ask the Almighty for a return to the early American educational ideals. They had no modern theories of training in those pioneer decades, no

"progressive" systems, no theories of self-expression; but they kept first things first. For them no training was complete without the study of the Bible, the memorizing of its passages, the exalting of its truth.

True, we can never fully recapture that early American ideal since our public schools, attended by children of various, conflicting creeds, cannot give spiritual instruction or require Biblical training; but the Christians of our country can return to the colonial practice - and the conditions after the war may make this necessary - by which the churches built their own elementary schools to insure religious instruction. My own Church annually spends millions of dollars to maintain and expand a system of child training which helps the pupils keep the Lord Jesus uppermost in his mind. We gladly pay our taxes to support the public educational system; but we also believe that the nation and the churches require hearts and minds illuminated by the Holy Spirit, souls daily instructed in Biblical truth. Therefore we maintain hundreds of Christian day schools throughout the land, offering more than secular culture can legally give - a sound, Scriptural training. These schools are open to your boys and girls. Give us your children so that we can help give them to Christ! Juvenile court statistics show conclusively that youngsters thus trained have a moral and spiritual force in their lives which goes far in keeping them away from crime and closer to Christ.

Similarly, we need a return to the spirit of Christian higher education which marked our country's yesteryear, and spread of the true faith. Read the records of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries to remind yourself that the oldest, largest, and best universities were dedicated to the Savior in their charters, on their seals, and in their Scripture-centered instruction! Deeply we regret that many of the colleges thus called into existence by humble, Christian faith, built by Christian funds, endowed by legacies from Christian friends, have forsaken this foundation. In too many cases such schools have become hotbeds of infidelity and hatred of the Redeemer. As some of you parents know from bitter experience, young people who enter colleges as happy, trusting believers, leave as dissatisfied, sophisticated skeptics. Particularly in times like these, when the nation needs spiritual strength for its first line of defense, we must keep Christ in culture. Therefore, if you fathers and mothers want your children to attend a college in which Biblical religion, far from being assailed, will be exalted, write me for a list of spiritually accredited colleges connected with my Church!

Similarly, the plea "Renew our days as of old!" arises from a dozen different sectors of our life. Give us the early American household, with large families, mothers devoted to their home, fathers conscious of the fact that they must be God's priests among their own, children who are obedient and respectful; homes, in short, with Jesus the constant Guest and His Spirit the consecrating Power! Think of it, Christian marriage was so sacred in the Plymouth Colony that during its first seventy-one years only six divorces were granted, and these on Scripturally justified grounds! Contrast with this the reports of fifth, sixth, and seventh marriages in the United States and a divorce rate which now seems primed for a startling increase!

We should, however, do more than cry out, "Keep America Christian!" We must act! Everyone who knows the Lord Jesus and the magnificence of His grace in reconciling a lost world to His heavenly Father must be ready to assume individual responsibility. Jeremiah does not primarily seek to start a mass

movement nor ask others to act for him. He recognizes his own share, his personal duty. May the Holy Spirit awaken men with the courage of that mighty prophet who, as few others, protested ceaselessly against evil, defended the faith at all costs, resolutely championed his Lord and continually sounded the necessary note of repentance and contrition! Let American clergymen make this fearless man of God their model by clinging to the whole Word of Truth! Such loyalty may produce opposition, just as Jeremiah had to fight the chief priests and the officials in the ecclesiastical system of his day. Dare to be a Jeremiah, and you will have a Jeremiah's blessing - deliverance in danger and persecution! If necessary, the Almighty can invoke His heavenly power to sustain you in any struggle.

Laity of America, read these Old Testament prophecies to find strength and courage during disturbed days! You are not too small, insignificant, isolated, to be heard or have your objection to apostasy sustained. The man with the Almighty on his side is still a majority. Therefore, if you hear any attack on Christ, cry out in rebuke! If in church circles you meet denial of the faith, any contradiction of God's truth, raise your voice in disavowal! If in the realm of politics attempts are made to discredit the divine Word; for example, if efforts are made to introduce anti-Biblical, anti-American, evolutionary, Communist books, reading guides or courses into the public-school system of your community, start a petition to prohibit them! Take the lead in eliminating violations of Scriptural teachings and our constitutional rights! Some of you business men, blessed with a clear-cut understanding of the Savior's teaching, should enter the nation's political life and contribute the uplifting power that Christian leadership can offer. Today there is a marked need in the weighty public offices - especially those dealing with the lives of our military youth - for many more far-sighted men who know Jesus and His exalting righteousness.

Jeremiah, realizing that without God all his protests would be of no avail, turned to the Almighty in the prayer of our text. Oh, that millions from coast to coast would likewise find refuge and strength in true petition and bring down God's benediction through fervent intercession! American on bended knees, with folded hands, bowed heads, and humble hearts could win victories over foes a thousand times stronger than our enemies across both oceans. So, pray, America! Pray penitently! Beseech God in your own room, your household, your church, wherever you may be! Pray persistently, with trust which can never be defeated because you know "with God nothing shall be impossible"! By the omnipotence of heaven, if it be His will and for our individual and collective best, He can change our sorrows, stop this war, and give the world a true and righteous peace, with all oppression defeated.

Especially, however, pray as Jeremiah did when he pleaded contritely, confessing the sins of his people as well as his own transgressions! Multitudes across this nation should repeat his prayer "Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned!" Come before God, you among the unconverted who have never accepted the Redeemer! Ask the Almighty, "Turn me from sin, from hell, from eternal death! Turn me from my own sinful flesh, from my own lustful thoughts, my own selfish, hateful, revengeful self! Turn me from the lure and lust of temptation! Turn me from the despair over my transgressions, from the accusation of my conscience, from the fear of death! Turn me from Thy wrath, and for Jesus' sake bring me into Thy love!" When you plead with this complete trust which takes Christ fully at His Word; when you know in the positive assurance of the Holy Spirit that the suffering which Jesus endured, the blood He shed on Calvary, the cry of anguish which there escaped His parched lips, the death He died on the cross,

was all for you, so that by the humble acceptance of Him as your Savior you could be turned from sin to salvation - you are saved for earth and heaven. Then, while you cling to Christ, no power of men or devils combined can tear you from His hands. You have been born again into a new existence that has turned you to God!

Plead with God in the faith of Jeremiah to turn you wholly to the Savior in body, soul, heart, mind, and spirit! My fellow redeemed, may the joy of a saved sanctified life be yours! By the power of rebirth and reconciliation to the heavenly Father, you, as believers in Christ, can be a mighty force in restoring the "days as of old," in keeping America Christian. God bless you in your love for the Savior, and God bless a Christian America, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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