

Sermon for Sunday, September 14, 1980, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, MO 63105

"OUR COUNTRY'TIS OF THEE?"

II Timothy 1:1-7

Text "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you."  
II Timothy 1:5

I want to talk a little bit about history this morning. I hope I don't bore you in doing that. I know back in college my history professor was the driest teacher I had. In ten minutes he could put me sound asleep and I don't want to do that to you this morning, but I do want to talk about history. I want to go back to the 16th century, the 1500s. By that time it was obvious to many sincere and dedicated Christians that the church was desperately in need of reform. As a consequence, it is not surprising that reformation broke out almost simultaneously all over Europe. By the middle of that century, the 1540s as a matter of fact, the so-called Protestant Reformation had taken two basic forms, one under Luther and one under Calvin, which is our spiritual heritage. Luther took the position that everything would be retained in the church that was not expressly forbidden by the Bible. Calvin took another approach. Basically he said that the church should keep only what was expressly commanded by scripture or necessarily inferred therein. That continues to be somewhat of a basic difference between the two major branches of reformation--Lutherism and Calvinism. Luther says we will keep those things unless they are expressly forbidden by Scripture. Calvin says we will only have those things that Scripture commands.

The heritage that we enjoy as Presbyterians goes back to John Calvin. A disciple of his was a young Scotsman named John Knox who brought this concept of a thorough going reformation of the church to Scotland and England. As the 17th century was approaching the half-way mark, the English Parliament appointed approximately 150 religious leaders to draw up documents that set forth the reformed faith and practice. That Assembly of divines was eventually to produce three of the greatest religious documents in the history of Christendom, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

Now, the reason I have told you this is because what was going on in those days was to have a profound impact on the world. More importantly, it was to lead to the colonization of America and the groundwork for what we believe and what we stand for as a nation was laid in those documents.

Let me explain. As Calvin and those who followed in his footsteps understood the Bible, it said certain things about man--about who he is, about why God created him, and what man is supposed to be. Therefore, when the men appointed to serve in the Westminster Assembly began to work, the very first question of both the larger and shorter catechism dealt with this concept. The first question was this: What is the chief end of man? And the answer was, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." So, one of the first principles of the Protestant Reformation was an understanding of why you and I even exist--it is to glorify God--to worship and honor and serve the Lord. Now, think for a moment about the implications of that. Project yourself back into history where nations were ruled by kings--often kings who were

despots. Imagine yourself in a land where either the king or the rule of a corrupt church is law. You are not your own man. You are a vassal of the state. This meant that if man's chief end is to glorify God according to scripture, and if this was in disobedience to the state or the Church, those men would be persecuted. As a matter of fact this did happen and we saw Europe have a blood bath in the Roman Inquisition. Even in England Protestants were burned at the stake. I have a book in my library entitled "Foxes Book of Martyrs"--it's a book of hundreds of lives--the stories of men and women who were burned at the stake or put to death because of their belief and their faith.

Do you see? As men began to understand that their chief duty was to glorify God, they could not tolerate any man or any government or any church that tried to keep them from doing that. So, when they were persecuted for what they believed, many of them eventually came to America--they came to a new land where they could glorify God and enjoy him forever. They understood that no human or human organization could lay claim to the whole man. They stood unalterably opposed to any form of totalitarianism that claimed the whole man. That is why today the Russians cannot tolerate the Christian faith and that is why they try to control it and repress it. The whole concept of Communism is a totalitarianism concept that demands the whole man. The Christian says that he cannot give his whole self--my first loyalty is to God whom I am to glorify.

When the time came to write the Constitution of our country, they wrote this concept into the Declaration of Independence. They said, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal (that is equal before God) that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights..." Do you see? If a man's chief end is to glorify God, he has been endowed by his Creator with certain inalienable rights that no man, no government, no church, no totaliterian force can take from him.

Our nation, then, was founded on this basic religious insight into who and what we are. So it was in this country our forefathers raised a banner--a banner that spoke of the purpose, the dignity, the worth of every man. In the years that followed that banner often became soiled and dirtied and tattered because the ideal often got out of focus. Consequently we were often guilty of such things as religious intolerance, of the creation of the institution of slavery, of racial discrimination, of economic repression, of social injustice. But always the staff stayed planted and the banner, though dirty and stained, still fluttered in the breeze of history. And the ideal would come back into focus even if but momentarily. The separation of church and state, the freedom of religion, the abolishment of slavery even though a family war had to be fought, the growth of the labor movement, a whole system of jurisprudence seeking to assure justice and equality before the law, the desegregation of the races, the equal opportunity laws--all these came about because that ideal--that understanding of man--floated banner-like over the land and over the hearts and minds of the people. Even today we still wrestle with the meaning of this ideal in terms of poverty, of ghettos, of education, and the whole spectrum of civil rights. Yes, we have often bungled the job, made mistakes, wasted money--but we are the only nation in the world who is today taking seriously and earnestly the problems of human needs on a scale never before seen in history.

Let me summarize for us what I have been saying. Our nation is founded on a concept of man--of who he is and of what his chief end is--that grows directly out of the Bible. America is what it is today because of Christian men who had a faith that was rooted in the Bible. On that faith they created a new nation.

But let me raise a question. If our nation is founded on a moral and spiritual insight that grows out of a faith in God and the Bible, what will happen to us as a people and as a nation if we turn from God and if we turn from our faith and if we turn from the Bible? Is it not obvious that if we cut ourselves adrift from our moorings that we will end in disaster? Already we have been shocked into the awareness of moral irresponsibility at the highest levels in our nation. A vice-president resigning in disgrace and shame; a president resigning and now the specter of Senators and Congressman being indicted for immorality. Far more serious, this moral laxity is evidenced as a wide-spread condition across the whole land. We have become a self-centered generation of people who are concerned about what I like, what I want, what feels good for me. We have too often abandoned moral responsibilities--we have left honor behind and we have laid aside duty. What are we going to leave our children? What heritage will we pass on to the generations yet to come? Will there be something for them?

With these thoughts and questions in mind I would like to call your attention to our scripture for this morning. St. Paul is writing to a young Christian named Timothy. He is a young man with great responsibility. Paul apparently has put him over a congregation of Christians as their pastor. But Paul has great confidence in Timothy. One of the reasons is that he is a young man with a past--he is a man with a spiritual past, with a spiritual heritage. His home and his family had given him something--it has given him an atmosphere of faith.

We do have a great nation. We do have a great national heritage built on a profound and basic insight into who we are and what our relationship to God should be. If we are to leave something for our children--if we are to give them a spiritual heritage that will continue to make us great as Christians, as a nation, then we must give our children what Timothy had--a godly home.

Mr. J. Edgar Hoover was a great American and a great Christian. He said not long before his death, "One of our great challenges today is to make American youth into productive citizens of tomorrow. Young people are full of energy, initiative and talent. They are looking for something to do. They need guidance. The key lies here." Yes, the youth of today do need guidance. If they do not get it in the homes from their parents, I don't know where in the world they will get it. How can we raise a generation of morally responsible youth who can rise up to give moral leadership to our nation if we are not teaching them in the homes? Mr. Hoover went on to say this: "This nation was founded on religious freedom. Religions have guided us in the past. They must continue to be our guide in the future. An America faithful to God will be an America free and strong." And then he added this, "The country as a whole must draw from its great heritage of religious freedom...to meet the challenge of the future. The family is so important to the proper rearing of young people."

What about the future--what about the future when the home is failing to communicate strong moral codes, strong ethical standards to the youth of today? What sort of future is there for a morally bankrupt generation that has not been taught right from wrong? I was reading a story recently of a sort of revival that swept an area in Canada where in that area all the communities got caught up in a spirial renewal as God reached down to touch lives. As this renewal swept through that area it had incredible moral repersecution in the lives of the people. The story said that the judges and the law officers no longer had anything to do! When we read the morning paper--and you try tomorrow--as you get your morning paper you make a list of the articles that will tell you about murder, robbery, rape, whatever-- what we need is a moral reformation in this city where renewal sweeps through the lives of people.

Do you realize that morallity cannot be separated from a relationship to God? Moralism will not stand by itself. It needs the relationship to God. Yet, our homes are increasingly drifting away from religious commitments. I hear people cry out against the immorality of our day, against the changing moral and sexual standards of young people. But it is not enough just to cry out in protest. If we are to leave a heritage for our children, we must begin in your home and in my home and in our own lives to be a God-fearing, Christ-centered people. We must be a people who put duty and responsibility to God above our o'm selfish desires and pleasures. There can be no moral fiber, no moral backbone to a nation whose families are not willing to pay the price of moral responsibility. Oh, how we need for all of our families to regain a sense of urgency, to be faithful to God and obedient to scripture and to live our lives in duty and honor to him.

Yes, you and I must regain a certain toughness about ourselves and our families that rejects easy self-indulgency for stern duty. You see, there is no easy answer to the moral dilema that faces America today. In the seed-bed of America--the home--we must begin to pay the price of moral and spiritual toughness if we are to leave an inheritance for our children.

Let us then here at Central be a moral beacon shinning in the spiritual darkness of this city. Let us together as families commit outselves once more to a renewal of our relationship to the one institution in this society that stands for moral rights, and it is the church. Let us demand for and of our children religious training, Bible centered Sunday Schools, Christ-like teachers, so that our faith may dwell in our children as well. Let us demand of ourselves the price our heritage demands--the price of regular worship, of faithful commitment, of continued devotion, that is may be said of our children, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your home and in the lives of your mother and father and now, I am sure, dwells in you."