

## A Country We Can Be Proud Of

*2 Chronicles 15:8-15*

**O**ne big difference between the US and China is that in China when you are asked embarrassing questions, it means that you're being interrogated by the police. In America, it means you're applying for a credit card. (Don Reading, quoted in *Reader's Digest*, December 1984, my updating).

In spite of the jokes we make about our country, we can be proud of America! No other country on the face of the earth is so deserving of the pride of its citizens as is America.

We may be proud of advances made in recent decades in the areas of human rights, technology, medicine and education. We may be proud of America's rich heritage and history. We may be proud of our freedom, a privilege paid for by the blood and sacrifice of many, and not enjoyed by any other country anywhere in exactly the same form. Yet even the most loyal and optimistic person among us has to admit that, in ways which are tragic and alarming, America is not what she used to be.

We can ignore the spiritual state of our country. We can speak to each other with convincing words, and turn our heads to the conditions and attitudes which threaten us with moral and spiritual bankruptcy. We can even pretend that it really isn't as bad as some doomsday preachers tell us. But none of these approaches will resolve the dilemma.

We saw in the message last week that Asa, king of Judah, went to work to restore the land of Judah to its former glory, a glory it could have only when its people were faithful to the Lord God. In the fifteenth chapter of 2 Chronicles, we see that Asa continued the work God had given him until the country was something to be proud of.

The burden of this message is not to emphasize what is wrong with our beloved country. Someone has written that we should not spend our

"precious time asking, 'Why isn't the world a better place?' It will only be time wasted. The question to ask is, 'How can I make it better?' To that question, there is an answer." (Leo Buscaglia, quoted in *Reader's Digest*, July 1986).

So today, let's not spend the precious time we have to spend in worship by asking, "What is wrong with America?" Let's spend it by turning to God's Word for answers to the question, "What is required to make our country one of which we can be proud through and through?"

I believe we need to hear a positive message about what we can do about the spiritual anemia which plagues us here in our country. I believe that God's Word gives us the requirements necessary to make our country a land of which we can unashamedly be proud!

## **1 The first requirement: Courage, v. 8a**

In 15:1-7, Asa took courage from the words of Azariah the prophet, who came out to meet him as he was returning from victory in battle. Azariah challenged Asa to finish the task God had given him. It had taken a lot of courage on Asa's part to even begin to remove the idols and objects of false worship from the land. But the words of the prophet were, "*Be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.*" (v.7)

After more than two hundred-thirty years, the work of making America what God wants her to be has only begun! After more than two hundred-thirty years, the challenge to make this a God-fearing nation is bigger than ever.

Courage to do the right thing has never been easy, but it is essential if we are going to make a difference in our country. Being people of courage is going to mean that many times we are going to cut across the grain of society.

In those turbulent years of the 1960's, one teacher began the year by telling his class of high-schoolers that every morning they would say the pledge of

allegiance to the United States flag. This teacher, a veteran of World War II and the son of immigrants, told his students that no one would be required to recite the pledge or to stand during that time, but that they could not infringe on the rights on those who chose to do so. For months the entire class sat in stony silence as he rose every morning, faced the flag, and recited the pledge alone. Then one morning two students stood with him. As the weeks went by, more followed. Before the year ended, everyone in the room stood and recited the pledge of allegiance.

That took courage! That is the kind of courage which made our country possible, and it is the kind of courage that is going to enable us to continue our fight to make our land what she ought to be!

## **2 The second requirement: Cleansing, v. 8b**

Asa wasted no time in obeying the words of God through the prophet. He had begun the work of reformation in 14:3-5. But it was a reform which consisted mainly of taking away and breaking down: *"He removed the foreign altars and high places ..." "...smashed the sacred stones..." "cut down the Asherah poles."* (14:3)

But the work of reformation was not complete until the land had been cleansed of every semblance of idol worship. Now the entire land is cleansed. Idols were removed from the entire land of Judah. Idols were removed even from the territory he had captured in battle.

But more was involved than merely removing objects of false worship from the land. Next Asa went to work to repair and rebuild the altars of the Lord God. Such an act was essential if the people were to be cleansed of personal sin.

Taking care of America involves taking care of her land, forests, rivers and streams. But there needs to be a cleansing process which takes place in the heart. The psalmist's prayer should become America's prayer: *"Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from all my sin."* (Ps. 51:2)

### **3 The third requirement: Congregating, vv. 9-10**

When the altar of the Lord in front of the Lord's temple had been repaired, Asa called all the people together. He called all the people of Judah. He also included all those who had settled among them from Israel. Verse 9 says that *"large numbers had come over to him from Israel when they saw that the Lord his God was with him."*

Americans have forgotten how important it is to congregate in order to worship the Lord! Sunday has become a day of rest, alright, but it is a day spent in selfish and leisurely pursuits, rather than in worship of God. Someone has said "We need to gather to worship. The whole church needs to come together to sing, pray, read the Bible, give, listen to a Word from God, and call people to decision for Christ. There is nothing else like a worship service." (Unknown)

A. W. Tozer has written, "The purpose of God in sending his Son to die and live and be at the right hand of God the Father was that he might restore to us **the missing jewel, the jewel of worship**; that we might come back and learn to do again that which we were created to do in the first place-- worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, to spend our time in awesome wonder and adoration of God, feeling and expressing it, and letting it get into our labors and doing nothing except as an act of worship to Almighty God through his Son Jesus Christ."

We Americans need to recover that jewel missing in our society today — congregating together to worship the Lord God.

Jim Henry was once pastor of the First Baptist Church of Orlando, Florida. He wrote in his pastor's column a few years ago that he stopped at a local gas station, and began to pump the gas himself. As the gas was going into his car's tank, he looked over at the Full Service island. In bold letters a sign offered these extras for the users. It read: *"Guarantee: We will clean your windshields, and check your oil. If we fail, your gas free. Weather permitting."*

Then Dr. Henry went on to comment, "We have some 'Weather Permitting' Christians. A kind of convenience faith. It really robs the practitioner of the joy of faith. I will give, teach, pray, visit, love my neighbor, share the Gospel, bring a friend, spend time with Jesus, minister to my family, attend Sunday School, WEATHER PERMITTING!"

Perhaps a portion of the problem is that our understanding of what worship really is has become so watered down and distorted that it is no wonder it has become expendable. Here is a great attempt at defining what worship really is:

*Worship is the soul searching for its counterpart. It is a thirsty land crying out for rain. It is a candle in the act of being kindled. It is a drop in quest of the ocean. It is a man listening through a tornado for a Still Small Voice. It is the voice in the night calling for help. It is a sheep lost in the wilderness, pleading for rescue by the Good Shepherd. It is the same sheep nestling in the arms of the Rescuer. It is the Prodigal Son running to his Father. It is a soul standing in awe before the mystery of the Universe. It is a poet enthralled by the beauty of a sunrise. It is a workman pausing for a moment to listen to a strain of music. It is a hungry heart seeking for love. It is Time flowing into Eternity... It is man climbing the altar stairs to God.*

*--Dwight J. Bradley*

## **4 The fourth requirement: Consecration, vv. 11-15**

When the people came together, they did more than just assemble. Much of the time, when churches across our land congregate, nothing much happens. But these people experienced a transformation in their lives which led to complete and utter consecration of themselves before the Lord.

They reinstated the practice of sacrificing animals to the Lord (v. 11), but they did much more than that. The Scripture says "*they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and soul.*" (v. 12)

To make their country once again something they could be proud of required the consecration of the individual hearts. They took an oath before the Lord with much noise of rejoicing (v. 14). They rejoiced over the oath, because they had sworn it wholeheartedly (v. 15). They sought God eagerly, and he was found by them (v. 15).

Here was worship at its best! Much more needs to happen in our worship times than we have commonly experienced. There should be a renewal of ourselves every time we worship. Each of us should recommit ourselves to that covenant of serving the Lord with all our hearts. That is one of the purposes of worship — consecrating and re-consecrating ourselves to the Lord. Is that something you need to do?

Years ago, I clipped the following from a church bulletin:

*Why do we have to use so many words in church?  
Sometimes, religion just seems to be words, words, words.  
I hear the pastor say "salvation," "grace," "redemption," "sin"  
"forgiveness," "sanctification,"  
And they're just words.  
They don't make anything happen inside me.  
I've heard some of them so many times they seem empty.  
During the sermon my mind wanders to the ball game that afternoon.  
I sing through a whole hymn and realize I hadn't paid attention to any of  
the words.  
Lord, I want words to have meaning and not be empty.  
Let your Spirit make the words come alive.  
May the words I hear in church and the words of my prayers  
Have real meaning for my life.*

Making America what she was meant to be, and a land of which we can unashamedly be proud, is going to require much more than words. It is going to require much pain and sacrifice, as has been expended already.

But there is much more which needs to be done, and I believe that God desires to use us Christians to do it. The question is not, "What is wrong with America?" The question is, "What can I do to make it better?" God's Word equips us for the task ahead of us, by telling us clearly what will be required of us:

**Courage**

**Cleansing**

**Congregating**

**Consecration**