

1997

Convention Sermon  
by  
Richard D. Land  
June 1997

If America dies, she will perish from self-inflicted wounds. It has always been the case and it always will be that nations, great nations, die from within, not from without. Surely, that is what God's Holy Word is telling us in the sixth chapter of the book of Jeremiah. Beginning with verse thirteen, as God sent His prophet Jeremiah, there can never have been a more direct command to go than the one that Jeremiah received from God. God said, "Before you were even in your mother's womb, I knew you and while you were in your mother's womb I sanctified you and made you a prophet to the nations." And then he says that God put forth His hand and touched his mouth and put God's words in Jeremiah's mouth and sent him forth to speak them to His people who were in rebellion and in pagan idolatry. And in the sixth chapter, beginning in verse thirteen we hear these words, "For from the least of them, even unto the greatest of them everyone is given to covetousness and from the prophet even unto the priest everyone dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying peace peace when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed. Neither could they blush. Therefore they shall fall among them that fall at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down saith the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see and ask for the old paths where is the good way and walk therein and you shall find rest for your souls. But they said we will not walk therein. Also I set watchman over you saying Hearken to the sound of the trumpet but they said we will not hearken."

In the day and time in which Jeremiah lived the only real earthly protection that could be afforded to a city was to fortify itself with a wall. And they would place watchmen on the walls and they would have their regular watches through the night and through the day and they would scan the horizon and at the first sign of difficulty, at the first sign of trouble, at the first threat, they had been issued trumpets and they were to pick up those trumpets and to blow a warning blast on the trumpets to rouse the people from their slumber or to call them from their work-a-day activities to go and to man the defenses to defend their homes and their families.

"God said my prophets are watchmen. I've set watchmen on the wall and they have scanned the horizon and they've turned and they've seen that the real threat is inside the walls, not outside the walls. And they have taken up their trumpets and they have blown the warning blasts saying, Stand in the ways and see and ask for old path where is the good way and walk therein and you shall find rest for your souls."

I was in a press conference a couple of years ago and a reporter asked me this question. She said, "We've heard a lot from you about what's wrong with America. What would America look like if America was the way you wanted America to be?" And I replied, "Well, a good place to start would be America in 1955, without the racism and without the sexual discrimination against women."

America in 1955 was a place where the following things did not happen, they do now:

Less than half of our children currently grow up in intact families. In 1960, 80% of our children were reared in homes where the father and the mother were both in the home and were married to each other. Less than half of our children experience that today. More than a million children a year experience the pain of parental divorce.

Every year there have been in the last 10 years a 400% increase in child abuse significant enough to require a doctor's attention.

Every hour our children watch 78 violent acts on television.

Every day in America 2795 teenage girls get pregnant.

Every day in America 1106 of those girls snuff out the lives of their unborn children through abortion.

Every 78 seconds a teenager in America attempts suicide. In the last 30 years we have seen a quadrupling of the suicide rate of our teenage boys and a doubling of the suicide rate of our teenage girls.

66% of our American teenagers by the time they graduate from high school acknowledge that they have used one or more illegal drugs. And we are being inundated with a tidal wave of moral relativism which centers on human sexuality.

In 1960, hard-core pornography was a five to ten million dollar industry in the United States of America. Today, it is an eight and a half to ten billion dollar a year industry. In the United States in 1996, there are more hard-core pornography outlets in America than there are McDonald's restaurants. Pornography is the third largest source of revenue for organized crime in the United States exceeded only by illegal drugs and gambling. Last year, Americans spent more money on hard-core videos, peep shows, live sex acts, adult phone calls, sexual devices, computer porn, and sexual magazines of a hard-core nature than they spent on Hollywood domestic movie receipts or all the gross receipts from the country music and the rock and roll industry in the United States. And on top of that, we are now being inundated with a subterranean electronic river of pure evil slime known as cyberporn on the internet.

It wasn't that way in 1955. As a consequence of this moral filth being poured out in our culture, one out of every three girls and one out of every seven boys in the United States will be sexually molested by the time they reach their sixteenth birthday, according to the FBI.

Somewhere in America, a woman is raped every 46 seconds, and every nine seconds in America, a woman is being physically beaten by either her husband or her domestic partner. There are 25 sexually transmitted diseases in the United States that are officially at epidemic stage. There are 12 million new cases of sexually transmitted disease in the United States every year and 3 million of those are teenagers who contract sexually transmitted diseases.

And then, of course, we are being brutalized, desensitized, paganized by an ever rising flood of the unborns blood as we continue as a nation to abort a baby every 20 seconds in the United States. Three babies a minute, 180 babies an hour, nearly 4000 babies a day.

When I was a Royal Ambassador growing up in a church in Houston, one of the first passages of scripture I learned was Ephesians, chapter two, verse 8,9 and 10, "For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves it is a gift of God not of works lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works that God hath before ordained

ordained that we should walk therein.”

What Ephesians 2:10 tells us is that God has a plan and God has a purpose for every single human life that is conceived. We are like the prodigal son. We as Americans have aborted one third of all the babies conceived in the United States since 1973. Have we aborted the next Billy Graham? He could be a second year seminary student if he had been conceived in 1973 and there is a one in three chance we aborted the next Billy Graham. There is a one in three chance that we aborted the one that God sent to find a cure for cancer. She could be in her first year of medical school if she were conceived in 1974. Have we aborted the next Dwight David Isenhour, the next Douglas McArthur, the next Abraham Lincoln? There is a one in three chance that we have done so and of course, for those 31 million American babies each one of them is a child sacrificed to the pagan gods of social convention, career advancement and material well-being.

I can still remember as a Junior in Sunday School having a Bible lesson about how the children of God had become so paganized that they went down into the valley of Gehenna and there they offered up in pagan sacrifice their little children to the pagan god Moloch. How could I have ever conceived as a Junior boy that I would live to see the United States of America offering up its unborn children as pagan sacrifices because they are too expensive, to embarrassing, to ill or to inconvenient! God help us!

There is only one hope for America. We are the prodigal son. We have taken the inheritance of our unborn children and we have gone to a far city and there we have wasted that inheritance in riotous living. And now we are reduced to feeding among the swine for the husks of life. And the only hope for America is to come to our senses as did the prodigal and to shake the filth from ourselves and to determine to go home to the Father that is scanning the horizon waiting for His people to come home to their father.

America is not the America of the fifties. This reporter said to me..she said “Well, was it really that bad? Was it really that good in 1955 or did we just know more about it now?” And I realized of course that I might as well have been talking about the time of Louis XIV. Since she was born some ten years after 1955 and I realized that at the age of 50, I was nine years old in 1955 and we are the last generation that knew Joseph. We have behind us young people who do not know it can be any different. They’ve never experienced America when it was right. And unless we take the leadership to lead them back to the old ways, to the old paths where is the good way, then surely we will proceed at an ever accelerating pace toward destruction. If America has changed this much in the last 40 years, if the present trends continue unabated, think about what America will be like 30 or 40 years from now. I already get uncomfortable when I read the Corinthian letters, because more and more we find ourselves in the same situation in which the Corinthians Christians found themselves, awash in a tide of moral relativity, in a tide of sexual paganism, a sexual abyss.

In 1947, C. S. Lewis, in a little book called *The Abolition of Man* said that in the properly ordered composition of human being, the head ruled the belly which was the sensual appetite through the chest. Lewis defined the chest as consisting of the emotions, the higher emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments, in other words, being taught the Ten Commandments, not the ten suggestions. And Lewis went on to say that the chest, the higher emotions of the chest, were the absolutely essential liaison between the cerebral and the sensual and without the chest, human beings became worshipers of their own minds or worshipers of their own appetites. And Lewis said that moral relativism removes moral character. It tears out the chest. In a sort of ghastly simplicity, we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue

expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked when we find traitors in our mist. We castrate and then we bid the geldings to be fruitful. I can think of no better diagnosis for what has happened to a generation and a half of America whose fathers and mothers and aunts and uncles and grandfathers and leaders lost their moral compass and lost their moral way and are awash in an ocean of relativism. And yet when people who are believers try to stand up and speak for the truth, we are told, "Oh you can't do that! That's a violation of separation of church and state!" Nonsense! Foolish and dangerous nonsense!

John F. Kennedy once said the greatest enemy of truth is often not the lie, deliberate contrived and dishonest but the myth, persistent, persuasive and unrealistic. And it is a persistent persuasive and unrealistic myth to say that you can't legislate morality. All law is the legislation of somebody's morality.

Romans 13 says that we are to have civil government to punish those who do evil and to reward those who do that which is right. You've got to legislate morality in order to do that. And when we pass laws making murder and theft and rape and racism illegal, we are not so much trying to impose our morality on murderers, thieves, rapists and racists, as we are trying to keep them from imposing their immorality on their victims and that is our obligation and our right.

When Abraham Lincoln was running for the presidency of the United States in another time of great moral crisis, he got a lot of criticism for making slavery an issue. And here's what he said, In 1860 in the midst of the presidential campaign, "You say you will not let me do a single thing to say that slavery is wrong. There's no place where you will even allow me to call it wrong. We must not call it wrong in the free states because it is *not* there. We must not call it wrong in the slave states because it *is* there. we must not call it wrong in politics because that's bringing morality into politics and we must not call it wrong in the pulpit because that's bringing politics into religion." And Lincoln concluded by saying, "According to you, there's no place where I can call this evil thing evil and this wrong thing wrong." I'm glad that Abraham Lincoln didn't listen to them.

We have allowed ourselves to believe this lie that somehow Christians don't have a right and an obligation to be involved in public policy and we have withdrawn and left the field to those who are our enemies. And as a consequence, there was a study done several years ago on what were the most religious countries in the world. And they came to the conclusion, based on a series of data that the most religious country in the world was India. And the least religious country in the world was Sweden. When Peter Burger, the famous sociologist was told of this, he said, "Hum, America is a nation of Indians ruled by an elite of Swedes." There's a great deal of tragic truth in that. And you know whose fault that is? It's our fault! It's our fault for not being willing to get involved and to be part of the process.

Jesus said to us, "You are the salt of the earth and you are the light of the world." Salt is a preservative. Salt is a purifying agent, but salt must come into contact with that which it would preserve and salt must come into contact, it must touch, that which it would purify. And it also not only purifies and preserves, it stings and irritates. That's why when Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth and you are the light of the world," He preceded it by saying, "Blessed are you when men shall revile you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake."

Let me tell you something. I grew up in Southern Baptist churches where it was often said, "Now we're Southern Baptists. That means we don't get involved in anything controversial. We just preach the gospel." Folks, that's an oxymoron. Now as a graduate of Oxford, I want you to know

know that an oxymoron is not a moron who went to Oxford, OK? An oxymoron is when you take two seemingly contradictory descriptions and you use them to describe the same thing. You know, sort of like "humble Texan." Well it is just as much of an oxymoron to say "non-controversial Christian". If we're being salt and light then we are going to be controversial. Jesus intended for us to be controversial. In the first century, Christians were known as the people who turned the world upside down, which means they were turning the world upside right.

Now, there has been a conscious concerted clever attempt by the various ruling elite in this country, the legal elite, the business elite, the social elite, the economic elite and even some religious elites to marginalize Christians and to drive them from involvement in the public policy of this nation and it must stop. We must tell them we will no longer allow them to censor us and suppress us and to keep up from our rightful place in the public square.

And if those nine Supreme Court justices in Washington don't like it, as I said last night, Supreme Court, sit down, shut up and butt out! It's time that we gave them an amendment to the constitution that makes it clear that the constitution is what governs us not nine judges opinions about the constitution.

We must have revival. America is too far gone for anything else to save us. We must have a heaven-sent, spirit-filled, Christ-centered, cross-focused, life-changing revival or we are doomed. When I was asked to preach the convention sermon, I was talking to the people who did the music and I said, "Please sing 'The Cross Is My Statue Of Liberty' ." I had a hard time getting through listening to it without breaking up. It has special meaning to me. I had been back in America for three days from my three years in England. I came to this city to take up a position as a professor at Criswell College and I was taken to Family Night at the music hall. I wasn't used to the church renting the music hall but I got used to that at First Dallas. And they were having their God and Country celebration and it culminated with a rousing rendition of "The Cross Is My Statue Of Liberty". And as they showed the Statue of Liberty, it talked about the blessings of being an American. I just broke down and wept. We live, by the grace of God,.....that has ever been seen on planet earth. God has blessed us wonderfully. But you know he has often blessed us in spite of ourselves. And our salvation will never be in America, but the cross of Jesus Christ. We must have a revival and it must be a revival, a revival that blossoms into an awakening and becomes a reformation. It's too late for just a revival. The revival has got to come first but the revival and the awakening have got to be applied to our government and to our culture. It's got to be from the inside out and it's got to be a regeneration of our nation through a regeneration of it's people that culminates in a reformation that shakes America as Luther and Calvin shook Europe and Whitfield and Wesley shook England and Edwards shook colonial America for Jesus Christ.

Government can't save us. Government is usually part of the problem, not part of the solution. King Josiah is the perfect example that the government can not bring revival. King Josiah heard the work of God. It broke his heart. He called for reforms. He instituted right and Holy worship in the temple. He got rid of pagan excesses. He instituted true religion and what happened? All of Josiah's reforms died with him because only the king's heart was changed. The people's habits were changed but not their hearts. And when the king died, the reform died.

We have a right, we have a responsibility, we have an obligation to be involved in the civic process. We are to hold up a moral standard as salt. Jesus commanded us to be salt and light but we must always remember that the salt of the law can change actions, but it is only the light of the gospel that can change attitudes. The salt of the law can change behaviors, but it is only the light of the gospel

of the gospel that can change beliefs. The salt of the law can change habits but it is only the light of the gospel that can change hearts.

And my dear brothers and sisters there is always a danger when we are in crisis to turn to the government and try to make the government our ally. And say, "If we can just get the government to sponsor our religion, we can bring about revival." That always has been and always will be a fatal bargain. When the government sponsors religion, the government thinks it owns it. When the government puts its arm around you and embraces you it's like being squeezed by a python. You lose all life and vitality and eventually drop over dead. Government-sponsored religion is government-dictated, government-deluded religion. It has always been a fatal bargain. We don't want the government to sponsor religion. We want the government to quit suppressing our right to be involved. We want the government to guarantee a level playing field, then get off the field! Does that mean that false religions have the same rights to express their opinions and their beliefs as we do? Sure. Let 'em come on. I never saw Elijah backing away from a confrontation with the prophets of Baal. He just whupped them good!

Let us never forget our Baptist Heritage. Let me tell you, America will never get the proper role of religion in society right without Baptists and our Heritage. It's in our genetic code to mistrust government when they come to us and say, "I'm from the government and I'm here to help you." With government sponsorship, with government favoritism, comes government control. The Baptist Faith and Message says the church should never resort to the state to do its work. It's our job. It's our privilege. It's our work to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. But when we preach that gospel, and God has blessed it and people's hearts and minds have been changed, then they have the right as citizens to come forth in the public arena and to say this is wrong and we want it stopped.

Abortion is the murder of babies and we want laws to change it and when we convince a majority of Americans that we are right, that's not called a theocracy, that's called the Democratic process.

God knows I love my country, but Christians our hope is not in America. America's hope is in Christ. Ask not what your country can do for God. Ask what God can do for your country. And the answer, of course, is everything.

Southern Baptists, let's heed the call to stand in the gap and repair the hedge and claim the promise of God when he said, "If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and heal their land." May there be a new birth of freedom, may there be a new birth of morality, may we stand in the ways and see and ask the old paths and heed the watchman on the wall. The Bible says that without a vision, the people perish. The vision is the *Chazon*. It is the entirety of the word of God and it is our job to proclaim and preach the gospel. No one else's. It's the job of those who name the name of Christ. The cross is our liberty and our salvation.

God bless you and God bless the United States of America.