

THE HOLY NATION AND THE NATIONS
PS. 33:12; I PETER 2:9

NEED: TO REALIZE THAT THE DUAL CITIZENSHIP ENJOYED BY CHRISTIANS

PROPOSITION: THE CHURCHES OF JESUS CHRIST REPRESENT THE HOLY NATION IN THE MIDST OF THE NATIONS OF MEN.

OBJECTIVE: TO LEAD CHRISTIANS TO CLARIFY THEIR FIRST ALLEGENCES TO THE HOLY NATION.

INTRODUCTION:

A Christian in this post modern world is a challenge. The influence of the Christian faith upon the morality and ethics of the world is a thing of the past. The ethical standards of the world in which we live are increasingly based up on pragmatism and polls.

It is urgent in this day that Christians do some clear thinking about our relationship to the “holy nation” and our relationship to the “nations.” This fourth of July weekend is a good time to review the basic Christian understanding of this dual relationship that we have as the people of God. We hear the word of the Lord in the Old Testament that it is a blessed thing to be a part of a nation that has the Lord as its God. We hear the word of the Lord in the New Testament that declares that because we are in Christ we are citizens in a “holy nation.” Let’s review together what we find in the scriptures concerning the relationship between these two nations. Beginning with Augustine, the Christians spoke of the “city of God” and “the city of man.” They were speaking of the same reality that I address when I use the word “nation.”

I. CHRISTIANS HOLD DUAL CITIZENSHIPS.

When you become a child of God you become a citizen in a heavenly kingdom. We are assured in scripture that “our citizenship is in heaven.” But at the same time we are still the citizens of the nations of this world. In our case we are citizens in one of the greatest nations that human history has ever known.

1. We enter both of these citizenship by birth.

At least this is true for most of us. Since both of my parents were natural born citizens of the United States when I can born, I automatically became a citizen of the United States. It came to me as a gift.

When I experience the new birth at the age of 9, I became a citizen of the “holy nation.” It came to me as a part of the heritage that is mine in Jesus Christ. I didn’t ask for it but it came to me anyway.

2. Our citizenship in the United States was a gift we did not choose.

We did not attend the class, pass a test, pledge allegiance, or do anything to become a citizen of the United States of America. It came to us simply on the bases of the parents to whom we were born. Being born to natural born citizens of this country automatically made me a citizen of this country. I did not choose to be a citizen.

Since I have come to an age of understanding and have become acquainted with the history of this country. I count it as a special privilege to be a citizen of the United States

of America. I can sing joyfully that I am proud to be an American. I remember reading about Alexander Graham Bell, one of the great inventors in this country. When Mr. Bell died he had this epitaph put on his tombstone. “Alexander Graham Bell, and then under that, “Inventor – Teacher.” Then he had it inscribed “Born in Edinburg – March 3, 1847.” And then, “Died a citizen of the United States – 1922.” This great inventor considered his becoming a citizen of the United States as the supreme achievement of his life. He wanted to be remembered as someone who regained citizenship in this country.

3. Our citizenship in the holy nation is by choice.

The Psalmist reminds us that it is first of all by God’s choice. By the gracious work of his Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. God extended to me and you the invitation to be a citizen of the holy nation. But then you and I had to respond to His choice. There was moment when we knowingly and willfully said to God’s invitation, “I will.” We chose to submit ourselves to the rule of Jesus Christ and to make loyalty and allegiance to Him the first thing in our lives. In that moment our names were written in Heaven and we become citizens in God’s holy nation.

We will always be people with this dual citizenship. It will cause us some crises of conscience on occasion as we have to make a choice between the two nations in which we hold citizenship. This becomes increasingly true as our nation positions itself against the holy nation that God has established.

II. CHRISTIANS GIVES FIRST ALLEGIENCE TO GOD.

We are not uncomfortable voicing a pledge of allegiance to the United States of American and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible with liberty, life and justice for all.” However, we could never pledge allegiance that gave the first allegiance of life to the earthly nation of the United States of America. That is reserved for the Lord God who rules in the holy nation.

1. We give to God our first love.

Jesus our Lord took the revelation God gave to Israel through Moses and made it the first law of his kingdom – “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” This command does not leave room for us to give an undivided allegiance to the nation of the United States. Our allegiance to this country must always be subjected to this first law of the holy nation – we are to love God supremely.

2. We give God our first obedience.

While we want to be obedient to the laws of our land, we reserve the right to obey the law of God first if the laws of our nation and the laws of the holy nation ever become to be in conflict with each other. Those earliest Christians were faced with this kind of choice and always choose to put the city of God above the city of man. At times it caused them to be imprisoned as when Peter and John refused to stop preaching the gospel when they had been commanded to do so by the authorities of the state. At times it cost them their

lives when they refused to bow at the command of the emperor before his image in worship. First allegiance and first obedience is always given to the Kingdom of God.

3. We acknowledged that the holy nation is eternal, but the earthly nation is temporal. We cannot give first allegiance to that which is temporal at the expense of that which is eternal. Throughout history kingdoms and nation have come and have gone, but the holy nation of God out last them all. It will be so in the future when all of history has run its course, in the end there will be only the holy nation – the people of God under the rule of God.

III. CHRISTIANS ARE MADE BETTER CITIZENS OF THE EARTHLY NATION BY THEIR CITIZENSHIP IN THE HOLY NATION.

It is a matter of history that citizens of the holy nation have made considerable contributions to the welfare of the early nation. The history of our own nation has been greatly enhanced and blessed by the presence of the holy nation within the nation. It should be of special interest that our patriotic hymn, “My Country, tis of thee,” was written by a Baptist clergyman, Samuel Frances Smith. It is noteworthy that the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of this country was written in 1892 by a Baptist minister, Frances Bellamy. The words, “In God we trust,” carried on all of our coins, are traced to the efforts of the Rev. W. R. Watkinson, of Ridleyville, Penn. He wrote to the honorable S. P. Chase in November 13, 1861. Seven days later Mr. Chase wrote to James Pollock, Director of the U. S. Mint, as follows, “No nation can be strong except in the strength of God, or saved except in his defense. The trust of our people in God should be declared

on our national coins. Will you cause the device to be prepared without delay with a motto expressing in the finest and the truest words possible this national recognition.”

In every generation Christians have made a significant contribution to the welfare of the nation.

1. The citizens in the holy nation are taught respect for authority in the earthly nation.

Every generation of Christians are taught respect for those that are in authority. They are taught to give honor to whom honor is due. They will never submit to any decree that will require them to offer worship to the state or any person who represents the state, but they will willingly submit to the authority of the state.

2. Christians are taught obedience to the law – even the law of taxation.

Christians in every generation and of every nation are taught to willingly pay their taxes. They have been taught to lead the way in rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.

3. Christians are taught to pray for those who are in authority in the earthly state.

They have enriched the life and the work of rulers generation after generation through their intercessory prayers.

4. Christians are taught to seek the good of the nation in which they live.

5. They work for the betterment and the prosperity of the nation in every way possible. They do this as an expression of their loyalty to the holy nation. Being citizens of the holy nation does not make them a threat to the welfare of the earthly nation. Rather instead it enables them to make an even greater contribution to the life of the nation.

IV. THE NATIONS THAT ACKNOWLEDGES THE HOLY NATION WITHIN THEIR BOUNDS WILL BE BLESSED.

Every nation across the centuries of history that has created an atmosphere in which the holy nation could function with freedom has enhanced its own place in history. The sovereign God who rules over the holy nation chooses to bless those nations that honor and respect the presence of the holy nation within their midst.

Eternity will reveal that a primary strength of the United States of America across its more than 200 years of history has been that it has placed no impediment in the way of the holy nation. It has allowed the churches of Jesus Christ freedom to be the church and to do the work of the church in the midst of the nation. It has not sought to control the churches by placing them under taxation or by circumscribing their activities by some legal means. Because of this, the history of this nation is the history of continued prosperity and freedom unto the hand of God.

Many discerning students of our national life are concerned that this is in the process of changing. There have been an increasing number of judgments on the part of the judicial systems of this country that have sought to curtail the freedoms enjoyed by the churches.

Legislative groups, administrative groups have used the strong arm of government to put impediments in the way of the holy nation as it seeks to do its work. In recent months the governing groups in a South Carolina city decreed that Christians could not meet in a private home to have prayer and Bible study. They used some concern about public safety to stand in the way of Christians voluntarily assembling in a private home to do nothing more than read the Bible and to pray. This kind of action on the part of the arms of government threatens the blessing of a sovereign God upon the life of this nation.

The evidence increasingly seems to be that the elite of our country see evangelical Christianity as being a threat to the welfare of the country. They seem to think that if they could get rid of the holy nation that the nation itself might be safer and a better place to live. On this Independence Day weekend I want to declare to you and to all who will hear that nothing could be further from the truth. Evangelical Christians are not a threat to the welfare of this country. They are the friends of this country. They are the preservers of the freedoms of this country. They are those that seek for and want nothing but the best for this country in every dimension. It is time for those of us who have the privileges of dual citizenship to stand up and to bear witness to the wisdom of having a holy nation in the midst of the nation for its eternal welfare.

Most of us gather here this morning and can meaningfully say, "I am proud to be an American!" But we can also say, "But the glory of my life is to be a citizen of the kingdom of God." And we are ready to affirm that because we are citizens of the kingdom of God we want to do our best as citizens of the kingdom of man.

Since there are some here who are not citizens of the holy nation, let me assure you there is an invitation for you to be a citizen. You find your way into citizenship through the new birth. You can experience the new birth this morning if you are willing to bow your head toward God and to acknowledge yourself to be a sinner. Those who bow before God and acknowledge themselves to be sinners, and open their hearts to the saving presence of the Lord Jesus Christ are borne into the kingdom of God. They are immediately citizens of God's heavenly and eternal kingdom. It would be a special joy this morning to help you receive this heavenly citizenship as your own personal possession.