

One With the Land

*Our nation is at a crossroads. Politicians are prophesying gloom and doom, and many Christians have joined in. They make it sound like God is no longer on the throne and that if you and I don't do something **right now**, our nation is going to go down the drain. But I don't see it that way at all. I see great hope. I see believers standing in the gap for this nation and God's power coming through to make up the difference. America is at a crossroads ... and I'm excited?*

I have a great love for America. When I hear a band playing patriotic music, my heart leaps. When I hear school children saying the Pledge of Allegiance, my eyes fill with tears.

I know I am not alone in this love for my country... many, many others share these same deep feelings. There is something about one's own land that is hard to put into words, something that almost seems spiritual. For a believer, patriotism strikes the same chords of our heart as hearing testimonies of God's goodness, provision, and protection. We are surprised, and wonder why we have the same response to our country that we do to our God.

The answer is found in Romans 8. In this passage of Scripture, we find there is a close relationship between a believer and nature, an intricate tying of the two together. Romans 8:21 says, *"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."*

Because of Adam's sin, all of nature is under the rule of Satan, the god of this world. Nature groans and travails, and all of creation fights against the problems brought upon this world by sin. Believers join in the fight as well. The firstfruits of the Spirit have given us a taste of heaven, and we now groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the time when both our own bodies and all of nature will be "delivered from the

bondage of corruption into that glorious liberty."

Nature and the believer work together, and according to this verse, even groan together. When you are born again, God not only ties you into heaven, but He ties you into creation around you. More specifically, there's an intricate tying together of your spirit and the land that you are from.

Throughout the Word of God, we find that when God raised up a people, He also identified them with a piece of property. When He raised up Israel as a nation, He tied them to Himself and to heaven, but he also tied them to their land. Again and again He has fought on their behalf so they could keep the land He gave them.

Now, we know that the nation we live in on earth is only temporary, but it doesn't mean we ignore it. It is said of Abraham that he choose to live in a tent, like a temporary resident, because he was expectantly looking forward to a more desirable country, to heaven, to a place where he would have a permanent residence and permanent foundations (Hebrews 11:9,10).

Like Abraham, we, too, yearn for heaven. But while we are here, it is God's will that we make the place we live in as close to heaven as possible. God wants us to bring heaven into the devil's world. Right under Satan's nose, we can bring in righteousness and divine healing, and see God's will unfold in our land.

The Bible calls believers "the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). Salt does not just sit on top of food. Pretty soon you cannot see the salt anymore because it dissolves and goes right into the meat or the vegetables. It becomes a part of it. Once this happens, you cannot pull the salt out. You cannot separate the salt from the food.

In the same way, believers should be identified with the country they are from. God did not intend for us just to inhabit the land but to become part of the land — to literally saturate society.

God's design is that believers so flavor our society, that if somebody decides they want to get rid of Christians, it will be like trying to get the salt out of the meat. In our nation today, Christians are getting involved. They are praying for our nation and

lifting up our leaders.

But God also intends us to do something else.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR A NATION AT THE CROSSROADS

In Hosea 4, we find Israel facing a situation very similar to what America faces today. Prophecies were coming to them that their nation would soon be destroyed if they did not change their ways. Hosea wrote of Israel's problems thousands of years ago, yet the answers Hosea brings out are the same answers God gives us today. The "*something else*" God is asking of believers who love their country can be found in this prophetic passage.

In verse 1, Hosea says, "Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel." Notice God doesn't address the whole nation. He addresses those who know Him as Lord and Savior.

In the U.S., we have a National Day of Prayer. But God is not looking for a national day of prayer — He's looking for the *Church* to pray. It is *believer's* prayers He is looking for. His Word says, "If my people who are called by my name shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

God will heal the land even with sinners sinning if the Church will pray. Sinners can be blessed because *we do* what we are supposed to do.

I believe in voting. But voting is not the most important thing, it is how you live the other times during the year. You cannot just go and vote conservatively every four years and then live like the devil all the rest of the time and expect that your vote is going to change things. God is looking for a nation that lives in righteousness every single day.

Hosea tells God's people, "Hear the Word of the Lord." Israel's problem was not an absence of the Word, it was an absence of *hearing* the Word. In Hosea's day, there was no lack of priests and prophets to stand up and declare the Word. But there *was* a

lack of people who made the effort to really hear the Word of God.

They would come to God's tabernacle. They would enter His gates and come into His courts, but they didn't open up their ears. Church had become something besides the place to hear the Word of God. It was a place to meet people and see friends. It was a place to come to get rid of that guilty feeling, to somehow make it up to God for not serving Him during the week. The people were coming, but they were not listening to the Word of God.

We know that "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). The word "hear" does not mean to just let the sound go in your ears. It is not just listening to tapes. It is actually allowing the Word of God to come in and to become a part of you.

The word "hear" literally means to "comprehend or understand." So God is really saying, "Comprehend". Understand the Word of the Lord, you people of Israel."

Job came to a place where he said, "I esteem the Word more than my necessary food." The most important thing we have is the Word of God. I have heard Christians brag on how many Bibles they have at home, but it is not how many Bibles you have in your house, it is how much Word you have hidden in your heart that you might not sin against God.

Next Hosea tells Israel, "The Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land." God is saying, "I have a contention with you, an argument with you."

How many of you know when God has an argument, He is going to win? You might as well say, "God, whatever it is. You are right: I am wrong." It is useless to argue with God.

I find it interesting that when God lists the problem He is having with Israel, He does not mention the sins first. (They will be mentioned in the next few verses.) From God's point of view, pornography, abortion, and violence are only the symptoms of the problem; they are not the problem in and of themselves.

Here, God clearly states what the true problem is: "There is not truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land." Let us take a closer look at these three factors. First, God said, "There is no truth." In Hebrews it says, "There is no faith." Second, God said there is no mercy, no love and compassion towards people. Do you know that when you have faith toward God, you will have compassion towards people? I have had people tell me, "Pastor Bob, I know I am supposed to be in the ministry, but I have no compassion for people. How do I get compassion for people?"

My answer is always, "Draw closer to God. You will get *His* compassion." God has compassion for people, and when you start drawing closer to God, you will feel His compassion, His mercy, and His love.

Compassion is not something you can work up. We live in a nation that is trying to work up compassion, but there is nothing worse than a phony trying to be compassionate when you know their heart is not in it.

On the other hand, true compassion is *powerful!* It was true compassion that healed the multitudes under Jesus' ministry. Jesus was *moved* with compassion to heal, *moved* with compassion to forgive sins. That same compassion will move you toward the things of God.

Third, God said, "There is no knowledge of God in the land." The strength of the nation is in believers receiving the Word of God.

We have a tremendous governor in the state of Oklahoma. I heard him speak a number of weeks ago. Afterwards, someone asked him, "When is this legislation going to be passed? When is that legislation going to be passed?" Our governor's answer was so full of wisdom. He said, "Listen to me. I can pass legislation here, but the strongest thing that we have in the state of Oklahoma is ministers preaching to congregations. You can do more things in one service than we can do with all the legislation ever passed here in Oklahoma City."

Legislation won't change people's hearts. The only reason you need legislation is because people will not just automatically choose to do right.

But if you change people's hearts, you will not need legislation. If everybody was born again, filled with the Holy Spirit, loved God and loved their neighbor, do you realize how few laws we would have to have? You would not have to have laws against stealing; nobody would steal. You would not have to have laws against adultery, nobody would even desire to commit adultery.

THE SINS OF A NATION

If everyone walked in line with the Word of God as revealed in Hosea 4:1, the sins of the nation listed in verse 2 would not even exist! In other words, the sins are simply the symptoms; the lack of truth, mercy, and knowledge of God is the real problem. The sins of Israel listed here sound all-too-familiar to us today: "By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out and blood touches blood." Notice what happens to nature in verse 5: "Therefore, shall the land mourn, and everyone that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, with the fowls of the heaven, yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away." We see again, as in Romans 8, the close relationship between sin, human beings, and all of nature.

This world is not just a natural world, it is a spiritual world. Nature suffers when believers do not follow after the Word of God. The curse becomes more rampant in the earth, Satan takes advantage of the situation and nature feels the effects.

Verse 4 says, "Yet let no man strive, nor reprove [or blame] another, for thy people are as they that strive with the priests." I love what the Hebrew brings out here: "the people of God are like those who bring charges against the priests." Things got so bad in Hosea's time that ministers were liable to be taken to court for preaching the Word of God. Sound a little like the day we live in? Many ministers guard themselves and perhaps veil the Word a little bit, because they do not want to be sued.

Listen! If it is in the Word of God, and I preach it, and somebody sues me, then let them sue me and haul me to prison. John the Baptist was in prison. Others went to prison, because they stood up for what they believed. God will see to it that I get delivered. I am not afraid when people say, "I will take you to court." The highest court

in heaven has settled this once and for all. Jesus won the battle! God concludes this long list of the sins of the nation with this statement in verse 6: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...." How often have we read this and concluded, "If you do not have knowledge, you can be destroyed." But read the next part of the verse, "...because you have *rejected* knowledge, I also will reject you." The problem is that people hear the Word and then reject it. They do not want to be accountable to righteousness. They would rather just "go with the flow" of ungodliness and sin.

THE SYMPTOMS AND THE CURE

God is trying to tell us something here: When you see these sins in the world around you, recognize them for what they are. They are merely the symptoms of a deep problem — they are not the cause. The cause is a lack of the Word of God actively at work in the lives of the people. God has already given us the solution when He said, "Hear the Word of the Lord."

It is important to see the difference between the *symptoms* of a problem and the *cause* of a problem. For example, if you have a really bad headache, you might take a couple of aspirins. But while aspirins get rid of the symptoms, they do not get rid of the cause.

Did the aspirin cure the headache? Was there an aspirin deficiency in your body that caused the headache in the first place? No! You just took aspirin to get rid of the symptoms, but it did not actually treat the cause. If you constantly have a bad headache, day after day, at some point you will need to deal with the cause instead of merely treating the symptoms.

That is what is wrong with our nation today. We are wanting Washington to pass legislation favorable to family and godliness. But such legislation is just an aspirin to take care of the symptoms while we keep hoping the cause will simply go away.

The cause is a lack of the Word of God and a lack of righteousness. The only real cure is to take time to root out the unrighteousness and the apathy in our own lives and get back to the Word of God.

Earlier, I said I was excited, that I had great hope for our nation. How can I say that? Because I have seen believers all across this nation who are dealing with the cause, who are giving their attention to hearing the Word of the Lord as never before.

I feel a great turning in our nation. Two years ago we took a decisive first step. We saw a sweep of righteousness in our nation that took the media by surprise...and took Washington by surprise. When the choice came, the Church rose up and said, "No, we are going to follow after God."

Since then, we have been slowly turning. We are not turning a little steamboat around here; we are turning a large tanker and it just takes time. But I can tell you this, those in positions of leadership in government, in education, in the press, and in entertainment who do not agree with the Church are running scared of the Church today.

Those opposed to righteousness are watching us closely because they are afraid of what we are doing. They think we are some huge, underground movement plotting to take over the whole world. Well, Jesus will one day, but meanwhile, we just want to turn it toward righteousness?

A SLOW REVOLUTION

When we live with something every day, we do not see the slow changes, but someone who has been away for awhile can see the changes clearly. I remember, years ago, when missionaries would come back to the states, they would say the same thing every time: "Boy, America has slid downhill dramatically since we were here last time." We could not see it because we lived around it every day.

But today, when missionaries come back, they're saying, "America has changed ... for the better!" Five or ten years ago, did you expect to ever see churches across our country as large as they are today? Churches where people come every day to get instruction in the Word of God? Who would have thought a few years ago we would see such a great movement as Promise Keepers? We thought most of the righteousness resided in the women and men did not care. But, thank God, men have risen up.

Did you think you would see a day like today when so many people are believing in God—and wanting to live righteously? They may not believe exactly like we do, but there is a rising tide of people who want to know God, who want to learn about Jesus Christ, who want family values returned.

This is happening *despite* what the press is telling us, *despite* what people in Washington are saying, *despite* what people in entertainment are saying, *despite* what people in education are saying.

I personally believe that we are going to see a landslide vote in November. I believe that the press is wrong and the polls are tainted. I believe we are going to see a great sweep of righteousness from the White House right on down to the state and local levels.

That is my prediction. I sense it in my heart. But listen, even if I am wrong, it will not stop the swing toward morality in this nation because we're not controlled from Washington, we're controlled from our heart, ..by the Word of God and through prayer.

There has been such a move in our country for the past number of years to pray for our nation. The Bible instructs us to pray for all that have authority over us that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty (1 Timothy 2:2).

Prayer has the power to change things. Once all the little chapels inside the various government buildings in our nation's capitol sat empty. Now Bible studies and prayer groups are meeting in them every single day!

People are hungry for the Word of God. They are listening to the voice of the Lord, and things have changed for the better. Righteousness is again rising up in our land. Morality is sweeping across our nation.

It is a great time to be alive!

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