

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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Deuteronomy 8:6-18 “Why America Has Prospered”

Intro. Aren't you glad that you live in America? There are so many freedoms that we enjoy as Americans. Today we enjoy freedom of religion. In some countries it would be illegal to do what we are doing today. But we can freely assemble to worship according to the dictates of our conscience. Something else that is great about America is our high standard of living. There are few countries that equal our prosperity. Even the poor among us are rich in comparison to half of the world's population.

We are in the midst of a series of sermons on biblical financial principles. What I want to do this morning is examine some of the reasons why America has prospered. I'm actually talking about the United States, because we have prospered far more than the countries of Central & South America. Why would I preach such a message? If we understand why we have prospered, we will be reminded of what we need to do to preserve or restore our prosperity. If we do not fully return to the principles that have made America great, the Bible warns that we will suffer the consequences. However, even if America as a whole does not return to these Biblical principles, that should not stop us from following these principles in our own lives. If you will do so, you will be better off financially.

So why is it that America has prospered? First of all, America has prospered:

I. BECAUSE OF THE PURPOSE & PROVIDENCE OF GOD

I believe that America is special, and America has become a great nation because it was formed by God for a divine purpose. It is clear to me that our nation has been blessed of God. Yet God's blessing is never an end in itself, but a means to a greater good. For example, God told Abraham that He would bless him and his seed. Then God told Abraham to be a blessing (Genesis 12:2). He said, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (v.3). God chose Abraham & blessed Abraham that he might be a blessing to others.

Even so, God has blessed America with a wonderful land, a land of abundance of natural resources. What we read here in Deuteronomy 8:7-9 sounds like something God could have said to our founding fathers, "For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper." If that doesn't sound like the USA, I don't know what does. We have plenty of food and lack nothing. We live in a rich good land with abundant resources, productive agriculture, and many wonderful blessings. God has prospered us by providentially placing us in such a productive land.

Yet such blessings are not just for our own benefit. God has given us a prosperous land that we might be a blessing to the nations. And we have! We have probably sent out & funded more missionaries than any other nation. We have fought & shed blood to set nations free from tyranny. We have spread freedom & democracy to other nations.

We see in this text that if God prospers a nation, we should give heed to the warnings of this text. In v.11 we see that we might forget the Lord in our prosperity. That has happened to a large degree in our nation. Too many Americans have dropped out of church and they spend their weekends enjoying their prosperity. He warned in v.14 that our hearts might become lifted up with pride, thinking as God warned in v.17, “My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.”

So in v.18 we see an important command, “And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth.” In this age of modern technology and sophistication, we tend to forget that it is God not our armies, our businesses, our technology that made us wealthy and great. As I said, He has blessed us and prospered us for His own purpose, that we might be a blessing to the nation. If we want to continue to enjoy God’s material blessings, we need to repent of our forgetfulness and pride, and turn back to the Lord, for He is One who enables us to gain wealth. America is not great & prosperous because *we* are great but because we have leaned upon, honored and served the one true God! We are nothing without God.

We have also prospered as a nation:

II. BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN A CHRISTIAN NATION

Many of the history texts used in our schools today omit almost all references to the religious influences in the founding of our nation. But the reality is that religion in general and the Christian faith in particular powerfully influenced the founding & development of this country. When the Pilgrim Fathers arrived in America, they wrote the Mayflower compact. They said they had come to the new world “for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith.” God is mentioned four times in our Declaration of Independence and all 50 states acknowledge God in their state constitutions. At the first gathering of the Continental Congress, the chaplain rose to begin the meeting with the reading of scripture. He turned his Bible to Psa. 33:12 and read these words, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD....” The God of Israel has been openly acknowledged as the God of our nation, and we have been blessed according to that Scripture. At one of the most crucial moments during that continental congress, the Delegates were about to splinter apart and the union itself seemed to be an impossible dream. Then God spoke to the elderly statesmen, Benjamin Franklin, and the Congress turned to prayer and in prayer the answer was found. Patrick Henry, the great patriot said, “it cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded, not by religionists but by Christians, not on religions, but on the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Article VII of our Constitution makes reference to “the Year of our Lord,” clearly a reference to Jesus!¹ It has been estimated that 197 of the 204 “signers” of major documents which established our country were deeply committed Christians (www.adherents.com). You see other evidences of Christian influence on our legal documents, in our court system procedures, and very visibly on the money we use every day, “In God We Trust.”

Since we have honored God as a nation, and respected His principles of righteousness, we have been blessed & prospered as a nation. Prov. 14:34 says, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” Righteousness used to prevail in our country, and thus we were exalted. The Ten Commandments promote righteousness, and they were carved into the

¹ Furthermore, several times the Constitution requires public officials to swear or “affirm” something. This option was added because of the words of Jesus, commanding His followers not to swear an oath (Matthew 5:33-36).

walls of the Supreme Court so they would make decision according to God's word, not man's ideas. Many have heard a quote from Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, who wrote the book, *Democracy in America* after an extensive visit here in 1835. He said, "Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

Since we have so prospered as a *Christian* nation, why would President Barak O'bama on April 6 tell Muslim audiences that we do not consider ourselves to be a Christian nation? Why would he want to distance us from our Christian heritage? According to CNN over 75 percent of Americans call themselves Christian. Even though that figure is less than it was 20 years ago, we are still the largest Christian population in the world. For the first 200 years of our existence, we were universally recognized as a nation founded on Judeo-Christian principles.

In some respects President O'Bama is correct. We are not a Christian nation as far as our current government is concerned, and the majority of Americas are not living as Christians. We have turned from God as a nation, and we are going to suffer the consequences unless we repent & turn back to God.

I want to show you something from Deuteronomy 28. Let's see what God promised Israel, a nation that affirmed that the Lord God was their God. In vv.12-13 we read that the Lord promised, "The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them." Here we see that God promised to prosper them if they remained true to Him. What we read here has been true of America until the 1960s. Our prosperity increased year by year. We became the head of all nations. But since we have turned from God, we have experienced what we read in vv.43-44, "The alien who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower. He shall lend to you, but you shall not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you shall be the tail." The U.S. government alone owes over 1 trillion dollars to the Japanese and Chinese.

To avoid the other curses that we read about in this chapter, we need to call our nation to repentance. We have all heard 2 Chron. 7:14, "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." Yet it must begin with the church. We cannot expect the nation to get right with God until the Church gets right with God! No nation is greater than its churches. America became great because its churches dared to proclaim God's Word! We need to win souls to Christ. We need to strengthen our churches.

Another reason why God has prospered us is:

III. BECAUSE WE HAVE FOLLOWED BIBLICAL FINANCIAL PRINCIPLES

Since we have been a Christian nation, the teachings of the Bible have highly influenced our nation. I want to share with you 3 biblical financial principles that have contributed to our prosperity as a nation.

A. We Have Promoted a Biblical Work Ethic – One of the reasons this country has prospered economically is because of the influence of a strong Puritan work ethic. The old

Puritans who founded New England gloried in work. They believed that work is a God-given duty. They detested wasting time. They believed in sobriety, frugality, prudence and responsibility. This strong work ethic drove a nation of people to tame a wilderness and to build an economic giant among the nations.

Where did they get this work ethic from? Of course it came from the Bible. God told Adam, “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground...” (Gen. 3:19). Work is a God-given responsibility from the very beginning. In the 10 Commandments God said, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work” (Exodus 20:9). Though the Lord also commanded us to take a day to rest, we are to work the other days. He certainly did not command a 4-day work week. A work ethic is taught in the book of Proverbs. Prov. 10:4 says, “He who has a slack hand becomes poor, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.” Prov. 28:19 says, “He who tills his land will have plenty of bread.” Due to these teachings, every Jewish boy was taught a trade.

This is also taught in the New Testament. Ephesians 4:28 says, “Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.” By the way, notice that as God blesses us with income, it is not just to meet our needs and wants, but that we might be a blessing to others. We are to give & help those in need. Then 2 Th. 3:11-12 says, “For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.” I used to wonder why Paul said we should work with “quietness.” I have come to realize he was probably talking about the fact that quite a few people talk too much on the job! Your employer isn’t paying you to socialize on the job. They are paying you to work.

Jesus Himself worked hard in the carpenter’s shop. He did not just sit around picking daisies! The disciples were working men when they were called into the Lord’s service. Paul continued to work, even during much of his missionary service. Then there is the story of Ruth. When she & her widowed mother-in-law returned to Israel from Moab, they were poor. Ruth was young & strong enough to work, so she went to the fields to glean grain. She was such a good worker that she caught the eye of a wealthy landowner, who happened to be a relative of her deceased husband. Boaz married her because she was a woman of virtue. She had a good work ethic. In time Ruth became a wealthy woman.

Young ladies, do you have a good work ethic like Ruth? What man wants to marry a woman who doesn’t want to work, but lay around all day and watch TV, or spend hours on the internet, or spend hours talking with girlfriends. And any woman with any sense is not going to marry a man who doesn’t want to work.

In contrast, the Bible condemns laziness. Prov. 6:9-11 says, “How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to sleep—So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, And your need like an armed man.” Prov. 26:14 says, “As a door turns on its hinges, So does the lazy man on his bed.” He keeps turning back and forth, but he never seems to turn to get up! He never turns up his sleeves to work! It is clear from these verses that work leads to prosperity and laziness leads to poverty.²

God has provided in nature an excellent illustration of diligent work. Proverbs 6:6, “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise.” Have you ever watched ants work? They

² Prov. 18:9 also says, “He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.” Work in constructive, but someone who doesn’t work does about as much good as the person who destroys things.

are some of the hardest working creatures on earth. They work hard even though there are no other ants watching over them, and making them work so hard (v.7). Well Solomon says that if you are prone to laziness, you should be wise and be more like the ant.

The Puritan work ethic changed a nation's attitude about work from being considered a drudgery to be avoided to work being considered a duty to God to be performed. That attitude shift has helped to shape our economic history & led to our prosperity.

Of course, like anything, we can take the biblical work ethic in an unhealthy extreme. God created the darkness of nighttime so we would get our sleep each night. God commanded that we take a day of rest each week, because we need to wind down & relax. Occasional vacations can certainly be beneficial for our health as well. But except for those times of rest, we are to work. That is our duty, and that leads to our prosperity.

Another biblical financial principle that we have followed as a nation is this:

B. We Have Generally Rewarded Hard Work & Industry – Human nature being what it is, if there were little or no reward for work, there would be very little work. So Prov. 14:23 says, “In all labor there is profit....” That is certainly the way it should be. Prov. 10:4 says, “He who has a slack hand becomes poor, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.” Even the ox is to be rewarded for his labor. Deuteronomy 25:4 says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” God did not require the Israelites to give over 10% of their flocks and produce. Anything beyond that was to be free-will offerings. He knew that hard work should be rewarded, that people should be able to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

This principle is taught in the New Testament as well. Jesus said in Luke 10:7, “the laborer is worthy of his wages.” Don't you look forward to payday? It is indeed a great motivator for work. It should be a motivator for doing a good job. Paul quoted those words of Jesus as justification for saying, “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor [pay], especially those who labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim. 5:17). The Bible teaches that work is to be rewarded with pay, and we have honored that principle in our country.

This principle influenced tax policy for many years in our country. Do you realize that until 1913 we did not have a national income tax except for the 1860s, due to the cost of the civil war. And even then, it was only about 5% at the most. Yet we are now moving in the direction of taxing more and more of what people make, and it will discourage productivity, and reduce our national prosperity.

My great-great grandfather was Stephen Felker. He experienced the fulfillment of the American dream. His grandfather immigrated to this country around 1750, along with a wave of German immigrants. They were fleeing poverty, war, and oppression. His grandfather probably worked as a bond-servant for several years to work off his fare to America. As far as we can tell, he & his children remained poor through the Revolutionary War and the founding of a new nation. Stephen Felker & his brothers were born in the 1790s in South Carolina. As a young man he learned to be a carpenter, earning a dollar a day. Yet through hard work he saved up enough money to buy some land and also farmed. He continued to work hard and save and became a private banker, even loaning money to help build the county courthouse. He made other investments along the way. Though he lost money during the civil war, he continued to work and invest after the war at the age of 66. I don't think he retired until he was simply too old & feeble to work. By the time he died at age 87, he had accumulated investments & properties worth \$400,000. That would be equivalent to tens of millions in today's currency. By the way, he was

an active member of the First Baptist Church of Monroe, GA. He followed the biblical work ethic, and he was able to prosper in this great country of ours. [Illus.#C-2006].

In contrast, the Bible teaches that we are not to reward laziness. 2 Th. 3:10 says, "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat." Yet since the 1960s our country has been rewarding sloth with tax dollars and punishing those who are the most productive with even more taxation.

If you are an employer, you should follow this biblical principle and be sure to pay your workers, and give an extra reward for doing exceptional work. And you need to vote for government officials who support the concept that people should be able to keep the vast majority of what they earn. People should be able to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

Yet another biblical financial principle that we have followed as a nation is this:

C. We Have Respected Property Rights – The 10 Commands include the provision, "You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15). In Old Testament Law, mortgaged property was to be restored to families in the year of Jubilee, which occurred every 50 years. God's Law also prescribed that family members were to redeem property for less fortunate relatives. In Acts 5:4 the apostle Peter said, "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?" The Bible clearly prescribes that we are to respect property rights.

Do you remember the story of Naboth & King Ahab in 1 Kings 21? One day the king decided that he wanted the land & vineyard that Naboth owned. It was next to the palace of king Ahab. He offered to buy the land, or trade. But Naboth refused, citing the legal tradition of God's law. Well, this king's wicked wife Jezebel said to the sad king, "You now exercise authority over Israel!" (v.7). She was say, "You are supposed to rule in Israel. This fellow can't refuse you." So she instituted a plot. She planted false witnesses against him and they stoned him to death, and seized his land. Then the Lord sent the prophet Elijah to confront the king and said, "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours" (v.19). It happened just as the prophet predicted. Some time later his wife was thrown to her death from an upper story window (2 Kings 9:33), and the dogs not only licked her blood, but ate her body except for her skull, her feet, and the palms of her wicked hands. God made it clear that no king or queen is above His law, including the right to hold private property.

From the earliest days of our nation, we have followed the biblical principle of property rights. The 5th Amendment to the Constitution says that we shall not "be deprived of Life, Liberty, or Property, without due process of Law; nor shall private Property be taken for public use without just Compensation."

Communism, and even Socialism to some degree, says that property ultimately belongs to the state or community. Yet it has never worked as an economic system. People are far less motivated to work and be productive when they do not own property, and when they fear that their property will be taken away from them. Why work hard when the government is going to come along & take 30% or more of what you make through taxation?

Yet, the liberal members of the Supreme Court, just a few years ago, took a step away from this principle when they expanded the power of government to take private property, not just for roads & schools, but also for economic development. In other words, they reinterpreted the Constitution to allow local governments to be able to seize land so they could sell it to a developer, which would result in more property tax.

Always remember that the President nominates persons to fill open seats on the Supreme Court, and the Senate confirms them. I encourage you to vote for Presidents & Senators who will

put people on the Supreme Court who will rule according to Constitution & our American traditions, not according to godless socialist principles.

By the way, since both Jews and Christians are heirs of these biblical principles, shouldn't we take note of the fact that Jews & Christians generally have prospered wherever they have been granted freedom? These biblical principles indeed promote prosperity!

Conclusion: Is it too late to return to the principles that have made America great? It is not. It was only 12 that started with Jesus. It was only 120 in the upper room. It was only a few students in England that sought revival where John Wesley found Christ. The American Revolution was partially a product of the Protestant Reformation that was started by one man, Martin Luther. You can I can begin a movement to restore America to our Christian roots, but it must begin with us. Let us begin with prayer. 1 Timothy 2:1-2 says, "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority...." Pray for our elected officials, beginning with the President. Pray that they will not pass or sign laws that are contrary to the principles that have been our nation great & prosperous. I'm would ask that at least some of you come and pray for our nation at this prayer altar during the invitation. Remember the promise of 2 Chron. 7:14.

Then we need to change our nation by changing hearts one at a time. Pray that souls would be saved. Pray that our churches would get right with God, and boldly proclaim the Gospel, and principles of righteousness. Share the Gospel. Support Home Missions.

Finally, vote for people who will govern according to the principles that have made our nation great & prosperous.

Sources: Steve Felker (outline; sermon: [..\PROVERBS\Work.rtf](#)); Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Randal L. Ross, "What Makes America Great?" (7/4/99; www.sermonsearch.com). Other sources may be listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). This sermon is a bit long as it. Edit down.

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