

**"THE MIRACLE CONTINUES . . . GOD BLESS AMERICA!"**

**Text: "And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless  
you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."**

**-- Genesis 12:2**

**DR. RICHARD M. CROMIE  
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As we approach the Fourth of July this week, I want to direct our attention to that holiday time and take a golden opportunity to wave the flag and brag about America the Beautiful. I call the sermon, "**The Miracle Continues . . . God Bless America!**" My purpose is to make a brief parallel between the ancient Jewish nation which was chosen of God to be a blessing to the world, and to the new chosen nation, America. My point, if you listen carefully, is that the miracle continues. By that I mean . . .

It was a miracle the way the Jewish nation began around 1800 B.C. There was a man named Abram, (he later was called Abraham). He was up around Mount Hermon in the City of Haran, when his father, Terah, died. Any of us whose father is gone, remember the day our father died, and the impact it had. I think that is connected here. The Bible says that God said to Abraham: "Get up and go, and I will make of you a great nation, and you will be a blessing to all the nations of the earth."

Just imagine a not-so-young man, whose father (and brother) had died about to be given responsibility for the future of the whole world. He was competent enough, it turned out, but his wealth was mainly in property. God told him to leave all his lands behind, and go to a new land. "Where?" "Just go," God said, "and I will show you where to go!" Sure enough, he became a blessing. To this day the Judeo-Christian witness is a blessing to all the nations of the earth. God knows what He is doing.

It was a miracle, the way their nation began. How casual, a man and wife and his nephew going on a trip, destination unknown. Further miracles were coming. So many times the Jewish nation was on the edge of disappearing. Abraham went down to Egypt and passed his wife off as his sister, to spare himself. The Pharaoh got angry (So did the Lord). Then, he and Lot got into a family argument and Lot took the verdant valley, which ended up being Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham took the hill country and that became the nation. It took great vision, but he had it; or rather God gave him eyes to see it.

Then, two generations later, Abraham's grandson, Jacob, a swindler, a liar, and a cheat, gave the nation a greater presence. But why would God ever choose someone like that? He likes people to be good. Near the end of Jacob's life, the whole nation went into hiding to escape the famine. They all trekked down to Egypt. But God knew what was coming and Joseph (Jacob's son) was waiting there on the throne. He welcomed his father and kinsmen and their nation was preserved, even in a foreign country. They prospered in Egypt.

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Then it went backwards two centuries later. A new king came over Egypt who hated the Jews. He made them slaves. Their lives weren't worth a farthing. The leader the people would get was to be a young man named Moses; but he left Egypt, got married, and went to Midian to work on a farm, where he and Zipporah had two sons.

He wasn't much by earthly standards. He stuttered. He was afraid. He saw visions. He was abandoned as a baby. He had a bad temper. He had every excuse in the world not to do what God asked him to do. In fact, he protested: "I don't want to go back down there, Lord, and confront the Pharaoh. I am a fugitive, I'm little, and I s-s-s-s-stutter." God said, "Go, and let my people go." He did. It was a miracle.

Then, came 40 years of wandering in the wilderness with no food and no lodging, no tents even. They survived on manna, a little funny fruit that spoiled every night. The old men and the children began to die in the wilderness. It was hot. There was no air conditioning. They did not want to be a great nation. They wanted to go back to Egypt. "Better to be a slave with a roof over my head than out there in this God-forsaken desert." But Moses persuaded, pleaded, prodded, and they proceeded to the Promised Land.

But guess what: when they got there, it was already occupied by giant-like people. The scouting party said, "We seem like grasshoppers, they are so big!" But thanks to Joshua, they fought for a century or so to get across the Jordan River. And, they did.

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~~Then came another century or two with the Judges and God's people fighting~~ amongst themselves. Every time they made progress, they forgot the source of their success. Then the Kings came: Saul, David, Solomon and the others, but the monarchy

ended in exile. They came back a century later to find their nation was deserted, and everything destroyed. They had to rebuild from the ground up.

We are down to the Third Century B.C., when there was only an echo of the promise that God would make them a great nation. Then came the Greeks and the Romans who conquered them. And the nation and the promise, were languishing.

But then, a little later, a Savior came riding down the hill on a donkey, climbing up the other side to be nailed to a cross and buried in a garden tomb. "What happened to the promise, Lord? A fine guardian and guide you are." But, you know the rest of the story. A great nation was promised. God will deliver on His promise, but people have to work at it. They have to persevere, and overcoming huge odds, they need to remember the promise.

Vigilance is still the proper price of freedom.

It all depends whether you believe that God is at work directing the course of human events, admittedly in His own time and in His own way, but my whole philosophy is predicated on the assumption that God has a purpose for each individual life, and He also has a purpose for the nations of the world. There is much we do not know about the Divine Will and Way, but if you do not believe that God cares and is involved, then the impact of this sermon will slide right by; and the Bible's view of history will be

ignored.

So (we have to move along) teleport your life ahead to the 18th Century A.D. and witness the fledgling 13 colonies who became the United States of America. That was a miracle, too.

Webster defines "miracle" in two different ways. First it is "An extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs." Secondly, it is "an extremely outstanding or unusual event, thing, or accomplishment." We see miracles every day. It is a miracle we are alive. Harlow Shapley, the great astrophysicist once said that when you consider all the possibilities from the beginning of the universe until now, it is a miracle that human life ever came to be. He said it was a miracle. He did not mean it as I do, he chose the second definition: "an extremely outstanding event." But I chose to say it was the divine intervention. Love and friendship are miracles in this dog-eat-dog world. The wonder is not that we die, but that we live.

Think about it this way . . . suppose that God was tired of the world He had made, by the Dark Ages up through the 16th Century. Human life was not what it should have been. Nations existed mainly to defend themselves and attack and consume others. Human life was cheap. Society was horribly split between a few "haves" and millions of "have nots." The religious establishment was entrenched and corrupt. (We do not

need a history lesson here.)

God got disgusted back in Genesis, and He sent the flood and drowned everyone but Noah and his kin on the ark. But then, it says, He was sorry. He promised He would never do that again. As our understanding progressed, somewhere in the corridors of heaven, I think the Lord God decided He would have to start over with a new nation: one which would honor all humankind, which would not be bound by nationalities, race or religion, where every child of God could have an equal chance, where life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness could become viable options.

It sounds like I am reciting the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution. I am, but I believe that God was asking: "How can I bring a place on earth which will honor man's individual right of freedom but still move toward my goal?" I believe He decided to do it by envisioning the United States of America.

When you think of the times three centuries ago, it was an outrageous idea. The Spanish explorers had claimed the southeastern United States; the French were to the north and west; the English were on the coast on down in Virginia; the Germans were in eastern Pennsylvania. Selected others held domain elsewhere. Who would have ever dreamed that crossing three languages and a dozen allegiances . . . it just could not happen on its own . . . it had to be a miracle.

When the Declaration was prepared and ready to be signed, six of the thirteen colonies: New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and South Carolina refused, South Carolina, New York, and Pennsylvania holding out the longest.

Thomas Jefferson tells the story in his autobiography: a clause reprobating the enslavement of African inhabitants had to be struck out to please two southern states; but Jefferson adds correctly that some northern states also held slaves and sold them, too. Some Virginians, too, thought we still had friends in high places in England, so they had to strike out the censures against Britain. For a while it appeared that the whole united effort would fail, or become hopelessly diluted. Debate continued, but . . . it passed. John Adams in a letter to his wife Abigail, said, "It is the will of heaven that America came to be."

Then came the Revolutionary War which should never have been won: thirteen itty-bitty colonies fighting Rule Britannia! A peculiar set of circumstances, but especially the determination of the Americans, held sway.

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Just like the ancient Israelites, the miracle did not come immediately. There are always giants in the land. Peace does not come without a struggle. There are giants here today. The promise is not yet complete, although we have come a long, long way. No

other nation on the earth so blends its diversity of people and yet lives in relative harmony. We have some horrible problems of crime and terrorism and lack of equality among different people. We still have a long way to go; but as Lincoln said: "We are the last best hope on earth."

The greatest part of that hope comes when we realize that God desires to overcome the differences between people, to eliminate the rivalries and warfare; to bring peace to earth so that all the Biblical dreams can come true. At times I see the glorious crowd marching, progressing. Every time we stand in the way of human harmony, we are opposing God Himself. Every time we climb over or weaken the boundaries, we are with Him.

Over 100 years ago the Russian author, Soloviev, talked about the day that would come when all of our past differences would be set aside. He wrote that there would be two sides left in the world: those who honored the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. On the other side, there would be those forces for evil, who care for nothing but greed and believe in nothing but vindication for their own small ways. He said the day would come -- just about now -- when we would have to learn to hold hands with everyone and anyone who loves the Lord, believes in humanity, and is willing to fight for the rights they adore.

Arnold Toynbee, the greatest historian of our century, wrote about the challenge and response of the 33 civilizations that preceded us, all gone. Each society is given a challenge. then each must respond. Toynbee said that our challenge is the diversity of God's people. Our response must be to gather them all together. He said that we would be the first civilization to be remembered as one which showed the love of God to all people and included them all . . . the first civilization who cared for all. It has never happened before. I might add that should Toynbee be wrong, we might not be remembered at all. It would all have been for naught.

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What can you do? Well, be faithful to the dream. Break down any barrier you see. Continue to believe that with God's help we can overcome the problems. Never be discouraged beyond the moment. Never fail to remember that God is more powerful than every victory of evil; that His purposes are not always clear but they are there. Believe that America is capable of absorbing change and changing people, able to move to the destiny God has already chosen. We have to believe it first.

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Then, we have to do our part in helping it along. For some of us, the help that can be offered seems rather meager. Time and energy are not what they used to be. But, in a strange mysterious way, just believing, sharing the goal, talking about the dream can help. Your prayers for the future of America, God will honor. You can be part of

the hometown crowd. if you pray for goodness to prevail . . . and beyond prayer, support with grace and gusto any and every activity that reaches out and touches the lives of children, and others who need help. In other words, think something, believe something, but do something. The only option we do not have, any one of us, is to do nothing. James Russell Lowell once said the least that any of us can do is not to add to the immense dead weight which nature drags along.

We need to close. I try not to inject political arguments from our pulpit. We have more than enough controversy in the world already. But as all of us who care have been saddened by the burnings of mainly black churches, we need to find a world of hope and common concern for all Christian citizens.

I was saddened further these past couple of weeks when so many -- black and white -- are trying to find a way to help, Jesse Jackson insisted on jumping on his platform to pummel the American way. "It exposes once more," he shouted, "the extreme corruption and sickness in the heart of America. We must rid the nation of this cancer of hate."

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Now I want to be fair, for Rev. Jackson has been a help to his people. But I think he should be saying, **"Thank God that while we have this awful problem, that there are concerned people of both races trying to solve it."** Rather than spreading the very

**hate he pretends to oppose, he could join the forces for good.**

**We are not perfect, but I'm proud to be an American! . . . For now and  
evermore. Amen.**