

Scripture

Proverbs 14:25-35

Message

Righteousness Exalts a Nation

If you have been joining us for these weekly recordings and sermons, you know that we have been working our way through John 15. Because this weekend is a holiday weekend, we are going to take a break from that study for today.

I want to read a collection of verses from the book of Proverbs. If you are familiar with the book of Proverbs, you know that much of the book is a collection of sayings – short, pithy statements that a parent might use to teach their children, or a spiritual guide might use to teach others who had a desire to live for God. Often times each verse jumps to a new subject. There may or may not be any connection with the verse that came before or comes after. So I want to read a sample of **Proverbs from 14:25-35**. You hear how it jumps from one subject to another. I chose this particular group of Proverbs because I want to talk specifically about 14:34:

***³⁴ Righteousness exalts a nation,
but sin condemns any people.***

This weekend (Sunday) is Independence Day, the 4th of July. We are observing the 245th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Representatives who were elected to attend the 2nd Continental Congress, bravely affirmed the document declaring that the United States were free and independent from Great Britain. They were taking a great risk – putting their lives on the line so to speak – as they added their names to this document. They were affirming important values that we continue to cherish. It is an important holiday for our nation. It is a day to celebrate Freedom. It is an opportunity to express our appreciation that we can be citizens of this country. It is an opportunity for us to express our loyalty to our Country; our patriotism.

In recent years there has been much debate about what it means to be a patriot. I don't want to go too deeply into a discussion about that. Everyone chooses to express their patriotism in different ways. Too often people are judged to be "un-patriotic" because they follow certain practices or they choose not to follow certain practices that others consider to be patriotic. Some people make determinations about who is patriotic and who is not, based on the way someone votes, or on the issues they support. **I believe we must be cautious against such judgmentalism.** What someone considers to be an act of rebellion or "un-patriotic" may in fact be the way someone expresses their desire for our country to be better.

As I was thinking about a sermon for this weekend, knowing that the 4th of July falls on a Sunday this year, this verse from Proverbs came to mind. ***³⁴ Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin condemns any people.*** As I was studying and preparing for this message, I came across a statement that caught my attention. I found it in an older commentary – The Pulpit Commentary. It came from the pen of William Clarkson:

"The humblest citizen whose life tends to establish righteousness amongst his neighbors is a true patriot, however narrow his sphere may be."

The verse says that Righteousness EXALTS a nation. **The word Exalts means that the people of a nation are elevated when Righteousness is practiced.** On the other hand **sinful behavior brings condemnation to a people** (nation). According to Clarkson's observation, no matter how great OR small our sphere of influence is, when we live righteously, we will have a positive impact on our nation. Patriotism is not measured by the number of flags we put in our yard, it is measured by our behavior toward others. Displaying flags or patriotic symbols can be meaningful or appropriate. But it is our righteous behavior that demonstrates our love for our country.

Let's look a little more closely at this verse. What does the Bible mean when it talks about **Righteousness**. It is an important word in the Bible. The Bible talks about the work of God in bringing wayward, or sinful people

into right standing with Himself. That work is referred to as **being made righteous**. When God brought the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, He made them His very own people. They were made His covenant community. They are **made Righteous**. In the New Testament, when a person makes the choice to believe in Jesus, and make Him their Savior and Lord, it is said that they are "**Made Righteous**". So to be made Righteous is to be brought into right standing with God. As people are made righteous through Faith, it is then expected that they will express that Righteousness in their behavior. As individuals live lives that are characterized by righteousness, it is also expected that righteousness will govern behavior of a nation. The Old Testament prophets rebuked the nation of Israel when they failed to live righteously. The words of the 10 commandments remind us of the righteousness that God longed to see in His people:

1. **No other gods before the LORD**
2. **Do not worship idols**
3. **Do not use the Lord's name without meaning -**
4. **Remember the Sabbath**
5. **Honor Father and Mother**
6. **You shall not kill**
7. **You shall not be unfaithful to your marriage covenant**
8. **You shall not steal**
9. **You shall not lie**
10. **Your life shall not be characterized by greed**

This was the righteousness that God desired to see from His people. This was the kind of behavior that God expected the nation of Israel to demonstrate. And this is the behavior that is referred to in the verse from Proverbs 14:34 that we are looking at today. The greatness of a nation is demonstrated in their practice of Righteousness.

There is more to this idea of Righteousness. **The Hebrew word that is translated Righteousness can also be translated with the words Justice, Honesty or Loyalty.** Righteousness is not only demonstrated in following the commandments, but is demonstrated in the way we treat others, especially those who are the oppressed.

³ Thus says the LORD: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. Jeremiah 22:3

These words are not popular words in some circles. It is time for God's people to lead the way in practicing Righteousness and justice. ***³⁴ Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin condemns any people.*** A nation's real greatness consists not in its conquests, magnificence, military or artistic skill but in its practice of righteousness and justice.

How do we apply this in our lives? We may feel that we are just one, or just a small community of believers. What difference will it make in a country as large as ours. We see violence, sin, injustice all around. Will our behavior change anything? That's not really the question for us to ask. The Scriptures never tell us if we are large enough in number to make a difference, then we should practice what we read. We are just challenged to be faithful as we are able, in whatever situation or circumstance we find ourselves.

"The humblest citizen whose life tends to establish righteousness amongst his neighbors is a true patriot, however narrow his sphere may be."

Where will you demonstrate righteousness or Justice? How will you "Lift Up" our nation.