



THE LIFE OF
A NATION

Presented by

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on

the **Back**
TO GOD
hour

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THE LIFE OF A NATION

Uo mou ke ea o ko oino i ko pono. I know that only a few of you have ever heard those words before. In a few minutes, I'll tell you what they mean. For now, I'll just say that they are Hawaiian. *Ua mou ke ea o ka aina i ka pono.*

Hawaii is a fascinating state of the union we know as the United States. It is the only one in which Caucasians are in the minority, and it is the only one that is a honeymoon haven for Japanese couples. The state of Hawaii is part of a group of Sandwich Islands which became the Republic of Hawaii during the 19th century and ceded itself to the United States in 1898. In 1900, the United States made it a territory, and it became the 50th state in 1959.

The island state of Hawaii illuminates several important facts about the United States that should not be forgotten now when the presidential inauguration is in the news. The ceremony in Washington, D.C., which vests the massive authority of the United States' presidency in James Earl Carter, is not of significance for the American people alone. It is an event that is bound to have large repercussions around the world. The *Manchester Guardian*, published in London, has said that, in a sense the president of the United States is the president of the world.

And the very geography of Hawaii underscores the world-wide impact that life in the United States has these days. For its location, roughly at the midpoint of the Pacific, graphically demonstrates that America's destiny is tied into the fortunes of the

developing Orient. Furthermore, its racial mixture highlights the way peoples of many races are part of the American dream which still functions as part of the mystique that gives the American nation its forward motion.

But of course, there are millions in the world right now who do not need the physical presence of an American state halfway across the Pacific to help them understand that America has a tremendous impact upon the conditions that exist in many countries around the world. The Australian businessman who sometimes shakes his head in dismay when he realizes how American capital has influenced the development of his country needs no such reminder. And though the memory of its ill-fated Indochina adventure is rapidly evaporating in the United States itself—as if it is an event that never actually happened—there are millions on that subcontinent still painfully aware of the awesome power America can deploy if it develops the rationale to do so.

And since the most major inaugural, political events within the United States have furnished the world with a specter of corruption that has made cynicism regarding notional life more widespread now than ever before. The heartrending agony of American democracy over the last three years, with vice presidential and presidential resignations, high level indictments, and embarrassing imprisonments for White House staff members, has had its repercussions, too, in other countries, where scandal has blossomed. It is important, even while the rhetoric of inauguration is spoken over the land, to remind one another that any nation, however great and noble, can still do evil and ignoble things. And every nation is a member of the vast family of

nations, which means that whatever it does will somehow send a shock wave around the world. No nation stands alone. Our destinies are interwoven.

It is so easy with all the speeches, the flags, the marching, and the built-in possibilities for hypocrisy that are a part of inaugural festivities to overlook the fact that the life of our nation and its conduct in the world are surrounded by many possibilities for rebellion against Almighty God. It is possible even for a nation like America, which has its prayer breakfasts, and which invokes the name of the Almighty.

And this is where Hawaii comes into the picture. Because of its location, yes, a location that underscores the way nations today are living together on our small earth. But also because of the Hawaiian phrase *Ua mau ke ea o ka aina i ka pono*. That's Hawaii's motto. And it's beautiful. This is what the language of the Hawaiian monarchs means in English: "The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness." America, do you hear this message that originates far out in the Pacific, that soars over your mountains and reverberates across your prairies? Are you listening? Does this message penetrate the hearts of your citizenry, does it envelop the processes of government, does it penetrate the recesses of your council chambers? Few words could be more timely than these: "The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness."

The idea in the motto of the Pacific state is thoroughly Biblical. It reflects the Bible's teaching that no nation can expect to receive the blessing of Almighty God if it consistently chooses the path of unrighteousness and injustice. And *no* nation can succeed without the blessing of Almighty God.

Truths like these leap out of the pages of the Bible whenever you open it. In the Old Testament, Psalm 33 emphasizes the necessity of a nation's fearing and honoring God in especially compelling ways. Right now, when many are enthralled by the pageantry of great political events, let's back off long enough to let the message of this Psalm grip our hearts. At its center is the brief phrase: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord ... The nation whose God is the Lord will be blessed. But the other side of the coin is this: the nation that consistently disobeys the Lord will be cursed.

Notice these words from Psalm 33 and sense its flavor:

[The Lord] loves righteousness and justice ..
Let all the earth fear the Lord,
let all the inhabitants of the world
stand in awe of him!
Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord ...
The Lord looks down from heaven,
he sees all the sons of men;
from where he sits enthroned he
looks forth
on all the inhabitants of the earth,
he who fashions the hearts of them
all,
and observes all their deeds.
A king is not saved by his great
army;
a warrior is not delivered by his
great strength.
The war horse is a vain hope for
victory,
and by its great might it cannot
save

Behold, the eye of the Lord is on
those who fear him,
on those who hope in his steadfast
love,
that he may deliver their soul from
death
and keep them alive in famine (vv. 5, 8, 12-19).

Now, Psalm 33-and the fascinating motto of the state of Hawaii reflects Psalm 33-forces us to do some hard thinking when it comes to a country's political life. It reminds us that God is not impressed by the things that impress us. We are impressed by a gross notional product, a booming economy, prosperity, military might, and so on and so on. These are all high profile things we can see easily, and we think they directly affect our well being. But the Bible says that God is looking for something else. The Lord loves righteousness, and when He looks down on the deeds of people in this world, righteousness is what He is looking for.

What about the righteousness of America? What does the record show? Ask a black American that question and he will tell you that for reasons he cannot perceive his people are simply not being given the opportunities that other Americans are receiving. He will tell you how, so far as he is concerned, it seems that too many of his people are being contained in ghetto areas from which there seems to be no possibility of escape. And it is well possible that the black American you ask will raise questions about how just and righteous America has been in its treatment of people like him.

Moreover, America has added to its manifold transgressions the unspeakable murder of millions

of unborn children since the last time it celebrated the inauguration of a president. Though there are some, apparently a majority of its citizens, who refuse to consider this a crime, there are some of us who will never accept this contemptible evaluation of human life. There is a drift toward death in America today that is appalling, and unless legislative and judicial machinery is brought into play to halt it, the destruction of our National life is inevitable.

Surely it should not be considered treasonous to suggest, even as the nation tries to shake off the last remaining corruption of Watergate and start a new chapter, that there is ample reason for us to speak words of repentance and assume the posture of penitence. For many and complex reasons, there is innocent blood on the hands of the American people. We must recognize this even now as the cadence of the honor guard is heard and the intonation of solemn oaths marks the inauguration of a new government within this great land.

The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness, and if there is no righteousness, the life of a land withers and the nation hurtles toward judgment. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord," yes, but the Lord will not be the God of the notion which consistently refuses to allow the witness of God's Holy Word to sound in certain areas of its national life. The Lord will be the God only of the notion that listens to the Scriptures and obeys them. Only the nation that obeys God's call to repentance and steadfastly rededicates itself to pursuing national greatness that is defined by conformity to the will of God, can expect His continued blessing.

I know that many of you would agree with what I have said thus far. The fact that so many of you do, and the fact that I can speak freely in this message which has been broadcast right in America as well as throughout the world, is an indication that there is great hope for this land. But the question now is this: what must be done?

One thing is certain if America is to repent and change, the change will have to find its source within the Christian community. It will not be enough for Christians to decry and "to view with alarm" conditions within their nation, as I am doing right now. This is not enough. It is just so much breast beating and hypocrisy. The present state of crisis is a time in which believers in the gospel, if they are serious about their faith, must get to work as never before.

For when the Bible says that the nation will be blessed whose God is the Lord, it is not speaking about some kind of general, undefined God, but it is speaking about the God who revealed Himself fully in the Lord Jesus Christ who suffered, died, rose again and now rules at the right hand of God the Father. This is the God Christians know. The exciting message of the salvation He purchased must be announced as never before so that men may come back to God by kneeling at the foot of Jesus' cross. There, receiving cleansing from their sin, they will receive the power of Jesus' Holy Spirit that will enable them to begin to live lives that bring honor and glory to their Savior.

There is hope for America and for any nation so long as the liberating good news of the gospel can be proclaimed within its borders. What must be done? This must be done. And let there be no

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mistake, the work of gospel proclamation must advance as never before. This is the first responsibility of the people of God.

In addition, those who know the secret of Jesus' salvation and who live out of the power of His Spirit must develop the skill of establishing a relationship between their faith and political life. After all, the Jesus who stands at the center of the Christian religion is not uninterested in the political process. He has created our world and human nature--oil the things that give rise to political reality--and He is the King of every nation. Therefore, those who live beneath the banner of the Lord Jesus Christ must not only announce that they are Christians as they are active in the political arena, but they must, as Christians, pursue solutions to our manifold problems, solutions which reflect the will of the Lord.

On the one hand it is extremely encouraging that the last election featured a surfacing of the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ in a very remarkable way. On the other hand, it is extremely discouraging that in many instances political figures who have boldly announced that Jesus was the center of their spiritual life, have felt it necessary to assure the electorate that they would not allow their religious commitments to interfere with their conduct of office.

Do we in America really want those who have grave responsibilities to discharge them in such a schizophrenic manner? Do we really want them to be Christians only in terms of their worship and their personal prayers, and to be pragmatic secularists when they decide great affairs of state? Surely the land which has enjoyed the sustaining

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influence of great faith infused into its history from colonial times deserves more from its elected officials. May we not expect that Christians in government will draw from the rich resources of their faith as they assess the grave problems that confront all men and strive to achieve solutions for them?

After all, the real problems of the present moment are preeminently religious: energy, arms, food, education, welfare. They are religious, are they not? Would we not expect that those who claim they know the Lord's will for their lives, would bring their knowledge of His will to bear upon the work which they have been called to execute on behalf of the people? And what I have just said has nothing to do with the establishment of religion or the separation of church and state. But it has everything to do with using men in their totality in political life. Christian officials must conduct themselves as Christians as they think, and speak, and act.

If Christian people do not find ways to establish a connection between their confession of faith and their public conduct in office, they cannot beat their breasts over the evil they want, but the fact will remain that they are as much at fault as anyone if the notion continues to pursue the path of evil. The God of the Christian faith is a God of righteousness, and Christians should be able to discern the shape this righteousness should take in terms of the issues that face us now.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. Psalm 33 invades the pageantry of inauguration with this solemn reminder. And from the island state washed by the gentle Pacific this reminder is

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reinforced by a strange sounding motto which reminds us that the life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness. May God bless the new president, and may God help America pursue this righteousness in the coming years.

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