

### *A Fourth of July sermon.*

*Jeremiah 29:7: Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace!*

Until rather late in the history of the world, God kept North America unsettled.

To be sure, earlier on, there were travelers from Asia who did arrive on the west coast, and who eventually did spread across the continent. Yet, even after thousands of years, these aborigines were still few in number, and the continent remained, in effect, a wilderness.

Travelers then came from the opposite direction, that is, from the east, from Norway via Iceland and Greenland and settled on the east coast of Vinland hundreds of years before Columbus came. Nevertheless, as the settlements in Iceland and Greenland perished, so nothing permanent ever became of any Norse settlement that had been founded in North America.

What was God's purpose in keeping North America unsettled? It was what his providence always has been in regards to man: it was in view of man's afterlife: That the Lord of heaven and earth wants all those born in time to recognize their sins, to be sorry for them, and to receive from him his promised gift of salvation, obtaining it by an act of faith. After that the Lord will take all those who have believed in his promised salvation home to be

with him. In this case God kept North America unsettled in order to provide a home, a nursery, if you will, for those followers of his recent Reformation in Europe. That is, he had reserved a promised land in which his gospel could grow and spread, indeed, to become one more westward stepping stone from where the gospel ultimately could proceed full circle around the globe before the end.

It was in the spirit of such reverent acknowledgment of the providence of God that Columbus named the first land in the Western Hemisphere "San Salvador," that is, "holy Savior" and did not pick a careless and flippant name such as "Devil's Lake" in North Dakota.

In fact, not only was it a precursor of things to come in North America that the Norse in Iceland had a republic in 925 A.D., but, more importantly, that fifty years before this, when the Norse first landed, they found orthodox Christians in Iceland, Irishmen, who had remained aloof from the great falling away (2nd Thessalonians 2:3) in the Western Christian church. Later in time North America indeed would become a home for orthodox Christianity, predominantly for the German and Scandinavian Lutheran immigrants.

After the handful of explorers of the 1500's and 1600's, settlers started to come to North America with the intent to establish a permanent home. Just the same, of these initial settlements some were disastrous failures; others barely survived. Of those that did survive, even

these amounted to little more than tiny outposts which clung to the shores of the Atlantic. Hence it appeared that nothing much ever would become of these homesteads. At this time, 130 years after Columbus, immigrants came in only as a trickle as compared to the waves of immigrants from northern Europe and Scandinavia in the latter third of the 1800's which poured into this country in the hundreds of thousands. Thus America was settled in the beginning in various places sparingly, in fact, in human estimate, randomly and haphazardly, with no unified intent or purpose with a view toward any future consolidation.

Yet, unknown to these settlers, God had a different plan in mind. In his providence he kept his sheltering arms over the infant years of our land, and supported it with his hand as it labored to take its first steps.

An eyewitness account of this unfolded blessing is given by none other than George Washington in the year 1783, who articulated it in these words: "The citizens of America, the sole lords and proprietors of a vast tract of continent, are now acknowledged to be possessed of absolute freedom and independency. Here Heaven has crowned all its other blessings by giving a fairer opportunity for political happiness than any other nation has ever been favored with. The rights of mankind are better understood and more clearly defined than at any former period. The collected wisdom acquired through a long succession of years is laid open for our use in the establishment of our forms of government. The free cultivation of letters, the unbounded extension of

commerce, the progressive refinement of manners, the growing liberality of sentiment, and, above all, the pure and benign light of revelation, have had a meliorating influence on mankind. At this auspicious period, the United States came into existence as a nation" (George Bancroft, *History of the United States of America* [New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888], VI, page 84).

In fact, Bancroft himself remarked about our country: "Our national organization... was essentially imbued with the spirit of the Reformation which rose up in Germany with Luther" ("Church News," *The Lutheran Witness*, editor Carl Adolf Frank, Vol. 5, No. 6 [Zanesville, Ohio: 7 August, 1886], page 45).

Thus commemorate the anniversary of our nation's founding in the highest manner possible by obeying Scripture's clear command to -

### *Pray for the Peace of our Land!*

1. What is lasting peace?
2. What will bring it?

1.

The Almighty commands in the text: "Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace!" The story behind our Old Testament text is this: Because the Jews had forsaken God by falling away from him, that is, by no longer

believing in his gospel promise of salvation, his patience with them finally came to an end. He kept his threat to punish them with a devastating war. The Almighty used the armed might of the country Babylon to do this. At the end of this war the Babylonians took the remaining Jews captive, and led them back to Babylon. At that location the Lord proclaimed to the Jews through his prophet Jeremiah: *"I have caused you to be carried away captives."* In other words, it was God's will and by his doing that they were subjugated in the land where they were now. What is more, it also was his will that they now should behave themselves in their new homeland by seeking the peace of Babylon. That is to say, they were not to overthrow their new government, nor rebel against it, nor become disobedient, nor even to form an underground movement such as the French did in World War II, but to observe law and order which would contribute to the peace of that country. This was God's will. Any other behavior God would not bless with success, but would punish.

This command was necessary for the idea of being a captive was very distasteful to the Jew. Moreover, there were speakers among them who were fanning the flames of revolt (verse 8). These speakers easily could have argued: *"We have been taken away forcibly from our rightful country. Our king is an idolater. Our government is heathen. Our rulers are enemies of God. They have unjust and ungodly laws. Why should we obey them? How could obedience to such a government ever please God? We have every reason to rebel. Let us revolt, and return to our homeland."*

Yet God knew all of this. Nevertheless, in light of all of this, and in spite of all of this, the Lord made his will perfectly clear. He warned in the text: *"Seek the peace of the city to which I have caused you to be carried away captives!"*

What God commands for his people in the Old Testament, he also commands for his people in the New. For instance, 1st Peter 2:13-14 orders: *"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good."* This text declares plainly that rulers have been sent by God. Stated briefly, governments have been instituted by God. Hence they are not *"a necessary evil,"* as Thomas Jefferson once put it.

Thus your concern today would be to obey the government under which you find yourself.

How would you obey it? How could you, as the text commands, seek the peace of your country? You could do it in the ways in which the Jews in Babylon did it. For instance, you could obey the laws that have been enacted by the government for the civil peace. You would not attempt to break these laws, even if you would not like them, or even if a police officer would not be around to catch you. You would submit to these laws willingly as a law-abiding citizen would. Indeed, you could and should urge others to do the same. As a result,

God will bless you with peace. Therefore, God commands you: "Seek the peace!"

Just the same, was not God aware that almost all of the governments at that time were not constitutional republics with a bill of rights which recognized certain inherent natural rights of the citizen, but, to the contrary, were governments that existed without the consent of the governed; states that overtaxed them, usurped citizens' rights at will, enslaved them, as the children of Israel were in Egypt, and overruled the laws of the land for personal profit; or that they were illegal governments that had seized power unlawfully, anywhere from poisoning the previous ruler to invading a country and annexing it? Yes, he was. Nevertheless, realize that God also has sent bad governments purposely as a punishment upon those who have rejected his saving grace (Job 34:30; Isaiah 3:4; Hosea 13:11). Thus God has seen to it that people throughout the world have been sent some form of government.

Moreover, these governments have made laws in order to maintain peace within their borders. Hence these laws are made by "man," as the 1st Peter 2:13-14 passage puts it. It is to these very laws of man to which the Christian is to submit.

What is more, the Christian is to obey the God-sent rulers who have enacted these laws, whether it would be the king or the governor, that is, whether it would be a high or a low official. This obedience is to be done "for the Lord's sake." In other words, faith in Christ demands

faithfulness to his God-sent government. In fact, Christians could and should be the best citizens in the land. Since they would believe in and love God, they will be moved for that reason to be faithful citizens. Thus, in the New Testament time, also, believers are to seek the peace of their land by being obedient to their government. Scripture declares that it would be their religious duty to do so.

How could you make sure that there will be lasting peace for our land? Would education work? Some years ago Harvard student Jose Razo, Jr. was convicted of six Los Angeles-area armed robberies. Higher education is not the answer for peace.

Could you ensure peace for our land by listening to the latest ideology of the editorialists, professors, and writers who advocate, for instance, that it is a woman's right to have an abortion? How could we expect to have safer streets if millions of American women have made the safest place, the womb, to be the most violent and dangerous?

Could you keep peace in our land by trusting in the political vision of our governmental officials? Years ago Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders had a definite social vision, yet she referred to the "unchristian religious right" and added that "We've got to be strong to take on those people who are selling our children out in the name of religion." How could we expect God to bless our land when such evil things are being thought of and intended? The Almighty warns, "I will punish the world

for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity” (Isaiah 13:11). While the human heart remains unchanged in its greed and lust for power; as long as human flesh is enslaved to selfishness, we never will have any real peace on earth. Man’s depravity is so deep and so damnable that it always will break out into civil disobedience, or worse: war, and cause suffering and death for millions.

For lasting peace, therefore, we need someone who is stronger than we to change human nature. Indeed, we need God himself. We need his power to change our hearts, to act on the prayers of his believers for peace, and to frustrate the evil intentions of those who would persist in their moral depravity. The reason that there is no absolute peace in our land is because of sin. Because of sin there is continual warfare between Heaven and earth. That is to say, no matter how nice you may think you may be, yet, without Christ, you bitterly will hate God. In your natural pride you will rebel against him; willfully you will break his holy law; day after day your sins will separate you even further from him, as you would reject him instead of receive him; as you would hate him instead of hold to him. As a result, “there is no peace... to the wicked,” Scripture declares (Isaiah 48:22).

So acknowledge that your sins call down the Almighty’s righteous anger on you! Realize that you could never remove yourself from this anger of God!

Nevertheless, understand that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, with his measureless mercy, came to bring you peace! It was no easy task for him to reconcile Heaven

and earth. For example, every last sin had to be suffered for, the demands of divine righteousness had to be met, and the guilt of every trespass had to be removed. The only way in which this could be done was for Christ to make “peace through the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20). In other words, God himself had to come into this world of wickedness to die in the sinners’ stead. Cruelly crucified as your substitute, Christ served your time in hell, so that you could live in resurrected radiance.

What has this to do with lasting peace for our country? It is this: If all of the human beings in our land would believe the sin-removing power of Christ’s blood, and would practice his program of love and peace in their lives, we will witness a marvelous era of brotherly love and national harmony.

How would this be possible? As soon as God would move a man to acknowledge that he is a sinner, but that Jesus Christ is his Savior, he will become a new man, with a new love for peace and harmony, and a holy hatred for war and selfishness (2nd Corinthians 5:17). As soon as a sinner would become regenerated by the soul-influencing power of the Holy Spirit, he will lose his appetite for selfishness, preferring peace to hatred, preferring forgiveness to revenge. As he would remember his divine Redeemer laying down his life for those who crucified him, the believer will be led by the Holy Spirit to follow Christ’s commandment to “love one another” (John 15:12). In fact, if all of the citizens of our land would be drawn to this spirit of love rather than to the madness for might and the ambition for power, we

could have avoided all of the civil disobedience, rioting, hatred, crime and other national sins that have burdened and divided our land for so many years; for those who have been reborn again into the new life of faith in their Savior Jesus Christ will build a national righteousness which could give lasting peace to our nation.

For instance, in the 1940's the *Chicago Tribune* featured an article on Frankenmuth, Michigan. At that time the town had been 102 years old, but had never had a crime of violence in all those years. During the last twenty-five of those years its jail had been entirely empty. Throughout the Depression not one person had been on the relief rolls. Since its founding Frankenmuth had been first in the State of Michigan to report all of its taxes paid in full, and it had given more than the average in charitable drives. What was the secret to this marvelous record of peace and prosperity? The answer is simply this: 95 per cent of the people in Frankenmuth were Christians, members of Lutheran congregations. Likewise, if every community in the United States were filled with men, women, and children who loved the Lord, there would be no crime waves, lawlessness, or scandals which are begun by the love of sinning; for the Lord, as he has repeated promised in his Bible, also would shower his blessings upon an obedient people, which would compensate for their weaknesses, failures, and lack of understanding, and in so doing would give them a personal and a national peace in spite of their own feeble and frail attempts to do so.

What could you do, then, in order to have this national peace? First of all, you must have real trust in the Savior, for without him you "could do nothing" (John 15:5).

Secondly, as the text indicates, you must pray for the peace of our land. Even though the government would not be perfect; even though there would be corrupt laws, corrupt makers of those laws, and corrupt citizens who elect those lawmakers, the only way to straighten things out and to receive rich blessings from Heaven would be to approach the Most High in sincere, faith-filled prayer.

Thirdly, believers scattered from sea to shining sea must help the citizens in their communities repent of their sins and return to God. In the shocking 11 September attacks of 2001 that humbled this nation, God gave us a startling sign of his displeasure. Yet there was no repentant response from coast to coast. Think about this: Just what would it take, what more would God have to do to get this land to wake up and to repent? In the days of Samuel the prophet, the Israelites humbled themselves and, after a solemn worship service of repentance, Heaven gave them a long period of peace (1st Samuel 7:14). Similarly, today, a penitent, Christ-trusting America without a doubt would receive from the Lord the blessing of internal and international peace. "If God would be for us, who could be against us?" (Romans 8:31.) Therefore, support mission work in order to re-Christianize our nation!

Fourthly, do not be hypocritical, but behave as a genuine follower of Christ! Obey his commandments! Do not be lawless and break them!

Fifthly, take care of your civic duties and privileges, such as, obeying the speed limit, voting, informing your elected representatives of your opposition to abortion, to gambling, and to other legislation which is detrimental to the lives and morals of our republic, so that, as the "salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13), you may not lose your godly influence on those around you!

Probably the highest question, then, that could be asked of you this Independence Day would be this: How could you best serve your country? The answer would be: By getting it to be blessed, not cursed by the Almighty.

How could you do that? It will be by seeking the peace of our land by being a law-abiding citizen, and by praying the Father for the peace of our land.

Serve your country and your Savior in this way! Do it today! Then be assured that you truly have been patriotic!