

The Nation

Sunday, July 5, 2020 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa
Zechariah 9:9 "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Introduction: John Adams

I've long had an interest in history, especially the American Revolution. I know such subject is not to everyone's interest, but it has never become boring to me. Of the flawed but brilliant figures of that age, one of my favorites is John Adams, a farmer/lawyer who also had connections to the Congregational Church. It was Adams who said, "But a Constitution of Government once changed from Freedom can never be restored. Liberty, once lost, is lost forever." So in the midst of the most unusual Fourth of July of my lifetime I wanted to share a few thoughts about being a Christian-a citizen of the nation of Christ, and as a citizen of the United States of America.

Set the stage

To set the stage, Zechariah, the great Old Testament prophet, speaking centuries before the life of Jesus, foretold the presentation of Messiah who would come riding on a donkey, yet come in complete triumph. The dicotomy was so great that some scholars speculated the existence of two Messiahs, or Christian theologians would suggest one Messiah who comes twice, once on a donkey (an action that symbolizes peace and peaceful intentions) and again as the conquering ruler of all Creation. Just as the view from one mountaintop to another obscures the great valley, so the view of the prophet sees two arrivals of Messiah with a great span of time in between.

The Lowly Beginning of the Great Nation

Recorded in all four Gospels, verse nine was fulfilled by Jesus when He arrived in Jerusalem on a donkey (Mt 21:1-11; Mk 11:1-10; Lk 19:28-44; Jn 12:12-16). It would seem to be the beginning of His reign in Jerusalem, for the symbolism of His arrival would have been obvious, but within a week He was dead, and soon thereafter He rose from the dead, creating an infinitely greater nation, ultimately of people from every people group on Earth. As Christians we are citizens of that great nation, a monarchy that will never end.

The Respect Shown to the Nations

We have this other dicotomy in that if we are citizens of Christ's kingdom (Philippians 3:17-21), then what is our view of our citizenship of the United States.

When pondering that, I found a phrase in the very next verse that caught my attention:

Zechariah 9:10 "I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; the battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth."

According to Zechariah, even after Jesus Christ returns to establish His Kingdom on Earth, there will be nations, and He speaks peace to them. Thus, citizenship of a nation can and should be cherished, and patriotism is not a sin. For all the troubles of the past months, the United States is still the nation, beyond any other on earth, of which I desire to be a part, and I am grateful that I hold a U.S. passport.

Love our country, Seek to be among its best citizens

So in response to this I renew my desire to love my country and seek to be among its best citizens. I cherish the ideals and note that freedom must be guarded, a warning that several of the founders issued right after the Revolutionary War. In order to be among its best citizens I must recognize that there are serious problems in our nation. Black lives matter is a serious concept because there have been too many episodes in which a black life didn't matter, and considering the recent case of the murder of a young Army private in Ft. Hood, Texas, we should add "female lives matter" as well. But beware people who promote problems but offer not solutions, or solutions that are so vague as to be undoable. For some, the issue is to keep problems without solutions because their intent is destructive. Beware of such people. Look for people who are espousing solutions that are real and practical.

Conclusion

You can be a true citizen of the kingdom of Jesus Christ and a true patriot of the United States as well. The kingdom of Jesus began with His humble arrival on a donkey, but will be fulfilled when He returns. In the meantime, we can love our nation, actually whatever nation that might be, and still be part of that Kingdom. In fact, I think the Lord Jesus requires us to love our nation and to work for the benefit of all of its citizens.