

WHAT MAKES NATIONS GREAT?

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By Jim
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Righteousness exalts a nation,
But sin is a disgrace to any people.

Prov. 14:34 WEB

Donald Trump
vows to make the nation great again. Others say that the nation is already
great although it needs a few improvements. But virtually nobody seems to recognize
what God says about making a nation great.

The history
of nations reveals the sobering fact that what makes nations great in the eyes
of the world is seldom good for their people. Great, powerful armies look good
to tyrants desiring conquest, but what about the poor people who pay for this
aggrandizement in blood and treasure? Big populations also look good to those
wanting markets for their goods, but what about those who pay for this in the
destruction of their environment and financial enslavement of their people? And
technology, what about those who worship virtually every invention that comes
down the road, but offer little succor to those entire countries overwhelmed by
technical achievements that have only succeeded in making them poorer and more
hopeless?

One thing I
think we can say for sure is that gaining more weapons, technology, population,
and possessions will not accomplish the task. Nor will adding territory to our
already large empire make us great. As Jesus said, "What shall a man be
profited though he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" This aphorism
also applies to nations, folks!

A few years

ago I read a book by MIT economist Daren Aseoglu and political scientist/economist James Robinson, entitled "Why Nations Fail, The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty," Crown, 2012. The thesis was essentially that nations fail or succeed based upon political and economic choices made early in their history as to how they will distribute wealth and whatever benefits of early national organization they manage to accumulate. The authors contrast many pairs of nations, but perhaps the most graphic example of success or failure is found in the two nations of Korea. Following the ruin of the Korean War early in the 1950s, South Korea chose a path of rewarding personal enterprise and wide distribution of the gains resulting from democratic national economic and political power. In short, they used "inclusive" institutions to include as many people as possible in the challenge and rewards of evolving into a successful nation.

North Korea,

on the other hand, chose the "extractive" model whereby tyrannical leaders distributed gains to themselves and their supporting cliques through institutions designed for this single purpose. The results you see today in a poverty-stricken nation unable to feed its own people because of massive costs of extreme militarization at the expense of virtually everything else.

God says it

isn't military power, or great wealth, or a large population, or rampant technology, or political dominance that creates a great nation, no matter what politicians today claim. God says that national greatness arises from righteousness in its people and institutions, meaning that principles of God-given righteousness must be evident and operative in their political, economic, and social institutions.

The prophet

Micah perhaps said it best when he advocated, "What does the Lord require of you, O man, but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with the Lord, your God." And the prophet Amos said, "Let justice run down like water, and righteousness as a mighty stream." These prophets referred to the justice that emerges from the entire Bible in a mighty stream of good for people, nations, and even the entire earth.

It's too bad

we don't hear more about this subject in our churches, but it's coming as it becomes ever more clear as the months pass that we cannot--- and should not--- sustain what we are doing in the name of growth and profit to the peoples, animals and substance of the earth. Its man's idea of what is good, not God's, and the sooner we learn this the better.