

Proverbs 22:28

Happy Birthday America – Remember the Landmarks!

Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your forefathers.

I am deeply grateful to be a citizen of the United States. I consider my United States Citizenship to be one of my most prized possessions. It is a privilege to be an American. I love the 4th of July. The corn is usually “knee-high.” The watermelons are juicy. The flags are waving. The fireworks light up the sky. Children ride their bikes. Families picnic together. Churches gather for worship and sing patriotic hymns. Apple pies bake in ovens. The crack of the bat in ballparks can be heard. These American traditions are a great heritage for us. And we can keep them if we maintain the ancient landmarks that our forefathers have established. A father was talking with his rather obstinate son one day and said, "Every person who lives in the United States is a privileged person." The boy answered, "I disagree." And the father replied, "That's the privilege." We have the privilege to disagree. We have the privilege to speak our mind. We have freedom of religion, of speech, of the press, and the right of petition. We have the freedom to hope and dream and pursue our dreams. We are free in so many ways! We have these rights because of what our forefathers have done.

Wise King Solomon composed many short, wise sayings called “proverbs” to help the reader to know how to get along in life. He shares one of these proverbs in Proverbs 22:28 that I think is appropriate that we look at it on this “Happy Birthday America!” celebration day. Do not move an ancient boundary stone which was put in place by your ancestors.

In ancient times, boundary stones or landmarks marked a person's property. Anyone who moved such a stone was, in effect, stealing land. Boundaries in Israel were sacred because God owned the land and he apportioned the property to the tribes in the Book of Joshua. To extend one's property illegally was a violation of covenant and oath. Or, to pull back a boundary previously held was to renege on commitment to God's promise. The boundaries that were established by their forefathers were to be preserved.

Unfortunately, moving a boundary stone was, and still is, a major problem. It's not so much in the realm of property that we're dealing with the moving of the landmarks. Some of the founding principles, the landmarks, the ancient boundaries, on which America was founded need to be maintained in this relativistic, post-modern age when everything seems up for grabs and everyone interprets things the way they personally see them.

What are some of these LANDMARKS that we must maintain in America? They are first of all Liberty and Sacrifice. Someone has said, “The temptation is to enjoy the fruits of citizenship without tending the tree of liberty.” This quotation drives at the fact that many of us haven't earned the freedoms we enjoy. We didn't go to foreign lands and fight for them. We have not shed our blood, sweat, and tears for them. A poet expressed it well. "We eat from orchards we did not plant. We drink from wells we did not dig. We reap from fields we did not sow. Fires we did not kindle warm us. Roofs we did not build shelter us. We are blessed by moneys we did not give." If we ever move the ancient landmark of liberty and sacrifice and fudge on our own commitment to tend the tree of liberty by our own acts of self-sacrifice and service, then we stand to lose one of our great American traditions – July 4th.

As John Adams signed the Declaration of Independence, he said, "Whether we live or die, sink or swim, succeed or fail, I stand behind this Declaration of Independence. And if God wills it, I am ready to die in order that this country might experience freedom." It was that kind of patriotism which led men, armed with little more than hunting rifles, to engage in battle with what was the most powerful nation in the world. Many of our forefathers paid a terrible price in the Revolutionary War, but finally they won the victory so that you and I might be citizens of this "land of the free and home of the brave."

You and I also I am sure are thankful to be citizens of these great United States. But as a citizen, you see, we have a responsibility to tend the tree of liberty. Is the world a better place because you are a citizen of this country? Is our community a better place because you are a part

of it? Is your church a better church because you are a member of it? Or are you like many, enjoying the fruits, but not tending the tree of liberty? Remember the landmark of liberty and sacrifice.

Peter Marshall, before the U.S. Senate said it ever so well in a prayer many years ago. "Lord Jesus, thou who art the way, the truth, and the life; hear us as we pray for the truth that shall make all free. Teach us that liberty is not only to be loved but also to be lived. Liberty is too precious a thing to be buried in books. It costs too much to be hoarded. Help us see that our liberty is not the right to do as we please, but the opportunity to please to do what is right."

A second set of landmarks is Capitalism and Conscience. When our forefathers came to this country and founded our system of government, they were convinced that there was a Higher Power who was involved in the destinies of men and nations. They believed that men were endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights - and that among these were life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This was evident in the way they wrote, the way they lived, and the way our nation developed. There was a moral fiber, a moral strength in our nation. But today it seems that our society is so caught up in greed and materialism that we're only interested in ourselves. It is survival of the fittest, and all we're concerned about is making more and more. We're slipping into capitalism without a conscience.

Capitalism means free market. We are free to buy, sell, and make a profit - to earn our own living. But capitalism without conscience becomes a cruel and ruthless form of life where competition and success and greed and materialism corrupt and we lose our concern for others. We step on whomever we need to step on in order to achieve our objectives, even if it's another fellow American. The news headlines underscore what I'm saying. WorldCom was at the precipice of bankruptcy after the revelation that it failed to report nearly \$4 billion in expenses. Essentially, WorldCom claimed a profit when it should have acknowledged a giant loss. Nearly 20,000 WorldCom employees lost their jobs as a result -- but the consequences of this reach much further than that. The WorldCom news has roiled financial markets around the world today, and led President Bush to call for a full investigation. It has also brought new outrage from many quarters about greed and mischief in the corporate boardroom. We have American capitalists leading corporations who are cheating other Americans all because they want more. They are capitalists without a conscience. When we start messing with the landmark of capitalism and conscience, we self-destruct.

The American dream is that we can and should pursue our goals and dreams. Seek God and if prosperity and blessing come your way, give Him the glory. Become the entrepreneur that you've always wanted to be. But remember conscience. Remember eternal things. Remember that all the money and prosperity in the world could never replace those that we lost on September 11, 2001 or during the past and recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Let's maintain the ancient landmark of capitalism and conscience.

Another landmark is Religious Freedom and Commitment. In the early days of our country, it was made clear that Congress would not establish a state religion – that Americans would be free to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience, providing it did not infringe on the rights of others. It was assumed that people would want to worship God and serve their Creator. Today, many Americans have this freedom to worship God with others, but do not participate. This is one of our greatest national landmarks, and yet we do not value its importance. A vast majority of Americans are considered unchurched and many "Christian Americans" only attend church once or twice a year. A freedom in which we do not engage is a freedom that we may not have a few generations down the road. Somehow along the way, in our celebration of independence and freedom, we have forgotten the greatest freedom of all.

Jesus Christ went to the cross and gave His life to gain our freedom from sin. We can believe this message and have life, but we are also called to belong to Christ's body, the Church. And that is a message that our country needs to hear again and again today. Remember the landmark of religious freedom and commitment. Exercise your religious freedom. Men have died

so that you can be a part of a local church, have and read your Bible, and be able to speak openly about your faith. We dare not move these ancient landmarks.

French writer Alexis de Tocqueville, after visiting America in 1831, said, "I sought for the greatness of the United States in her commodious harbors, her ample rivers, her fertile fields, and boundless forests--and it was not there. I sought for it in her rich mines, her vast world commerce, her public school system, and in her institutions of higher learning--and it was not there. I looked for it in her democratic Congress and her matchless Constitution--and it was not there. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great!"

I think at times, we have forgotten God. To a great extent, our modern objectives have become success, status, and security. These are followed closely by self-indulgence, comfort and pleasure. Our permissive society turns freedom into license; rights into riots; and pornography into profit. Concerned about a higher standard of living, some fail to live by any standard. Riches are elevated above righteousness, and science above the Savior. We abandon the moral law and then shake our heads in disbelief as crime increases.

In 1940 teachers identified the top problems in America's schools as: talking out of turn, chewing gum, making noise and running in the hall. In 1990, teachers listed drugs, alcohol, pregnancy, suicide, rape and assault. William Bennett has said, "There is a coarseness, a callousness and a cynicism to our era. The worst of it has to do with our children. Our culture seems almost dedicated to the corruption of the young. People are losing their capacity for shock, disgust and outrage." Bennett continues: "Today we must carry on a new struggle for the country we love. We must push hard against an age that is pushing hard against us. If we have full employment and greater economic growth—if we have cities of gold and alabaster—but our children have not learned how to walk in goodness, justice and mercy, then the American experiment, no matter how attractive we make it, will have failed."

We are reminded of the solemn warning that God gave to another nation, which was experiencing the thrill of independence after centuries of slavery in Egypt. Although it was written over 3,000 years ago, this warning could very well apply to the United States today. In Deuteronomy 8:7-14 Moses tells the people, "For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land. . . where you shall eat food without scarcity. . . When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware. . . lest, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them. . . and your silver and your gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart becomes proud, and you forget the Lord your God." Some day our money and economy may totally collapse. When and if it does, we'll be left with those four words, "In God We Trust." It's a landmark we dare not move. Patriotism is not a short and frenzied burst of emotion but the long and steady dedication of a lifetime. -Thomas Jefferson once remarked, "I hope that you are thankful to be a part of this great land of ours, and that you'll not take your citizenship lightly, but be determined to hold high the freedoms we enjoy so that the generations that follow us will experience and treasure them also." His words will live long among us if we do not move the landmarks already placed by those who have sacrificed for our nation and for us long ago and in recent times.