

**"The Lord Is the Founding Father
of Our Nation (& All Nations)"
Sermon on Jeremiah 18:5-10
Weekend of July 3, 2005
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
Pastor Karl Walther**

Scripture says: *Blessed are the people of whom this is true; blessed are the people whose God is the Lord.* Amen.

God's Word for our special consideration during this week of Independence Day is Jeremiah chapter eighteen, verses five through ten. Here Jeremiah reports the following:

"Then the word of the LORD came to me: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel."

"If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned."

"And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Introduction: It's Worth Celebrating Independence Day!

Dear fellow citizens of the United States of America and of the Kingdom of God:

They say it was as hot that summer as it has been this summer. Long ago, but not so very long, when you consider the entire course of human history—two hundred twenty-nine years ago today, those many dozens of men from each of the colonies met at what is now Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

And what a confluence of outstanding personages it was! John Hancock presided over this Continental Congress. Several of the first presidents of the United States were in the assembly. George Washington was absent, however, since he was in the field with the troops of the Continental Army. Significantly, Thomas Jefferson was there—along with a document he authored: a Declaration of Independence from Great Britain.

The government these men would go on to establish several years later really was a great experiment. You see, it was kings who ruled the lands of Europe. They also ruled their colonies in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. In fact, all over the world – from tribes led by their chiefs to empires led by their monarchs – whole peoples were usually ruled by a single person: until now.

We call them the founding fathers of our nation. And this weekend's holiday has us remembering them with gratitude. Nevertheless, God's Word to us today reminds us: **THE LORD IS THE FOUNDING FATHER OF OUR NATION (& ALL NATIONS)**. This section of Scripture tells us: (1) **WE MUST LISTEN TO HIM AND AVOID EVIL**, and: (2) **WE MUST LISTEN TO HIM AND PURSUE VIRTUE**.

Theme: The Lord Is the Founding Father of Our Nation (& All Nations)

God's Word to us today takes us back longer than two hundred twenty-nine years. It was actually some six centuries before the coming of Christ, some two thousand six hundred years ago now. And the setting is the ancient land of Israel.

The history of God's people of Israel back at that time was not particularly rosy or celebratory. Of the twelve tribes of Israel, all but one had gone into exile, never to be heard from again. And that one tribe, that one kingdom of Judah, would soon be exiled, too. And one of the men through whom God announced that message to Judah was the Prophet Jeremiah.

In this particular part of Scripture, the Lord had sent Jeremiah down to the workshop of a potter. And as the potter spun a lower wheel with his foot and fashioned on the upper wheel a lump of clay into nice rounded pot, the potter botched his job. So naturally, he started over. The potter re-worked the clay into an entirely different pot.

And Jeremiah says, and this is our text: ***Then the word of the LORD came to me: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel."***

And the message was clear, wasn't it? God himself was the Founding Father of Israel. He established Israel, when he delivered the nation from Egypt. He gave to Israel its system of laws, at Mount Sinai. And the Lord himself ruled Israel directly for quite some time. So, if the Lord didn't like the way Israel was turning out, he had all authority to refashion Israel in whatever way he'd like.

Now, how true is that for us? Does that apply to the modern day United States of America? Of course, it does!

Oh, let me be clear.... Old Testament Israel was unique. God did not split the Atlantic to deliver us from Great Britain. God did not drop the constitution from the slopes of Mount Vernon. And it is not God's portrait that's on our one dollar bills.

However, the Bible tells us—Romans chapter thirteen, verse one: *There is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.* No government on earth exists without God's permission. God weaves the actions of each government into his perfect will for the sake of his Church.

So, it's right to say that the United States has no founding fathers; it has a Founding Father: the Lord himself. More than we honor the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution, we need to listen to his Word: the Bible. And finally, if he decides to refashion us, we are putty in his hands. Even our own founding documents were wise enough to acknowledge that....

Part One: We Must Listen to the Lord & Avoid Evil

So then, what does our Sovereign, the Lord, have to say to us? Well, in this Word from God he says—not at all just to Israel, but also to every country: ***"If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed – the picture is that of a plant in the ground or a building with its foundation – "If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed... and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned."***

See: back at Jeremiah's time, these words were the Lord's earnest invitation to the people of Israel. The Lord warned the Israelites that he was going to uproot them like a plant and tear them down like a building. He was planning to do that because they had failed to trust him, failed to listen to his Word, and so: they had gotten themselves into all kinds of evil trouble.

Is the same true for us? Yep, the same is true for us.... What evil has the Lord warned us against, so that we would turn away from it? Well, think of the Ten Commandments. God reveals his will: "Honor your father and your mother"; so, let's obey those in authority over us—and avoid God's punishment for disobeying them! God

reveals his will: “You shall not murder”; so, let’s treasure God’s gift of life and refuse to rob anyone – from womb to tomb – of their enjoyment of their life! God reveals his will: “You shall not commit adultery”; so, let’s treasure God’s gift of marriage, and support the marriage of every married couple, and refuse even to consider marital intimacy outside the bonds of marriage!

But let’s go farther, shall we? What evil has the Lord warned us against, so that we would turn away from it? Above all things, the Lord says: “You shall have no other gods,” and: “I the Lord your God am a jealous God”—I want you all to myself; I want you honoring and loving and trusting me above all things.

So, what gods do we cherish besides the Lord our God? ...Is it pleasure? Is our mind always set on what fun we can have next? Give it up! Focus instead on how you can best serve the Lord! ...Or are money and possessions our gods? Are we relying on sufficient stuff to protect our lives and bring us happiness? Give it up! Trust the Lord to take care of you instead! ...Or are we our own little gods? Is it always all about us? Must it always be our way, rather than the Lord’s way? Give it up! God began our lives, and we will end our lives with God; so, leave everything in between in his hands, as well.

Part Two: We Must Listen to the Lord & Pursue Virtue

So, you see: the Lord is this nation’s Founding Father. It means we need to listen to him and avoid evil. It also means we need to listen to him and pursue virtue. Listen again to the final words from God’s Word to us: *“And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.”*

That was very true for Old Testament Israel, wasn’t it? When the dear Lord founded Israel, he meant only the best for it. He gave Israel moral laws which, if they followed them, would have promoted a very blessed citizenry. He gave Israel civil laws which, if they followed them, would have eliminated an untold amount of evil. And he gave Israel ceremonial laws: sacrificial laws that pointed to him who would be the Sacrifice for their sins, cleanliness laws that pointed to Him who would cleanse them of their transgressions, festival laws that pointed to Him who would conduct them into God’s presence forever. Unfortunately, of course, Israel failed to follow these words from the Lord.

And all of this applies well enough to us, doesn’t it? No, it’s not that we’re bound to the provisions of the Old Testament—the sacrificial, cleanliness, and festival laws. We learned that well enough last week....

But think of the good things the Lord has delivered to us in our system of government. Chief among them ... our precious freedoms—freedom of religion and press and speech and assembly!

And brothers and sisters: the Lord did not give us freedom of the press, so that we’d be free to excite all sorts of sinful interests. No! He gave us freedom of the press, so that we would – above all things – feel free to print his Scriptures, and read his Scriptures, and there find out that God’s heart yearns to be united with ours—despite our many sins.

And brothers and sisters: the Lord did not give us freedom of speech, so that we’d be free to spew all sorts of filth from our lips. No! He gave us freedom of speech, so that we would – above all things – feel free to tell our children and tell our spouses, to tell our friends and to tell our coworkers, “There is a rescue from the guilt you’re feeling and the death you’re facing. Own up to your guilt, and place it all on the strong shoulders of your Savior Jesus Christ. See his shoulders spread out to harbor all your transgressions? See his head bowed down under the weight of all your guilt? But now he’s risen! And

from his throne in heaven he pronounces upon you his verdict: ‘Not guilty at all!’ and ‘Entirely innocent of all wrongdoing!’”

And brothers and sisters: the Lord did not give us freedom of assembly, so that we’d be free to form our own little gangs. No! He gave us freedom of assembly, so that we would – above all things – get together: to love each other, to sing our anthems to our Savior, to pledge allegiance to Christ our rescuing King, to listen to the perfect state of our union with the Lord through Jesus Christ, to petition and to receive our judge’s mercy, and to banquet together—with his body and blood assuring us of our citizenship in his eternal kingdom.

Conclusion: It’s Worth Worshipping on Independence Day!

So, you see: The Lord Is the Founding Father of Our Nation and All Nations. Praise God! But praise the Lord all the more that Christ Jesus – who died for you – is the Foundation Stone of Our Church. And use the freedoms afforded to us in this nation to trust and to proclaim the more precious freedoms Jesus has delivered to you and to others: freedom from sin everlastingly, freedom from death forever, freedom from hell eternally. Thanks be to Christ our King! Amen.

Scripture has us praying: *May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you.* Amen.