

## America - Land of the Free, Home of the ...?

## I. America - the Beautiful

## A. Opening hymn - O beautiful for spacious skies (Katharine Lee Bates - 1913)

1. Most of the time we sing 1<sup>st</sup>/last verses

a. First verse tells about mountains, plains, oceans, gleaming cities

b. Included is a prayer for God to "shed His grace on Thee"

## 2. We tend to skip over the tough lines.

a. verse 2: America! America! **God mend thine ev'ry flaw,  
Confirm thy soul in self-control, Thy liberty in law!**

b. O beautiful for heroes proved In liberating strife, **Who more than  
self their country loved, And mercy more than life!**

**America! America! May God thy gold refine**

**Till all success be nobleness, And ev'ry gain divine!**

(Emphasis mine)

## B. We love to remember how America - formally know as the United States of America - was created by people of faith

1. This jumped out at me as I studied the scripture for today and then saw the inscription from the Statue of Liberty in something else I was reading

2. The inscription is a poem written in New York City, 1883, by a Jewish immigrant named Emma Lazarus. Entitled The New Colossus, it reads:

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame

With conquering limbs astride from land to land;

Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand

A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame

Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name

Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand

Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command

The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame,

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she

With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,  
 Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to  
 me,  
 I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

## II. Connection to Matthew

A Do you hear the undertones of Matthew in that poem?

B. Listen to the passage - 3 ways - as the language has changed over the years:

1. (KJV) 28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,  
 and I will give you rest.  
 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek  
 and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.  
 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
2. (NIV) 28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I  
 will give you rest.  
 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle  
 and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.  
 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."
3. (MSG) 28-30 "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come  
 to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll  
 show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work  
 with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms  
 of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you.  
 Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and  
 lightly."

C. Once again:  
 Give me your tired, your poor,  
 Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
 The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,  
 Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me

D. It sounds to me like we were trying to create a country that reflected Jesus  
 idea that people grow weary of feeling over-worked and under-  
 appreciated and that ALL people need God's grace and mercy as well as  
 the law.

1. God's law provides a frame-work to help people remember how to treat  
 one another,

2 Humans write laws that sometimes begin with good intentions but somehow get twisted into causing more harm.

- a. Individuals have a similar problem -we WANT to do what is right - what we have learned to be true about God's law, but somehow our intentions never quite make it to fruition.

III. That sounds a lot like Paul's confession in his letter to the Romans:

- A. "I know that all God's commands are spiritual, but I'm not. Isn't this also your experience?" Yes. I'm full of myself—after all, I've spent a long time in sin's

prison. What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. So if I can't be trusted to figure out what is best for myself and then do it, it becomes obvious that God's command is necessary.

But I need something more! For if I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time. . .

I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question?

The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does.

- B Rev. Richard Donovan says in The Sermon Writer:

"Not being full of self, [the] little ones are open to receiving God. Having no religious assurance, they are open to receiving grace. Possessing no wisdom, they are open to learning from Jesus."

1. That's why the poor, the not-so-wise, the weary all flock to Jesus.
2. That's why the poor, the not-so-wise, the weary all flock to the USA which they see reflecting the ways of Jesus - even if they don't realize that's who taught it first.
3. They are NOT proud or pompous or "full of themselves" - they have NOTHING to lose and EVERYTHING to gain!

C. Jesus himself was rejected in time and IS rejected in ours when people get "too full of themselves"

1. As Jesus said: "How can I account for this generation? The people have been like spoiled children whining to their parents"
2. "Thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth. You've concealed your ways from sophisticates and know-it-alls, but spelled them out clearly to ordinary people. Yes, Father, that's the way you like to work."

#### IV. Conclusion

It's when we can confess like Paul: "I need something more 'I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me?" that we will find the same answer he did : "Jesus Christ can and does!"

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to [Jesus]. Get away with [him] and you'll recover your life. He'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with [him] and work with [him]—watch how [he does] it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. [He] won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with [him] and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Come and find Jesus.

To God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost be all glory and honor and praise. Amen.