

# America's Greatest Need

by Russ Sukhia

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*America's decline is a direct result of its departure from God and its adoption of pagan and humanistic values.*

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 2:20

**Topics:** "Spiritual Decline", "Discipleship"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the decline of American churches in recent decades, where the focus has shifted from meaty sermons and doctrinally sound hymns to short, simple talks and catchy music. The result is an evangelical church that is lacking in knowledge of the word of God. The speaker urges parents to teach their children the important truths of the Bible and to model a Christian walk in the home. He also encourages Christians to reach out to others with the good news of Christ, pray for their conversion, and help disciple young believers. The sermon references the book of Jeremiah to warn of impending judgment and highlights the breakdown of spiritual leadership as a key factor in the decline of society.

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## Transcript

The Lord is speaking, He says, For of old I have broken your yoke and burst your bonds. And you said, I will not transgress, when on every high hill and under every green tree you lay down playing the harlot. Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality.

How then have you turned before me into the degenerate plant of an alien vine? For though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, yet your iniquity is marked before me, says the Lord God. How can you say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after the bales? See your way in the valley, know what you have done. You are a swift dromedary breaking loose in her ways, a wild donkey used to the wilderness that sniffs at the wind in her desire.

In her time of mating, who can turn her away? All those who seek her will not weary themselves, in her month they will find her. Withhold your foot from being unshod and your throat from thirst. But you said, there is no hope.

No, for I have loved aliens and after them I will go. As the thief is ashamed when he is found out, so was the house of Israel ashamed. They and their kings and their princes and their priests and their prophets saying to a tree, you are my father and to a stone, you gave birth to me.

For they have turned their back to me and not their face. But in the time of their trouble, they will say, arise and save us. But where are your gods that you made for yourselves? Let them arise if they can save you in the time of your trouble.

For according to the number of your cities are your gods, O Judah. Why will you plead with me? You all have transgressed against me, says the Lord. In vain I have chastened your children, they receive no correction.

Your sword has devoured your prophets like a destroying lion. O generation, see the word of the Lord. Have I been a wilderness to Israel or a land of darkness? Why do my people say, we are lords, we will come no more to you.

Can a virgin forget her ornaments or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number. Why do you beautify your way to seek love? Therefore, you have also taught the wicked women your ways. Also on your skirts is found the blood of the lives of the poor innocents.

I have not found it by secret search, but plainly on all these things. Yet you say, because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me. Behold, I will plead my case against you because you say I have not sinned.

Why do you gad about so much to change your way? Also, you shall be ashamed of Egypt as you were ashamed of Assyria. Indeed, you will go forth from him with your hands on your head. For the Lord has rejected your trusted allies and you will not prosper by that.

Let's pray. Father, this is your inspired inerrant word. And all Scripture is profitable.

All Scripture is God breathed. We pray that you will use it now to accomplish your purposes in our hearts. Speak to us this day.

We ask in Christ's name. Amen. As you know, this week, America will be celebrating the anniversary of the signing of our Declaration of Independence.

And we will do so as we usually do. With picnics and parades and concerts and speeches and awe inspiring fireworks displays. But as we celebrate our country's birthday, many Americans, as grateful as we are to live in this land of freedom and opportunity, are also aware that in some critical areas, America seems to have lost its way.

In fact, Christians can see that there are some striking parallels between modern America and Israel and Judah before they were taken away captive so many centuries ago. Now, let me say at the outset of this message that I am fully aware that we Americans are not God's chosen people, as were the Jews. We are not in any literal sense the descendants of Israel.

We are not and never have been a theocracy as Israel was. Our laws have not come directly from God. Nonetheless, it is impossible to read our history.

It is impossible to read our founding documents without seeing unmistakable signs of our godly heritage and of God's providential protection and oversight in our pilgrimage as a people. And I know of no one passage of scripture that speaks to our nation more directly than Jeremiah chapter 2. After the death of Solomon, the nation of Israel was divided into two nations. Israel in the north, Judah in the south.

In the south, it included Jerusalem. The long process of degeneration began or continued and proceeded over 400 years. Israel was then carried away by the Assyrians.

The Lord is now, in this passage, speaking through his prophet, Jeremiah, to the people of the south, to the people of Judah. Warning them of impending judgment. Warning them of the destruction that is coming upon them.

First of all, God reminds them of their heritage. Verses 1 to 3. He says, I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after me in the wilderness in a land not sown. Israel was holiness to the Lord, the firstfruits of his increase.

All that devour him will offend, disaster will come upon them, says the Lord. God remembers their first love for him. The kindness of their youth.

The Lord can look back with fondness upon America's early history as well. James Madison, master builder of the Constitution, fourth president of the United States, said, We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future of all of our political institutions upon the capacity of mankind for self-government.

Upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to sustain ourselves according to the ten commandments of God. John Quincy Adams, on the 45th anniversary of Independence Day, said, The glory of the American Revolution is this. It connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity.

That's the glory of the American Revolution. It put together in this one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity. On Independence Day itself, July 4th, 1776, Samuel Adams said, We have this day restored the sovereign to whom all men ought to be obedient.

And from the rising to the setting of the sun, let his kingdom come. Washington said, The propitious smiles of heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which heaven itself has ordained. Daniel Webster said, Our fathers brought hither their high veneration for the Christian religion.

They journeyed by its light. They labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate and to diffuse its influence through all their institutions, civil, political, and literary.

He also said, Whatever makes men good Christians makes them good citizens. Of the Bible, Lincoln said, It's the best gift God ever gave to man. Andrew Jackson said, That book, sir, is the rock on which our republic rests.

The Bible is worth all the other books that have ever been printed. Patrick Henry said, It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible. Washington said, We see this early love for the Lord in our earliest documents.

The Constitution of the New England Confederation, 1643. Whereas we all came into these parts of America with one of the same end and aim, namely to advance the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ and to enjoy the liberties of the gospel in purity with peace. And it goes on.

Mayflower Compact, signed November 11, 1620, declares that the signers had undertaken for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia. Of course, our Declaration of Independence speaks of a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence. I remember you.

The kindness of your youth. The love of your betrothal. When you went after me in the wilderness, in a land not so.

God goes on to say, What injustice have your fathers found in me that they have gone far from me? Notice the state of affairs. Jeremiah describes the people had become idolaters. Verse five.

They did not seek the Lord Jehovah who delivered them from bondage. Verse six. They defiled his land with their abominations.

Verse seven. And even the religious leaders failed them. Verse eight.

The priests did not say, Where is the Lord? Even the priests did not say, Where is the Lord? Where is Jehovah? The breakdown of spiritual leadership is key. And I'd like to camp here for just a few minutes. Alexis de Tocqueville, attempting to explain to his French countrymen what made the United States unique, reportedly wrote in 1835.

Not until I went to the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame 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.

As many of you know from personal experience, there has been a tragic breakdown among the religious leadership in America. Some years ago, Red Book magazine published the results of a survey of ministers in training. Ministers in seminary training to become pastors.

This survey represented all of America's major seminaries. They found that 56% of those young men in training, young men and women today, 56% rejected the virgin birth of Christ. 71% rejected life after death.

98% rejected the belief that Jesus would return to earth one day. 98% in one of America's largest denominations. One survey indicated that only 5% of her ministers and laity and members, that is, believe that the Bible is inerrant.

Only 5%. That happens to be the denomination that Bible-believing pastors and churches left over 30 years ago to form the PCA. And why they had to leave should be self-evident.

For God says, come out from among them and be separate and touch not the unclean thing and I will receive you and will be a father unto you. And you should be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. God says, have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

Israel and Judah compromised with the pagan religions of their land. They adopted some of their traditions and their practices. They embraced syncretism, pluralism, a little of this, a little of that, syncretism.

There's no reason to be hard-nosed about it. Let's cover all the bases. We can worship Jehovah and we can also worship Dagon.

We can worship the Lord and we can worship Ashtoreth and Baal. Today we're told there are many ways to God. Who are you Christians to say that there's only one way? How can you be so intolerant and judgmental? This is of course the message many of our pastors and priests are giving.

And so it should not surprise us that as we've noted previously, 70% of mainline Protestant churches, 80% of Roman Catholics agree with this statement. Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and others all pray to the same God, even though they use different names for God. Well, believe it or not, now we've taken a step further.

The Seattle Times reported just two weeks ago today, quote, shortly after noon on Fridays, the Reverend Ann Holmes Redding ties on a black headscarf, preparing to pray with her Muslim group on First Hill. On Sunday mornings, Redding puts on the white collar of an Episcopal priest. She does both, she says, because she's Christian and Muslim.

Redding, who until recently was director of faith formation at St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral, has been a priest for more than 20 years. Now she's ready to tell people that for the last 15 months, she's also been a Muslim, drawn to the faith after an introduction to Islamic prayers left her profoundly moved. Her announcement has provoked surprise and bewilderment in many, raising an obvious question, how can someone be both a Christian and a Muslim? But it has drawn other reactions too.

Friends generally say they support her, while religious scholars are mixed. Some say that depending on how one interprets the tenets of the two faiths, it is indeed possible to be both. Others consider the two faiths mutually exclusive.

There are tenets of the faiths that are very, very different, said Kurt Fredrickson, director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena. The most basic would be, what do you do with Jesus? Yeah, I think so. That would be a pretty basic question.

Christianity has historically regarded Jesus as the Son of God and God incarnate, both fully human and fully divine. Muslims, though they regard Jesus as a great prophet, do not see him as divine and do not consider him the Son of God. I don't think it's possible to be both, Fredrickson said, just like you can't be both a Republican and a Democrat.

Redding, who will begin teaching, get this, she will begin teaching the New Testament as a visiting assistant professor at Seattle University this fall. She has a different analogy. I am both Muslim and Christian, just as I'm both an American of African descent and a woman.

I'm 100% both. Redding doesn't feel she has to resolve all the contradictions. People within one religion can't even agree on all the details, she said.

So why would I spend time trying to reconcile all of Christian belief with all of Islam? She says, I could, when I heard those prayers, something spoke to me, and I could not not be a Muslim, she said. Now get this. Her bishop, he's the one who's over her in the Episcopal order, her bishop, the right Reverend Vincent Warner, says he accepts Redding as an Episcopal priest and a Muslim.

And he finds the interfaith possibilities are exciting. Her announcement, first made through a story in her diocese's newspaper, hasn't caused much controversy yet in the Episcopal church, she said. The religious leaders of Israel and Judah compromise God's truth.

Is not America on the same road? The Lord continues in his message to Judah, he says, those who handle the law did not know me. Whether we speak of America's lawgivers or law interpreters, there seem to be fewer and fewer whose decisions indicate that they in fact know God or even acknowledge that there is such a thing as right and wrong or absolute truth. Frederick Moore Vincent, former chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, said nothing is more certain in modern society than the principle that there are no absolutes.

Former Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said truth. Truth is the majority vote of that nation that could lick all the others. Now, why would he say something like that? Because he would also say, quote, I see no reason for attributing to man a significance different in kind from that which belongs to a baboon or a grain of sand.

Think about it. If there are no absolutes, no unchanging truths, if we're no different than a baboon or a grain of sand, then even our Constitution, which the Supreme Court is charged to interpret, can be interpreted to mean whatever prevailing public opinion may require. For example, in the 1960s, the Supreme Court determined that suddenly they realized the Constitution prohibited prayer and Bible reading in our schools.

This they discovered despite the fact that when the Constitution and Bill of Rights were adopted and for a hundred years thereafter, virtually all of our schools began the day with prayer and taught from Scripture. Even Christians today are confused about the First Amendment. Well, doesn't the Constitution require the separation of church and state? What does the Constitution say? Well, here's what it says in its First Amendment.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof. That's the Establishment Clause. Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.

It goes on to say, nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof. In other words, our founders wanted to make sure that America did not end up with a national church. Therefore, they said Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.

They didn't want to have a national church as England had. You've ever heard of the Church of England? It's their national church. In modern English, the First Amendment would read, the federal government shall make no law having anything to do with supporting a national denominational church or prohibiting the free exercise of religion.

Why was that necessary? Because at the time of the ratification of the First Amendment, 1791, many of the colonies were supporting a single church or religion. Justice Hugo Black grudgingly acknowledged in the 1962 decision banning devotional prayer from public schools, quote, indeed, as late as the time of the Revolutionary War, there were established churches in at least eight of the thirteen former colonies and established religions in at least four of the other five. For example, Massachusetts paid the salaries of the congregational ministers in that state until 1833.

Congregationalism was the established church in Massachusetts. Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story wrote, the real object of the amendment was not to countenance, much less to advance Mohammedanism or Judaism or infidelity by prostrating Christianity, having Christianity bow down to these others, but rather to exclude all rivalry among Christian sects. So the Presbyterians weren't lobbying to make it a

Presbyterian country, as we probably would have done, and the Congregationalists weren't trying to make it Congregational, and the Baptists weren't trying to make it a national Baptist church.

He says the intention was to exclude all rivalry among Christian sects and to prevent any national ecclesiastical establishment which would give to a hierarchy the exclusive patronage of the national government. Madison said, Madison, chief architect of the Constitution, the First Amendment was drawn up because the people feared one sect of Christianity might obtain a preeminence, or two might combine together and establish a religion to which they would compel others to conform. Now, you don't need three law degrees and 30 years of legal practice to interpret the First Amendment.

An unbiased American with only a high school education could do a better job than some of these justices. Why? Because they have adopted an evolutionary concept of the law. It's constantly in flux.

It's constantly changing. It doesn't matter to us what the founders meant when they wrote that. What matters to us is how would we like to interpret it for today? We want to get the Bible out of school? That's what they meant.

Even the rulers have transgressed against me. Those who handle the law knew me not, God says, and even the rulers have transgressed against me. John Whitehead notes that over two-thirds of those who've held the office of president have been lawyers or have been connected with the legal profession.

Also, between a half and two-thirds of the seats in Congress have usually been filled with lawyers. Unfortunately, the presuppositional foundation that undergirds the law profession has now been shifted from a Judeo-Christian base to a humanistic one. In other words, not only are we trying to dethrone God, we are putting other gods in His place.

That's what the people of Judah were doing. Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods? In other words, the Philistines, they worship Dagon. They continue to worship Dagon.

They don't change their gods, but my people have changed their glory for what does not profit. Be astonished, O heavens, at this. Be horribly afraid.

Be very desolate, says the Lord. My people have committed two evils. They've forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and have hewn themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

It's bad enough they've turned away from me, but they've adopted these other gods and goddesses. Not only are we trying to dethrone God, we're putting other gods in His place. We may not call them gods, but we're giving them the devotion that we once reserved for God.

The God of materialism, the God of technology, the God of science, the God of human reason, the God of mankind itself. Listen to the Humanist Manifesto. Religious humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created.

We find insufficient evidence for the belief in the existence of a supernatural. As non-theists, we begin with humans, not God, nature, not deity. We can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species.

Now it seems to me, and seems to many, these are religious statements. Thus, humanism is a religion. But it's now legal to teach humanistic tenets in our schools, and illegal to teach Christian ones.

We've forsaken the fountain of living waters, and we have hewn out broken cisterns which can hold no water. Look at verses 20 and following. For of old I've broken your yoke and burst your bonds, and you said I will not transgress.

In other words, God's the one who gave you liberty. I've broken your yoke. It was God who granted us liberty as a people through His providence.

Washington spoke of the war for independence this way. The interposing hand of heaven in the various instances of our extensive preparations for this operation has been most conspicuous and remarkable. The interposing hand of heaven has been most conspicuous and remarkable.

We must remark upon it. In other words, Washington's saying, in verses 23 to 25, the Lord compares Judah with a wild donkey in heat, indiscriminately seeking a partner. Judah had become a society of pleasure seekers, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.

The image of a donkey in heat indiscriminately seeking a partner certainly seems descriptive of our culture, not only in our pursuit of sexual gratification, but in our pursuit of pleasure in general, above our pursuit of God. Verses 26 and 27, he speaks of the fact that they formed gods of wood and stone, and then they worshiped them as if the wood and stone had created them. You say to a tree, you are my father.

You say to a stone, you gave birth to me. Oh, we laugh at such foolishness. Yet we're taught in our schools, in our museums, in our zoos, in our magazines, on nature programs, that we're here because of a chance combination of some random elements, and we're taught it as if it were undisputed fact.

The atheist Sam Harris, in his now popular book, Letter to a Christian Nation, writes, all complex life on earth has developed from simple life forms over billions of years. This is a fact that no longer admits of intelligent dispute. Now, we may dispute it, but not intelligently.

So, are we much different from those who say to a tree, you are my father, or to a stone, you gave birth to me. Think about it. If some explosion out of nothing caused us all, then we can say to that, bang, you are my father.

To that bit of dust, you gave birth to me. William Jennings Bryan was mocked when he said it, but I think he was very much correct when he said, there is no more reason to believe that man descended from some inferior animal than there is to believe that a stately mansion has descended from a small cottage. Verse 34, also on your skirts is found the blood of the lives of the poor innocents.

The Lord has to bring this up. Also on your skirts is found the blood of the lives of the poor innocents. I haven't found it by secret search.

It's not as if I had to study to find it. It's on all these, he says. This is evidently a reference to the pagan practice of child sacrifice.

The pagan practice of child sacrifice that the Israelites, and in this case the people of Judah, the dwellers of Judah, had incorporated into their worship. How heinous, how horrendous can it get? They're sacrificing their children. What about the innocent unborn baby's sacrifice in America? Is there not a parallel? The grisly practice that continues today.

Today, while we're sitting here in comfort, by the end of the day, 3,000 babies will have been killed legally in America. 3,000! The annual numbers have decreased somewhat, for which we can be thankful, but we are still sacrificing upon the altar of the God of unbridled sexual passion. Over 3,000 babies a day.

Over 20,000 a week. Over a million a year. Over 45 million since 1973.

Does not God see this? For the people of Judah, there was only one thing that could spare them from judgment. Look at chapter 3 and verse 12. Go and proclaim these words toward the north and say, Return, backsliding Israel, says the Lord.

I will not cause my anger to fall on you, for I am merciful, says the Lord. I will not remain angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity that you've transgressed against the Lord, your God, and have scattered your charms to alien deities under every green tree that have not obeyed my voice.

America is in need of repentance. America is in need of repentance. It could be argued that it is our greatest need.

But repentance must begin with the people of God. We must ask ourselves, are we lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God? Have not many of us left our first love and turned aside to a love of wealth, a love of comfort, a love of ease? Do we still have a passion for reaching the lost? Do we really believe that they will perish without Christ? The PCA's mission to North America reported a few years ago that 85% of evangelical churches in America are either stagnant or in decline. 85% either stagnant or in decline.

Half of Americans claim to have a church home, but only 34% of them are actually in church on any given week. And think about it, if the statistics that we've quoted about unbelieving ministers are anywhere near accurate, attending the average church is not necessarily supportive of a person's faith. How will America be saved if America is to be saved? One person at a time.

One person at a time. If each believer, if each one of us would get serious about his faith and reach just one other person, if that person who was to be reached with the good news of the gospel responded to Christ and laid hold upon Him by faith and was then disciplined, if he then established a Christian home, taught his children, loved his wife, reached out to his friends, prayed for his grandchildren, etc., we would see monumental changes, a monumental shift in America. Yes, we need to evangelize.

We need to reach men and women, boys and girls with the gospel, with the good news of salvation. But I think it's becoming more clear to me, the older I get, that perhaps as great as the need for evangelism is the need for discipleship, faithful teaching and training in our homes, in our churches, in our schools. I mentioned in a sermon in May that not only did 70% of mainline Protestants and 80% of Roman Catholics agree with that statement I quoted earlier, that Christians, Jews, Muslims, etc., are all praying to the same God, but about half of those who give evidence of being born-again Christians and half of those who attend evangelical churches, churches that preach the gospel, also agreed with the statement.

In May I referred to Michael Horton's radio broadcast, The White Horse Inn. I recently heard an alarming segment of a previously aired broadcast. An interviewer was asking people if they knew what the gospel was.

He's got a microphone. I don't have one here. Do you know what the gospel is? Here are the answers he got from one person.

I think to me the gospel is a message that can be personal to any person. Not something really tangible. Something that you have to find within yourself in whichever means.

Another person. What is the gospel? It is Jesus Christ living in my life every day in every situation and passing that on to everyone else. That's a little better.

What is the gospel? It means you love the Lord and you love yourself and you love other human beings. What must I do to be saved? I guess accept God and do right. How do you define the gospel? Oh goodness, these kinds of questions.

This is why I ask, what kind of questions do you want me to answer? How do you define the gospel? To me the gospel means spreading the word. Okay. And what is the word that you spread? The interviewer asked.

That he believes that he will deliver you from any kind of illness, any sickness, any discomfortment. He will be there in a time of need. He is your all in all.

That's the gospel message he's spreading. What must I do to be saved? The questioner asked. I know I think going to church and frequent confessions and keeping up with your belief and your religion.

Of 60 people who were questioned, only one gave the right answer to what is the gospel. As you might guess, the results were even worse when the questioner asked the question, what is justification? Now this would have been bad enough if the interviewer were just stopping people at random on the street. But all those people who were interviewed were attending the Christian booksellers convention.

The Christian booksellers convention, where presumably you would find Christians. In the last few decades, even American churches that officially embraced the gospel of Christ have put great emphasis upon giving the non-believer what he really wants. Which means replacing meaty sermons with short, simple little talks.

Replacing doctrinally sound hymns with catchy, repetitive music. Introducing drama and dance into worship. And the result is an evangelical church that is woefully ignorant of the word of God.

So parents, have you taught your children the important truths of the word of God? Are they prepared to go out into this culture? Are you modeling a Christian walk in the home? Christian, are you endeavoring to reach your friends, your family, your co-workers with the good news of Christ? Are you praying for their conversion? Are you helping to disciple young believers? Are you humbling yourself and praying and seeking God's face and turning from your wicked ways? If enough Americans do so, then perhaps God will do for us what he promised to do for his nation. Hear from heaven, forgive their sin and heal their land. Father, we see these parallels between us and the people of Israel, the people of Judah.

Lord, we know that this land has been greatly blessed, that we have an abundance of material prosperity. We have enjoyed freedoms that most people in the world will never know. And yet, Lord, it's true that in many ways we have forsaken you, the fountain of living waters.

And we have hewn out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. Father, forgive us, convict us, bring a spirit of revival into this land and may it start in our own hearts. We ask it in Christ's name.

Amen.

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