

“What Are You Going to Give America for Her Birthday?”

I Peter 2:11-17

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July 1, 2001

When is the last time you went to a birthday party that had no presents? I cannot recall. A part of the fun of going to a birthday party is watching the honored guest open his or her presents, especially if the person is forty or fifty and the presents are “thoughtful and timely.”

Our nation is having a birthday this Wednesday. She will be 225 years old. Now that calls for a celebration and parties will be held in every city, town and village. I’m sure many of you will attend one.

What are you going to give America for her birthday? Surely you will not let this momentous occasion pass without a celebration and a gift. Have you thought about what present you will select?

Most of the time when selecting a gift, we usually ask what someone needs. Our selection is based upon their needs. That helps to insure that we select an appropriate and useful gift.

That same logic applies here. Let’s select a gift based upon what America needs. So, what does our nation need? She needs many things and I would like to mention a few.

First of all, America needs people who are good. According to Peter, a person is good in two ways, by doing things that are healthy and refusing to do things that are harmful.

“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us” I Peter 2:11-12.

America needs people who will live by the Golden Rule. Our nation needs citizens who are honest, trustworthy, dependable, respectful, courteous and kind, people who live lovely and attractive lives.

On the other hand, America needs disciplined citizens who refuse to do things contrary to the will of God. Our nation needs citizens who refuse to be deceptive, prejudice, cruel, unjust, corrupt, unforgiving and mean-spirited.

Remember, we are pilgrims passing through this world and are not to live by the world’s standards, but God’s. I am glad, for what makes us good Christians will also make us good citizens of this world, including our country. So, for our nation’s two hundred twenty-fifth birthday, give her the gift of your goodness.

Secondly, America needs people who are responsible. America needs people who make decisions after weighing the consequences. Our country needs people who accept responsibilities with their freedoms and are good stewards of their time, talents and resources.

I believe Peter would concur, because he encouraged his readers to live like free men but use their freedom wisely. Actually, he encouraged them to live as God’s servants and when faced with a decision, ask, “What would Jesus do?”

One cannot read this passage in I Peter without grasping Peter’s concern for community. He strongly encouraged the early Christians to consider the welfare of the

people around them when making decisions. That's acting responsibly and that's what America needs.

America needs people who are compassionate. We live in a time when people are under enormous stress and strain. Pressures and problems are commonplace. Many are at the breaking point and acting out in bizarre ways. This is why we need a country full of Good Samaritans who take seriously the need to become their brother's keeper.

Did you read the letter of gratitude in the Atlanta paper last Saturday written by Adrienne Jacobs? Adrienne, her daughter and infant granddaughter were traveling in Atlanta recently. Their car broke down in the afternoon rush hour traffic. They feared the worse as they thought of every tragic consequence that could happen. To their surprise, the opposite occurred.

Several people stopped and offered help. One was a lady who worked at a nearby restaurant. She left directions to her restaurant after Adrienne declined to go with her because she was afraid to leave her car. Shortly thereafter, a young mother named Melissa pulled over and insisted that this family wait inside her air-conditioned vehicle. She finally persuaded Adrienne to let her drive them to the restaurant that was down the road. When they arrived, the employee who had stopped earlier came running to greet them and seated them in a quiet corner so Adrienne's daughter could attend to her baby. In addition, a delicious meal was brought to them.

In the letter to the editor, Adrienne wrote, "I can't convey how impressed I am at the warmth, concern and compassion that was shown my family and me. It has restored my faith in human nature."

Aren't you glad to know that Atlanta has Good Samaritans? I am and I hope all of us are. This is what our country desperately needs.

You have three more days to think about it. Our nation's birthday is Wednesday. What are you going to get America for her birthday? How about a commitment to be good, responsible and compassionate? I believe it is a gift she will not return.