

Sermon Outline

PURE WHITE: OUR COMMON NEED (REVELATION 7:13-14)

I. What Makes a Nation Great?

- A. What makes a nation great?
 - 1. If your starting point is this age/world, wealth, education, technology, and military power are all valid criteria for what makes a great nation.
 - 2. But if your starting point is the Lord God, then your answer might turn out somewhat differently.
- B. God's perspective is in Proverbs 14:34: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."
- C. Since white is one of the colors of the flag, National Day is a reminder that our nation is only as great as its righteousness.
- D. Revelation 7:13-14 is a reminder that just as Christ was the answer to Israel's sin, Christ is also the answer to Singapore's need for righteousness and purity.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What do you think makes a nation great? What would make Singapore a great nation? (2) According to Proverbs 14:34, what will exalt a nation?

II. Singapore Idol(s)

- A. Let's reflect a little on our social climate here.
- B. In a recent *Straits Times* forum article (Aug 2), a person asked the question: "Is Singapore losing its moral moorings?"
—"What a waste of their bright and promising careers. I am disappointed and disturbed. What has gone wrong and why? Can we prevent their recurrence?... Whatever happened to the traditional Asian values instilled in us as children and while we were growing up? This is the first time in 60 years that I have witnessed so many people, overwhelmingly Singaporeans, caught in a spate of sex scandals within a short span. One must question whether our society is moving towards a lack of moral probity. Is the loosening of conservative rules, illustrated by the acceptance and promotion of activities like bar-top dancing, the reason?..." (*ST Forum*)
- C. According to the author and many others, these problems may be due to...
 - 1. "the loosening of conservative rules"

2. the loss of “the traditional Asian values instilled in us as children...”
- D. If your starting point is with the Lord, you know that the problem is ultimately *sin*.
- E. To be more precise, it’s *sin* in several different directions.
1. The *sin* is on the part of those who did the immoral things and those who have lost their “moral moorings” and “conservative values.”
 2. The *sin* is also on the part of the teachers of conservative values themselves.
 - a. While they imparted a code of conduct, they did not necessarily teach the Law of God or reconcile people to him.
 - b. They also talked as if all moral authority rested on Tradition and Culture.
 - c. They made Tradition into an idol.
- F. Eventually, younger generations came to see that traditional/conservative values were simply *values*.
1. They were not laws from heaven set in stone.
 2. They were simply their parents’ and culture’s (idolized) preferences.
 3. So they rebelled.
 4. The old gods of Tradition and Harmony are being replaced by the new gods of Sexual Liberation, Narcissism, and Secular Humanism.
- G. The younger generations also came to their false gods with some help from their parents and teachers.
1. They were taught from young that career success *is* the supreme goal of life.
 2. Now that they have achieved what their parents and teachers have always wanted for them, does anything else really matter?
- H. The person’s article in *The Straits Times* is tremendously revealing on two sides.
1. It reveals that there is some kind of moral decline going on in our society.
 2. It reveals that for many, the salvation of a decadent society is found in a return to Tradition.
- I. Being a conservative can be good.
1. A conservative is one who conserves the old ways.
 2. If your old ways are the Word of God, well and good.
 3. If your old ways are a mixture of moral principles and cultural preferences, things become more murky.
 4. If you can separate moral principles from cultural preferences, well and good.
 5. But if culture and morality become one in your mind, then we essentially add to God’s Law—and make our culture into a god.
- J. The main problem in our society is a lack of obedience to God; *sin*.
1. On the part of the authorities—pastors, parents, teachers, etc.—*sin* was when we lost sight of our true starting point, God.
 - a. We made a compromise with our culture.

- b. We became satisfied with simply achieving the values of our culture.
 - c. The controlling value in our hearts is really upward mobility, and success, and cultural harmony.
 - d. We gave our children and students up to false gods—the gods of Materialism and Social Conformity.
2. On the part of the students/children, sin is now the rejection of any transcendent moral authority.
- a. Our students/children do not accept our (false) gods—so they reject traditional authority.
 - b. Qualities like virtue and righteousness are now increasingly meaningless concepts.
 - c. The disciples of secularism have finally grown up.
 - d. Our society is now reaping the consequences of our fathers' idolatries.
- K. Is Singapore losing its moral moorings?
- 1. What moral moorings did we have to begin with?
 - 2. If your foundation is not God, then how do you stand?

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does starting with the Lord change our views of society's problems? (2) How did the teachers of our conservative values contribute to moral decline? (3) In what sense should Christians be conservatives? (4) How can Conservatism be dangerous? (5) Is Singapore losing its moral moorings? How would *you* answer this question?

III. In the Last Days (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

- A. Our heavenly Father warns us that this decline in human civilization is inescapable.
—2 Timothy 3:1-5: "...in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless...having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power."
- B. When more and more of our young people believe that morality is merely a cultural product, it only makes sense that they would want to do their own thing.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does the Lord warn us about in 2 Timothy 3:1-5? (2) Where and when have you seen these traits in our society?

IV. Containment Measures

- A. There is still a place for conservative traditions in a society!
 - 1. This place should not be exaggerated.
 - 2. But at the very least, conservatism can buy time for our society.
- B. Singapore has done well in ensuring that conservative principles go into various laws and traditions. Examples:
 - 1. Recognizing that freedom of speech does not mean an unrestrained freedom of expression
 - 2. Filial piety
- C. At the same time, these laws and traditions are not the final solution.
 - 1. At most they are containment measures.
 - 2. The most they can do is restrain bad behavior and provide some semblance of order.
 - 3. They cannot save.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What role can conservative traditions and laws play in a society? (2) What are some examples of useful traditional customs or laws in our society? (3) Why must we not place too much hope on such rules or traditions?

V. The Coming Rule of God

- A. Who alone can save us?
- B. The book of Revelation is a series of visions of the future that God gave to John while he was exiled for his faith on the island of Patmos.
- C. Revelation teaches that only when the Lord Jesus returns will everything be set right.
—11:5: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does the book of Revelation teach? (2) What does Revelation 11:5 teach us about the fate of the nations of the world?

VI. Washed in the Blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:13-14)

- A. John sees a vision of a multitude of people.
 - 1. These were “from every nation” (v 9).
 - 2. These were dressed in white robes and carried palm branches.
- B. The dialogue between the heavenly being and John.
 - 1. One of the heavenly beings ask John: “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” (7:13)

2. John replies: ““Sir, you know.””
 3. The heavenly being responds: ““These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb””
- C. Two facts are told us about this international crowd of people.
1. The first: They are “the ones coming out of the great tribulation.”
 - a. What is this “great tribulation”?
 - i. The great tribulation is the series of trials and judgments that befalls the world when the Lord Jesus opened the seals of Revelation 6.
 - ii. Some believe the great tribulation is a literal seven-year period in the future when Christians will come under persecution.
 - iii. Some hold that the great tribulation was that period of persecution which ended with the fall of Jerusalem or Rome.
 - iv. My preferred view is that the great tribulation is this present day in which we live.
 - b. Whichever view you end up choosing, what is clear is that this international community...
 - i. has survived a time of immense trouble—and emerged victorious.
 - ii. is *all* of God’s people.
 2. The second: They “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”
 - a. These people are those who “have washed their robes” —Which implies that their robes were *not* white to begin with, but stained with sin.
 - b. These people “made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”
 3. Two very important biblical symbols are found here—blood and lamb.
 - a. Blood is the physical symbol of a being’s life-force.
 - b. The lamb is an animal for sacrifice.
 - i. God showed the prophet Isaiah that the coming Savior will function like a sacrificial lamb for Israel.
 - (A) Isaiah 53:7: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like *a lamb* that is led to the slaughter, and like *a sheep* that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”
 - (B) Isaiah 53:5: “But he was pierced *for our transgressions*; he was crushed *for our iniquities*; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.”

- (C) John 1:29: Jesus the Son of God is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1:29).
4. The two symbols come together in a wonderful way: “the blood of the Lamb”
 5. Since the Lamb is the Son of God, his blood has infinite value and can compensate for all sins.
 6. Jesus the Son of God, the ultimate Lamb of God, has died for sinners.
—1 John 4:10 says: “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the *propitiation* [that is, the appeasing sacrifice] for our sins.”
- D. The righteousness for which we long does not come from within us, but from without.
- E. The Good News of God goes against our usual human conditioning.
1. We don’t have to earn our own righteousness; we can be made righteous by the work of another.
 2. When we trust in the death of Christ to cleanse us, God will apply the death of Christ to us.
- F. That’s how the people in John’s vision came to wear white.
1. They have trusted in Jesus to pay for their sins.
 2. In so doing, they washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb.
 3. For that, they will emerge victorious from the great tribulation.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What was the cultural makeup of the people John saw? How were the people dressed? (2) According to the heavenly being, who are these people, clothed in white? (3) What does it imply that the people “have washed their robes”? (4) What is the significance of the symbols of blood and lamb? (5) According to Isaiah 53:5, 7, what will the Lord’s Lamb do? (6) Who is the Lamb in the vision? (7) How did the people make their robes clean and white?

VII. Aspiring to National Greatness

- A. One of our nation’s strengths is its energy and ambitiousness.
- B. But what exactly is the greatness that God most desires from our society?
 1. In Scripture, the Lord does not place much emphasis on many of the things that we do (success, prosperity, etc).
 2. Instead, the Lord says, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4).
- C. Going on his Word, God doesn’t much care if Singapore becomes the educational or athletic capital of South East Asia (!)
—He cares more that we belong to him and do justice to one another.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What are some strengths and virtues you can thank God for about Singapore? (2) What exactly is the greatness that God most desires from our society?

VIII. Singapore Redeemed

- A. Will Singapore attain to this greatness?
- B. God has always desired to bless the nations, not destroy them.
 - 1. Consider the following texts:
 - a. Genesis 12:3: “I will bless those who bless you [Abraham], and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”
 - b. Revelation 11:5: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”
 - c. Revelation 7:9: “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands”
 - 2. A remnant will be saved out of every nation.
 - 3. Singaporean Christians are Singapore redeemed.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What are some strengths and virtues in Singapore for which you thank God? (2) What is the greatness that God most desires from our society? (3) What do Genesis 12:3, Revelation 7:9, and 11:5 suggest about the future of our country?

On National Day, we not only remember our common need for righteousness. We also remember that our common Creator—the true God of the universe—has supplied all our needs in Christ Jesus. We need only to go to Christ and wash our robes in his blood. Christ Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Christ Jesus is the Future of Singapore and the Salvation of all the nations of the world. May the Lord have mercy on our land.