

# A Beacon of Freedom

*by: Ronald L. Dart*

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I listened to the President [George W. Bush] give a speech just last November that was perhaps one of the most important foreign policy statements of any modern President. It was only a thirty minute speech but it had far reaching implications. The strange thing was it didn't seem to get a lot of attention at the time and that's a shame, especially for those of us of a religious persuasion. In this speech, the President raised two fundamental questions that any person who believes in God must answer one way or the other. Let me tell you what they are. The President began with a reference to another speech, this one by Ronald Reagan, "In June of 1982, President Ronald Reagan spoke at Westminster Palace and declared that a turning point had arrived in history. He argued that Soviet Communism had failed precisely because it did not respect its own people; their creativity, their genius and their rights. President Regan said that the day of Soviet tyranny was passing, that freedom had a momentum which would not be halted. A number of critics were dismissive of that speech by the President. Some observers on both sides of the Atlantic pronounced the speech simplistic and naïve, even dangerous. In fact, Ronald Reagan's words were courageous and optimistic and entirely correct."

But who could have thought that at the time, besides Ronald Reagan, of course. It's really hard to grasp what was happening then. There was no way most people could look at the world around them and think what was coming. I know I certainly couldn't have. The idea of the Berlin Wall coming down and the dissolution—I couldn't believe my ears—the dissolution of the Soviet Union. We take it all for granted today, but listen to the summary offered by President Bush of what took place in the years that followed. "The great democratic movement President Regan described was already well under way.

In the early 1970's there were about 40 democracies in the world. By the middle of that decade, Portugal and Spain and Greece had held free elections. Soon, there were new democracies in Latin America and free institutions were spreading in Korea, Taiwan and East Asia. This very week in 1989 there were protests in East Berlin and in Leipzig. By the end of that year, every Communist dictatorship in Central America had collapsed. Within another year the South African government released Nelson Mandela. Four years later he was elected president of his country. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century ended, there were around 120 democracies in the world." Think of that. From the beginning of the 1970's there were 40 democracies. As the century ended, 120 democracies. "Ronald Reagan would be pleased and he would not be surprised. We have witnessed, in a little over a generation, the swiftest advance of freedom in the 2500-year history of democracy."

It's staggering when you think about it, isn't it? But it's manifestly the truth, no one can deny it. It's out there for anybody to find. There were 40 democracies around 1970 and by the end of the century there 120. It raises a fascinating question. What do you suppose the world would be like today if, in the 1930's, the United States had remained isolationist and had left Europe under the heel of Hitler and had left Asia to the tender mercies of the Japanese Empire? And said, "Our business is just business, we're not going to worry about what's going on over there. We'll protect our shores. The rest of you can just have to look out for yourself"? What on earth would the world look like today if we had done that?

President Bush continued, "Historians in the future will offer their own explanations for why this happened. Yet we already know some of the reasons they will cite. It's no accident that the rise of so many democracies took place in a time when the world's most influential nation was itself a democracy." The President went on to cite examples of why this was so and then he said this: "Historians in the future will reflect on an extraordinary, undeniable fact: over time free nations grow stronger and dictatorships grow weaker." It's true that Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul played important roles in the fall of the Soviet Union. But the biggest role was played by history. Then President Bush said this, and it brings us to the first of the questions I want to ask. "Liberty is both the plan of heaven for humanity and the best hope for progress here on earth."

Is that true? Is liberty the plan of heaven for humanity? President Bush continued, "The sacrifice of Americans has not always been recognized or appreciated. Yet they have been worthwhile. Because we and our allies were steadfast, Germany and Japan are democratic nations that no longer threaten the world. A global nuclear standoff with the Soviet Union ended peacefully as did the Soviet Union. The nations of Europe are moving toward unity; not dividing into armed camps and descending into genocide. Every nation has learned, or should have learned, an important lesson. Freedom is worth fighting for, dying for and standing for. And the advance of freedom leads to peace. And now we must apply that lesson in our own time. We've reached another great turning point and the resolve we show will shape the next stage of the world democratic movement." What a staggering thing he's telling us here; that the advance of freedom leads to peace. It reminds me of something that Tom Freedman wrote in his book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*. He said, "No two nations that have a McDonalds have ever gone to war against one another." It's true, you know.

Later in his speech, the President said something very revealing about himself and about how he sees this country. He said, "Therefore the United States has adopted a new policy, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East. This strategy requires the same persistence and energy and idealism we have shown before and it will yield the same results. As in Europe, as in Asia, as in every region of the world, the advance of freedom leads to peace. The advance of freedom is the calling of our time. It is the calling of our country."

And that raises the second big question we have to deal with. The first question was: Is it true that liberty is the plan of heaven for humanity? And the second is this: Is it true that the advance of freedom is the calling of our time? Is it the calling of our country? As citizens of this country and as believers in God we have a duty to address these questions. Ours is a government of the people, by the people and for the people, remember? And since we are the people, then I have to conclude that God will hold us all accountable for what our nation eventually does. So question number one: is it true that liberty is the plan of heaven for humanity?

Luke records for us an incident in the ministry of Jesus. It is in fact the first recorded message of Jesus in a synagogue. In a way, it is Jesus' mission statement. "He went in to the synagogue and they delivered to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened it up and found a place where it was written, and he read, 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.'" Do you understand what he's talking about here? He is talking about that part of the Law of God where there is a year of release. Debts are canceled, people are set free, the slaves are released, it is a time of maximum freedom. And Jesus is saying, "That's what I'm here for." He closed the book, gave it back to the minister and sat down and the eyes of everyone in synagogue were fastened on him. And he said to them, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." What Jesus was about was freedom.

Paul will later write to the Romans in chapter eight, verse 20, "For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." The whole objective of this is that eventually the entire creation will be made free and this freedom will be brought to it by the children of God. On another occasion, in writing to the Corinthians, Paul says, "Now the Lord is that spirit and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3). There can be no doubt that freedom is indeed the plan of heaven for mankind. So we have answered the first question.

What about the second question? Is it true that the advance of freedom is the calling of our time; it is the calling of our country? Now you have to ask the question "What was the President referring to? Was he talking about the calling of God or the calling of history?" Perhaps it doesn't matter.

The founding fathers said in the Declaration of Independence, "We do hold these truths to be self evident. That all men are created equal and are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights." The founding fathers stated in the first official document of our nation that our rights and our freedoms are granted, not by men, not by power, but by God. And we laid the foundation of the laws of this nation on those rights. In a way, we made a covenant with God in our founding. Through the years of our history, we have

become the wealthiest and most powerful nation the world has ever seen. And unlike the great empires of the past, our nation has a commitment to freedom and the rights of man. Rights we declared were given by God and were the right of every man, every where. And we need to consider the obligations that fall to us with the wealth and the power that we have in our hands. When you have the power, when you have the means in your hand to do something about the freedom of people, how can you withhold your hand from giving it? There's a statement in the book of Proverbs, chapter three, verse 27, "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due when it is in the power of your hand to do it. Don't say to your neighbor, go and come again and tomorrow I will give." Do it now, the proverb tells.

Then I'm reminded of the story of Abraham, a remarkable man, in a very real sense, the father of all the faithful. The story is found in Genesis 14:8, "And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar;) and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim." And in this battle the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah lost, and lost badly. "And their enemies took with them all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, all their food and went away." They also took captives. "They took Lot, Abraham's brother's son, his goods and they departed. Now there came one that got away and he told Abraham what had happened. Well, Abraham, when he heard his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, 318, and pursued them to Dan."

Now think about that for a moment. Here's a man who's got servants in his hand of fighting age, 318 of them that work for him, and they go out to fight against these assembled armies. He split his men into two parts against them, he and the servants, by night and they smote them and pursued them to Hobah. He brought back all the goods: Lot, the goods and all the women they had taken captive and all the people. So here comes Abraham back from this battle with all the goods, all the possessive of Sodom and Gomorrah, he's taken it all back. By international law, if you want to put it that way, by the common law of the time, all that was now his. By the rights of salvage or whatever it may be. They had taken it, Abraham got it back.

Now as he comes down here, Melchizedek, king of Salem comes out to meet him and bless him. And Abraham paid tithes of every bit of this stuff to Melchizedek who was a representative of God. Why'd he do that? Well, Melchizedek came and blessed him and said, "Blessed be the most high God who delivered your enemies into your hand." In other words, Abraham said, "God gave me this victory, he is entitled to 10% of everything I brought back." It belonged to him at this time. He could do that. It was the right thing for him to do. But then he did something interesting. The king of Sodom, "Would you please return to us the people and keep the goods to yourself?" And Abraham said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted up my hand to the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread to a shoe latchet, I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abraham rich.' I'm only going to take what the young men have

eaten and the portion of the men that went with me.” Well, that’s fascinating. What Abraham did was give it all back.

Now here’s my question: was Abraham a blessing to Sodom and Gomorrah? Of course he was. It’s a fulfillment of something that God had told Abraham on more than one occasion. On one of them, Genesis 22:15, “The angel of the Lord called Abraham out of heaven, the second time and he said, ‘By myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have not withheld your son, your only son, in blessing I will bless you. In multiplying I will multiply our seed as the stars of heaven.’ Abraham’s children were going to be enormous in number. They were going to be like the sand on the seashore in multitude. “And your children, your seed, shall possess the gate of his enemies and in your seed, your children, shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice.”

Now how many ways are there that the nations of the earth could be blessed by the children of Abraham? Well, we just saw one. We saw how that Abraham went out and protected them by force of arms and brought their people back and set them free. Abraham delivered freedom to the men of Sodom and Gomorrah from the hands of their enemies by intervening militarily on their behalf. Sure, Paul, in the New Testament, cites the seed of Abraham being Christ and in Christ all nations would be blessed, but that’s not the only way this is to be taken. It’s plain that it’s also talking about Abraham’s children. It was God’s intent that Israel be a beacon of freedom in the world and that the nations of the earth would be blessed by their presence. And like it or not, in the modern world, that burden has fallen on the English speaking people of the world. We carry the burden of Abraham to be a blessing to the nations. We are a beacon of freedom and we are the only nation with the power to project freedom wherever we choose to project it. How on earth could we ever refuse?

Not everyone in our country wants to do this though, and that’s why I felt compelled to address this question from a Christian perspective. But there’s a sad note that comes with this. I think we have answered these questions. Yes, freedom is really the gift for all mankind, it is the plan of heaven for mankind. And yes, freedom and the projection of freedom is the calling of our country for this age. Because, you see, the blessing of God carries with it certain obligations. In Deuteronomy 28, God has this to say, “It shall come to pass if you will diligently hearken unto the voice of the Lord your God to observe to do all the commandments which I command you this day, that the Lord your God will set you on high, above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come on you and overtake you if you will just listen to the voice of the Lord your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the fruit of the ground, the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your cattle and the flocks and sheep. Blessed shall be your basket and your store. Blessed shall you be when you come in, blessed shall you be when you go out. The Lord will cause your enemies to rise up against you to be smitten before your face. They’ll come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways.” And for us it has been just like that for all this time. And there is a Scripture that goes

on to say, "Because you served not the Lord with gladness and joy of heart for the abundance of all things, you will serve your enemies" in ways that are going to be far less pleasant than this.

I said that we had assumed the burden of the children of Abraham but we are their heirs in ways less pleasant. The prophet Isaiah wrote, he said, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for I have brought up children and they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his owner, the ass his masters crib. But Israel? They don't know. My people don't even consider." A stupid animal can find his way home, but not my people. "Ah, sinful nation! A people loaded with iniquity. A seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters. They have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger. They have gone away backward." Now does this have results? Does this kind of turning way from God, this throwing of God out of public life, this forsaking of him and refusing to acknowledge him as the source of every good thing that's happened to us...does that have consequences? God asks, "Why would you be stricken anymore? You revolt more and more. The whole head is sick. The whole heart is faint. From the bottom of your foot to the head there is no soundness but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores. They haven't been closed up or bound up or mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire, your land strangers devour in your presence and it is desolate overthrown by strangers." It's terrible! What he's telling us is simply this: if you turn your back on God, as candidly all too many people in our country are doing, there are consequences for that that are going to come down on your head.

Does it have to turn out this way? Is there no reversing of the trend? I don't know. But there have been times in history when the trend has been reversed. And as our nation is the only nation with the power to project freedom into the world, as far as I can see we are the only people, we Christians, to project the truth of God into our society. How can we refuse? God in history has left us this burden. How can we not make every effort to turn this thing around? Oh sure, Christ is going to return. Christ is going to put down all human government and Christ is going to bring in a wonderful new world tomorrow. But in the mean time, are we supposed to sit on our hands and say nothing and do nothing? Is God going to say, as he said once before to Israel, "I look for a man to stand in the gap, I look for somebody who would stand up and tell the truth to power, and I couldn't find anyone." And frankly, if we're not going to do it, who will? And if not now, when will we do it?

Let me remind you of what Paul said in Romans 8:16, "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. If we're children then we're heirs. We're heirs of God, join heirs with Christ if so be that we suffer with him that we may also be glorified together." Why would we need to suffer with Christ? Well, if you read through Paul you'll begin to understand that it's because Paul stood up for what was right. Paul took the gospel where it needed to go. Paul preached the gospel in the face of opposition. He didn't roll over for people. And so consequently, there was suffering to do for Christ's sake.

What are we supposed to do? Are we supposed to sit around and keep our mouth shut because it's dangerous to speak out? I reckon Paul said that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us for the earnest expectation of the creation waits for the manifestation of the sons of God." What Paul is saying folks, The world is waiting for us. "The creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who subjected the same in hope because the creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." That's our mission and one really wonders, if that's our mission, shouldn't we be about it now?

Paul wrote to the Corinthians saying, "Seeing then that we have such hope we use great plainness of speech." We don't put a veil over this like Moses had to do with the children of Israel. Their minds were blinded for until this day the same veil remains untaken away in their reading of the Old Testament. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is on their heart. Nevertheless, when they turn to God the veil shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that spirit and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. I think we've answered our questions. Liberty is the will of God for mankind; it is his plan for mankind. And it is our duty to project that liberty by word and by deed wherever the spirit of God leads us.

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