

OpenTheo

The Meaning of America

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Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

For this special Independence Day bonus episode, Kevin goes solo to talk about what America means and how Christians should relate to our nation. The most contentious debates that we currently have are about history, and we can't agree on which story to tell about America. Kevin examines two books that approach this problem of America's story differently. Are they incompatible? Which way do you take?

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John Piper pleads for preachers to make the supremacy of God the bracing air of their sermons. He longs to see a new generation of preachers, and a revived band of seasoned brothers, set aflame with the grandeur of God—his glory as the goal of preaching, his cross as the ground of preaching, his Spirit as the power of preaching. It is fitting that *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* now appears in hardcover for the first time. It has proven to be an enduring work through the decades.

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Timestamps:

Revised and Expanded Piper [0:00 - 1:22]

What we disagree about is history. [1:22 - 6:52]

Is there such a thing as an American? [6:52 - 10:58]

Book 1: Covenant, Crucible, Creed [10:58 - 23:49]

Book 2: Celebration and Criticism [23:49 - 30:57]

6 Quick Thoughts [30:57 - 46:47]

Books and Everything:

After Nationalism: Being American in an Age of Division, by Samuel Goldman

Land of Hope: An Invitation to the Great American Story, by Wilfred McClay

Transcript

[Music] Greetings and salutations, this is Kevin Young and you are listening to life and books and everything. This is a special summer episode and it's me flying solo for what I think will be a little bit more of an abbreviated time together. We are brought to you as always by Crossway grateful for their partnership in sponsoring life and books and everything and want to come into you today.

The revised and updated version of John Piper's book, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, which is being released soon by Crossway. Definitely, and I'm eager to see the revised expanded version, but certainly the older version is definitely top five of my most best preaching books that I've read. So I'm really looking forward to this new one, so do check out John Piper with a glowing blurb from Sinclair Ferguson calling it one of the few must read books when it comes to preaching.

So I'd like us to think a bit and as we are coming to the 4th of July holiday here in America, and I know we have people listening from outside of the United States, and hopefully there may be something still beneficial as you listen to me, talk about a couple of books and do some rumination on the meaning of America. That's what I want to talk about, the meaning of America. It seems to me that to a large degree, many of the most contentious debates in our society at the moment have to do with history.

We may not know that we're debating history, but we are. They have to do with the story that we tell ourselves, the story that we tell our children, the story that we pass on in our schools. What is the story of America? And just to put it in very extreme terms, perhaps the received story for many, many years was a story of great triumph moving from strength to strength and perhaps a few unfortunate blemishes here and there.

But we did away with slavery with the Civil War and Martin Luther King Jr. in the Civil Rights Movement, did away with the remaining oppression towards African Americans. There's some, the Trail of Tears and Native Americans is not a glowing mark, but for the most part, a story of heroes, a story of virtue, a story of liberty, of freedom from tyranny, and maybe depending upon your upbringing, even a great story of God's providence, maybe God's covenanted people, American exceptionalism. So, a story that we should be proud of as Americans.

And one that is filled with all sorts of heroes and virtues and ingenuity and something speaking to the great American character. Don't tread on me. And if there are bad guys,

because almost every story needs bad guys and good guys, the bad guys are outside of ourselves.

The bad guys are King George and the British and then we come to like the British and we watch down to Naby. And we follow the Royals too much. Hey, didn't we have a revolution to not pay attention to what the Royals do, but you know, the British.

That's why for a long time, all the bad guys in movies, if they were sort of highfalutin bad guys, they had British accents. They speak of Imperial authority, and then maybe depending on how you learn the Civil War, maybe the the southern earth defending slavery some in the south learn that the north were the bad guys, but for the most part it's people outside of here. The British and then you fight into World Wars and you fight the Nazis and you fight fascism.

So we have stories of heroism here and fighting perhaps different periods of ignorance and some benighted views and people in our own shores, but there's much to celebrate that that's one version of America. Another version on the other polarity is to tell a story largely almost entirely of oppressors and oppressed and the villains. They are us or they're at least mostly white males.

And the story of America is the story of great atrocity, the story of great tyranny from our own people and mistreating those who were not male mistreating those who were not white, and the whole litany of crimes and atrocities against humanity and there would be evidence for this telling of the story. Jim Crow and slavery and the Trail of Tears and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. And that version of America is a version that we ought not to be proud of, but in a twist, and Shelby Steele writes about this and several of his books, there was a twist in the 1960s and 70s and moving on that in order to disassociate that if you disassociate yourself with that older American story, it did win you a certain hearing.

There was a virtue in itself in decrying all of the vices of America. Now, that's putting it very crudely, those two stories of America, the story of America that is largely a story of triumph with notable points of evil scattered throughout, but a story of great heroism and courage and freedom and the gift of liberty to the world, or a story that, yes, of course, there are good things, but the story that's been mainly one of the oppressors and those in power, wielding their power at the expense of others. Of course, it's a long history and there's lots that can be said, and so it's not hard to find evidence of either of those two narratives.

All of that is just preface to say that so much of why there are often such viscerally strong reactions to some momentary cultural flashmoins, because really, we're arguing about the meaning of our own history and what doesn't mean to be an American. And is there even such thing as being an American? And if you sort of think about if it's your own family history, so try to sympathize for a moment with both of those meta

narratives I've sketched out. So, on the one hand, if you're talking about your family and anyone, if you're honest about your family, you know as well as anyone, what the imperfections are, you know how dad got too angry, you know how mom didn't do this very well and the kids weren't respectful, you're so you know your family's not perfect, but it is your family and you love your family and you're proud to be a part of your family.

And so if people come along and they say, you know what your whole family story is about, is about what rotten people you are. And it's about how you treated everyone else and your family story is really not about the noble things that you did. It's not worth celebrating.

In fact, the best thing we can do is tell people and apologize for your family. Well, you can see how that's going to elicit a strong negative response. And on the other hand, if someone says, well look, all I've ever heard about is your family is so great.

And how your family, we've heard all the famous stories and how your family brought the meals to the new neighbors and your family got the neighbors and your family built this town by the sweat of their brow. Well, what about the time that your family stole from the people on the other side of town? What about the time when your family lied? And you're not telling the real story about your family. And in fact, your family story is not actually my family story.

And your family story was at the expense of my own family's story. Well, then you can sympathize that to just want everyone to sing and celebrate that family story seems not just strange and ill fitting but distasteful. And so, Colin, Justin, I've talked about before.

They're not here to agree or disagree with me. But when it comes to these symbolic gestures, which are often so ambiguous, say kneeling during the National Anthem, what is that? What does that sign mean? Well, we're not just debating about kneeling or not. We're talking about a whole way of viewing our history and then you put in, well, what does that say about the military? So for some people, it's a way of saying we don't agree with the story of America has unfolded for all sorts of people.

And for others to kneel there during the National Anthem, patriotic moment with the unfurling of the flag is to say, you don't respect this family story. And in fact, this story that is about noble sacrifice and this story that I can point to where my grandfather or my father or my great-grandfather fought to preserve what's good and right in noble. So, you can see, we're not just pulling in one or two cultural flashpoints but a whole way of viewing our own identity and our own history as Americans.

One of our informal slogans is E Pluribus Unum, out of many one but more and more. It's not so certain that there is an Unum. And as we'll see in just a moment, they're somewhat argue, there never has been.

So I want to talk about two books, won't spend a ton of time here and I'll finish with a few rambling thoughts. That's redundant when you're on a podcast. The first book, which just came out, is called *After Nationalism, Being American in an Age of Division* by Samuel Goldman.

Samuel Goldman teaches Political Science and Executive Director at the Lohr Institute for Religious Freedom at the George Washington University. So, *After Nationalism, Being American in an Age of Division*. It's not a long book.

It's 125 pages before you get to the end notes. What does he mean by "after nationalism"? Well, he says we live after nationalism in the sense that our public discourse is characterized by appeals to various and potentially incompatible conceptions of the nation. That's what he means.

After nationalism, we do not have a shared sense of national identity. What's helpful in this book, and we'll get to his prescription in a moment, but there is a helpful heuristic device or pedagogical device, you might say, that he says there have been throughout American history. There have been basically three ways of understanding who we are and what it means to be American.

They all can be described with a C word. So, there's "Confident, Crucible, and Creed." What's really good in a short book like this, that will stick with you. And of course, lots of scholars can say, "Well, that's not nuanced enough, but yeah, it's going to stick with you, and it's helpful to think.

These three things." So, one way of viewing American identity has been covenant. They said this was largely the Puritans of New England, understood themselves to be in a unique relationship in a covenant with God, that the American people have an errand into the wilderness. Now, you may say, "Well, that's just a really conservative Puritans, but it wasn't just that.

It morphed into certain strands of 19th, 20th century progressivism, old mainline liberalism, any sort of idea of a people who have a special mission from God, and perhaps earlier it's to be a city on a hill, but others it might be to be a civilizing influence or to rid the country of alcohol. There is this covenant idea. That's what it means to be an American.

And Goldman says, "Well, that has very little purchase power today, not very many people, even among Christians." Though, I just read a book that came out recently, re-exploring this idea of covenant. And if you think of covenant just most broadly as a people accountable to God, that's certainly true. But not many people are trying to make that explicit religious case.

So he says, "It requires a high degree of theological consensus." That's a challenge. And

it also is a characteristic vision of a virtuous society which is very limiting when you become an increasingly diverse people. So he says this covenant idea has often been most resonant with WAS, white Anglo-Saxon Protestants and with Yankees up in New England or in the upper Midwest.

But he does say that there are certain parts of it that are worth considering. It provided a well-ordered nation, revolved around shared prosperity. It sketched out a sense of religious guidance for the nation.

It put together a disparate group of people, although they weren't very disparate from our vantage point, with this sort of singularity of purpose. So that's one view is a covenant. This is a crucible.

Think of a crucible as a melting pot. That's really what he means, but see word crucible, things being crushed and pounded together. So that's another view of America.

This great tapestry. It was a melting pot, but then melting pot seemed like, well, you lose your own identity as you're melted down into something else. So maybe a salad bowl, you still retain your own identity, or maybe a patchwork quilt.

So there's different kind of metaphors, but he says that in this idea of a crucible, there's something about a nation of immigrants. We all come from different places, but we come together and we experience life as Americans and we come together. Maybe as an orchestra in each of us, we're stronger for playing our own part and sort of a celebration of diversity.

Now, you might say, well, that has some more purchase power. People today like multiculturalism like diversity. And yet if we look at this throughout history, Goldman argues, it's been a broken crucible because it wasn't just African Americans or Native Americans who weren't really here and being brought in as a kind of melting pot.

Or playing a part in the symphony. But throughout history, it's other sort of Europeans. People that now just get lumped together as white, but when it was Italians or Poles or Irish or even at different times Germans and later in the 20th century Asians.

So it's been a pretty patchy record. And you can't just say, well, those darn conservatives know many times it was progressive ideas. Sometimes it was different labor leaders who wanted to keep out people from other parts of the world, maybe as cheaper labor force or held discriminatory views toward them.

So you have this idea of a crucible, which he said again, there's there's something to it of coming from many different places. And yet he said it's never really had a sterling record. The next group thrown into the crucible has always been a painful one.

And then finally, creed, and what he means by the creed is what we might find in the

Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. And these are the ideals worth fighting for. We the people in order to form a more perfect union.

And we hold these truths to be self evident and over time certain other documents are added to the creed. The Gettysburg Address Martin Luther King, Jr. speech. We have a dream that to be American is to believe in this creed of equality.

This kind of civic nationalism, this aspiration to be whoever you can be to live a life of freedom. Says again, for many, many years, this was taken for granted. And yet he says we have often fought wars over these undeclared creedal principles sometimes for good reason and other times he says for less noble reasons.

This creed, he argues, is increasingly not enough to hold us together, especially when some would argue that those founding documents were written with duplicity. You can argue about that. I actually think they were written by men who believed in those ideals, but were very flawed and holding to those ideals.

So one of his critiques of all three of these views, and this is his fourth chapter, he calls memory nostalgia and narrative, that we tend to look into the past with a very rosy eyed. And that's true for most of us. Now we'll look into other people's past, but whatever we consider to be our past.

So if our family story is America, or if you think, well, your family story is the civil rights movement, or your family story is Calvin and Geneva, or your family story is the period, whatever you identify, kind of those are my people. Well, you know, it's not that hard, doesn't cost you anything. You may be an American, but if you're real, your more important identity is as a Scottish Presbyterian, then, eh, yeah, it doesn't mean that you're not going to be a Christian.

Yeah, it doesn't cost you that much to point out other people's problems and other people's families. But whatever your family identity is, it becomes very painful and difficult, which is why we resort to nostalgia. We want things to look good.

We have this kind of homesickness for the past as we imagine that it must have been. So what does he offer as a way forward? I found those three C's to be very helpful. It can stick with you.

Covenant, crucible, creed, just three different ways. I don't think they have to be mutually contradictory, but three different ways of viewing what it means to be an American. When it gets to the way forward, he argues that we ought to be a community of communities.

A variety of overlapping, sometimes contending groups that reflect and cultivate different conceptions of identity responsibility and purpose. In other words, he argues for a kind but aggressive pluralism. Let's have an open public square and he says, look, we

just had to be realistic.

We have over 300 million people. We don't have a shared identity. We have many identities.

We have many different communities. And so if you have a class based organization, if you have associational freedom, if religious community, various political institutions, let those institutions and those communities be strengthened. Let them have as much freedom as possible and let them contend vigorously for their views of identity.

And as we do that, then with our own unwieldy diversity, perhaps we can find a way. And perhaps he says that's really what America is about, is finding a way in the midst of all of our competing constituencies to still somehow do life together, which seems to me falling back a little bit on the crucible idea. So he's certainly on to something.

We do have to face the country that we live in, not the one that we wish we did. And he's certainly true. There are, we can all see this.

There are many, many competing ideologies, identities, tribal factions. We are a community of communities. And I do appreciate his encouragement that we should let those communities have as much autonomy and freedom and strength as they can.

And so find your identity as a reformed Christian in America and contend for that with others and why that identity matters is important. So there's something to that. And yet, I couldn't help but finish the book is interesting and helpful as it was, it parts feel like, is that enough? Is there more, must there be more? Is it really possible in the long run? Maybe he would just say the long run is coming to an end.

Is it really possible to have, even with 300 million people, you need, don't you need some group identity? Is it possible to have to say that being American means really, it means that we all agree to compete with each other on what it means to be American? Don't we need something of a shared story? Something of a shared identity? Aren't we facing some really dystopian events ahead if we have nothing of a shared history? And so that leads me to the second book, *Land of Hope, An Invitation to the Great American Story* by Wilfred McClay. It may sound like this is very, that he and Goldman would disagree entirely. I don't know if they would.

Goldman does quote from McClay a couple of times in his smaller book, but this book by Wilfred McClay came out a year or two ago. It's a American history textbook, probably for college freshman high school students. It's a big, thick, heavy book, 400 plus big pages.

But it reads really well. And I've read other things that McClay has written. He is a professor at University of Oklahoma.

And he tells this story of America. And you can hear in the title sort of where he's going. Land of Hope and Invitation to the Great American Story.

So some people right away would say, "Ah, no. How can you even, what an audacious title?" But what I really appreciate about McClay's book here is he says at the outset and he says all throughout the book, look, we need to be honest with our own failures as a country. We need to tell the truth about our own story.

And so there are many points in which he may celebrate certain individual. I think of his chapter on World War II where he says, "Yes, things we did wrong, strategical errors, things that were racist at home." And yet he does say on the whole, it was an event of great self-sacrifice by millions of people in the United States for ends that were not immediately seen for their own sakes. But were for the sake of others.

So there's many instances like that where he is willing to say, "Look, here is something very good about America, about the American character." And yet he points out the list of abuses, whether it's the way that the U.S. government treated Native Americans at various points. And of course slavery and Jim Crow. And look, those aren't the only two ways to sin.

Those aren't the only ways that a national people can sin. That's what we tend to think of. Nations sin by racism and by social injustice.

Well, there's lots of other ways too. But what I so appreciate about the book is he tries to really do both, not one or the other. And he tells a story.

It's well written. It's almost elegant prose at times. I'm sure some people would say it's too much of a traditional textbook.

It focuses on leading men and focuses on presidents and military generals and major events. And yet I think the rather straightforward way of telling the story is a strength rather than a weakness and tries to draw in others who may not fit in the Mount Rushmore pantheon of heroes and tries to tell all of that as part of the American story. I just want to read what he says in his epilogue, which is really a beautiful closing to the book where he discusses what it means to talk about American patriotism and being American.

And I think he's right that we must have some national identity. There must be some story that we tell that we more or less agree on. We may not agree on all the particulars.

We may not agree. What's the major key and the minor key, but there must be some story that we tell about ourselves. He says this book is offered as a contribution to the making of American citizens.

As such, it is a patriotic endeavor as well as a scholarly one and it never loses sight of

what there is to celebrate and cherish in the American achievement. That doesn't mean it is an uncritical celebration. The two things celebration and criticism are not necessarily enemies.

He says a little bit later, we should not take these aspects of our country for granted. He's talking about the freedoms that we enjoy in our form of government and our constitution and the ways in which we are open to self criticism. He said we should not take these aspects for granted.

They have not been the condition of most human associations throughout most of human history. They do not automatically perpetuate themselves. That is really important.

It is very easy to think. This is just the default way. If only we could be so much better because this is sort of default to have a bill of rights, to have a constitution, to have elective representative, to have a right to trial by jury of your peers, to have a system of appeals, to be innocent until proven guilty.

This is just sort of the way things are. When you look at history, no, this is a very unique arrangement just because it's become common in the last 250 years. It doesn't mean it has been at all common in the history of the world.

We tend to take for granted all the things that are good and we only see the things that are broken or don't seem to be working or haven't worked for everyone like they should have. One of the questions we must always ask is compared to what? Okay, you want this would be better. Okay.

Or what we have rather is broken and here's okay compared to what? So where's the utopia? Where is the heaven on earth? It's certainly not in America, but you always have to say compared to what? So I appreciate the way that he tries to argue that this country is a land of hope and yet we are honest about our own failing. So just go to the last page. He says, "This conversation to be a real and honest one must include the good, the bad and the ugly.

The ways we have failed and fallen short, not merely what is pleasing to our national self-esteem, but by the same token, the great story, the thread that we share should not be lost, and a blizzard of details, or a hailstorm of rebukes. This is and remains a land of hope, a land to which much of the rest of the world longs to come." That would be another episode to try to defend that conclusion, but I confess that I resonate with it. So let me just conclude with a few thoughts thinking about this as Christians, because as I've written before, we need to be careful.

We're talking about something as difficult as American history. You can fill in the blank with your own country, many of which are much older than America. We don't want to

make a certain view of American history, an unwritten requirement for communion, whether literal communion or just fellowship, in our churches.

That's not a requirement. You must have a view of America. You must have the right interpretation of American history, or you are not welcome in the body of Christ.

That is adding to Scripture. So that's a caution. At the same time, speaking for myself and my church, we are in America.

We live in America. And we can't help but have to come to some conclusions and talk about these things. And so how do we do so, and how do we think through these issues in a way that might be helpful? Here are six quick thoughts.

Number one, let's look at our history and add without always subtracting. What I mean is we should be eager to add great stories from some white man. And if for much of American history, the contributions from non-white men have been neglected, then let's add.

Now I know sometimes it is a zero-sum game. You have a textbook and only can be so many pages long. You can't put in everything.

You have to make those choices. But as we just have a conversation, as we just talk, as we just learn and celebrate, let's continue to learn and to add to those stories. And jazz, folk music, rock and roll music, coming out of the fusion of African-American experience and other rivulets flowing.

This is part of what it means to be America. A lot of us think our own experience. We have that's real America.

Real America is the prairies, the countryside. Real America is New York City. Well, there's a lot of real Americas.

And we can learn more and we can add without always having to subtract or making everything a zero-sum conversation. To add in the triumphs and the experiences of minorities, of immigrants, you can add them without always, and therefore, this is why these bad guys are even worse than we ever thought. So add, without always subtracting.

Two, let's be committed as whether we're talking about academic historians or just armchair historians. I said this before. Let's be committed to do neither hagiography nor ha-martiography, hagiography, hagi-o-saints.

That's one version of history. We just look at the, we just present everyone as saints and George Washington never told a lie and wouldn't chop down the cherry tree and the founding fathers were a noble pantheon of enlightened men. And it's all hagiography.

But on the other hand, people see that and they go to hagiography. All we can see are flaws. All we can talk about are people's inconsistencies.

All we can talk about. We only see, instead of looking at people's warts and all, we look at people only warts, nothing else. We can do nothing else but talk about their warts.

And if we're honest, oftentimes, people trade one hagiography for another. I mean, this could happen if you were Catholic and you became Protestant. Or if you were, Baptist and became Anglican, you grew up with one view of America and then you came to see, oh, that's very bad.

And then you celebrate the African-American experience in America, and you trade one hagiography for another. And you end up not really doing justice to either. So our goal as reasonable people doing history, and this is my third point, is, and this is quoting a famous quote from Quentin Skinner, and that school of historiography and intellectual history in particular, seeing things their way.

As a historian, people even dabbling in history, we want to try to see things there. Now, that doesn't mean we have to agree. That doesn't mean at the end of the day we can't say, well, I tried to understand where they were coming from, and you know what, it was wrong, it was hypocritical.

Here's what we learned from it. But I do think this is not just good history, but this is part of what it means to do history as Christians. We want to love our neighbors as ourselves, even our dead neighbors, especially those who are fellow brothers.

Who are fellow believers, we don't always know, some clearly weren't. But I hope when I get to heaven, anybody that I've written about historically, I hope if I saw them, they would say, I think you were really doing the best you could to try to understand who I am, who I was. We owe that.

And so often, people who, just because you have a PhD in history doesn't mean you really have an interest in doing this. And it could be history about our founding fathers, or it could be history about somebody who's still alive today, or history that took place in the 1980s and 1990s. And there's no effort to really try to see things that way.

No effort to try to say, well, what was the totality of their vision, or what were they really about? Or let's put this quotation in context, or let's try to understand this one errant statement, or this one blind spot in the broader scope of everything they did and said, no, we just can find the one. You can find the one thing, ding them for it, and move on. That is not doing history as Christians ought to do history, which is to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Wouldn't you want someone to do history on your life someday? If you're properly self-reflective and humble, you would say, well, no, don't present me as walking on sunshine

and moving from triumph to triumph, I was a sinner. But do try to be fair and try to be honest, and don't just cherry pick the worst things you can about me. So let's try to see things their way.

Tell the truth. Love our neighbors. Here's number four.

Let's do history with the proper anthropology and Christology. What I mean by that is a proper anthropology tells us that there is good and bad in each of us. That doesn't mean we just have to be relativists and say, well, everyone's just some good, some bad.

There are people in the history of the world that have had a lot more good and a lot more bad. There's somebody like Winston Churchill who has a long list. I'm speaking outside of America, obviously, a long list of faults.

He was vain. He was ambitious. He made tactical errors.

He could be impossible to work with. And yet his strengths and his genius and what he accomplished and what he prevented in the world, though he wasn't a Christian ought to overshadow that in a spiritual sense, but looking historically. So it doesn't mean we just say everyone's 50% good, 50% bad.

But as I say, with the proper anthropology, we know people are made in the image of God. They're capable of great things, and they're capable of great evil. And every single person has been a sinner.

Every single person has had clay feet. So that's a proper anthropology and then a proper Christology. So there's good and bad in each of us, and there's only one final hero.

Now, we're going to have heroes, and it's not wrong to have heroes. We see in the New Testament, they look back at those men and women of great faith. You have to have heroes.

We have permission in the Bible to have heroes besides Jesus, as long as we understand the only final hero, the only one who gets it all right is Jesus. So if the hero is MLK or Abraham Lincoln or George Washington or Frederick Douglass or Thomas Jefferson or John Witherspoon, and you find something about that hero, which shows him to be a sinner, and you find yourself absolutely furious with rage. And that's a sign that probably wasn't just a hero, it was a knighthole.

That's what we feel like when our goddesses are put to death. So let's have a proper anthropology, a proper Christology. Number five, I'm almost done.

Let's celebrate virtue where we find it and lament and condemn vice where we find it. So what I mean by that is when they're heroic actions of great courage, of bravery, of

genius, of ingenuity, let's celebrate it. And let's celebrate the virtue and let's lament the vice rather than celebrate the color first of all, or lament the color first of all.

I want to present history in such a way that whether the people in history looked sort of like I do or not, had dutch last names or not, if there's vice, even if their last name was a d'young, I'm going to be able to say I tried to understand that and it was wrong and it's lamentable. And where there's virtue and there's true nobility of character and sacrifice and courage and standing up for the good and the true and the beautiful, then let's celebrate it. So again, let's make the virtue and the vice ring out, not that sort of blood, that sort of skin, that sort of person, because that way of telling history, it feels good for a moment and it will, it will inevitably make things worse, not better.

Because as soon as you start telling that way, instead of aspiring, because you see, I can aspire to be more courageous, then I can aspire to noble things, and by God's grace I can grow into them. I can aspire to be a different race, a different ethnicity. So if you lock people into a virtue or you lock them into a vice and lock them out of a virtue, pretty soon they're going to say, "Oh, oh, well, that's how you play the game?" Well, let me tell you what my tribe, what my people are really like.

This isn't to say that any sort of ethnic identity or celebration is wrong, clearly it's not. Celebrate African American heritage. My family was always proud to be Dutch and lots of places across the country have tulip time festivals and celebrate Dutch heritage.

I wanted to leave those things behind, but shouldn't lock people into to be Dutch, is truly to be virtuous, or to be Dutch is truly to be one of the bad guys instead of the good guys. That's not the way to accurately tell history, and it's not the way in the end that's really going to be beneficial to people or to our country. And then finally, should be obvious, but we recall that we're dual citizens.

That means our earthly citizenship is not irrelevant. I am an American. I think it's good to be proud to be an American.

I hope if you're listening, you're proud from some other place. You're proud to be Brazilian or Mexican or Canadian or Scotsman. I'm proud to be an American, and I will enter into heaven as an American.

And yet that earthly citizenship must, must pale so much in comparison to my heavenly citizenship. And if I find that my, so here's what I say, if I find that I can much more easily connect with my earthly citizenship, and in fact that's my great passion, greater than to advance the interests of my heavenly citizenship. And I find much more in common with those people who share that than my heavenly citizenship and something's wrong.

The church is the outpost, is an embassy of that heavenly kingdom. So the church is to advance the interests of a king from another land, abiding by that king's rules to

advance his interests in this foreign land. So just as you're an American embassy in London, you say, well, I want to be respectful as much as I can, and take in the sights and be happy here to live in London and understand what Londoners are like.

But if I'm true as an American ambassador, I'm here to advance the interests of my home country. Visiting here, it's a nice place to visit, and I learned to love some things. But this is not what I'm ultimately about.

And it's that way with our dual citizenship. So my fellow Americans, I hope you have a great 4th of July. Great Independence Day.

My British friends, you can insert whatever joke you want to now about us unruly Americans. It's too late to apologize. You can go Google the video and watch it.

So we have things to be proud of as Americans. I think it's quite right that we would celebrate the independence of our country as people all around the world do. And as we keep it in proper focus with our dual citizenship, I think a proper kind of patriotism in its place can be healthy.

And as we look together and think together about our own history and what it means to be an American, and of course we're not going to agree on it. That's established. But if we can show as Christians a way to love one another, to speak the truth, not just to each other, but about one another, and perhaps to bend the ear to listen.

And maybe there is just something we can recover about our shared history and identity. As Americans, second, and as Christians first. Thanks for listening.

Have a great holiday and until next time, or if I got to enjoy them forever and read a good book.

[music] [Silence]