

America, You Were Born for More

Nations are not eternal. They are born, and they will all eventually die. Even in my own lifetime, I've watched wars and revolutions redraw the maps of Europe and Africa a few times. Countries like Rhodesia and Czechoslovakia have passed into the history books while new names appear on the United Nations member list. Doubtless this process will continue into the foreseeable future.

But the lifespan of a nation is not always what it seems. During the late 7th century, it looked like the sun might be setting on the Byzantine Empire, headquartered in modern Turkey. Arab Muslims swept through North Africa and the Middle East, conquering more territory more quickly than anyone since Alexander the Great nearly a thousand years earlier. The Byzantine Christians lost huge swaths of their territory in just a few years. Their capital Constantinople was besieged incessantly. But in the end, the empire would endure another seven hundred years before finally falling to the Ottomans in 1453.

It is easy to feel discouraged about our nation's future right now. Our national debt is burgeoning out of control, and most of our elected leaders seem determined to avoid dealing with it. The out-of-wedlock birthrate is climbing, destabilizing our families. Abroad, I am tempted to agree with a former vice president who observed that our enemies no longer fear us and our friends no longer trust us. Many worry with good reason that our elected officials no longer possess the moral clarity or courage to face down those who would seek to weaken or to destroy us.

But I believe that America was born for more than what we have already achieved, and I do not believe our time is up just

yet. At the time of our founding, we overthrew the greatest empire in the world to gain our independence. Ordinary men and women risked their lives and fortunes for the opportunity to perform an experiment in liberty: could human beings really govern themselves, instead of living at the whim of a dictator or king?

Over the ensuing decades, our principles and our constitution were tested to their limits. In time, our nation began to live up to its ideals more completely, extending full citizenship rights to individuals regardless of race or gender. We survived a bloody civil war and two world wars to become the most prosperous and powerful nation on earth. Our constitution became a blueprint for countless new nations that shared our belief in human dignity and freedom.

But there is still more we can do and be, if we can remember the reason we were born in the first place. We can continue to be a beacon of hope and an example of peace, prosperity and good government. We can still be a light to the world.

When I received my cancer diagnosis in 2005, I was given a 10% chance of survival. But I had been born for more than I had accomplished so far. In my latest book, I talk in detail about my journey from the brink of death to a life more abundant than I could have imagined. In some ways, my greatest challenges seemed to strike just as I was on the brink of being used for greater works than I could have ever dreamed. Could the dark times facing our nation really be just a prelude of greater things to come?

Just as our nation faces uncertainty and danger, I believe many of our citizens face the same in their individual lives. Personal finances, relationships and careers can all reach points of crisis in the blink of an eye. Most of us have supportive friends and family, but even the best people will fail us at times. There were many instances during my illness when I did not feel God's presence. It seemed as though my

prayers were going unanswered and the whole world was oblivious to my pain.

But this has also been part of the human experience from the beginning of time. Whether great leaders of the past or great saints from the Bible, all have experienced dark times where God feels so very far away. But we can find encouragement by reading the trials and triumphs of those who have gone before us. Often we discovered they faced threats even larger and more frightening than those that face us today. And the good news is that God is always faithful. And there is always hope, as long as we hope in Him.

Harry R. Jackson Jr. *is senior pastor of 3,000-member Hope Christian Church in the nation's capital. Jackson, who earned an MBA from Harvard, is a best-selling author and popular conference speaker. He leads the High-Impact Leadership Coalition.*