

Franklin Graham Issues Urgent Admonition Lest America Self-Destruct

America has a new president and vice president. I believe their inauguration can be the turning of a page in American history, an opportunity to alter the atmosphere in Washington and have an impact on the nation's direction. Many have prayed for America to be given that opportunity, and God granted it.

Donald Trump, like all leaders, is not without flaws, but I believe he will be willing to listen. That's important. He has made several good Cabinet choices that will help bring strong leadership to our nation.

I have known Mike Pence, the vice president, for some time—he has a deep faith, with a firm commitment to God and His Word. I pray that these two men will stand up to the secular humanistic agenda that has been taking hold in this country. I am honored to have been invited to participate in the inauguration, and I'm thankful that the ceremony included prayer and the reading of God's Word.

As God's people, this is not a time to stand down or drop our guard. Powerful forces are opposing any change of direction. Our new leaders need wisdom, strength and guidance from Almighty God. The Bible says, "*Pray without ceasing*" (1 Thess. 5:17). For our nation and its future, that admonition never had more urgency. Our faith and hope is in God, not human leaders.

In the Bible, we read of a pattern that repeated itself over and over in Israel's history. The nation would lose its focus on God and become accommodating toward sin. That led to God's judgment and troubled times. When the people humbled themselves, repented and cried out fervently to God in prayer

for help, He responded by giving them a fresh opportunity. But before long, the people of Israel would relax and once again lose their focus on obedience to God.

Let's not allow that cycle to develop on our watch. We must keep praying not only for America and its leaders, but also for our churches, for spiritual awakening across the land, and for people who need Jesus Christ. And we must make sure our own hearts and lives are fully committed and obedient to God.

The Bible promises that *"The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much"* (James 5:16). We can easily overlook the first part of that same verse, which begins, *"Confess your sins ..."* At every prayer rally on last year's Decision America Tour, on the grounds of every state capitol, God's people who gathered to pray for the nation first confessed sin—their own sin, sin in their family and the sinful ways of our nation. God heard and responded. Ask God to continue stirring a spirit of repentance, along with prayer, throughout our land.

I recently returned from a visit to Iraq, where Christians have suffered greatly. The brutal murder of believers has become commonplace, and hundreds of thousands of Christians in Iraq have been forced to flee their homes in the last few years because of the actions of fundamentalist Islam. A sobering new study reports that around the world, in just the last 12 months, 90,000 believers have been killed because of their commitment to Jesus Christ—that's one person every six minutes. Vastly more believers are being persecuted in ways that seldom or never get much news coverage. Another study reports that a half-billion Christians today live in circumstances where they are prohibited from freely expressing their faith.

That's why I'll be back in Washington in May to host the World Summit in Defense of Persecuted Christians. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association is sponsoring this critical international event to put a spotlight on the persecution of

our suffering brothers and sisters in Christ around the globe, and to stir up prayer and action to help alleviate their plight. We are expecting 600 delegates from at least 130 countries and territories, including victims of persecution, advocates for religious liberty, and men and women experienced in ministering to the oppressed and persecuted. This is an unprecedented gathering.

We need your prayers for the summit, and for the delegates. Many will take a risk in coming and speaking out publicly. Many are from places where Christians live in poverty—they and their local churches are unable to pay for the trip. We count on friends like you to help cover the cost, because we want to show these faithful fellow believers that we stand with them and are praying for them, and we want the worldwide church to hear and know what is happening.

I'll be in Puerto Rico next month to preach at a Crusade in San Juan, the capital city. I would appreciate your prayers for our team. Ask God to give the churches and Christians of Puerto Rico a boldness as they invite unsaved loved ones and friends to hear the gospel. The following month, I will lead an evangelistic crusade in Vancouver, Canada.

Although many people in America are hopeful about the political change that began with the recent elections, what America ultimately needs is spiritual change—a transformation that starts in individual hearts. Last year, God led us to hold prayer rallies and proclaim the message of the gospel in the capital cities of all 50 states. Thousands gave their lives to Jesus Christ. Now God has given me a burden to go back, this time to preach in medium and smaller cities across states and regions.

We will start this May with the Decision America 2017 Tennessee Tour, taking the gospel from the Mississippi River to the Great Smoky Mountains, with stops in four cities. Later in the year, we'll go to seven cities across Texas, and we'll

do the same in more states next year. As God enables, I hope to go back to every state with the gospel. {eoa}

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