

American Family

Whatever happened to the American Dream?

What is “the American Dream?” For most, it’s a comfortable home and financial security.
 Current state of the American Dream – many fear it is fading.
 Historical review is a common practice in Biblical preaching.
 History = His story

America – unique in history

- 224 years under the same constitution
 - France has 15 constitutions since
 - Poland has 7 since 1917
 - Russia 4 since 1917
 - Afghan 5 since 1923
- Has never used it’s super power status to annex nations.
- Strongest economy (for much of it’s history) – 4% of population, 31% of GDP
 - If you live under the poverty level in American, you’re more likely to own a phone, TV, AC, auto, eat more red meat, have more sq. feet living space than the average middle class in Europe

Beginning of the American Dream

1. Early definition – religious and economic freedom
 - The best of the Puritan reformation in England came our way in the Pilgrims
 - Mayflower Compact – “covenant”
 - From religious people came important values – equality, hard work, honesty, generosity, and self control.
 - From the Biblical value of equality came the dominant American ethic – freedom.
 - Declaration of Independence – *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*
 - First Amendment to the Constitution – *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof*
 - John Adams wrote in 1765, *I always consider the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scene and design in Providence for the illumination of the ignorant, and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth.*
2. From these values came economic prosperity
 - Alexis DeToqueville’s observations (1835) Democracy in America. It has been described as “the most comprehensive and penetrating analysis of the relationship between character and society in America that has ever been written.
 - *I sought for the key to the greatness and genius of America in her harbors and her ample rivers ...; in her fertile fields and boundless forests ...; in her rich mines and vast world commerce ...; in her public school system and institutions of learning. I sought for it in her democratic Congress and in her matchless Constitution.*
 - *Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power.*

- *There is no country in the whole world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America, and there can be no greater proof of its utility and of its conformity to human nature than that its influence is powerfully felt over the most enlightened and free nation of the earth.*

The American Dream unravels

John Wesley

*“Wherever riches have increased, the essence of religion has decreased in the same proportion. Therefore I do not see how it is possible, in the nature of things, for any revival of true religion to continue long. For **religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality**, and these **cannot but produce riches**. But, as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and the love of the world in all its branches.”*

He ended up with this exhortation,

- *“Earn all you can, give all you can, save all you can”*

Roaring Twenties

- In Scott Donaldson’s article, *“The foundations of the Protestant ethic were subverted, replacing the values of hard work and thrifty abstinence with a show of luxury and idleness.”*
- *The American Dream went from an idea that anyone could achieve success in this country through hard work and perseverance, to an idea that one needs to keep accumulating material wealth in the quest for happiness and fulfillment.*
- The Stock Market crash and Great Depression temporarily curbed America’s appetite for self indulgence and brought about a return to conservative values – hard work, ethics, etc.

These cycles of diligence, prosperity, compromise, decline, and then restoration have continued since.

Most recent is 2007-2008

- Housing bubble and bust
- Large unemployment.

American Dream restored

- Corporately and individually, we have to go back to the beginning:
 - *“**We have this day restored the Sovereign** to Whom all men ought to be obedient. He reigns in Heaven and from the rising to the setting of the sun, let His kingdom come”. Samuel Adams, known as “The Father of the American Revolution”, at the signing of the Declaration*
- ★ The American Dream was originally built around God – “restoring the Sovereign”

Matt. 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Scripture references: Deut. 8:11-18; Prov. 10:4, 12:24; Psalms 19:9; 25:14; 111:10; Matt. 22:37-40