

Introduction

Today, I'm going to preach about "The Best Idea." I've taken the title from a 1994 essay that a political scientist named Francis Fukuyama wrote, which caused quite a stir in academic circles.

Fukuyama says that ideas are the driving force of history. A nation takes hold of a good idea and organizes its institutions and life around it. That nation then becomes what is called "**a lead society.**" It takes center stage in the world and becomes the dominant force in history. But its leadership role is only temporary. Another nation eventually takes hold of a better idea and it becomes the lead society. According to Fukuyama, history is nothing more than a succession nations, each taking hold of a better idea than the one before it.

History unfolded that way, he says, until America was born. What happened was that it came up with the best possible idea. There are no ideas left that are better than the one it has articulated and achieved. Consequently, it marks the end of history. It's a permanent lead society. It will never be replaced. The future will be what America is now.

That's Fukuyama's thesis in a nutshell. But is he right? Is America's the best idea? Let's take a look at Daniel 2:19-23 and the United States Constitution and find out.

The God of History and Wisdom

Let's start with the word "**mystery**" in verse 19. It refers to a dream that King Nebuchadnezzar had. Daniel needed to know two things: what the dream was and what it meant. So he prayed and asked for God's help and He gave it. He revealed both the dream and its meaning to him. Daniel then blessed Him because He did in verses 20-23. This blessing of his teaches us two remarkable things about God.

One is found in the first and second lines of verse 21. Daniel declares that God "**changes the times and epochs.**" He is, in other words, the God of history. History isn't just a series of random events

that are going nowhere. It's something that God guides and directs instead. Daniel identifies one of the ways that He does, "**He removes and establishes kings.**" Think of any historical leader, like Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, George Washington, or Adolph Hitler. Those and all leaders gained and lost power by God's permissive or active will. He allowed the circumstances that led to their rise and fall or caused them. Not one rose or fell apart from His will. That demonstrates something about Him. He is the God of history.

Daniel's blessing teaches us another thing about Him. Verse 22 states that He knows things that human beings can't discover for themselves. And that He reveals some of those things to them, for example, the dream and its meaning to Daniel. Or that there is eternal life after death to us. The third and fourth lines in verse 21 make a related point. He gives wisdom and knowledge to those who have it. If people have those, it's because He gave them to them. He is, in other words, the God of wisdom and knowledge.

But it's wisdom that I want us to focus on this morning. J.I. Packer defines it as well as I've ever heard it defined: "**Wisdom is the power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the surest way of achieving it.**" His definition shows that wisdom has three aspects. First, we recognize what the worthiest aim is in a given context. Second, we recognize the optimal (best) means for achieving it. And third, we pursue those means.

That is wisdom and as verse 21c-d makes clear, God isn't only the God of history, He's the God of wisdom as well. If people have it, it's because He gave it to them.

The Aims of the Constitution

Which explains the United States Constitution. I've told you, I think, that attorneys and physicians have a sort of running competition about whose profession is the noblest. Attorneys sometimes tell physicians in that regard: "**While physicians were still bleeding**

people with leeches, attorneys were drafting the greatest political document in human history.” The document to which they’re referring of course is the United States Constitution. But is what they say true? Is it the greatest political document ever drafted? Let’s attempt to answer that by applying the definition of wisdom to it.

First, does it recognize what the worthiest aims are in its relevant context, human society? The Declaration of Independence tells us what those aims are. They’re the **“unalienable Rights”** (capital “R”) that the Creator God bestows upon all people, which include **“life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”** Well, the Constitution recognizes those rights in its Preamble. Listen as I read it: **“We the people of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States.”** That Preamble articulates the aims or objectives that the Constitution seeks to achieve. And believe me, they’re the worthiest possible in the context of human society.

The Means of the Constitution

Now let’s apply the second aspect of wisdom to the Constitution. Does it recognize the optimal means for achieving its aims? We answer that by analyzing its **“architecture.”** Its architecture is the **“structure”** that its original seven articles, without the Bill of Rights, set forth. That structure has two animating principles.

One is federalism. Federalism means that the powers of the government are divided between the federal government and the states. Those powers are divided in this way.

First, the federal government ***can do nothing*** unless a specific provision in the Constitution authorizes it. If no provision authorizes it, it can’t do it. If one does, it can. The United States, for instance, owes \$14.5 trillion in debt. Is it constitutional for the federal government to

borrow money. Yes, because Article I, Section 8, Clause 2, gives it the power to do that: **“The Congress shall have the power To borrow Money on the credit of the United States.”** If that provision weren't there, the federal government couldn't borrow money.

The powers of the government are divided another way. The state governments *can do anything* unless a specific provision in the Constitution prohibits it. If no provision prohibits it, they can do it. If one doesn't, they can't. Is it constitutional, for instance, for states to impose trade barriers on one another? No, because Article I, Section 8, Clause 3, “the commerce clause,” reserves that power exclusively to Congress, which impliedly prohibits the states from doing it. If that provision weren't there, the states could impose trade barriers on one another, which would create chaos if they did.

You now know generally what federalism is. The powers of the government are divided between the federal government and the states. That is one animating principle of the Constitution's structure.

Another is the separation of powers. Separation of powers means that each branch of the federal government – legislative, executive, and judicial – has its own distinct responsibilities, yet is subject to the checks and balances of the other two branches. The President, for instance, can veto legislation passed by Congress. But Congress can override the veto with a supermajority vote of two-thirds of the voting members of each house. The separation of powers achieves several goals. It prevents concentration of power, which is the root of tyranny. It also provides each branch with weapons to fight off encroachment by the other two branches. The Father of the Constitution, James Madison, summed it up this way in Federalist Papers 51, **“Ambition must be made to counteract ambition.”** Separation of powers is designed to maximize not efficiency but freedom – and does.

I've just touched the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the architecture or structure of our Constitution. But it's enough for me to make this point. Not only does it recognize the worthiest of aims, it

recognizes and establishes the optimal means for achieving them.

That is supreme wisdom and explains why I said what I said. The United States Constitution is the greatest political document ever drafted. It's a work of sheer genius and I'm not exaggerating. It's the best idea - one that, according to 2:21, God Himself gave its signers.

The Pursuit of the Constitution

Now lets move to the third aspect of wisdom. The first two speak to the Constitution. The third speaks to us. Are we pursuing its means for achieving its ends? Or to ask it another way, are we being faithful to it?

After the Constitutional Convention had completed its work, a woman approached Benjamin Franklin and asked, "**Well, Dr. Franklin, what have you given us?**" To which he replied, "**You have a republic Madame, if you can keep it.**" That is our concern isn't it – keeping the incredible freedoms we have. But there's only one way we can keep them. It's by being faithful to the Constitution.

What does that mean though – to be faithful to the Constitution? That question raises one of the most hotly debated issues in America today – the resolution of which will determine the course of its future. Is the Constitution an "**enduring**" document or a "**living**" document?

Some Americans believe it's an enduring document. They argue that human rights are natural rights (God-given) and are fixed and unchanging because they are. The original meanings and principles that the Constitution's signers intended, therefore, are written in stone. They can't be changed except in the way that it provides, by amendment.

Other Americans believe it's a living document. They argue that human rights are historical rights (evolutionary) and are dynamic and changing because they are. The original meanings and principles that the Constitution's signers intended, therefore, are written in sand. They can and should be changed, updated, as the times dictate. That change is affected in two ways: (1) Judges, in the cases before them, interpret the Constitution to mean what they think it should mean; or (2) Congress and

the President read “**implied powers**” into it that aren’t actually there.

Whether Americans take the Constitution to be an enduring or living document is going to decide a whole host of practical issues. Take President Obama’s national health care plan as an example of that. Is health care a human right in the same way that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are? Does the Constitution give the federal government the power to establish a national health care law? If so, where does it? How our elected officials and we view human rights and the Constitution determines how they and we answer those questions.

So, which of the two views is faithful to the Constitution. In my opinion, it’s the first. I see it as an enduring document. Now, I’m not suggesting that you need to see it the way I do. But I am suggesting that you need to do what I’ve done, which is three things. First, get informed. Learn as much as you can about the two views. Second, based on what you’ve learned, embrace one of them with conviction/passion. And third, act (vote, witness, and lobby) accordingly.

There is a necessary first step in doing those things. It’s to read and understand the Constitution. One of the biggest misconceptions people have is that it’s a document for lawyers and judges. It’s not! In *The Federalist Papers*, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay made it clear for whom it was written - the populace, the masses, like you and me. The Constitution is short, straightforward, and clear-cut. With a few exceptions here and there, legal and technical terms are absent from it. Consequently, each of us can and should read and understand it. It’s our very first responsibility in being faithful to it.

Conclusion

When my son Moses enlisted in the Marines, he took an oath, the opening words of which are these: “**I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States.**” The truth is all of us should make that same commitment, to support and defend the Constitution. Why? Because it’s the best idea.