

RECOGNIZING OUR COUNTRY'S
250th Anniversary

Part 1 • June 28, 2026 | Pastor Jason Smotherman

HOME OF THE BRAVE?

Most Americans know the first verse of The Star-Spangled Banner. We stand, we place our hands over our hearts, we sing it before football games and school assemblies, but very few people know the whole story behind it.

In September of 1814, a 35-year-old lawyer and amateur poet named Francis Scott Key boarded a British ship during the War of 1812 to negotiate the release of an American prisoner.

The negotiations were successful, but there was a problem. Because Francis Scott Key had overheard British battle plans, he and his companions were not allowed to return to shore. They were detained on a ship several miles away while the British prepared to bombard Battle of Baltimore and attack Fort McHenry.

All night long he watched. Some accounts say that for twenty-five hours bombs exploded. Rockets filled the sky. Cannons shook the harbor. Smoke covered the battlefield.

There were moments he could no longer see the fort, and the only evidence that it was still standing was an occasional glimpse of a flag illuminated by the explosions.

Can you imagine that? Every flash of light asking a question. Every explosion asking a question. Is it still standing? Did we survive? Have we made it through the night? Then, when the smoke began to clear at dawn, Francis Scott Key saw something unexpected. The enormous American flag was still flying over the fort.

And in that moment he grabbed an envelope from his pocket and began writing words that would eventually become our national anthem.

But here's what many people don't realize. The line we sing is not a declaration. It's actually a question.

*"O say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?"*

For nearly 250 years we've sung it like a statement. But Francis Scott Key wrote it as a question. A nation was being asked something. Will freedom remain? Will courage endure? Will we still be brave enough to stand?

Because being the "land of the free" has never been guaranteed. And being the "home of the brave" has never been automatic.

So every generation must answer that question for itself. Are we still home of the brave? The second is why we are constantly battling the secularists in our country who want to pretend that God hasn't been the source of blessing for our country.

There are four verses, not one. And the final verse points directly to God.

Listen to these words:

*"Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: 'In God is our trust.'
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave."*

Somewhere along the way, we kept the flag, part of the anthem, but we forgot the motto. We preserved the celebration, but neglected the foundation.

America 250, for me, is not simply about looking backward with nostalgia. It's about asking a question.

- Are we still the people God has called us to be?
- Are we stewarding the blessings we've been given?
- Are we brave enough to stand for truth?

We understand that throughout our history, corrective behavior was a must if our nation were to continue. Slavery, the chief example of this. The Civil war was fought to right these wrongs of injustice.

Currently the genocide of babies being aborted in America is another sin we must answer for. According the World Health Organization, around 73 million babies are aborted every year. According to the most recent numbers, 1,126,000 million babies were aborted in America in 2025.

Throughout America's history, whenever the nation drifted spiritually, God raised up men and women who called people back to Him. In the 1730s and 1740s, God used men like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield to spark the First Great Awakening, preaching the necessity of salvation and a personal encounter with Christ. In the early 1800s, leaders like Charles Finney carried revival across the frontier through camp meetings and evangelistic crusades, leading thousands to faith and inspiring movements in missions and social reform. Later, evangelists such as Dwight L. Moody helped fuel the Third Great Awakening, stirring prayer, evangelism, and a renewed commitment to reaching the world with the Gospel. Time and again, when people became comfortable, God poured out His Spirit and reminded His Church that we were made for more than religion, we were made for revival.

Then in 1906, in a rundown building on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, God did it again. Under the leadership of William J. Seymour, people from different races, backgrounds, and denominations gathered together seeking God. What followed was a powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit marked by salvation, healing, speaking in tongues, and a renewed passion for missions. From that humble prayer meeting, the Pentecostal movement spread around the world, impacting hundreds of millions of people. It is a reminder that God is not looking for impressive buildings or

influential people: He is looking for hungry hearts.

The story of the Great Awakenings is really the story of a God who refuses to leave His people where they are. Every awakening began when ordinary people became desperate for an extraordinary move of God. The question is not whether God can do it again, history has already answered that. The question is whether this generation will hunger for His presence the way those generations did. If God could send revival to the colonies, to the frontier, to the cities, and to a little mission on Azusa Street, then He can send revival to our church, our city, and our generation. The God of awakening has not changed.

Every 100 years or so, our nation was baptized in renewal and revival, except for our generation. There has been hot spots for sure, but an awakening needs to be in our nation once again.

Maybe the greatest question is this: When God looks at His people in America today, does He still find a people courageous enough to be called "the home of the brave?"

Pastors who will stand with courage and not bow. Believer's who will give God more than a tip of their time.

As America celebrates 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the Church has an opportunity to remind people that while nations rise and fall, God's purposes remain eternal.

We can celebrate America without worshiping America. We honor what God has done and still is doing while remembering our ultimate citizenship is in heaven.

PSALM 33:12 (NKJV)

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He has chosen as His own inheritance.

This can be a catalyst to remember and return. Nations drift when generations forget. The greatest threat to a nation is not an enemy from without but forgetfulness from within.

Israel repeatedly experienced this cycle. God blesses. People prosper. People forget. People drift. God calls them back.

America is not Israel, but the principle remains true.

Two hundred and fifty years is significant. Empires have come and gone. Kingdoms have risen and fallen. Flags have changed. Borders have shifted. Yet here we stand. A nation that has experienced extraordinary blessing.

The question isn't whether America has been blessed. The question is whether we've remembered the Source of the blessing.

The danger of prosperity is amnesia.

Comfort has a way of convincing us that we built what God actually gave us. Moses warned Israel:

DEUTERONOMY 8:13-14

and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase

and all you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God

Forgetfulness is often the first step toward spiritual decline.

POINT 1: PROSPERITY IS A TEST, NOT A TROPHY

DEUTERONOMY 8:17-20

¹⁷ You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." ¹⁸ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

¹⁹ If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. ²⁰ Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God.

Prosperity is not proof of our greatness. Prosperity is a test of our gratitude. God never intended blessing to produce arrogance. He intended blessing to produce worship.

Questions: Are we grateful? Are we humble? Are we dependent upon God?

Prosperity without gratitude creates pride. Prosperity with gratitude creates worship.

POINT 2: EVERY GENERATION MUST ENCOUNTER GOD FOR THEMSELVES

JUDGES 2:10

...there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord..."

Inheritance is powerful. But inheritance alone is insufficient. You cannot inherit an encounter. You cannot inherit revival. You cannot inherit conviction. Every generation must personally know God. We cannot assume because churches exist that disciples exist.

The Church's assignment is not merely preservation. It is transmission.

POINT 3: RETURN BEGINS WITH REPENTANCE

2 CHRONICLES 7:14 "If My people..."

Revival does not begin in Washington. It begins in God's house.

The prescription is simple: Humble ourselves. Pray. Seek His face. Turn from wickedness. God promises to hear, forgive, and heal. God has always worked through surrendered people.

Don't just celebrate 250 years of American history. Ask yourself: What kind of spiritual inheritance are we leaving behind?

The future of America will not be determined solely by politicians. It will be influenced by parents. Pastors. Grandparents. Teachers. Ordinary believers who faithfully live for Christ.

An awakening is needed in our country. God pick us!