If you care about the world, you have to care about America. If you have the idea that, “America is going to hell and it’ll be good for America, the church will thrive under persecution,” that’s not a Biblical view. It’s like being glad that somebody is suffering because it will be good for their soul. We don’t rejoice in suffering, we want to help people. We need to care about this country and then we can care about the world. You’ve always known that America is a beacon of freedom to the world. It’s basically been our mission to be a blessing to the world. I would argue that God has mightily blessed this nation specifically so we can be a blessing to the world. In fact, we have exported freedoms to the world. We’ve sent treasure and we’ve spilled blood on foreign fields. That is who we are, and it’s the idea upon which we were founded.

We are being Hollowed Out from Within

I’ve just written a book called If You Can Keep It. I’ve never felt as passionate about anything I have written before. That includes my Bonhoeffer book. I feel like a man on a mission with this book because our country is in serious danger of becoming America in name only. Sometimes you face an existential crisis and you can see it for what it is. The Revolutionary War was an existential crisis. This is a different kind of existential crisis. We’re being hollowed out from within. We are not having our freedoms taken away at gunpoint, we are allowing them to evaporate, and we are becoming America in name only.

And that will be the greatest tragedy in the history of the world because we have been blessed beyond all measure for purposes beyond our own shores. We have been a beacon of freedom to people around the world, people in
Franklin came out of the building, a woman said to him, "Actually, they knew it might fail. In fact, when Benjamin spoke those words that Franklin spoke, "If you can keep it," were chilling because for about 200 years, rather miraculously, we kept it very well. It is the last 40 or so years we have not been keeping it. We’ve been running on fumes.

My new book was influenced by Os Guinness and his book, A Free People’s Suicide. Os talks about something called a golden triangle of freedom, which is the idea that freedom requires virtue, virtue requires faith, and faith in turn requires freedom.

Freedom, which is to say self-government, requires people to govern themselves. You don’t steal because somebody is pointing a gun at you, you don’t steal because it is wrong. That’s called virtue. All of the Founders understood that without virtue, self-government and the liberties we enjoy are not possible. When I heard Os Guinness talk about this, I was sickened because I realize that this idea at the very heart of the American experiment was unknown to me. Jefferson, Franklin, all of the Founders said that virtue is utterly crucial to the kind of self-government they were proposing. So in order for us to keep it, as Franklin said, we needed to be basically a virtuous populace.

So freedom requires virtue and virtue requires faith. Faith and virtue are linked. It doesn’t mean that every person of faith is virtuous or that every virtuous person is a person of faith but that communities full of faith tend to be more virtuous, tend to govern themselves more effectively. When revival broke out under the preaching of George Whitefield, Benjamin Franklin observed that those communities where
revival broke out, crime went down. Franklin knew that what Whitefield was preaching created a populace of faith and virtue and those people were able to govern themselves infinitely more effectively than any other group of people.

The Founders understood the dynamic that freedom requires virtue, virtue requires faith, and that faith requires freedom. If faith is coerced, if it is not utterly free, it is not real faith. You cannot force faith. It has to be free. And when the people are free to believe or not believe, to go to that church or that church, then faith is real. Then, they will be people of virtue. Then, they will be able to govern themselves. So religious freedom is at the very heart of the Founder’s vision.

Repent of Our Sins, Embrace the Good

For 40 or 50 years, we have not been keeping the republic. We’ve not been teaching these things. We’ve bought into the negative narrative and we talk about all the bad things America has done. Now, there is nothing healthier than facing what you’ve done wrong so that you can repent of it. But if you are with somebody who just wants to say we’re bad, that’s a problem. We need to talk about the greatness of America and what it has meant to people in the world. People like my parents dreamed of coming to this great nation and raising their children here. They understood this. But for 40 or 50 years we’ve had this largely negative narrative. And so we’ve not loved our country. We’ve not taught our children to love their country.

There is a wrong kind of patriotism and there is a right kind of patriotism. There is a right kind of healthy self-regard and pride. To be constantly despising yourself is a sick thing. And the narrative among the cultural elites has been to focus on what’s wrong with the country. And those people believe they’re right. They’re not necessarily evil, but here’s the problem, they’re wrong.

There is no question that the God of the universe, that the God of the Scriptures has had His hand on this country. Our secular version of things is willfully ignorant. There are numerous things that have happened in our history that point to God’s hand. The Founder’s saw it, Abraham Lincoln wrote about it. When we say give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free, we do that because that is who we are. It’s a fundamentally Biblical idea.

America Blessed to Bless Others

Alexis de Tocqueville wrote about the idea that America is great because America is good. That’s a Biblical concept,
right? That you do God’s will, do what God asks you to do, and He will take care of you because He loves you and wants to bless you. This country needs to understand that we have been blessed to be a blessing.

We must not allow people to tell us that our patriotism is a selfish kind of patriotism. We need to love this country. We need to say with humility, we are blessed and we want to use our blessings for the whole world. We want to bring freedom to the whole world. Our freedoms, these extraordinary treasures that never existed in the history of the world before 1776, are meant for everybody in the world. So when George Bush said that everybody should be free, he was right. The problem is, you can’t just award people this fragile, complicated thing and expect them to know what to do with it. They need to be prepared for it. And this country, largely as a result of English law, largely as a result of customs and mores, and also as a result of the preaching of George Whitefield for four decades, was able to handle this treasure of freedom.

We Need to Keep the Republic

By the way, Benjamin Franklin, somebody we think of as a French Enlightenment deist, was not. When he was in the constitutional convention, tell me if you’ve heard this in public school, things were not going well. It was not normal for them to be able to pull off creating a constitution. They got so desperate that Benjamin Franklin gave a speech, I quote it in my book, where he beseeches the assembly to pray. To go to the Almighty whose hand was involved miraculously in their creation during the times of the Revolution and to beg Him to open the door so that they could create this Constitution and bring this new way of being in the world.

This 2016 election is a symptom of where we are. For 40 years we have not been keeping the republic. And I’m here to blow a trumpet folks, and to say to America, we need to keep the republic. We need to get busy, we need to remind ourselves of the glorious stories of our past, of the heroes who died and bled for the freedoms we enjoy. To take those things for granted is nothing less than a horrible sin. And we’ve basically taken them for granted with the help of the media, with the help of academia, we’ve not passed them along. The Constitution is not enough.

The people need to keep the republic. Franklin knew that if the people don’t keep the republic, the republic goes away. And when the light goes out of liberty and the America experiment, there isn’t a second or a third hanging around to replace it. What we have is an inestimable treasure given to us by the God of the Universe for His purposes in history. If we want America to be great again, America must be good again. We must teach virtue again, and we must teach heroism and self-sacrifice, and all the things that the Founders knew not to be optional or extra-credit but to be absolutely foundational to who we are and to the American experiment in history.