



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Forgotten Promise of American Liberty – Part 2

Guest(s): Eric Metaxas

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- Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson, and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.
- Roger Marah: After the U.S. Constitution was finalized, a woman asked Benjamin Franklin, "What have you given us, a monarchy or a republic?" Franklin quickly replied, "A republic madam, if you can keep it." This is Family Talk, a production of the James Dobson Family Institute. Today, you're going to hear the conclusion of Dr. Dobson's interview with New York Times best-selling author Eric Metaxas as they discuss his book *If You Can Keep It: The Forgotten Promise of American Liberty*. Eric Metaxas is an author and also the host of his own popular radio program on the Salem Radio Network. During the next half hour, he'll be highlighting Minister George Whitfield's impact on the early colonies' view of freedom and liberty. Dr. Dobson and Eric Metaxas will also explain how faith, morality, and law all work together in a democracy. With all that said, let's get to their conversation right now on this edition of Family Talk.
- Dr. James Dobson: Well, Eric, I can't wait to get started talking about your book again. This is an outstanding text. I do hope that our listeners will go out and get a copy of it and share it with your children. Tell me if teenagers and junior highers can understand what you've written here.
- Eric Metaxas: Well, the original title for this book was Letters to a Young American, because I said we have to communicate these ideas, these basic fundamental ideas must be passed on to the next generation. Yes, young people can read it, depending on their aptitude level or their interest level, but it's not a tough read. There are a number of wonderful stories in it. I mean, the story of Nathan Hale and the story of Paul Revere and the story of Washington in 1783, we have got to pass these stories on. They are so beautiful and they really, they're just undeniably inspiring, but you've got to teach them to the next generation. That's a big piece of what I'm trying to do here.
- Dr. James Dobson: I want you to talk about George Whitfield and the role that he played, because he died before the Constitution was written and before the Declaration of Independence. I think it was 1770.

Eric Metaxas: He died in 1770.

Dr. James Dobson: He had an enormous impact on this entire-

Eric Metaxas: I mean, listen, I actually say in the book that this is another one of these things that, when I really understood this, I was embarrassed. I said how is it possible that I have missed this, or that a lot of us have missed this? George Whitfield really paved the way for America to come into being. Now, people who don't know who George Whitfield is, this man was an evangelist unlike any that has ever lived. I mean, he makes Billy Graham and Paul, the Apostle Paul, look lazy. This guy was preaching four times a day, every single day, for decades. I mean, the man was beyond anything that has ever existed. You realize that he came to this country, he was a very young man in his early twenties, invited by the Wesleys, Charles and John Wesley, who were friends with him at Oxford, invited him. It's such a story.

He comes and he starts preaching, and no one had ever heard anything quite like it. He's preaching the purest kind of gospel of grace, and people who'd been used to kind of moralistic sermons, dour, fatiguing, depressing sermons that tell you what a wretch you are and you've got to try harder, he was really delivering the sunshine of the gospel of Jesus. Thousands would come to hear him. Now, it's inconceivable to us. Thousands would come to hear him, and this man did this up and down the 13 colonies all across on horseback for years and years and years and years. We learn that eventually 80%, now, this is not a typo and I'm not misspeaking, 80% of every single person alive in the colonies had heard him in person, not on the radio. There was no radio in the 18th century.

80% heard him in person and he became, if you can think of it, I would say the only celebrity who was not local. In other words, this was a man who, if you talk to somebody in Maine, in Connecticut, in New York, in Virginia, all the way down to Georgia, they all loved George Whitfield. They all knew about George Whitfield. He was a phenomenon, and this man was preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. He wasn't just talking about anything, he was preaching the gospel. At the heart of it, you touched on it before, the message was we have a direct relationship with the only king, Jesus, and therefore we can question our earthly leaders. If we are being ruled by a tyrant, we can overthrow that tyranny. We have no obligation as Christians to put up with it.

Dr. James Dobson: He laid the foundation for the understanding. He influenced the founding fathers-

Eric Metaxas: No doubt.

Dr. James Dobson: And the ideas and the theology that he was expressing.

Eric Metaxas: I would say it's not so much that he influenced the founding fathers, as he influenced the people, so that when the founding fathers put this together, they

knew the people already got it. They got it because of Whitfield, not because of Benjamin Franklin, not because of Sam Adams or John Adams or any of those guys. They got it because of Whitfield. This man was broadcasting these ideas in a distinctly religious vein. He wasn't talking about Montesquieu and John Locke. He was talking right out of Scripture.

These ideas, this is the big surprise for so many of us, these ideas of freedom come right out of the Scripture. This man laid the foundation all across those 13 colonies so that when it was time for the founders to say, "Okay, here it is, if you can keep it," they were ready to keep it. They understood it, they got it. But, that is because of George Whitfield, and is only because the gospel was preached that the people of those colonies were ready to govern themselves. That's what's so astounding, and I'm astounded that I didn't know this and most people in my generation never heard of this stuff.

Dr. James Dobson: Pardon my ignorance, but did he come out of or influence the second great awakening?

Eric Metaxas: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, that's precisely, that this man, his preaching caused revival. I mean, thousands and thousands and thousands of people would come. I have a passage in the book, first person passage, I quote the whole thing at length, of one farmer from, I think, Middletown, Connecticut riding and riding and riding on his horse with his wife to hear Whitfield preach. They were just mad with...

Dr. James Dobson: We don't have recordings of them, what a shame.

Eric Metaxas: It's unbelievable. The thing is, that the revival that broke out all across the 13 colonies, Franklin and others understood that when people get touched by whatever this man is preaching, they behave better. In other words, even if you didn't buy into the whole Jesus thing or if you didn't buy into the theology, you just noticed, Franklin said whenever this happens, crime goes down. What is going on? This country was prepared because of the great awakening, because of Whitfield, they were prepared to govern themselves. They didn't need overlords, they didn't need masters over them with a gun saying don't steal. They governed themselves miraculously, and it actually was miraculously, it's because of the grace of God, and they said I'm going to do what is right because it's right, not because somebody's forcing me to do what is right.

Dr. James Dobson: If you don't have that virtue, there are not enough policemen and can't be enough members of the army-

Eric Metaxas: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: And all the other restraints, you can't have enough of that.

Eric Metaxas: But, that's exactly what has happened in the last 40 or so years. Is that, the reason we're losing liberty, because as people cease to govern themselves incrementally, if we're less virtuous, what will happen is the government must increase, the government must grow. It's the horror. If we govern ourselves, we push government out, we don't need government. But, if we don't govern ourselves, the government very naturally fills the vacuum. That is why our government has grown and grown and grown. At least, that's one of the major reasons.

Dr. James Dobson: Nature abhors a vacuum.

Eric Metaxas: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: What we've got right now is spiritual vacuity, and our leaders in Washington, and you could guess who I'm thinking of at this moment, have stepped in there and began telling us how we're going to live.

Eric Metaxas: Right. This proves the thesis of my book. In other words, if we had not forgotten all the stuff that's in this book, we would've never tolerated this. Most Americans, if they understood this stuff, they would rise up and say, "Hey, hey, excuse me. You are not the king. You are elected by us." I mean, in a civil society, when this kind of thing happened a couple of centuries ago, people threw tea into the harbor. They went crazy. They said, "We will not tolerate this." We in this day because we've forgotten these principles, we tolerate it. We ought to rise up and say, "Excuse me, sir, there is not a chance we are going to abide by this. We are a free people. You are not a king."

Dr. James Dobson: Let me tell you my own experience. I have watched this deterioration for many, many years. When the left began telling the Boy Scouts how they would run their private organization funded by private funds, I thought to myself, "Well, they've really gone too far now. People are going to rise up on this one, because what more venerated organization is there than the Boy Scouts?" It wasn't a peep.

Eric Metaxas: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: You come on down through the years, and we come to 2015 and the Supreme Court redefines marriage, which has been honored in practice and law throughout the world for more than 5,000 years, every single continent on earth, and you've got five members of a court who said it's not going to be that way anymore. I thought, "Boy, they've done it now. They have really pushed too far."

Eric Metaxas: Can you imagine-

Dr. James Dobson: The Supreme Court does not create law.

Eric Metaxas: Well, I mean-

Dr. James Dobson: It interprets law.

Eric Metaxas: If you ever wanted to know why we are where we are politically speaking, you can understand, and you have been talking about this for a long time, the frustration at these Republicans because they seem to lack spines, they seem to have no guts. I think that's why people say throw the bums out. They are not doing the basics, the absolute basics. If our elected leaders don't understand these things, can you expect the citizenry to understand these things? But, actually I think that it's an opportunity for the citizenry to rise up now and to say, we really, we have to take our government back, and it almost doesn't matter who is president. We're really at a point where we need a true popular movement where people have to say to be an American means these things, we have to teach these stories to our kids. We've got to do it, because our leaders have failed utterly.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I think that's got a lot to do with what's happening politically in this country at this time.

Eric Metaxas: Absolutely, yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: It explains the uprising.

Eric Metaxas: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: The irritation, the way people are responding politically.

Eric Metaxas: There's no doubt about that, and I could say a lot more on this, in fact, I do say a lot more on my own radio program. If people want to know the details of my political views, they can listen to The Eric Metaxas Show, which they can find at metaxastalk.com.

Dr. James Dobson: That's a Salem station.

Eric Metaxas: That is a Salem station. I talk about this all the time, but you're absolutely right, there's no doubt about it.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's go back to George Whitfield's influence, and especially the way the founding fathers viewed virtue and religion. Obviously, they did not want this to be a theocracy.

Eric Metaxas: Well, that's right.

Dr. James Dobson: But they also knew that you can't have a free people, self-government, unless there is goodness within people, and that takes us right to the Christian faith.

Eric Metaxas: Well, it takes us to religious liberty, because they understood, this is what's so fascinating, is that if you believe the Christian faith is true, then you're not afraid of competition. You say if we have a fair competition, anybody can preach what they like. There's total religious freedom, because we believe that when you really have a level playing field, people will choose that thing. They will hear it and they say, "Yes, that is right." They said, "We've got to have religious freedom in this country. We cannot coerce it." If you coerce it, even if you try to force people to believe what's true, it's not real belief. You cannot force belief.

Religious liberty was at the very heart of everything. They understood it. When we say religious liberty, not just freedom to worship, because freedom of worship is meaningless. Freedom to live out your faith. Once Sunday is over, once you leave your house of worship, that you live your faith out in the marketplace, in the school, wherever you are, the founders understood that this is not just a good idea, it is necessary. In fact, if you look at our history, it has been people of faith, of serious faith in the Scriptures that have stood against the slave trade, that stood against slavery, that stood against Jim Crow. Over and over, you see the role that religion has played in appealing to what Lincoln called the better angels of our nature. It happens over and over. The founders understood that without people of faith, this will not work.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, let's quote some of them, and this comes right out of your book. John Adams said, "Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other." John Adams.

Eric Metaxas: Can you imagine? I mean, this is John Adams, and several of them said the same thing. They understood there is no way that this works. Now again, this is our history. If we are not teaching our history and if we ourselves don't know our history, how can we possibly continue? I would say, I have said, that we're at the end. It's like a cut flower that, unless you are connected to your roots, you are dying. This nation, for the last 40 or so years, as I keep saying, has been disconnected from our roots. These are our roots, this is history. You don't even have to like it, but you have to acknowledge all of the founders saw things this way.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, but the far left denies that it ever was said. They don't want that. They become angry when they hear these quotes.

Eric Metaxas: Right, well, this is why I'm trying to keep this book out of their hands.

Dr. James Dobson: I'm trying to get it in their hands. Alexis de Tocqueville has another quote in your book, "America's great because she's good."

Eric Metaxas: Yeah. He didn't actually say that, but that's the substance of what he said.

Dr. James Dobson: He was a Frenchman who came over here to see what in the world's going on in the new world.

Eric Metaxas: That's his number one observation. Again, he didn't say it in exactly those words, but in so many other words, he basically observes that what makes America this amazing phenomenon of that day. I mean, he looks at it, they all looked at it, said, "How is it possible that this nation is thriving 50 years after the revolution?" It's thriving, and he saw that at the heart of it all was the churches, the people who believed in virtue, believed in helping others, all of these Christian ideas, he recognized was at the heart of our success.

Dr. James Dobson: We have to remember what was going on in Europe at this time. I mean, shortly before this you have the French Revolution where people are beheading their leaders, and a war came out of that. Napoleon and what he reaped on the people of Europe.

Eric Metaxas: No question.

Dr. James Dobson: Of course, a little bit before that in the 1600s they had a civil war in Britain that wound up with the King being beheaded, King Charles the First. All of that chaos is going on in the rest of the world, and here these men are sitting in a civil way in the Constitution Hall and talking about freedom and liberty and self-government. I mean, that came right out of the Christian faith.

Eric Metaxas: They all would have said, all of the founders would have said that God's hand was involved in this. In other words, even though the ideas come out of Scripture and everything, they believe beyond that God was miraculously involved. I tell a number of stories in the book of these miracles that, when you understand these things, you say it really does seem kind of obvious that God's hand was on the creation of this nation. I mean, you can't prove it, but I think a fair minded person says there is something here that goes beyond what people were able to do.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the best proof of it is that we've walked away from Him now, and look at the chaos that we have.

Eric Metaxas: To my mind, it's strong evidence for this over and over again that we have been great because we have been good. If we want to be great again, we have to be good. Honestly, we cannot make America great unless we the people understand this idea of what it means to be good, what it means to love our enemies. It doesn't mean we agree with them, but it's a whole different way of doing business that we have been doing since the beginning. We have been a different kind of country, and we need to understand what that means.

Dr. James Dobson: Take us back to something you said in the first program, what we did yesterday, that I didn't focus on or discuss with you. I want you to elaborate on it. What is the golden triangle?

Eric Metaxas: The concept originated with our friend Os Guinness. I dedicate the book to him because I don't want him to sue me, since I ripped off all of his good ideas.

That's a joke, he's a friend. But, he came up with this concept. Now, all the founders understood this, but they never referred to this phrase the golden triangle of freedom, that's his own coinage. But, it says that freedom requires virtue, virtue requires faith, and faith in turn requires freedom. That's the heart of how this works. If you want to have true freedom, self-government, you have to have virtue. People will not govern themselves. They will need to be governed from above unless they have virtue. But, if they have virtue, they can have freedom. Where does virtue come from? Virtue comes typically from faith. There's just no question about that. Even if you have faith in some larger order and God's not involved, there's no question that people aren't just virtuous because they're nice people. It has to come from buying into something, and in most of the cases, it's people's Christian faith.

Dr. James Dobson: All right, that leads us to this most important question. Where is America going? Seems to me we have two choices. One is revival, with the majority of the American people recognizing that we have forgotten not only all of these principles, but the God who gave them to us. The other is revolution. Is there a third choice?

Eric Metaxas: Yeah, there is a third choice. The third choice is to just die with a whimper. A bang would be a revolution or a bang would be a revival, a whimper, to quote TS Elliot, would be, "To slide into becoming America in name only," in quotes. We become America, and we become a socialist country like Europe. We fade from history and we become a great nothing. To me, that is so horrifying, and I mean, again, Dr. Dobson, that is why I wrote this book. It's a *cris de cœur*, a cry from my heart for this nation that I love.

Dr. James Dobson: Does the third approach work? Because, there's already so much anger and hostility. People are killing each other in Chicago and other places.

Eric Metaxas: Well, this is the thing, is that these things are in God's hands. But on the other hand, I'll say this. The Lord put these things in our hands. We have the ability, and when I say we, I mean specifically the church. God says to His people, "You do what you like, but here's what I would like you to do, and if you do what I ask you to do, the nation will be saved." When we're talking about America, let's face it, we're talking about the whole world. We have been a beacon of light and liberty to the entire world. If you care about people in third world countries, you need to care about America. I really do believe that it's going to be the church first.

Now, everything that's in this book is for everyone. It's not just for Christians. I really believe we kind of need both. In other words, we need civic education, and that has nothing to do really with private faith, or at least let's say it's not directly connected. But, you need both. You need revival and then you need civic instruction. Everyone in America should be able to read this book and say, "Yes, we have forgotten this. We need to teach this." Then the level of faith, that's up to people and their families. But, you know and I know that unless there is a holy remnant and unless there is revival, none of this other stuff can

be sustained. It's a book I've written for believers and non-believers, because I think that historically, even if you aren't yourself much of a believer, you look at this and you say historically this is true.

Dr. James Dobson: What you're talking about not only is America, but the whole world, because the role that America has played.

Eric Metaxas: Well, I'm glad you brought that up because I have to say it, it has to do with the idea of what is true patriotism. Patriotism is to believe in, what does God love in this country? What did He put in this country? If you love those things, then it's not about me. It's not overweening hubris and pride and arrogance. On the contrary, is that I've been given a holy privilege to do things that will affect people beyond our shores. The Lord always says, "You're blessed to be a blessing. The blessing's not just for you. If you don't bless others, I will cease to bless you." As a nation, we have blessed others around the world, and therefore the Lord has continued to bless us. As we cease to do that and as we have ceased to do that, because we have forgotten all of these things, the Lord removes His blessing. This is about the rest of the world. I say that we're the nation for others. The whole world is looking to this nation to be a light of liberty and to be the nation that reaches out beyond itself, which is a fundamentally biblical concept.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we've been talking with Eric Metaxas in these last two days about a subject of incredible importance. I've said this before, but I'll say it again, that I think this is the most important program that we have broadcast in many years, because it relates to the very foundation of this country. The title itself says it all, *If You Can Keep It*, which speaks to the fragility of freedom and liberty, and the subtitle is also extremely important, *The Forgotten Promise of American Liberty*. Get this book, share it in your Sunday school classes. Share it with your friends. Share it with your children, those old enough to understand this. Begin to lay the foundation again for how we got here and why this has been the most blessed country on earth, and the prosperity that we have enjoyed is only a piece of it. This ability to make our own choices and live our own lives without the interference of a tyrannical government, that is also what I fear for the future if we don't awaken. Eric, thank you for writing this book.

Eric Metaxas: I cannot tell you, I thank the Lord for you and for all you have done, not least for giving me this opportunity, because as you know, this is something, it goes way beyond us, so this is a privilege for us to get to talk about these important things. But, I'm so grateful to you in particular. Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: I love you, my brother.

Eric Metaxas: I love you too. Thank you.

Roger Marah: What an important reminder to focus on the heritage of our American liberty. We challenge you to develop your own knowledge of our country's history, and

then share it with your own children. I'm Roger Marsh, and you've been listening to Dr. James Dobson's conversation with Eric Metaxas today here on Family Talk. By the way, if you're interested in getting a copy of Eric's book, *If You Can Keep It*, visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. Once you're there, you can also get information about Eric Metaxas' radio show or any of his other popular books. Again, you'll find that information when you go to drjamesdobson.org.

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Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.