



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: If You Can Keep It: 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 Marsh: Well, welcome once again to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, the vice president of content and the executive producer here of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk programming. Question for you, what does it really mean to be an American? And what did the founders believe was necessary to keep the republic alive? Well, those are the questions at the heart of today's edition of Family Talk, as we are continuing Dr. Dobson's discussion with *New York Times* best-selling author Eric Metaxas about his book called *If You Can Keep It: The Forgotten Promise of American Liberty*. Eric Metaxas is the founder and host of "Socrates in the City." He also hosts The Eric Metaxas Show and is the author of six *New York Times* best-sellers, including his acclaimed biography on Dietrich Bonhoeffer. On the last edition of Family Talk, Eric Metaxas introduced us to the forgotten foundations of American liberty. And today, he and Dr. Dobson will go a bit deeper, exploring how faith, virtue, and self-government are inseparable. and what it will take to reclaim what we've lost. That's coming up on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's 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.

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 so yes young people can read it depending on their aptitude level or their interest level but it's not a tough read and 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. So that's a big piece of what I'm trying to do here.

Dr. James Dobson: I want you to talk about George Whitefield 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: And he had an enormous impact on this entire nation.

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 Whitefield really paved the way for America to come into being. And now people who don't know who George Whitefield 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. And you realize that he came to this country. He was a very young man in his early 20s, invited by the Wesleys, Charles and John Wesley, who were friends with him at Oxford invited him. It's such a story. So 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, you know, dour, fatiguing, depressing sermons that tell you what a wretch you are and you know, 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. So 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 Whitefield. They all knew about George Whitefield. 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. And 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. And if we're being ruled by a tyrant, we can overthrow that tyranny. We have no obligation as Christians to put up with it.

Dr. James Dobson: So 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. And they got it because of Whitefield, not

because of Benjamin Franklin, not because of Sam Adams or John Adams or any of those guys. They got it because of Whitefield. 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. And these ideas, this is the big surprise for so many of us. These ideas of freedom come right out of the scripture, so this man laid the foundation all across those 13 colonies so that when it was time for the founders to say, OK, 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 Whitefield. And it's only because the gospel was preached that the people of those colonies were ready to govern themselves. That was 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 Whitefield preach. They were just mad.

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

Eric Metaxas: It's unbelievable. And 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? So this country was prepared because of the Great Awakening, because of Whitefield. 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 because 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 it's 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 and all the other restraints right 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 okay if we're less virtuous, what will happen is the government must increase. The government must grow. It's the horror, right? 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 and 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. 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: This proves the thesis of my book. In other words, if we had not forgotten. gotten all the stuff that's in this book, we would have 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, you know, 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. And 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? And it wasn't a peep. 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. The Supreme Court does not create law. It interprets law.

Eric Metaxas: If you ever wanted to know 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. And so 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. It explains the uprising, the irritation, the way people are responding politically. Let's go back to George Whitefield'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. And so 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. So religious liberty was at the very heart of everything. They understood it. And 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. And 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."

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? We are, 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. And this nation we've, 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: And I'm trying to get it in their hands. Alexis de Tocqueville has another quote in your book. "America is 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: And 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 and 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 wreaked on the people of Europe.

Eric Metaxas: No question.

Dr. James Dobson: And, of course, a little bit before that in the 1600s had a civil war in Britain that wound up with the king being beheaded, King Charles I. So 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: And 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 and 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. And 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? It 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. And 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 T.S. Eliot, you know, 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 that's, I mean, again, Dr. Dobson, that is why I wrote this book. It's a *cri de coeur*, a cry from my heart for this nation that I love.

Dr. James Dobson: Now does that 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, that's, this is the thing is that, you know, 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. And 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. So if you care about people in third world countries, you need to care about America. And 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 and 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. 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. And 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. So 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: And 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 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. And the Lord always says you're blessed to be a blessing. The blessing is 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. And 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. So 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 and 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 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: Thank you.

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

Eric Metaxas: I love you too. Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Eric Metaxas remains a good friend of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. It was so much fun to relive that friendship listening to today's edition of Family Talk. You know, as America approaches her 250th birthday, the questions that Eric Metaxas has brought forward today couldn't be any more urgent because

what we do with our history in the next few years may determine our nation's future. You've been listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. As I mentioned, part two of Dr. Dobson's conversation with Eric Metaxas on the book that Eric has written about American liberty called *If You Can Keep It*. And if today's discussion sparked your interest, we encourage you to visit our website at jdfi.org. You can hear both parts one and two of this conversation, as well as learn more about Eric's book, *If You Can Keep It: The Forgotten Promise of American Liberty*. Again, you'll find that information and more at jdfi.org or just go to drjamesdobson.org if that's easier to remember.

Every day, the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute works to preserve what matters most, the family, the sanctity of human life, religious freedom, and the biblical principles that form the bedrock of our nation. When you give to support this ministry, you're investing in a mission to strengthen families and speak truth into a culture that desperately needs to hear it. You can make a secure donation when you visit drjamesdobson.org, or if it's easier, just write down those initials, jdfi.org. You can also call a member of our constituent care team as well. That number is 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh. On behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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