#2 Constantine the Great and the Edict of Milan
Who was the greatest US President?

Surveys asking Americans:
WHO WAS THE GREATEST ROMAN EMPEROR?
“If there is one figure who stands above all others during the early centuries of the church, it is Emperor Constantine.”
Christian or not???

Had son Crispus and own wife Faustus executed

Should there be a monument honoring him ???
COLOSEUM & ROMAN FORUM (Forum Romanum)

Arch of Constantine in Roman Forum
To the Emperor Caesar Flavius Constantinus, the Greatest, pious, fortunate, the Senate and people of Rome, by inspiration of divinity and his own great mind with his righteous arms on both the tyrant and his faction in one instant in rightful battle he avenged the republic, dedicated this arch as a memorial to his military victory.
“Constantine is best known as the Roman emperor who converted to Christianity and in so doing made it possible for Christianity to became a world religion. Without Constantine Christianity probably would not occupy the place that it does today. Without him it is unlikely that Christianity would have emerged from the mass of conflicting, of often quite similar belief systems coexisting in the empire into which he was born.”
Let’s take a look at his story and see how he was used providentially by God to create a significant turning point in history.

Constantine
What was it like to live as a Christian in the Roman Empire before Constantine came to power?
The Great Persecution

Easter, A.D. 303 and Rome's plot to exterminate Christianity.

Galerius

Diocletian
Four government edicts against Christianity

1) Christian buildings had to be leveled & copies of Scripture were burned. To take claim to court needed pagan sacrifices
DILEMMA

Should they hand over biblical texts to authorities & be shunned by other Christians? If so would be considered "traditaires" = “hand-over”

Or they could resist and face persecution & possibly death.
2) Another edict ordered governors to arrest & imprison all Christian bishops.

3) Bishops would not be released from prison unless they were willing to offer pagan sacrifices.

4) Sacrifice to the gods were required of all citizens, putting intense pressure on worshipers of the triune God of Scripture.
Was it hopelssss?

No, God was providentially working behind the scenes.
THE KING’S HEART IS IN THE HAND OF THE LORD, LIKE THE RIVERS OF WATER; HE TURNS IT WHEREVER HE WISHES.

PROVERBS 21:1
Pressured Maximinus to retire. Appointed new Augusti: Gaierius and Constantius Chiorus (father of Constantine).
Persecution continued in East. But in western part of Empire civil war developed. Attempts to despose Constantius Chlorus
Constantius Chiorus died 306. Son takes over. Constantine proclaimed by his troops the new emperor in West. Lucinias gained control in East.
How did God work in the life of the new Emperor Constantine?
Father not a Christian but Neoplatonist mildly tolerant of Christianity.

Mother, Helena, was a humble Christian.
Some claim that when his father died he saw a vision at a temple of Apollo. He was told he would become emperor.
HOW DID HIS VISION AT THE BATTLE OF MILVIAN COME ABOUT?

WARNING
Some hagiography may be at work
Decided to march on Rome to face rival & co-ruler Maxentius. Wanted to enter city and claim position as sole ruler of Western Empire. Approached with smaller army in 312. PAUSED TO PRAY....
“By this sign you will conquer.”
At night saw vision of Christ. Ordered him to place a Christian symbol on shields of soldiers.
Maxentius secure in city walls. As defensive measure destroyed the Milvian Bridge over Tiber and replaced by hooking together a column of boats.
Troops retreated and hundreds drowned crossing the river.
Maxentius himself drowned in river
Decapitated head of Maxentius paraded through the streets of Rome
Constantine triumphantly marched into Rome under banner of cross. Eusebius compares to destruction of Egyptians under Pharaoh in Red Sea.
Next year, 313, he and counterpart Lucinius issued Edict of Milan.
EDICT OF MILAN  313 AD

“Our purpose is to allow Christians and all others to worship as they desire, so that whatever Divinity lives in the heavens will be king to us.”
The Edict of Milan does NOT make Christianity the only official religion of the empire !!!!
The Edict of Milan proclaimed by Roman Emperors Constantine and Licinius bestowed tolerance for Christianity and other religions.
DON’T FORGET WHAT HAPPENED 2 YRS. BEFORE (IN 311AD)

This stopped persecution and gave Christians right to worship privately.

EDICT OF TOLERATION BY GALERIUS (Edict of Serdica)
Constantine has conflict with Licinius and in 324 he defeats him to become sole ruler of the entire Roman Empire.

Lucinius more inclined to pagan monotheism so began persecution again.

Ordered execution of Licinius
How did the Edict of Milan and Constantine help Christians?
1. It ended era of persecution.
2. Property that had been confiscated by govt. was returned.
3. Made Sunday legal holiday freeing up Christians for worship and rest. But retained name SUNday.
4. Placed the Chi Rho emblem on some coins. But retained pagan themes on coins.
5. Gave churches exemption from taxation.
6. Enlisted help of Eusebius to prepare 50 copies of the Bible for the churches in Constantinople.
7. He encouraged the building of churches. Architectural style patterned on the imperial basilicas.
8. Established new capital in east named after him.
   (330 AD)
Lasted 1,000+ years until fall of Constantinople to Muslims in 1453
Was Constantine a genuine Christian?
If he was genuine follower of Christ why did he delay his baptism until he was on his death bed in 337? (By Bishop Eusebius, an Arian)
Arranges for his Arch of Constantine
Yet it contains NO Christian symbolism or references.
Yet he was one who convened the Council of Nicaea (325) which addressed the heretical beliefs of Arius on deity of Christ.
When enters Rome after victory at Bridge of Milvian he doesn’t make offerings to the gods but attributes victory to the Christian God and denounces pagan deities.
It’s risky to question the motives of someone from past history when we can’t interview him or watch him closely. Should we give him the benefit of the doubt?
CONCLUSION

Whatever you think of Constantine, you can give thanks that his reign was a beneficial turning point for Christians.

Look for the big picture.
If you were a Christian living under Diocletian persecution it looked like world was coming to an end. Couldn’t see God working behind the scenes.
THE KING'S HEART IS IN THE HAND OF THE LORD, LIKE THE RIVERS OF WATER; HE TURNS IT WHEREVER HE WISHES.

PROVERBS 21:1
Once persecution stopped, did it ever return?
Pray God might continue to work in the hearts of kings and presidents, to be favorably disposed toward followers of Christ.
Why the church needs more Omicron !!!