

202 "In God We Trust"

In case you haven't heard - the election of the 45th President of the United States is due to be held next week.

The American electorate is faced with an extraordinary choice between the two main candidates, each of whom arouses unusually deep hostility: Hillary Clinton is seen as representing the worst aspects of the elite Washington establishment, while as for Donald Trump - enough said! The notion of such a man holding the most powerful political office on earth causes widespread fear and astonishment, and yet whatever he says or does, he doesn't give up, he lurches on to the next great gaffe, and according to the polls is still very much in the fight.

The whole American electoral system seems to be in a real mess, that two such candidates have emerged as the front runners. It appears that "the road to the White House" now involves more than ever vast sums of money, highly-skilled use of the media and social media, and the involvement of many questionable characters and deals along the way.

Things are clearly far from well, and if we are not praying already, it is high time we got on with it! Whichever candidate wins, his or her In-tray is fearsome: abroad, dealing with the Middle East, Russia, China, Europe and Nato, and now also with the growing threat of "cyber attacks"; and domestically, dealing with immigration, "illegals", guns, police behaviour, race riots and the profound depths of division and anger within American society. Why anyone fancies the job is a mystery.

Of course, we take these matters to the Lord in prayer, drawing guidance and comfort from His Word. Throughout the Scriptures leadership is such a key theme, because the nature of any leadership cascades down from the top and affects millions of people, for good or ill.

Moses, Joshua and Samuel largely got things right: they stayed faithful to the Lord through thick and thin, and so they led the people in the true paths. (But in passing we note that Samuel's sons went astray, I Samuel 8.1-5, this being one example among others, especially involving the kings, of a God-fearing father not necessarily ensuring that his sons followed in God's ways).

The list of the kings of Israel and Judah makes for some sorry reading! A few "did right in the eyes of the Lord" (eg., I Kings 15.11) despite sinful failings (such as David, and then for Judah, kings such as Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah; and for Israel, only Jehu). Idolatrous kingship led to idolatrous practices among the people: the Lord's warnings through His prophets were ignored; and

finally the Lord acted as promised in divine judgement, leading to exile for both Israel and Judah.

The New Testament times are the era of tyrant puppet kings and Roman officials, so the spiritual state of the people depended on the priests, who by that stage were highly politicised and hence had all the value of "whited sepulchres" (Matthew 24.27). No wonder the arrival of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus on to the scene caused such a stir! - with the news of a different Kingdom and a very different way of things being done.

This old scriptural principle - that leadership sets the tone - still stands today. If it is godly leadership then great benefit flows for all concerned. If it is ungodly leadership, then soon "anything goes" and all suffer. Unfortunately this latter type of morally-opted-out leadership has been prevalent in western societies for many decades, so it is no wonder that things are in a such a sorry state, not just in the West but across much of the globe. The Lord is clearly "shaking the trees" in warning and mercy, directing the leaders of the western nations back to Himself, "the God of our fathers" (Exodus 3.13-16 / 4.5), just as He has done so often before. But will the leaders listen?

Believe it or not, the official motto of the United States is, "In God we trust", a phrase based on frequent references in the Psalms. Quite so. May our prayers - more vital than ever these days (Philippians 4.6 / James 5.16 / I Timothy 2.1-6) - be to that end: "O Lord our heavenly Father, 'in wrath, remember mercy' (Habakkuk 3.2). In your mercy please cause the leaders of the western world to return openly and unashamedly to you, by faith in Jesus Christ our Lord, to trust you, obey you, and follow you once again in their heavy responsibilities of leadership. Lord, may thy gracious will be done, for Jesus' sake. Amen and Amen".

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