

When You Are Weary of Washington

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Imagine the following situation. It's post-Civil War America. You, your family, and ancestors have been slaves for several generations. You've known no other life than back-breaking cotton harvesting beneath the southern sun. Then comes the grand news of the Emancipation Proclamation: you and your family are free to go!

There's only one problem: you and your family have no resources. How can you begin a new life? You have no property or money, no savings or transportation. So you go to your former owner and ask him to finance your new life. You ask the plantation owner to give you wagons, clothing, and property.

The only thing more bizarre than the request is the former owner's willingness to agree to it. He not only gives you the basic provisions, he gives you more than you could imagine. Those silver candlesticks you polished? Yours. Those cattle you fed? Yours. Those wagons, weapons, and clothing you managed? All yours.

Sound far-fetched? Impossible?

Sound biblical? If you remember the story of the Israelites in ancient Egypt, it might. The Israelites were oppressed people, forced to make bricks without straw. After 400 years in Egypt, many of those years spent in slavery, God intervened and liberated the nation. In short order, they went from a nation of slaves to a nation of freed citizens. Yet, how could they survive? They had no resources for their new life. They were pyramid builders. How would they survive? Would you believe the Egyptians would fund their exodus?

God had instructed Moses:

"...so I will use my great power against Egypt. I will strike Egypt with all the miracles that will happen in that land. After I do that, he will let you go. I will cause the Egyptians to think well of the Israelites. So when you leave, they will give gifts to your people. Each woman should ask her Egyptian neighbor and any Egyptian woman living in her house for gifts—silver, gold, and clothing. You should put those gifts on your children when you leave Egypt. In this way you will take with you the riches of the Egyptians." (Ex. 3:20-22 NCV)

You remember the appeal of Moses to Pharaoh. You remember the ten plagues and the ultimate decision of Pharaoh to release the people. But do you remember this part:

"The Lord caused the Egyptians to think well of them, and the Egyptians gave the people everything they asked for. So the Israelites took rich gifts from them. The Israelites traveled from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men walking, not including the women and children." (Ex. 12:36-37 NCV)

The Israelites left Egypt not only with their freedom. They left Egypt with "silver, gold, and clothing." Whatever they asked for, the Egyptians gave it. You'd have thought it was give-away day in Egypt.

"Uh, I'll have your gold, your vases, and all those silk robes."

Egyptian response? "Take it all; it's yours."

God softened the hearts of the oppressors. He turned them from beasts into benefactors. History was defined, not by the Pharaoh or his court, but by God and his plan. Who directed the hearts of the rulers? God did.

Who directs the decisions of rulers? God does.

Perhaps you need this reminder...It's election time in America. A sophisticated version of *Braveheart* warfare. One party stands on the ridge to the right; their enemy glares at them from the left. They volley and fight. Finger-pointing. Mud-slinging. Tacky accusations. It's easy to get cynical. Even easier to grow fearful. The global economy is fragile. National morality is in a downward spiral. Does anybody know the next step? The right path? Can anyone get us out?

Yes, God can.

The believer looks at politics through a different lens. We believe, first and foremost, that God is the God of the nations. Washington doesn't call the shots; God does. The congress doesn't direct the future; God does. The Bible is chock-full of moments in which God manages the hearts of monarchs. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases." (Pro. 21:1 NIV)

His sway over the Egyptians was just one example. Interested in a few more? I have four.

Consider Cyrus, the king of Persia. "*In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing.*" (Ezra 1:1 NIV)

In our land of elections and limited authority, we might fail to appreciate the power of the throne in biblical times. The king, especially the king of Persia, exercised complete control. He could command without consult and dispatch without contest. When he spoke, it happened. Yet, when God spoke to the king, the king responded. The destiny of the people lay, not in the will of Cyrus, but in the will of God. Was Cyrus seeking to obey God? According to Isaiah, the answer is "no."

"For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel my elect, I have even called you [Cyrus] by your name; I have named you, though you have not known me." (Is.45:4 NIV)

Cyrus didn't know God, or respect God, yet God used Cyrus to accomplish the desire of heaven.

Still another example of God's rule over the king's heart is in the story of Daniel and the Babylonian official. Daniel was taken into captivity by the Babylonian kingdom. As a young man, he resolved not to eat the food from the king's table. When he requested permission to create his own diet, the Bible says: "*Now God caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel.*" (Dan.1:9 NIV) This was a serious request: the official could actually lose his life by granting it (see verse 10). Yet he ruled in Daniel's favor. Why? Because God prompted him to do so.

God also intervened with Nehemiah and King Artaxerxes, ruler of Persia during the 5th century BC. He had a servant by the name of Nehemiah, a loyal cupbearer of Jewish ancestry.

The book in the Bible that bears Nehemiah's name begins with sad news. Hostile forces had flattened the walls that once guarded the city of Jerusalem. Even the gates had been burned. The few remaining Jews were in great trouble and shame. Nehemiah responded in prayer: "*O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant...and give success to your servant today and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.*" (Neh. 1:11 NIV)

“This man” was the king. Nehemiah could not leave his side. He was on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If Nehemiah ever helped the people of Jerusalem, it would only be with the blessing of the king. But why in the world would Artaxerxes release Nehemiah to travel to a distant outpost? Nehemiah asked God to go to work. The answer to prayer took nine months to come, but it came. Artaxerxes noticed the sad face of his servant and asked for an explanation. Nehemiah was hesitant to speak. He became “dreadfully afraid.” (Neh. 2:2) Still, Nehemiah told the king about the devastation of Jerusalem. One might wonder how the king would respond, how he would answer. Why would the King of Persia concern himself with Jerusalem? He did. “What do you request?” (Neh. 2:4)

Nehemiah asked for time away, letters of endorsement, supplies, horses, and soldiers. And so it was that the Persian king was prompted to grant the unlikely blessing: the reconstruction of God’s city.

One of the most astounding examples of God’s sway over the nations is mentioned, almost in passing, in the Book of Exodus. The Hebrews and their prayer pilgrimage.

“Three times a year all your men are to appear before the Sovereign Lord, the God of Israel. I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your territory, and no one will covet your land when you go up three times each year to appear before the Lord your God.” (Ex. 34:23-24 NIV)

God instructed the Promised Land settlers to stop their work three times a year and gather for worship. All commerce, education, government, and industry came to a halt while the people assembled. Can you imagine this happening today? Can you imagine all the members of our military, police force, first responders, and security teams leaving their posts and gathering in one place to praise and worship God? Our country would be utterly defenseless!

Yet, God promised to protect the territory. He promised, *“No one will covet your land when you go up.”* (Ex. 34:23 NIV)

As you worship me, he promised, I will protect you. So who controlled the impulses of the enemies? God did. Who prompted the Egyptians to favor the Hebrews? God did. Who directed the official to be kind to Daniel? God did. Who softened the king’s heart toward Nehemiah? God did. Who kept the enemies at bay while the Hebrews worshiped? God did. Who controlled the destiny of the nations? God did.

And God does.

As David prayed, *“O Lord, God of our Fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you.”* (2 Chron. 20:6 NIV)

Others may worry about the election. Others may grow bitter from party or petty rivalries. Others may cast their hope with the people of the elephant or the donkey. Others may anchor their future with conservative or liberal, but not us. We place our trust in the work of God.

How many kings has he seen come and go? How many nations has he seen stand and fall? He is above them all. And he oversees them all. So, while others get anxious, we don’t. Here is what we do: we pray.

“First of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim.2:1-4 NIV)

The flagship assignment of Paul to Timothy is prayer. The initial topic of prayer is “rulers and all who have authority.” Do we pray for the sick? The lost? The evangelists? Of course. But preceding even them is this call to pray for “rulers and leaders.”

We ask God to use them to facilitate a haven for quiet lives and peaceful worship. Why? Because God wants “all people to be saved.” The government then is a tool of God. Its leaders are servants of God. *“There is no authority except that which God established. The authorities that exist have been established by God...for [the ruler] is God’s servant to do you good.”* (Rom. 13:1,4 NIV)

It is not always ours to understand the why and how of this verse. Why does God permit evil dictators to occupy office? How does he use them? We aren’t told, but he does.

Our job is to pray.

Would you take this job seriously? Would you pray for forty days for our country? Specifically asking God to: [U.S.A.]

Unite our country

Strengthen us

Appoint and anoint our next president

You can commit to this endeavor by going to maxlucado.com.

Paul urged us to pray so that we may lead quiet and peaceful lives...Do you think our nation promotes a life of quiet and peace and holiness? If not...might the problem be the fault of the church? God’s promise is clear:

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2 Chron. 7:14 NIV)

Only God can unite the nations. Let’s ask Him to do just that.

Dear Heavenly Father,

You have given us this promise: “if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:14)

So, we pray to you. We turn from evil and look to you, our God. Please:

Unite us

Strengthen us

Appoint and anoint our next president

In the name of Christ we pray,

Amen

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