

FIRE IN MY BONES: Presidents Don't Save Us, Jesus Does

People didn't vote in ancient Israel, nor did they put "KICK THE ROMANS OUT!" bumper stickers on their chariots. But there was plenty of political anger seething in Palestine, even without Fox News, CNN and MSNBC around to stir the pot. After the attempted assassination of former President Trump last month, we need to smother the fires of political rage more than ever.

Jews especially abhorred tax-collectors since they worked for the Roman Empire. Yet when a chief tax-collector named Zaccheus showed up to hear Jesus preach in Jericho, Jesus called Zaccheus down from a sycamore tree and proposed a meeting at his house.

I'm sure the crowd was shocked that a holy rabbi would fraternize with one of Caesar's cronies. They probably expected Jesus to give Zaccheus a lecture on the evils of embezzlement. But the Bible doesn't say Jesus talked to him about his fraud or the injustice of Roman occupation. Their meeting wasn't about politics.

After one visit with Jesus, the infamous Zaccheus repented of his crimes and pledged to give half his possessions to the poor (Luke 19:1-10). Jesus' act of kindness led to a big heart change.

This was Jesus' style. He looked beyond race, class, sectarian divisions and social labels. He was as comfortable talking to prostitutes and condemned criminals as He was to synagogue officials and Roman centurions. He looked into men's hearts with a piercing laser beam, not so He could judge their sins but so He could shine the light of His mercy.

Jesus calls His followers to love everybody that way—and

“everybody” actually includes everybody, Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives. I’m saying this because too many of us lost our religion during recent presidential campaigns. While political commentators screamed at each other like banshees on Sunday-morning talk shows, Christians unfriended each other on Facebook because campaign rhetoric grew so hateful. These days it seems we can’t even eat a Chick-fil-A sandwich without arguing!

In November, the political theater will end and voters will elect the next commander in chief. And hopefully we will choose a leader who has the qualities needed to guide this nation wisely for the next four years. Do your own evaluation. If you are a Christian, character should matter when you go to the polls. Don’t vote for a candidate just because you like his or her sound bites, blistering attack ads or over-the-top promises. Vote for character. That’s what America needs.

Regardless who wins, we all need to make some attitude adjustments back to being less world-like and more Christlike:

Love people regardless of their political views. I’m involved in a Christian ministry that confronts the abuse of women globally. Yet there are many people in the secular arena, including Hollywood celebrities such as Susan Sarandon and George Clooney, who share my concern about domestic violence and sex trafficking. Recently, I had to face the ugly fact that I had made bitter judgments against some people because of their left-leaning views. I can’t be a vessel of Christ’s love if my heart is full of hate.

Quit making politicians into gods. At the root of today’s angry rhetoric is the notion that politics can solve our moral problems. Christians in the United States, especially since the early 1980s, have embraced an unhealthy infatuation with political power. We clamor for King Saul to save us when God wants us to trust Him.

News flash! Ronald Reagan didn't save us. Neither did Bush No. 1, Clinton or Bush No. 2. Neither Biden nor Trump will deliver us this year. And let's not forget that the Jesus movement occurred during the terms of Johnson (a Democrat!) and Nixon (a Republican!).

Frame your words with kindness. In our culture it has become in vogue to be hot-headed. Candidates and commentators throw vitriolic barbs like grenades, and when the discussion is moved online, cyber-zealots drop F-bombs to prove their point. In American politics, we thrust, jab, kick, punch, skewer and impale each other with our words.

There is a higher way. The apostle Paul called us to season our conversation with grace (Col. 4:6) and to put on a heart of kindness (Col. 3:12). But we can't express kind words if our hearts are full of judgment, racism, hatred or anger toward those we disagree with. If you hold judgments in your heart, they will become like buried land mines. When someone walks near them and pushes your button, you will go boom!

We must speak the truth, but we must say it in love. It would be better for us to keep our mouths shut if we can't say what Jesus is saying, and do so in His tone of voice.

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