

Ben Franklin Addresses Us After Election

Writing my regular commentary prior to election results posed a problem. After prayer, I sensed God's prompting to do what is done in Congress when someone says, "I yield the balance of my time to ..." Today I defer to one of our oldest and most beloved Founding Fathers, Benjamin Franklin, whom God used in a providential way to rescue 55 delegates who gathered to try and establish a constitution that would serve as a framework for our emerging nation.

In our living room, we have a beautiful portrait of the delegates convening in Philadelphia in 1787. Washington, Madison, Hamilton, Franklin and others are pictured looking serene, due to something Franklin triggered.

Weren't they involved for weeks in toxic rancor, rage and division? Some even threatened to walk out from days of fruitless debate.

Passionate and polarized, they clashed heatedly on topics such as representation, federal power versus state, limits of the executive branch, slavery and commerce.

Then, just when everything appeared lost, the elder statesman (a deist among the overwhelming majority of Christians) appealed for quiet at a pivotal time as he proposed something that was catalytic in altering not just the gathering, but also the solution that saved our nation and gave us the longest surviving constitution in world history—now almost 240 years!

Our constitution was ratified in 1788. Three delegates held back from signing the initial documents, but whatever Franklin proposed they honored, then added the ingenious Bill of Rights, ratified in 1791. Franklin said in jest, "Those still

having objections should doubt a little of their own infallibility.”

What was at the crux of Franklin’s exhortation to his colleagues in crisis? In the midst of all our confusion and conflict in America, can he speak to us also through the corridors of time?

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A Clarion Call

In the beautiful portrait hanging in our living room, we find once self-seeking and stubborn politicians on their knees, engaged in fervent intercessory prayer. An impossible stalemate was shattered as delegates demonstrated humility and came together in unity to appeal for divine intervention. Franklin reminded them how Congress had started every session in prayer, asking for God’s guidance, during the War of Independence. They were convicted, and in this time of desperation turned once again to God.

Fifty years ago, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, after being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, having escaped the gulags in communist Russia, spoke at Harvard and said to America prophetically: “What made it possible for the Russian Revolution to take place and Communism to rise to power?” He replied: “Men forgot God.”

I yield the balance of my time to the Hon. Ben Franklin.

Listen to Franklin

Mr. President: The small progress we have made after four or five weeks, close attendance and continual reasonings with each other—our different sentiments on almost every question, several of the last producing as many noes as again, is me

thinks a melancholy proof of the imperfection of the human understanding. We indeed seem to feel our own want of political wisdom, since we have been running about in search of it. We have gone back to ancient history for models of government, and examined the different forms of those republics, which having been formed with the seeds of their own dissolution now no longer exist. And we have viewed modern states all around Europe, but find none of their constitutions were suitable to our circumstances.

In this situation of this assembly groping as it were in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our understanding? In the beginning of the contest with Great Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayer in this room for the Divine Protection—our prayers, Sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle, must have observed frequent instances of a superintending Providence in our favor. To that kind Providence, we owe this happy opportunity of consulting in peace on the means of establishing our future national felicity. And have we now forgotten that powerful friend? Or do we imagine that we no longer need His assistance.

I have lived, sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings, that “except the Lord build they labor in vain that build it.” I firmly believe this; and I also believe that, without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel; we shall be divided by our little partial local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall

become a reproach and a byword down to future age. And what is worse, mankind may hereafter from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing government by human wisdom, and leave it to chance, war, and conquest.

I therefore beg leave to move—that henceforth prayers employing the assistance of Heaven, and it's blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the clergy of this city be requested to officiate in that service.

3 Reminders

1. The primacy of prayer does not exclude our duty to be informed influencers on issues as “salt” (holding back decay). We cannot be passive, expecting God to do what He has told us to do! He tells us to resist the devil, preach the gospel and overcome evil. God reigns, but He commands us to communicate the gospel and truth.

2. We must remain devoted to prayer, believing as we turn from sin (2 Chron. 7:14) we can see healing in our land as God extends mercy and a reprieve as we “occupy” until He comes (Luke 19:13).

Prophetic leader Eric Metaxas says, “May this election and our prayers lift us out of this abyss that we might again become ‘a shining city on a hill’ to whom the whole world looks and which glorifies our Father in heaven!”

3. Let’s remain optimistic but realistic in relating lovingly to others who promote unrighteousness. We cannot compromise and try to be in unity with enemies of Christ.

Kevin Jackson challenges us: “Let us never forget that Jesus Christ is the most unique person in all of human history. People tend to forget that He said, ‘Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace,

but a sword ... a person's enemies will be the members of his own household'" (Matt. 10:34–36).

Upon leaving the Constitutional Convention, Elizabeth Powel asked Franklin: "Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?" He responded then (as today), "A republic, Madame, if you can keep it."

Amen.

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