

The Scandal of Election 2016

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On Tuesday, November 8th, we will elect the next president of the United States. Each one of us who chooses to exercise our right to vote will mark the ballot having weighed not only every option but the realistic consequences of the option we're choosing.

The gravity of it this go-round is like lead weight in feet of clay. The voting booth is a house of mirrors where we are forced to face ourselves all by ourselves. We have before us the rulers we've demanded. And, of course, none of them can save us. None of them can "save our country," whatever that now means. None will keep all their promises, even if they mean to. Want to. We're reduced to damage control. It's a heck of a way to cast a vote but most of us, myself included, will do so nonetheless.

In our uncivil war we are weighing the sins of our candidates like jagged stones stacked on our personal pan-size Scales of Justice. Once we've properly reaffirmed everything we already believed, we congratulate ourselves by hurling the stones at anyone who doesn't see our enemies the same way. We simultaneously demonize and deify those of other opinions, telling them they're idiots while holding them personally, publicly responsible in advance for all the inevitable transgressions of their candidate. Meanwhile we are collectively committing a sin ultimately more consequential than anything the media can uncover on our candidates between now and Election Day.

If "we" does not include you, I'm not talking to you. No need to get offended or defensive. If we are not you, this is not about you. It's about the rest of us.

We have misplaced our faith. Our blood-curdling fear has given us away. And unrelieved, force-fed fear is making us crazy.

Buried beneath our panic is systemic disappointment but it makes us feel weak and pathetic so instead of owning our disappointment – in our country, our candidates, our options, our leaders, in one another and, God help us, in ourselves – we rage. Mad feels better than sad. It's painful to long, in the words of Hebrews 11:16, for a better country and embrace the hard, cold fact that we are strangers and exiles on earth. (Hebrews 11:13)

Grieve, mourn, and weep, James 4:9-10 says. Turn your laughter into mourning and your joy into despair. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.

But who wants to do any of that? So we rage.

We have become not only like the world but like the world at its social-worst: *lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive...ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. (2 Timothy 3:2-5 ESV)*

Yesterday's America, in all its honor and shame, is in ashes but, rather than exercise the faith and obedience and earnest prayer to see God raise some beauty from the heap, some gold from the fire, we keep trying to glue ashes back together. And they won't stick. Yesterday's America has become an idol to us. It has no more breath in it and the thing about idolaters is that, sooner or later, they become like their idols. (Psalm 135:18)

God could do something new but we've lost our hope. We want back what we've seen instead of believing Him for what we haven't.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. (Hebrews 10:23 NIV)

We are driving drunk on rage, swerving all over the road, fenders dangling and headlights shattered from our collisions with one another. Any means to our end. It's okay to lie to shove people to the truth. To bully, harass and threaten people publicly and relentlessly into doing the right thing. To twist the facts to straighten this mess out. To pull the covers off our opposition and throw them over our candidate. Our witness to the world has become the crimson-faced hysterical screams of armageddon after Jesus said "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32) We are so void of vision that all we can see is a big fat "T" in the road ahead. It's right or left. There is no other way.

Poor, poor God. He's down to His last two options. And poor, poor us for having such a poor, poor God.

We are called to be people of faith in a God who never needed a man-paved road to get anywhere. A dead end means nothing to a God of resurrection.

This is what the Lord says— he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters (Isaiah 43:16) can also make a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland (Isaiah 43:19).

When the Word became flesh, He didn't even bother parting the sea to get to His boatload of followers engulfed in the storm. Divine feet made a floor out of suds.

"Jesus is not running for president," someone said to me recently.

And, of course, she was right. He's running the universe. But she'd never know that by us. And this is the cue where we roll our eyes because, after all, we're talking about reality here. This isn't Sunday School. We have to think practically especially on an election year. Placing the whole of our faith, the totality of our future, entirely in the hands of God is naïve in times like ours, we reason. Save it for church, providing you can find one where faith's welcome past the mat. It doesn't apply in the real world. It's *Theology for Dummies*. Grossly naïve.

But the Bible has a different definition of naiveté. In the Scriptures placing trust in human flesh and blood is pitifully naïve. There, imagining God limited to human options is the epitome of naiveté.

³ Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. ⁴ When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. ⁵ Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God. ⁶ He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them— he remains faithful forever. ⁷ He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, ⁸ the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous. ⁹ The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. Psalm 146:3-9

Come November, we cast our votes. But if we cast our confidence into our candidates, woe be unto us.

Unbelief is not just the absence of faith as if it leaves a vacuum. It's the substantive presence of spiritual infidelity. It's not just an omission. It's a form of rebellion. What we are doing with our candidates is idolatrous. In theological terms, adulterous. When this inch of history is recorded in the annals of heaven, it will not be the scandals of our candidates that slacked the jaws of angels. It will be the unbelief of the church.

Remember what I accomplished in antiquity! Truly I am God. I have no peer; I am God, and there is none like me. Isaiah 46:9

We are meant to look back to what God has done in the past so our faith is set aflame for what He can do in our future. The gospel didn't come to us in seats of government. It came to us in a stable reeking to high heaven with cow manure. God didn't plant the Savior of the world in the womb of a governor's wife. He planted the Christ in the womb of a peasant-girl in the middle of nowhere. The same one who'd get to bear the reputation that she'd done

something naughty and gotten herself pregnant.

Jesus never once sat on a throne here. The closest He got was the back of a donkey. God did not blaze a trail with the gospel galloping on a horse through the halls of government. He did it through cheap sandals flapping on the grass. Through the mouths of ordinary, law-abiding citizens who had the guts to defy the order to keep their mouths shut.

So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:18-20)

"and the government shall be upon his shoulder." Isaiah 9:6

It is the world's way to associate power with people at the top but the power of the gospel is at the bottom. In God's hierarchy, the way up is down. Divine power comes *from* on high, not up high. The kings and queens of Planet Earth still have to bow low for power from the loft.

We're terror-stricken like our entire future is dependent upon what happens on November 8th. What happens that day is momentous. The ramifications are profound. We cast our votes prayerfully. Carefully. We plead for wisdom. But the church of Jesus Christ doesn't rise or fall on the fleshy back an election.

We have our God. He has His people. And we are not a few. We don't even have to fully agree with one another to be a colossal force for the gospel. All we have to do is agree with God that nothing is too difficult for Him and that no amount of mortal elbow grease can back His throne into a corner. He cannot be overruled. And it is He alone – I cannot say this loudly enough – it is *He alone* who truly loves the world. To think we care more than He does is remarkable hubris.

Whatever happens in November, the responsibility for the gospel is coming back to us. It's not the government's job. Seed spreads best ground level. We are only as powerless as our passivity. We still have voices to raise at deafening volume for the vulnerable. We still have knees to drop in contrition and desperate need for intervention. We still have feet to run to the aid of those in crisis like single mothers who need support. Like under-served school kids who need tutors. Like neighbors who are being ostracized. Like homeless who need help with shelter. Like teenagers who turn up with unwanted pregnancies. Like the hated, mistreated, forgotten, overlooked, unheard. Paul didn't tell the government to overcome evil with good. He told us to.

We have convinced ourselves the end of the gospel is near while Jesus stated in no uncertain terms it would be proclaimed throughout the earth before the end of this age. We are convinced government has the power to gag God while 2 Timothy 2:9 says the word of God cannot be chained. Difficult days are ahead. We cannot endure them faithlessly. Opposition is inevitable no matter who makes it to the White House. At some point we've got to quit looking to leaders to fight for our faith. Faith we haven't fought for is faith we don't possess.

Legislation is not the only way we effect change. We seek it. We fight for it. But, if we don't get it, it has never been God's only means to change. Issues we care so much about – like protecting the lives of the unborn, like relief for the poor, justice for all, eradication of racism and inequality – don't tumble off the table because the wrong person pulled up a chair to it. None of those are born of human concerns. They are *God's* concerns. To oppose those things is to oppose Him.

He could have taken simple routes to His will along the way, like putting it straight on Pharaoh's heart to free the Hebrew slaves. He didn't. He chased Moses down in the far side of the desert where he'd hidden because of his sin. And God made sure that the only route out for the people of God was the miraculous. He can also place the godly beside the godless in the highest places of government like He did Daniel, if we still have Daniels who are willing to stare down the throats of ravenous lions and entrust themselves to a maker never out of options.

God can turn Pennsylvania Avenue into the road to Damascus, for crying out loud. He can soften the hardest heart. Transform the vilest offender. Thank God no sin is too great for the power of the cross. Oh for grace to trust Him more.

We need our faith back. Without it we cannot stand. Without it we cannot please God. (Heb. 11:6) Without it we can't grasp joy. He still counts our faith as righteousness. (Romans 4:23-24) We live by faith. We love by faith. God foresaw this day and scheduled our births and our deaths within it. He entrusted us with the gospel and the gifting to share it. Imagine the great cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 12:1 gathered in the unseen stadium to watch our generation run our race. Can you picture them cheering from the stands, "Vote Trump!" "Vote Clinton!" "Vote _____!"?

I think they'd tell us to run valiantly by faith drenched with hope because this race ends well.