

Word for Tuesday:

“If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” ~Isaiah 1:19-20a

“Eternal vigilance is the price we pay for liberty.”

This quote, likely a paraphrase of something John Philpot Curran once said (and frequently attributed to Thomas Jefferson), reminds us that some good things in life need constant tending if they are to survive and thrive. In this case we are reminded that people always seek to accumulate power, and the accumulation of power by one person often leads to the loss of liberty by many.

Just society is another such thing that must be protected by eternal vigilance. Society, and the makeup of a society are not static, but are always changing. New generations are born, existing generations age and die off. Technology changes the way we interact with our world, for better and for worse, and usually both at the same time. Even the climate changes and new realities must be adjusted to.

But what we find is that those who are comfortable in the status quo quickly lose their desire to be vigilant. Those who adjust best to the changing nature of society in political and economic terms turn to sneering at those who adjust poorly, often from a purely self-focused perspective; “I have done it, why can’t you?”

The reality often is that societies become unjust because the comfortable turn a blind eye to developing inequity. In truth, the development of injustice is a subtle process that few may see as it happens. It’s only when injustice takes deep root that it becomes spectacular, though like frogs in slowly heating water the comfortable may not recognize it until the moment of revolution. The French revolution is instructive – those suffering injustice must be wary of the reign of terror, those who are comfortable must beware the guillotine.

In turning to ancient Israel, we find that the powerful and comfortable did not see themselves as oppressors, whatever God’s word to them was. Their comfort had blinded them to the vast inequities filling their society; their self-reliance (dare I say their privilege?) made them contemptuous of the poor and oppressed. God’s Word to them was that a necessary ingredient of true worship is to look carefully into their own society to recognize systemic injustice and repair it. And God held out to them the carrot, and the stick. “If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” Such things should be readily apparent to you and I: if we celebrate the American revolution, we must also be instructed by it and made wary. Wary not only of the loss of our own rights, but wary of becoming King George and trampling on the rights of others, not least their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

1. Prayerfully consider whether there are injustices that we profit from, whether they result from unjust American action overseas, or unjust systems in our own society that give unequal benefit.
2. Some injustices are so systemic that we cannot help but profit from them, or be oppressed by them. Cry out to God for help to navigate and oppose these systems.
3. Read Daniel 9:1-19.
 - a. Whose sin was Daniel confessing?
 - b. What promise did Daniel rely on?
 - c. Was Daniel’s prayer accepted? Read Daniel 9:21-23