

Question: The contentious and bitter national politics, police shootings, rioting and constant threats of terrorism are distressing. What do you think Jesus would say about times like this?

No matter what anyone may think about the political parties and candidates, many of us find the contentious and volatile character of the current presidential campaign distressing. Unfortunately, this spirit is not limited to our national politics. Added to this are news reports of police shootings, rising crime rates and rioting in many of our large cities, the constant threat of terrorist attacks, and stories of young men coming home from war either dead or severely wounded. We are experiencing a very stressful and frightening time. In times like these, I believe Jesus would remind us of what the psalmist said: “God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne” (Psalm 47:8 NIV). No one has removed him from his throne yet.

This is not the first time our nation has faced challenges of this kind. Just in my lifetime, there have been eleven presidents: one authorized the atomic bomb, another was assassinated, an attempt was made on the life of another, one resigned in disgrace, and another was threatened with impeachment. During the 1960s, Soviet Premier Khrushchev hit his shoe on the table at the United Nations and declared, “Our people will bury your people.” During the 1960s and 1970s, we had the Cuban nuclear missile crisis, war in Korea and Viet Nam, anti-war rioting and racial strife. More recently, we have had 9/11 and the war on terrorism. Yet, our world and nation are still here.

Jesus might also point us to the message of the Old Testament prophet, Habakkuk. On behalf of the people of God, the prophet cried out concerning the terrible things taking place in their nation: “How long, O LORD, must I call for help? . . . Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds” (Habakkuk 1:2-3). In response, the Lord told them that he was going to raise up the ruthless and dreaded Babylonians to punish his people for their wicked ways (Hab. 1:5-6). This led the prophet to cry out again and ask how God could allow “the wicked to swallow up those more righteous than themselves?” (Hab. 1:13). The answer of the Lord was a woe upon Babylon because of her violent and destructive ways: “Now it is your turn! Drink and be exposed! The cup from the LORD's right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory” (Hab. 2:16-17).

How were the righteous people to react to all of this? “The righteous will live by his faith,” said the Lord (Hab. 2:4). Thus, the prophet concluded with one of the greatest statements of faith in the Bible: “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior” (Hab. 3:17-18).

This is a message we also need to hear as we face stressful times in this world. No matter what may happen, the Lord is still in charge. Repeatedly, the book of Daniel announces: “The Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes” (Dan. 5:21). Proverbs adds: “Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails” (Prov. 19:21).

How should we react to stressful times in our nation? Pray for our nation. Pray for our rulers. Pray for our future national leaders. Pray for peace in our world (1 Timothy 2:1-4). Above all, live by faith and obey God. After Jesus warned his disciples of things they would soon see, he said: “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). No matter what we or others may do, there is coming a time when Satan and all evil will be cast into the pit and sealed over forever; and it will be said: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15). At the end of the Bible Jesus said, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Will you dare to join me in praying, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

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