



February 7, 2008

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2008

Super Tuesday is over. We still have multiple candidates seeking each party's nomination. I have been getting quite a few questions about who I think should be the next President. The answer is that I know with more certainty who I am not voting for rather than for whom I will vote.

God's Word does speak to the selection of political leaders in Exodus 18:17-27. First, a little background. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, is giving Moses instructions for establishing a leadership structure for the recently freed and fledgling Israelite nation. The setting was not a monarchy; humanly speaking, the only leader the Israelites had was God who spoke to them through Moses. In vs. 21, we see how to select the governing officials. We must select people "who fear God"--"men of Truth", "those who hate dishonest gain". That gives us a good idea of what to look for in any election.

First, they must be people "who fear God." Out of God's very nature come the values for which He stands. Therefore, to fear God, at the very least, encompasses holding to God's value system and God's standard of morality. So, I must vote my biblical values. When I evaluate candidates, I must ask where they stand on the black and white issues of the Bible—abortion, homosexuality, gay marriage. I must not vote for those that do not hold to God's standard of morality. This is a pretty easy filter through which one can run the candidates. To be sure, it does get more complicated when there is a candidate who has changed positions on say, abortion, in the last couple of years after holding a pro-choice position for so many years.

Second, I must vote for people of integrity. This is where it gets tricky simply because we don't personally know the candidates. There are histories of multiple divorces, affairs, lying, etc. Because we don't personally know the people, we can't know if they have truly changed. To be fair, one has to acknowledge that people can and do change. I am not the person I was 10 years ago and neither are you—for better or for worse. My tendency is to look at their track record over the last 10 to 15 years and try to evaluate their integrity. Have they bounced back and forth on issues of morality, or have they maintained a consistent course? Have they delivered on their promises? With what kind of advisors have they surrounded themselves? In past elections, were they the same kind of person during the campaign as they were once they got elected?

It goes without saying that a candidate must be qualified to lead if they are going to get my vote, but candidates don't get this far without being qualified to lead. The media and caucus would have pressured them out by now. If more than one candidate is qualified for office based on the above test, I would simply make it a matter of prayer to seek the Lord's will for which I am to vote.

With all this said, I will not vote for a candidate who does not meet the above qualifications. If there is no candidate who is biblically qualified based on the tests of morality and integrity, I will not vote for the least unqualified of two or three biblically unqualified candidates. I will write in my own candidate if I must, knowing my candidate can't win. We are not supposed to vote for a winning candidate; we must vote for a biblically qualified candidate, and if that person doesn't win, then so be it. Why? I have to say, and this may not be a popular statement, but I do not believe it is biblical to think that a believer is responsible for protecting the "greatness" of our country. Scripture calls us to preserve God's standards of morality in our culture (salt), and to deliver through our voices and our lives the Gospel message to our culture (light), but nowhere are we called to be preservers of America's "greatness". To think we can preserve America's greatness is arrogant. That thinking is based on the premise that we made America great to begin with. Anyone who has read American history knows we got off to a precarious start at best. For several decades, we were so vulnerable as a nation. It was the grace and providence of God that established our country and raised our country to the status of "superpower". It is God who can allow us to keep that status and God who can take it away--just read Daniel 2:21. The vote of a believer is reserved for the biblically qualified. I must always remember that I am a Christian who happens to live in America. I am not an American who happens to be a Christian. The same is true for you. The Lord has us in the United States to advance the Kingdom of God in our country. It may be God's will for America to decline in order to get the attention of our country. It may be the Lord's will for the American Church to be persecuted to do some much needed pruning and cleaning of our churches. Our country has had it so good for so long, and Christians in America have had it so good for so long that, generally speaking, we have lost the calibration of our moral compass; we have become lazy and lulled into a false sense of security, and we have lost our way. It matters not to me how physically attractive, eloquent, or popular a candidate is. If they want my vote, they must demonstrate a biblical standard of morality and a pattern of integrity.

NEW ORLEANS TRIP RECAP

Our first 2008 mission trip is over. I can't believe it. I am so proud of our New Orleans team. Five days of adrenaline filled, nocturnal street evangelism. Sleeping and resting by day, street evangelism by night (9pm to 3am). Mardi Gras presents a tremendous opportunity to reach people for Christ. Hundreds of thousands of people from all over the country descending onto two to three city blocks for a long weekend before returning home. It only makes sense that we would show up where lost people from all over the country have already assembled and try to reach as many of them for Christ as possible. In four days our team passed out over 5,000 tracts and had countless verbal presentations of the Gospel. Individuals were saved, and names and contact information of others who seem ripe for salvation were collected for further follow up.

Some may say that evangelism should not take place in a setting with so much immorality taking place. Funny, I thought people only chose righteousness once they are saved and inhabited by the Holy Spirit. Do you really expect a lost person to have the fruit OF THE SPIRIT if they don't have the Spirit? Lost people do unrighteous things. As I say often from the pulpit, lost people do what lost people do. Galatians 5:19-21 says a lost person is marked by sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, witchcraft, fits of rage, drunkenness, and orgies, just to list a few. Do you know what takes place on Bourbon Street during Mardi Gras? Sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, witchcraft, fits of rage, drunkenness, and orgies. If I am not supposed to go and give the Gospel to people doing those things, then I am not supposed to distribute the Gospel at all. They are just lost people doing what lost people do. I'm so proud of our team for going. I'm so proud of our church for loving lost people enough to wade into the filth to get the Gospel to the lost. I love it. The Lord loves it. Hallelujah. I am so thankful for what the

Lord did through our team members, and I'm thankful for what He did in our team members. We are off to a great start with our missions work.

LORD'S SUPPER

Let me remind you that this coming Sunday we will be celebrating the Lord's Supper in all three morning services. We will be devoting the entirety of the services to the Lord's Supper. There will be times of congregational singing, Scripture reading and explanations of the various purposes of the Lord's Supper, guided times of prayer and reflection, and of course the eating and drinking of the bread and the cup. It will be a rich time in the Lord to which I am very much anticipating in my own life in addition to the life of our church family. There are only two New Testament ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the believer gets baptized only one time. That leaves just the Lord's Supper for the believer to observe until the return of the Lord Jesus. I can't wait for Sunday.

APRIL RHINES IS LEAVING

Well, I did my best to talk April into disobeying the Lord's will, but I simply couldn't do it. She is leaving my team, and she will be sorely missed. April's husband, Jeff, is an IT guy and got a great job offer in San Antonio. Jeff and April prayed long and hard through the situation and felt the Lord leading them back to the city from which they came. Though selfishly I am very disappointed, I wholeheartedly support them in their pursuit of the will of God for their lives. Jeff's job here in Houston was putting him into a situation where he had to work hours that are not conducive to parents of young children. The job in San Antonio has a schedule that will give him quality time with his wife and kids. My perspective is that our respect for Jeff can only go up. Many men claim they value their wife and kids, but few make the professional sacrifices necessary to have adequate time in the home.

Jeff will begin his new job this month. April and the kids are going to remain here until the house sells. She will continue to serve in her place of ministry until that time comes. We will feel the loss of April, but I can only admire their commitment to the Lord and their family. April, I pray Heaven's blessings on you as you go. May the Lord give you the desires of your heart and then give you the desires of your heart.

Please pray for me as I search for April's replacement. In the meantime, we have a great lay leadership team that will carry the load.

LEADERSHIP TEAM MEETING

Most months, I meet with our church leadership team on the first Monday night of each month. Our leadership team is comprised of our major ministry leaders (ie: Men's Ministry, Women's Ministry, Parking Ministry, Prayer Ministry, etc), our ministerial staff, our trustees, and the teachers of the classes involved in our adult Sunday School ministry. The agenda of each meeting varies, but the nature of our monthly gathering is simple. The leadership team gathers so we can ask questions of one another, I use the team as a sounding board for some issues I am dealing with, we discuss church-wide challenges, and ensure our ministries are operating within the vision of our church family.

Our leadership team has much diversity. Their ages range from the 20's to the 60's. Formal educational achievements range from high school diplomas to post graduate degrees. Some were raised in the church from infancy and were saved at a young age. Some were saved in adulthood. Their personal interests, occupations, hobbies, and family lives vary greatly. But despite such diversity, there are two things each of the team members have in common: 1. Each of them is in love with the Lord Jesus. 2. Each of them is committed to the vision of our church.

They have not demonstrated these two commitments with their mouths, but with their lives. All of these individuals were watched carefully before being selected to leadership. They did not seek titles or leadership. None of them think there is a Kingdom task beneath them—even if it is cleaning up vomit in the lobby. Prior to assuming a place of leadership, when they have disagreed with a decision, they have done so respectfully and kindly. None of them are known for slandering church leadership. They are not perfect people, but they are known for righting their wrongs. They are people who served faithfully and sacrificially in other positions before being selected to our leadership team. They are individuals who share their faith with lost people. They are individuals who are passionate about the Word of God.

I really do love our leadership team. They are men and women that I count on and deeply value in my ministry. I am thankful for their dedicated leadership.