**REAL CHANGE AGENTS**

***My Circle of Influence***

I have lived through 18 Presidential elections, beginning with Dwight Eisenhower’s first term in 1952 to Joe Biden’s first term in 2021. I say that in the same tone I say I have lived through 35 Minnesota winters. In other words, I survived them! I cast my first vote at 18 years old in 1972, marking the ballot for Richard M. Nixon. I was so proud. I figured I was making a difference, helping society change for the better. It changed alright, remember Vietnam and Watergate?

The years have come and gone. I have exercised my right as a citizen in every election, whether national, state or local. As I said, my intent was to help change society for the better. Men have bled and died that I might have this public duty to let my voice be heard. My vote is as important as Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, Joe Biden or any other billionaire, politician or mover-and-shaker in America. I want to make a difference by influencing my country, my state and my town. So, I vote. In point of fact, I do more than that, I get involved by becoming an election judge every two years, having volunteered since 1980 (FYI - that’s 21 straight elections).

I say all that to say this. As a gospel preacher I have always taught Christians are to make a difference in society. We want morality, not just the economy, to be better for our families, communities, and businesses. Sadly, we sometimes have fallen into the cultural mindset that society can be changed at the polling booth. From time immemorial that has never been true.

Let me give you a case in point: Israel under King Josiah.

“*Now before (Josiah) there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him*” (2 Kgs. 23:25).

Jeremiah, the prophet of God during this period of “restoration,” was not fooled for a minute. He proclaimed this judgment during the 13th year of Josiah’s reign:

“*Yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to me with her whole heart, but in pretense*!” (Jer. 3:10).

You see, not even a God-fearing monarch could change the hearts of an idolatrous people who had since the days of the judges longed “*to be like the nations around us*” (1 Sam. 8:19). The fact is, we can go to any culture of any date in any time in history and see the same scenario. It doesn’t make any difference who is in the White House or the Governor’s mansion if the people intend to “*do what is right in your own eyes*” (Judg. 21:25). If kings like Josiah, Hezekiah, David and even Jesus wear the title of “King of the Jews,” the masses, with their hearts hardened, will still “*turn and walk no more with Him*” (Jn. 6:60-66). “Restoration Movements” are effective only one heart at a time. Like Joshua, regardless of who others might serve, we must each say, “*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*” (Josh. 24:31).

As a disciple of Christ I will change society only by first changing myself. When I have been transformed by the renewing of my mind and given my body as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1), then, and only then, will I become “*the salt of the earth, and the light of the world*” (Matt. 5:13-16). It might seem like politicians are the change-agents of our culture by the votes they cast and the laws they pass, but in truth most politicians are not leaders. Politicians are mere followers who wet their fingers and stick them up to judge the political winds and then act accordingly. While there are occasionally a few exceptions in which true statesmen stand out, God has shown us not to put our hope in the rulers of this world.

Josiah, a political reformer and godly statesman, had taken the throne at the incredibly young age of eight. But it was not until he was 26 that his reformation began. In the eighteenth year of his reign the book of God was found buried in the temple. Hilkiah the priest found God’s Book and it was read before the king. He immediately tore his clothes and vowed to seek God’s mercy. He did not waste a day in purging the land of all traces of idolatry in hopes that God would relent in His judgment.

“*Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to follow the LORD and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book*” (2 Kgs. 23:3-4).

It was written as an epitaph of Josiah at his death: “*Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him*” (2 Kgs. 23:25).

While Josiah’s body was still warm in the grave, both of his sons Jehoahaz (3 months), and Eliakim (11 years) “*did what was evil in the sight of the Lord*” (23:32, 37). In other words, Josiah’s magnificent “restoration” was only window dressing. Outwardly the people conformed to the king’s commands, but inwardly they longed for their idols once again. God saw through their charade and passed judgment upon them. Jerusalem was plundered and the people were taken captive to Babylon. The lights went out in Judah.

The lesson learned is that the only true change-agents are those men and women who, like Paul, “*have made myself a servant to all… and become all things to all men that I might by all means save some*” (I Cor. 9:19-22).

Who could have possibly thought that a small band of backwater Jews from a far-off outpost in the Roman empire would – or could – have changed the world? But they did. And they did it by simply caring about the lost souls next door, working by them in the field, or standing next to them in the marketplace. These humble folks changed the world, not in the voting booth, but at the kitchen table or around the hearth, telling their neighbor about God’s grace found in the death and resurrection of King Jesus.

Be a real change agent, not in the next election, but today, as God’s evangelist in your circle of influence. – Rick