

“WE, THE PEOPLE”
Jeremiah 29:1-7

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INTRODUCTION:

1) A blatant violation of the will of the people: The Supreme Court ruled, 6-3, on a case (Santa Fe ISD vs Doe) in June of 2000 against student-led religious activities in public schools such as Bible study groups and prayer at a ball game or at graduation as unconstitutional. This ruling in fact is a direct violation of the will of the people. According to Barna Research polls, 67% of Americans support the freedom of religion rights of the students. The six liberal Justices of the Supreme Court overruled the will of over 200 million of the American people. The Declaration of Independence begins with this phrase: We the People. . . But the will of the over 200 million people was trampled by six liberal human beings on the Supreme Court. The voice of the people doesn't have the power in national or local politics any more. This is a very serious matter for the freedom of our nation in general, and the rights of religious people like you and me in particular. If a candidate who wins 50.1% of the votes in a national election can be a president, why can't the will of 67% of the people protect the right of the students? Who holds the real authority in this nation? Six liberal Justices or 200 plus million Americans?

2) Does the Bible have an answer to this problem? Yes, it does. But before we go to the biblical answer to this problem, let's see what we can do as people of this great nation. America is proud of being the melting pot of all kinds of

people: People came here from all over the world with their values, cultures, languages and religions. But the majority of them came here for one purpose: to build a better life. As for us Chinese in this community, some have been here for generations, others came only a few months ago, and most of us have been here for between the two time dots. Many came from Canton, Hong Kong, Taiwan, China and S-E Asian countries. We came with our roots still in our home country, with a strong sense of ties back home. Some sociologists call us the Third Culture people: unique and different from both our home country and the new home country we are living in now. Now let us study the text today to see what God wants us to do in a situation like this.

GOD IS IN CONTROL OF HUMAN HISTORY: (29:1-4)

1) God leads his people wherever they go: “This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, said to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.” (29:4) It was God who brought the Israelites from Jerusalem to Babylon. God did that to punish his people for their rebellious sins against his commands. In our case, we may have different reasons why we came to this country. But it's God who directed step by step the path of our life that led us to this country. Every step of our life is under the leading hand of God to the place God wants us to be. It's God who created all the conditions and shaped our plans why we are here in this country, this city and this church.

2) God cares for his people wherever they are: “This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from

Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles (in Babylon).” (29:1) No one can doubt whether God cared for the Israelites when they were in their homeland. But God did more than that. He cared for his people even when they were in exile in a foreign country. There isn't any difference in geographical location or distance between God and his people. His love for his people reaches to the ends of the earth. No one can be too far away from the loving care of God.

3) God sent his message by his messengers: “He entrusted the letter to. . .” (v. 3) God's message was written by his prophet Jeremiah and sent to his people by several messengers in verse 3. Both in the OT and NT, God sent his word or teaching/message through his servants, prophets in the OT, apostles in the NT and preachers in the Church Era. God always sends his messages through his servant/messenger. Although the Bible is open to all people, God has chosen special people, such as pastors, preachers and teachers and missionaries, to be his messengers to deliver and expound his word.

4) God's message is for all his people: “This is the text . . . to the surviving elders, the priests, the prophets, and all the others, . . . and after the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders, the craftsmen and the artisans, had gone into exile from Jerusalem.” (vv. 1-2) God's message was written and sent to all his people, from the very high and prestigious to the common people. God intended his word to be well received by people of all classes and status. No one is too high or too noble or too smart that they may think they don't

need to listen to God's word. In the same way, no one is too low, too unworthy to hear and obey God's word. This is a very important biblical principle, particularly for those who may think they are well educated or have learned enough so they don't need to hear any more, or for those who find ways to argue or reject God's word.

5) God has divine instruction for his people: “This is what the Lord almighty, the God of Israel, says.” (v. 4) This is the beginning of God's instruction to his people in Babylon. It began with instructions about their present situation in a foreign country, which is the passage we will study today, to prophecies about the future return to their homeland 70 years later. God mapped out every step of life for his people. Many of us oftentimes feel confused about our future. But we don't need to feel that way. God has all our future mapped out for us. All we need to do is to find it out using the Bible, although sometimes we see clear steps, other times general directions, guidelines and principles.

GOD'S COMMANDS TO HIS PEOPLE: (29:4-7)

1) God wants us to settle down: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.” (v.5) History's facts show that over 90% of Chinese who moved to this country eventually settled down and their children and children of their children also embraced this country as their home. This will be their home country, no matter where we first came from, Hong Kong, China, Taiwan or any S-E Asian country. To identify and settle down is important for all immigrants. How unreasonable and unfair if we live, work

and have family, enjoy all the good things in one country, but our hearts and loyalty are still in another. I understand the emotional tie we all have to our home country and the people we used to know and love. But God asked his people to settle down, build, plant and enjoy the fruit of their work. This is the first step we need to take: See this country as OUR country, and know that it certainly is the only country our children ever have and know. Many parents can't get along with their children on this issue: Are we Americans?

2) God wants us do something: “Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” (v. 7) Historically, Chinese people have not done enough in getting involved in the new country they moved to and settled down in. All we seem to care about is getting the best education, making the most money and raising the best children we can. But God encouraged us to get involved in the well-being of our new country: its peace and prosperity. God says this has a direct impact on us as individuals, families and as a people. When I tried to encourage our people to get involved in the business of the country, some people told me all I need to do is preach the Bible and lead people to Christ, and don't do anything else. But God told his people to get involved in seeking the peace and prosperity of their new country. Remember what God says: if this country prospers we also prosper. On the other hand, if this country gets into turmoil, we all will suffer. 67% of Americans believe this country is on the wrong track and need to change. Can we stay away and don't care, do nothing?

3) God's faithful got involved in government: “It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them . . . one of whom was Daniel.” (Daniel 6:1-2) The story of Daniel is so popular even little children know about him. In God's plan, he was chosen to be the top official in his new country, got involved in government business and gained the favor of the king. He did not just help the king interpreted his dream, he also pointed out the dangerous future of the kingdom. Some of us see the horror in what the U.S. government is doing: kicking out everything about God, Bible, prayer and someday maybe the church and banning preaching of the gospel, all in the name of “separation of church and state.” And we are volunteering to stay out of anything to do with the government. I sent out a document today entitled “CHRISTIAN FIRST, POLITICS LATER,” which details the danger to Christianity that we are facing today in this country. I want all Christians to wake up and see this present danger and get involved in the business of the government on all levels, starting with voting. Learn to know, get engaged, do our duties as citizens, vote for a government that will protect our right to believe and preach Jesus Christ, the right to pray, to read the Bible anywhere in this country. This is so important that we can't afford not to do it.

4) God can use more good people: “Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.” (Dan 6:3) Looking at the 2016 election makes some of us lose hope about American

politics. Some lament it is a shame to have these kinds of people running for president of the country. Why is there no better person to lead this country, we ask. It is because there aren't many people who have the exceptional quality that Daniel showed. But we don't have to be high officials to impact the society in which we live and work. We can contribute our Christian values, personal integrity, and character for the betterment of our society and country. Our government from local to national needs people who have exceptional quality to lead us in the right direction.

LINCOLN ON GOVERNMENT AND CONSTITUTION:

Quotes from his speeches and writings: (From Wikipedia)

1) On the Constitution: “We, the people, are the rightful masters of both the Congress and the courts, not to overthrow the Constitution, but to overthrow the men who pervert the Constitution.” We need to have a president who will nominate Supreme Court Justices who respect and uphold the Constitution.

2) On government: “. . . that government of the people, by the people and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” Today, it is all the government, the elite and the powerful politicians who control and corrupt the government. We the people have lost our rightful ownership of this country. It's time to take it back.

3) On government changes: “This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people. Whenever they grow weary of the existing government, they can exercise their Constitutional right to change it, or exercise their

revolutionary right to overthrow it.” I certainly won't advocate starting a revolution to overthrow the government and it isn't necessary in this country to do so. But I certainly will encourage all people of this country to use your power of the ballot in this election on Tuesday, November 8, to ensure a change.

4) On government elections: “The ballot is stronger than the bullet.” In this country, we have the power stronger than bullets, and it is our vote, to change the government by electing people who will change the direction of this country. People in many other countries do not have the right to vote, but have only a monopolizing ruling party, the elite, and their inner circle that make all decisions for the people. We see so many wrong policies in our government, and we complain about it with pain. No more! Get out to vote, change the government, and bring the power back to the people, not the big-name politicians who have violated all the laws and still get away with it.