

## Leadership Challenge

### Proverbs 14.34

Scripture reading: Deuteronomy 10.12-22

Tomorrow is the big day – well it is big if you are Julia Gillard or Kevin Rudd. Will we have a new prime minister?

There has been blanket news coverage . . . I don't have to tell you that. Tomorrow's decision is all we've been hearing about for five days. Channel Ten even hastily launched a new breakfast show so as not to be left behind.

But is there really that much interest? Certainly not on the international stage. Some media outlets have not reported it at all. Others have joked about it. One headline actually read: "Much Ado about Nothing in Australia".

A Channel 9 reporter roamed the streets of Penrith to ask people what they were thinking. It seems that even locally there is an acute lack of interest. The consensus seems to be: Julia or Kevin – what's the difference?

How interested are you in the challenge tomorrow?

Do you think God is interested? I know He is – perhaps more than we are. Now I am not suggesting that God is a personal fan of either Julia or Kevin – or even Tony, for that matter – but I do believe God cares deeply about the present condition and the future direction of this country. Ultimately, whoever emerges as the prime minister after tomorrow's vote will be the leader only because God has permitted it . . . and he or she will be accountable to God for how they lead.

Romans 13:1 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority **except from God**, and those that exist have been **instituted by God**.

That's a sobering responsibility – too often shrouded by personal interest and arrogance.

But there is a role for us as citizens to play, too. A role that goes beyond voting or even complying with the laws our government enacts. Our biggest role is directed toward God: to pray and obey.

Sermon in a Sentence: **Pray and obey – for God and country.**

[Pray]

We come now to the final message in the series, **The Good Life**. Let me briefly revise where we've been in this study through Proverbs.

**The Good Life** begins with God. No-one ever finds enduring satisfaction in life without coming to God in healthy fear. It is God alone who makes a person good – ironically not before a person confesses how bad they are.

So God is all we need . . . and everything else, like money and family and pleasure, is secondary and must be submitted to Him.

This applies to our country as well. God is first. Country is second. And country – any country – will only ever be good if it is conscious of, and submissive to its accountability to Almighty God.

Is Australia there? Is this a country under God?

Regretfully, I think the answer is a clear and emphatic no. We are a country under selfish ambition. We are a country under hedonism. We are a country under – of all things, the very thing we all abhor – arrogance.

To sum it up . . . we are a country under God's judgement.

Tomorrow's vote will not change that. But here, today, on the grass roots level, we just might.

**Pray and obey – for God and country.**

Our text is Proverbs 14.34.

Proverbs 14:34 (ESV)

<sup>34</sup> Righteousness **exalts** a nation, but sin is **a reproach** to any people.

There are two sides to this proverb. Notice the good side:

## 1. What Leads to Admiration

Think of a country you admire. A country renowned for its freedom, prosperity, security, cleanliness and orderliness. A country you wouldn't mind moving to.

Have you thought of one?

Did Syria come to mind? How about Afghanistan? Or Iraq? Or even Indonesia?

How about a country I just returned from: Cambodia? Let me tell you what I saw in Cambodia. Rampant crime. Dirt. People selling themselves. Poverty. Brown water.

None of us would call Cambodia an exalted society. We pity a country like Cambodia; we don't want to live there.

Not coincidentally, Cambodia is 98% Buddhist. Righteousness exalts a nation. Cambodia is far from being righteous.

What does it take for a country to be admired? Where does the righteousness that exalts a nation come from? Five essential actions are listed in Deuteronomy 10.

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 (ESV)

<sup>12</sup> "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but **to fear** the LORD your God, **to walk** in all his ways, **to love** him, **to serve** the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>13</sup> and **to keep** the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?

## A. Fear of God

The first action is foundational. As we've noted earlier – Proverbs calls it the key to the good life. Fear God.

Why should we fear God? Deuteronomy tells us. It is because He is exceedingly great:

Deuteronomy 10:14 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup> Behold, to the LORD your God **belong heaven** and the **heaven of heavens**, the **earth** with all that is in it.

Deuteronomy 10:17 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> For the LORD your God is **God of gods** and **Lord of lords**, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.

Does the leadership of our country fear God? More to the point . . . do we?

## B. Walk with God

This second action has to do with direction. There are two paths that may be taken in life. God walks on the narrow way, yet most people walk on the broad way. Will we walk with God? Or with people?

It is humiliating to walk with God. It is humiliating because we can never walk that way on our own. Like a little child, we must depend on God to lead us along step by step. It is also humiliating because the majority of people are on the broad way and they mock at those who walk with God.

Is the leadership of our country walking with God? More to the point . . . are we?

## C. Love God

The third action is revolutionary. No other religion conceives of a god who loves and desires to be loved. Yet this is reality. The true and living God desires to be close to us in a growing relationship.

Jesus said that this action fulfills all of the law. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind.

Does the leadership of our country love God? More to the point . . . do we?

## D. Serve God

One of the dynamics of loving someone . . . even God . . . is that we begin to think of ourselves as equals. That is good and desirable in nearly all relationships. For example, if a man is always cowering before his wife in fear and servitude, we would not call that a healthy marriage.

But equality is not something that ever enters into our relationship with God. Yes, the relationship is meant to be intimate – where we enjoy being with God and feel free to tell Him anything. But the relationship is never between equals.

That is why serving God is an essential action. We live to honour and obey Him . . . and therein we find the satisfaction and happiness that eludes nearly all people.

Does the leadership of our country serve God? More to the point . . . do we?

## **E. Keep God's Commands**

When it comes to serving God, we are not at liberty to decide how and when we will do so. We must serve God in the way God requires. This is the fifth action. Keeping God's commands.

There are many commands in the Bible. But, thankfully, the commands are quite simple and easily remembered.

Have no other gods. Do not love man-made objects (idols). Respect God's name. Reserve God's day. Obey your parents. Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not commit adultery. Do not covet.

Wouldn't you agree that a country that obeyed these ten simple laws would be a country worthy of admiration? I think I would want to live in such a country, wouldn't you?

Does the leadership of our country keep God's commands? More to the point . . . do we?

Earlier, I used Cambodia as an example of a country that is not righteous, and that is not exalted. But is Australia any better? True – we are admired among nations . . . so much so that boatloads of asylum seekers risk their lives to get here. But is this admiration really deserved? Will this admiration last?

On Thursday, I was handing out leaflets for Edu-mission, the English school outreach that Sue heads up in Mount Druitt. As I walked around Dawson Mall, I was struck by the similarities to Cambodia. Rampant crime. Dirt. People selling themselves. Poverty.

I saw scores of school students in the mall that day. Disrespect. Disorder. Disadvantage. I couldn't help but think, what chance do these kids have?

Righteousness exalts a nation. But righteousness cannot be legislated. It has to come from our heart.

How righteous are we?

The good side of the coin tells us the key to greatness. It is there for the taking. Will we do it?

**Pray and obey – for God and country.**

We now turn to the bad side of the coin.

## 2. What Leads to Abomination

Righteousness exalts a nation, but **sin is a reproach** to any people.

Is our country sinful?

Let's have a quick look at the facts.

### A. What Our Law Approves

- 1) Abortion – about 75,000 every year. In a 2010 study conducted by the Medical Journal of Australia, 61% of adults said abortion should be legal in the first trimester for any and every reason and 26% said it should be legal for particular reasons. That is 87% in favour of abortion.
- 2) Gay Marriage – it isn't on the books yet, but we're nearly there. Julia Gillard was reported to have said in an unguarded moment this past week that it is going to happen.
- 3) Commercial Brothels – Prostitution is a thriving industry. Plans were announced last year to build a three storey brothel in the centre of Sydney – Australia's largest.
- 4) Rampant Alcohol Abuse – There are many statistics – all of them shameful. Here's just one that I quoted at our Bible study groups this past week: 80% of all weekend admissions at St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney are alcohol related.
- 5) Pervasive Gambling – 10% of all the pokie machines in the world are right here in New South Wales. That is not a claim to fame. That is a claim to shame. Add to that all the other forms of gambling that are popular in our country – from the Lotto to the TAB and there's no argument about whether or not we are sinful.

### B. What Our Society Experiences

The proverb tells us sin is a reproach. A reproach is self-inflicted harm. A reproach is an embarrassment.

Is our country suffering reproach? A glance at the headlines on any given week answers the question:

- 1) Drug Abuse
- 2) Teen Suicide
- 3) Gang Warfare
- 4) Drive-by Shootings
- 5) Bitterly Broken Families

This last week, 7 News conducted an exclusive interview with Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione about these very things. Scipione had something very interesting to say:

The real problem is that basic values of morality and decency are lost on our society. To illustrate the point, Scipione pointed to a recent incident where several young teenagers were rounded up at 2am in central Sydney. Their parents were telephoned . . . and most of the parents couldn't be bothered collecting their kids. They didn't care.

Now it is my understanding that Andrew Scipione is a devout Christian, so it is not surprising that he gets the connection between moral decline and societal decay. It is past time for our society to wake up to the self-inflicted harm and embarrassment our sin is bringing upon us.

In the wake of the 2011 London riots, which included days of uncontrollable looting and violence, Great Britain's chief rabbi Jonathan Sacks decried the "moral disintegration" of the western world.

"[The rioters] are the victims of the tsunami of wishful thinking that washed across the West saying that you can have sex without the responsibility of marriage, children without the responsibility of parenthood, social order without the responsibility of citizenship, liberty without the responsibility of morality, and self-esteem without the responsibility of work and earned achievement.

"What has happened morally in the West is what has happened financially as well. Good and otherwise sensible people were persuaded that you could spend more than you earn, incur debt at unprecedented levels and consume the world's resources without thinking about who will pay the bill and when ....

"There are large parts of Britain, Europe, and even the United States where religion is a thing of the past, and there is no counter-voice to the culture of buy it, spend it, wear it, flaunt it, because you're worth it. The message is that morality is passé, conscience is for wimps, and the single overriding command is "Thou shalt not be found out."<sup>1</sup>

Reproach!

Listen to some additional Proverbs:

Proverbs 5:22 (ESV)

<sup>22</sup>The **iniquities** of the wicked **ensnare** him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin.

Proverbs 10:16 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup>The wage of the **righteous** leads to life, the gain of the **wicked** to sin.

Proverbs 13:6 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup>**Righteousness guards** him whose way is blameless, but **sin overthrows** the wicked.

Reproach.

Where is hope? What is the solution?

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Sacks, "Reversing the Decay of London Undone," The Wall Street Journal (8-20-11)

Proverbs 20:9 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> **Who can say**, “I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin”?

Neither Julia Gillard nor Kevin Rudd is the answer to that one. And you and I aren't either.

Jesus is.

God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us **that we might be made the righteousness of God** in Him. (2 Corinthians 5.21)

No amount of government-led reform will ever fix the sin problem our nation has. We need redemption . . . at a grassroots level. Redemption by the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross for us.

Again, the spotlight is not on tomorrow's leadership challenge before the caucus. It is on us – standing as individuals before the holy God. Are we righteous? Have we been made righteous? Have we come to God for mercy and salvation?

Know this: there is no other way given among men whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4.12)

We have seen, then, that righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. Two sides – a good and a bad. Which side are we on?

I want to close this message with an encouragement and a challenge.

Let me encourage you that there is a better day coming. Jesus will someday end all abomination and lead a new nation to global admiration.

Isaiah 2:4 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

Isaiah 11:6-9 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup> The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. <sup>7</sup> The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup> The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. <sup>9</sup> They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

If you have trusted Christ as your Saviour, you are already a citizen of that future, glorious, eternal country. Even so, come Lord Jesus!

Now a challenge. In the meantime, we are also citizens of Australia. In the words of the late John Stott, may we shine the light.

“You know what your own country is like. I'm a visitor, and I wouldn't presume to speak about America. But I know what Great Britain is like. I know something about the growing dishonesty,

corruption, immorality, violence, pornography, the diminishing respect for human life, and the increase in abortion.

“Whose fault is it? Let me put it like this: if the house is dark at night, there is no sense in blaming the house. That's what happens when the sun goes down. The question to ask is, "Where is the light?"

“If meat goes bad, there is no sense in blaming the meat. That is what happens when the bacteria are allowed to breed unchecked. The question to ask is, "Where is the salt?"

“If society becomes corrupt like a dark night or stinking fish, there's no sense in blaming society. That's what happens when fallen human society is left to itself and human evil is unrestrained and unchecked. The question to ask is "Where is the church?"<sup>2</sup>

**Pray and obey – for God and country.**

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<sup>2</sup> John Stott, "Christians: Salt and Light," Preaching Today, Tape No. 109.