

# **Spring of Liberty**

## **“Collaboration works.”**

### **Daniel 5:2-6**

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#### **When Government Doesn't Work**

Tripoli: the people flooded into the government compound where the dictator Muammar Qaddafi governed for over four decades. No more iron fist. A long-dormant hope for liberty is reborn. Guns are shot skyward celebrating Libya's spring of liberty. People long denied the right to come to the table of liberty are taking a seat. Now, they want a government that works.

Two weeks ago the credit rating of the United States of America was downgraded for the first time in history. Standard and Poors said that it wasn't because we were actually incapable of paying off our debts.

It was because they didn't believe that our government leaders could work together well enough. So were they really saying that we no longer have a government that works?

#### **Responsibility**

Libyan dictatorship and American democracy are about as different as you can get. Americans don't have a regime that crushes and kills its opposition.

And yet: have you ever noticed how whatever group gets into control in Washington or Lansing it seems like a takeover – only they don't actually *kill* the opposition they just often refuse to listen to anyone with a different point of view?

The spoils of victory.

It's when victors exploit their spoils, government stops working. The needy are hurt the most and the public good gets lost. Sometimes Will Rogers' words ring true: “The more you observe politics the more you've got to admit that each party is worse than the other.”

Though I don't like what it's done to my pension portfolio, Standard and Poors might have a point.

The story from the Book of Daniel takes us to a banquet at the end of Babylon. It's said when Babylon conquered peoples and oppressed them they confiscated their idols and sacred things. Then they'd use them and abuse them as a way of rubbing defeat in the face of the defeated, who of course had no seat at their table of liberty. The oppression of the defeated was emphasized by the oppression of things they held sacred.

So Belshazzar the dictator held a feast and took the sacred vessels of the Jews and used them to make sacrifice to his false gods. He gloated in his superiority, desecrating their holy things. And the mysterious hand appeared writing words on the wall that referred to weights and measurements: *Mene, mene, tekel, parsin*: "You have been weighed in the balance and have been found wanting."

Like Qaddafi, Belshazzar had utterly neglected what he was supposed to do: listen to all the people, govern well, establish justice, protect the weak, and build a strong community. Make seats for all the people to come to the table of liberty.

### **True Governance**

This morning we gather 'round another table. It belongs to the King of the Universe, with places set for the strong and the powerless, victors and vanquished alike. This is the table of reconciliation. It is the table of healing and empowerment. And you and I can take our place. We have a seat.

Jesus' table is a place for collaboration, where plans are determined by everyone listening and contributing for the common good. This table teaches us that we can only expect of our leaders what we demand of ourselves.

As we prepare for another round of campaigns and elections, may we judge our candidates their ability to work with others as much as we discern their platforms.

And may we encourage them by this example: welcoming each other to Jesus' table of grace with respect and love.