

## From Our Pastor

### May 19, 2018

Sabbath Greetings to Everyone!

A neighbor to our South appears close to total implosion. Venezuela's battered economy has been hit by falling oil revenue and the plummeting value of its currency, the bolivar. It also has one of the highest rates of inflation in the world. People are starving or selling possessions in order to just barely get enough to eat. Hospitals are out of many supplies, leaving many patients with chronic conditions in danger of death.

There is food in neighboring Columbia, prompting many to try to cross the border and purchase something to eat. When the border is closed desperate people try to cross anyway. Last week, about 500 Venezuelan women broke through the border controls in search of food. There are protests in the city streets almost every day--some against and some in support of the current government of President Nicholas Maduro.

Why is this once prosperous nation so divided? According to BBC.com, "Venezuela is split into Chavistas, the name given to the followers of the socialist policies of the late President Hugo Chavez, and those who cannot wait to see an end to the 18 years in power of his United Socialist Party (PSUV). After the socialist leader died in 2013, Nicolas Maduro, also of the PSUV, was elected president on a promise to continue Mr. Chavez's policies. Chavistas praise the two men for using Venezuela's oil riches to markedly reduce inequality and for lifting many Venezuelans out of poverty, but the opposition says that since the PSUV came to power in 1999, the socialist party has eroded Venezuela's democratic institutions and mismanaged its economy.

When we look at the chaos and division in Venezuela, are we perhaps seeing our own future?

More than one writer in recent times has observed that the United States is growing divided as in the days prior to the bloody catastrophe known as the Civil War. Red America and Blue America are spiraling into divisions approaching those of 1860.

In an article published in National Review, Victor Davis Hansen recently wrote: "The United States is currently the world's oldest democracy, but America is no more immune from collapse than were some of history's most stable and impressive consensual governments. Fifth-century Athens, Republican Rome, Renaissance Florence and Venice, and many of the elected governments of early 20th-century Western European states eventually destroyed themselves, went bankrupt, or were overrun by invaders.

The United States is dividing as rarely before. Half the country, mostly liberal America, is concentrated in 146 of the nation's more than 3,000 counties — in an area that collectively represents less than 10 percent of the U.S. land mass. The other half, the conservative Red states of the interior of America, is geographically, culturally,

economically, politically, and socially at odds with Blue-state America, which resides mostly on the two coasts."

We see the divide becoming more coarse and mean, with labels and character accusations thrown at those who disagree. Jesus Christ two thousand years ago warned, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. (Matthew 12:25)"

Our Founding Documents, Judeo-Christian principles, and the rule of law were the foundations agreed to by the vast majority of Americans for more than two hundred years. In recent times those foundations have been under assault from every quarter and we see the result. How much longer before our divisions about basic principles of life result in an anarchy similar to what we observe in Venezuela?

As a nation we have forgotten the God who blessed us more than any nation in history. Our schools teach our children that creation was an accident, life came by chance, and there is no lawgiver or eternal truth. The entertainment industry flaunts morals and derides any belief in a God or commandments.

The words of Ezekiel spoken in 590 BC ring loud for us today, "Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 18:31)

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