

## PASSING OF MR LEE KUAN YEW

The nation of Singapore united in mourning the passing this week of its founding father, Mr Lee Kuan Yew. The first prime minister's name is synonymous with the rise of the nation. LKY was undisputedly the most well-known man in Singapore. All around the world, the great and the good have saluted the memory of a leader of undoubted vision, courage, wisdom, and determination. In his lifetime LKY forged a diverse group of multi-ethnic immigrants into a secure, efficient, and prosperous nation.

The Bible has much to say about government. We know that our state leaders are raised up by God, "*For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.*" (Rom. 13:1b) It is God alone who determines who sits on the throne. That does not mean that everything they do is right or good, but that God is the sovereign power behind them, permitting their rule. As such, we are called to be subject to them and "*Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.*" (Rom. 13:7) This "*fear*" is more a sense of awe and reverence for those that hold the offices of the state. This word "*honour*" has the idea of showing the proper respect for those in authority because they are holding a God-appointed office. Peter also exhorts us to "*honour the king*" (1 Peter 2:17).

One of the chief responsibilities of a Government is to maintain law and order. The divine mandate is,

**For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. (Rom. 13:3-4)**

Government is given by God to restrain man's sin and to protect man from himself. Even bad government is better than no government. For if God were to remove governments, lawlessness and sin would abound in our society as in the days of anarchy before the flood. The worst days in Israel were days when lawlessness reigned, "*In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes*" (Judges 17:6)

LKY inherited the English Legal system from the British in 1965 that was based on the values of the Judeo-Christian worldview. Wisely, he upheld and uncompromisingly enforced those values in Singapore society. Today our wives and daughters can walk the streets of the city safely at night. The streets of Singapore are clean and the political culture is remarkably uncorrupted. This is universally acknowledged. For instance, the

Corruption Perceptions Index has consistently ranked Singapore as one of the least corrupt countries in the world. It is, therefore, biblically appropriate to honour the legacy of Lee Kuan Yew in maintaining these features of Singapore life in his time of leadership.

As I looked at the old pictures of the newly independent country of 1965 and compare it with the present, it has to be acknowledged that the changes in this country are unparalleled in human history. No other former colony has moved from Third World to First World in one generation. One statistic that caught my eye was that in 1965 the GDP of Singapore was equivalent to that of Myanmar. It is now almost five times the GDP of Myanmar. In terms of purchasing power parity, Singapore now has the third-highest per capita income in the world. It is one of nine countries with the top AAA rating from all credit rating agencies and the only Asian country on the list. Since 1965, after adjusting for inflation, the average incomes of Singaporeans have increased by 6 times! Children from the least privileged backgrounds have risen from great poverty to achieve remarkable success. Acute poverty is rare in Singapore.

Singaporeans have a reputation for grumbling and ingratitude. LKY bemoaned this attribute many times. In 1977 he described the average Singaporean as “a champion grumbler.” However, the passing of LKY showed that the society, that he helped forge so successfully, had not completely forgotten the work he did. Tens of thousands waited up to ten hours in the hot sun to have a brief moment to show their respect before his coffin. When all is said and done most Singaporeans intuitively understood that a giant walked in our midst. The silent majority appreciated his legacy. They were privileged to have such a leader. He was God’s gift to Singapore.

Benjamin Disraeli once observed that real statesmen always formulate policies for the good of the next generation whereas politicians only care about the impact of their policies on the next election. LKY was a true statesman who had a vision for the long term for his people. He was prepared to make the tough choices in order for the future good of the nation. Policies like bilingualism, world-class education, meritocracy, balanced government budgets, CPF, strong anti-criminal sentences etc. were the foundation of the success of Singapore. The trite sound bite of popularisms did not interest him. His policies affected multiple generations.

The greatest ruler in terms of economic achievements in the history of this world was King Solomon. He once observed, “*A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.*” (Prov. 22:1) In 2013, Great Britain buried its greatest post-war Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. I have just returned from Israel this week. The locals there pointed out that their first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion was also their greatest. Tomorrow, Singapore will say a final farewell to their first and greatest Prime Minister. All of us were enriched by his presence and are

poorer now for his passing.

The death of LKY is a notable landmark. It is good for us all to reflect and thank God for his legacy in the arena of human governance. I believe he got more decisions right than wrong and that was a providential blessing for all who live in this society. In his personal life, LKY's love and commitment to his wife and family were an example to us all.

From a Christian perspective, the passing of a great leader reminds us once again that we are all mortal. As the Psalmist reminded, "*Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not*" (Psa. 49:12) In a graveyard in the UK is a headstone which has these words,

*Remember Man as you go by  
As you are now so once was I  
As I am now so shall you be,  
Prepare yourself to follow me*

All the pageantry, power, and wealth cannot hide the fact that we all come into this world and leave the same way, "*But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes*" (Psalm 82:7). It doesn't matter if you have access to the best medical care in the world - the pauper and the prince meet in the graveyard. Death is the great equalizer of humanity. Man comes and goes but only God's word endures for us to live by, "*For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever.*" (1 Peter 1:24-25a)

The older we get the more conscious we are of the impermanence and brevity of life. The limited time we have can be wasted or it can be invested wisely. Often we are so caught up in the busyness of life that we lose sight of its brevity. As the hymn writer says, "Life at best is very brief, like the falling of a leaf." We have no exact knowledge of what will happen in the next few minutes, let alone tomorrow or next year! Many leave their homes in the vigour of health yet depart this world by sundown.

We all are simply passing through life and have an appointment at death with our Creator, "*And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment*" (Heb. 9:27). There is a Higher Power that we must all give account for our lives. That is a fixed appointment that we all must keep.

We do not know what a day may bring forth but God does. It is all tied up in the Sovereign Plan of God. We do not like speaking in terms of there not being a tomorrow. But there may not be. Did you know that you are alive today simply because God wills it? You can't control the length of your life, but you can control its depth. Every day live wisely according to God's Word. Every moment live fully for the glory of God.

The demise of Mr Lee Kuan Yew reminded me of the 2002 death of the late Queen Mother in England. At her funeral service, the Anglican minister read from the old Prayer Book and said, "We commend her to thy

mercy O Lord.” When all that is said and done, that is all we can do!