

Should Christians Care About Politics?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 September 2024

Preacher: Elliott Lytle

[0 : 01] Well, good morning, everybody. Hope everyone's doing good today. My name is Elliot. I'm one of the pastors here. So good to be with you here in One Harbor, New Bern today. And we're going to be continuing in our series called Believable, where we've been answering some tough questions.

And to this point, we've talked about some pretty tough stuff, some difficult questions in Scripture. And so today, you know, we're going to take a little light, nothing too spicy today. We're just going to talk about, you know, a small matter of how Christians should engage in politics.

Of course, I'm joking because there are a few topics today in our society that really calls the temperature to rise in a conversation like discussing politics.

And believers, followers of Jesus haven't been exempt from that. You can tell that from the fact that like when Jesse said last week, hey, we're going to talk about politics, both services were like, mm. And like periodically throughout the week, people are like, you know, hugging me and like praying for me.

Like, I'm so sorry, man. Like I'm going to war or something. But it's a series about hard questions. And so in a series like that, and particularly in election year, it seems like a fitting subject.

[1 : 21] And one that the Bible does have something to say about. However, right up front, we've got a problem, which is the Bible addresses the relationship that Christians have to their government from a very limited perspective.

So when we want to talk about politics, generally what we have in mind in our current context are things like activities associated with running for office or governing or advocacy or like specific legislation or line items and party platforms.

And while the New Testament does certainly address aspects of how Christians should relate to their government, it's pretty silent on how Christians should participate in their government.

And there's a reason for that. If you think about it, at the time when the New Testament was written, there was simply no reality to things like Christian political leadership and Christian governments and participation in a democratic constitutional republic.

Like, those things didn't exist. It would be hundreds of years of like, you know, movement through history before those things come to fruition. And so, the reason that matters is because when we talk about politics or civics or governance, those topics can get really complicated.

[2 : 44] And as believers, we always want to start with, okay, well, what does the Bible say? Like, we want to be a people that knows and follows God's Word. But when the Bible doesn't address something completely directly, I think there's always two temptations.

And as we go through the sermon today, I think it's actually a good, helpful exercise to think about which of these you're more prone to. Like, which of these you've got more of a proclivity to do.

So, the first thing I think we do is we want to try to make the Bible say what we want it to say. We want to use the Bible as an authoritative weight to justify something that it doesn't actually endorse.

We want to take a modern-day political position and lay it into the text in a way that it doesn't actually exist. I think the other temptation is because it may not say something about a specific policy platform.

It's just to put our heads in the sand and avoid all complicated issues altogether. To have nothing to say, right? Like, I'm afraid I'm going to be wrong, so we're just going to say nothing, right?

[3 : 56] And I honestly think those two temptations really help define for us why this is such a tense topic. And so, let's just have some real talk, okay?

So, if you're anxious about talking about this in church, I would guess it revolves around probably one of two things, and I think they actually mirror those two temptations we just talked about.

So, the first one is this. If you're worried about having a sermon on politics, it might be because what you've experienced or what you're worried is going to happen is, I'm going to get up here, and I'm going to preach some text of Scripture, and then I'm going to exegete it, and at the end of that, I'm going to say, because of that, it is completely obvious that the only person a follower of Christ could vote for is.

And then I fill in the name. Or I'm going to say, you cannot be a follower of Jesus and be a part of the blank party.

Or maybe it's a piece of policy. I'm going to come up here, and you're worried that I'm going to read from the text, and then I'm going to give you like a modern-day political platform party and say, you know, if you don't follow that, you're not loving your neighbor.

[5 : 09] If you follow that, you're supporting evil. You've become a puppet of an evil and secular and pagan government. And of course, the problem with that is, if you don't agree, that leaves you in a real tough spot, right?

Like, I like this church, and I like the way we preach the gospel, and I like the people here, and I like the community, but I just don't agree with that. So, am I like outside the camp now?

So, for many of us, because of that tension, I think we want to go the other way and say, you know, the best route is just to not bring it up at all, right?

Like, let's just not talk about that, right? Vote your conscience, we're done, you know, and just be done with the sermon. But sticking our head in the sand has consequences as ever.

And, you know, just like the other. And I would say, for many, that's actually the other frustration, right? Why don't we say more? Like, are we really going to have no commentary on anything that's happening in our society?

[6 : 13] Like, has Jesus really just called us to be mute on everything? And indeed, really, at some of the worst moments in history, I would argue there's some legitimate criticism to be had for a church remaining silent.

Like, where was the church? Where was the voice of the church when Nazis were taking over Germany? Where was the voice of the church during Jim Crow?

And so, for many, the frustration is going to be, why don't we say more? Because the truth is, I don't think every issue has some kind of squishy middle, right? Like, there's sort of this idea out there that there's like, here's what conservatives believe, and here's progressives, and probably the answer's in the middle somewhere.

I don't think that's the truth. Like, not every issue has some compromise in the middle. Some things require you to have a more definitive stand. And so, obviously, a charged subject.

And so, that being the case, I'm going to ask the same question I did the last time I gave a sermon in this Believeable series, is I think it's an important question to ask. So, why should we even talk about this?

[7 : 21] Like, if it's going to be, like, can it be of help to do a sermon like this? Or is it just going to be something we're wading into that's going to be hopelessly divisive?

Well, obviously, I'm preaching, so I believe the answer to that's yes. And I would say kind of two simple things up front. One, I think we should talk about politics because how followers of Jesus live every area of their lives matters.

God wants to be Lord of every piece of our lives. And it would seem strange to me that there would be, like, this one thing where you go, ah, but not that. That's something different, right?

How we live our lives, how we engage in politics, whether you want it to or not, is part of how we testify to the truth of who Jesus is. And so, I think we have to talk about it.

The other thing is I think we should talk about politics because of its impact on relationships. I think there's a few things in our culture that are really tearing apart relationships and causing Christians to sin more than engaging poorly on this topic.

[8 : 27] And so, I think silence on this issue, just because it might be awkward or uncomfortable or heated or turning a blind eye to it, is really just watching our brothers and sisters get damaged by this and saying nothing, right?

So, we're going to trust that God does have something to say to us, and we're going to go for it today. But before we jump into the text from Scripture, just a couple more prefacing remarks.

So, like other topics in this series, and this one in particular, there is no way we can cover comprehensively everything you might want to talk about around this, right? It's just too broad a

subject.

And so, today I'm really just going to focus, laser focus in on what specifically the Bible does say, not every application of that. And what that means is, in a sermon like this, there is probably going to be multiple points, and this would be me too, not just you, but I'm going to say something, and your first reaction is going to be, but what about?

And those questions are important too. So, we don't have time to get in all those today, and frankly, I don't think like a monologue like this is the best way to do that kind of discussion. So, on October 12th, from 9 to 12, this will be in the New Bern events calendar shortly, we're going to host a workshop on the subject of Christians and politics.

[9 : 44] We did this recently at the Moorhead site, and a lot of people felt like it was really helpful. And so, in that forum, we're going to have, that's going to be more like a roundtable discussion, where we'll have a little mix of teaching, and then some discussion at the roundtables.

And what we'll do there is we'll really think about different approaches that Christians have taken to politics, like their strengths and their weaknesses, and we'll talk about some of those fundamental issues of how Christians and public service work.

And so, the point will be to leave there with a better understanding and a better discussion about the various perspectives that Christians have taken. So, if you leave unsatisfied today, and you want to talk about more of that, please sign up for that.

That space will be limited, but here at the New Bern site on October 12th, we'll be announcing that over the coming weeks. But today, we're going to look at what honestly I think is most important, which is what's in the Bible.

What God has said to us. And before we do, I just want to, again, maybe like lower everybody's anxiousness. You do realize that God knew one day we would be here, right?

[10 : 52] Like, they might not have known about the United States when the Bible was written, but God did. And He knew that one day we would be sitting here, followers of Jesus, talking about this subject.

And so, we can approach it with courage because our Father's here with us. Amen? So, let's just pause and pray for a moment, and we'll get into it. Father, we commend these moments to You. God, we want to be good stewards of everything You gave us. We want to be like Jesus in all that we do. God, I just pray You'll bring Your Spirit here, Your comfort, Your peace, Your illumination, Your challenge.

Make us like You, Father. Come and be amongst us. Send Your Spirit. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. So, we're going to do two readings today, and we're going to spend most of our time in Romans, but I do want to take a quick stop in the Gospel of Matthew because Romans is going to give us this nice little concise bit of theology about how we relate to our government. But there's a story in Matthew that I really think helps frame how Jesus thinks about the role of government and its context in God's kingdom. So, Matthew chapter 22, verses 15 through 22, you have this story.

[12 : 07] It says, Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle Him, Jesus, with His words. And they sent their disciples to Him along with the Herodians saying, Teacher, we know that You're true and You teach the way of God truthfully and do not care about anyone's opinion, for You are not swayed by appearance.

Tell us then what You think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, Why do You put me to the test, you hypocrites?

Show me the coin for the tax. And they brought Him a denarii. And Jesus said, Whose likeness and inscription is this? And they said, It's Caesar's. And then He said, Therefore, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.

And when they heard it, they marveled. And they left Him, and they went away. Now, we're not going to do like a full-blown exposition. We actually talked about this story in a similar way in the book of Mark.

But just as a real quick recap, so this tax, as talked about in this verse, was really, really contentious in Jesus' day. Not the least of which because it was considered idolatrous because it had an image of Caesar on it, and Caesar was deemed worthy of worship.

[13 : 24] Now, the Pharisees aren't really coming because they're that upset about the idolatry here. What they're really trying to do, because the text tells us that, is they're trying to find a way to trap Jesus.

And they think they've got Him because this is what the dilemma they've created is. If He says He supports the tax, then He sounds like He supports idolatry. Like the Jews will see that as it's got Caesar's image on it, and He's an idolater.

And if He doesn't support it, then He sounds like an insurrectionist. And maybe the Romans will take care of Him for us. And Jesus comes back with, honestly, one of the most brilliant comebacks in recorded history.

It says they went away and they marveled, and this is why. So the first thing He does is He asks for a coin, which is kind of ironic, right? Because that means somebody had to have it in their pocket, right?

Like, y'all so worried about this thing being idolatrous, but y'all carrying around that Caesar jingle too, right? Like, somebody's got that. So already, that's probably why He calls them hypocrites, right?

[14:28] Like they're carrying it around. And then He holds the coin up and He says, whose image is on that? And they said Caesar. And He says, so give it to Him. And if you're following the logic, that immediately begs the question, well then what has God's image on it?

You do. You are made in God's image. And so Jesus basically says, Caesar gets some of your money, but God gets your whole life.

Give back to Caesar that little thing that's His, but give to God what is His. And in doing that, He not only avoids that dilemma, He does something really profound. Jesus both legitimizes and trivializes human government.

So some people in Jesus' day, just like in our own, really believed that almost all governments should be overthrown and they were illegitimate.

Like if it wasn't the theocratic, covenantal-type government that God had set up for Israel, it had no place in anyone's lives. The zealots in particular were saying, this is a huge dilemma.

[15:35] There is no way you can have any loyalty or any honor to another country and to God. You can't do both. And Jesus basically disarms them and says, that's a false dilemma.

Christians in every age, I think, have been tempted to use the immorality and godlessness of leaders as an excuse to just disobey or dishonor them.

And as a teaser, we are going to see later in this sermon that sometimes civil disobedience is absolutely necessary. But what you never see in Scripture is this wanton disregard for the right of governments to government.

Like what you don't see is that you get to do whatever you want when you disagree. I mean, think about it. Jesus essentially says here, Caesar has the right to tax you. And this is at a time when taxes are a lot more exploitative even than they are today, if you can believe that.

And Jesus doesn't like append on it and only pay that tax to Caesar if you can verify that that that money's going to things that you agree with. And think about the audience he's talking to.

[16:42] Like what was Rome doing with that money? Like some things that maybe you could argue were common good like building roads and aqueducts and things and some things like building temples to false gods.

Like some of that money was going into centurions' pockets who maybe to some measure helped keep the order and keep peace but also might hang your family on a cross if you got sideways or wrong.

But frankly, none of that seems to be Jesus' primary concern here. And that's actually part of a bigger theme. If you wonder about some of the harder sayings in Scripture, there is a theme that runs all throughout Scripture where God is just much more concerned about who you are and who you are becoming than what circumstance you find yourself in.

I mean, maybe to put it more plainly, we absolutely always want to focus on our government and the problems with it. And Jesus wants to focus on the problems in us.

And we don't like that shift. And so Jesus, if He legitimizes the government, then we can't just run past it. We have to take it seriously. But also, we shouldn't take it too seriously.

[17:57] See, part of the genius of Jesus' answer is that it does give some honor to Rome, to Caesar, but it's also really subversive. Like it doesn't directly undermine the government authorities, but it does trivialize them.

What does Caesar owe? Some things give them to Him. What is God owed? Everything. And it seems to be that that's the teaching that Paul wants to write about in Romans 13.

So when we jump over to Romans 13, the Apostle Paul, writing to an audience in Rome, says this, 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.

Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to do good conduct, but to bad. Would you have, you would have no fear of the one who is in authority?

Then do good, and you will receive His approval, for He's God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for He does not bear the sword in vain. He is a servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

[19 : 12] Therefore, one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath, but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this, you also pay the taxes, because the authorities are ministers of God attending to this very thing.

Pay to all what is owed to them, taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, and honor to whom honor is owed.

So, again, we don't have time, like there are so many things packed in that verse that we could unpack, and so today I think we only have time for a few broad themes, and I think the first broad principle is probably going to be the hardest for us, so let's just go ahead and do it.

Followers of Jesus should submit to and respect governing authorities. So this passage tells us pretty plainly, you can't just say because God's kingdom is here, because God is the ultimate king, I can fully disregard human kingdoms, even those that are opposed to God's ways.

Now, an important textual note, Paul does use the word be subject to or submit here, not obey.

Like, we don't owe unconditional obedience to the government, and we're going to talk about that in a minute, but submission is a really important part of the Christian life, and frankly we can't just rush past it.

[20 : 40] And just by the way, that's throughout Scripture on a variety of topics and relationships, and I think most of the time our natural, again, proclivity is to try to figure a way out of it, but what about, right?

Like, let me give you an example. So, the Bible says pretty clearly, children, obey and honor your parents. That is the normative way that children are supposed to relate to their parents.

And for the most part, we don't have a problem with that, but obviously even a statement like that engenders some questions, right? Like, what about when the parents are really bad? Like, what about when they're dangerous?

What about when they're abusive? And that's a really important question, and something you have to flesh out, right? Like, I think most people in here would say, yeah, there is probably a point where honoring looks like not obeying or getting away, right?

But even in that, you can't, the admonition is not children obey and honor your parents only when they're perfect.

[21 : 47] Like, you can't just run past it, and we have, because Jesus takes it serious, we have to take it serious as well. And I think this verse from Paul points out a couple of reasons.

First, we're called to submit to the government because the government and governmental leaders are a God-appointed part of this world. Government is a part of God's providence in how He takes care of the world.

You could probably open up the box of theology and talk about, is that, you know, only in the fallen world after? Was that always part of His plan? That's an interesting question, but as for right now, we know from this verse in Romans, it's a part of God's world, and that's true for both God-fearing and God-hating governments.

And let's just be honest, okay? Like, you don't have to feel a certain way. Like, that is hard to accept. Like, it would have been hard for the ancient Israelites to hear that under the boot of Rome. Frankly, it's hard for us to hear it. Like, that's not something we want to hear either. And it seems like it was probably hard for the early church, too, which is why Paul feels the need to write this segment to an audience who's under the boot of Rome.

[23 : 05] And then it gets even crazier because Paul says, God institute those authorities, and by the way, they have the right to bear the sword. Which seems completely upside down from what he just said in Romans 12.

So, like, if you go back and look at Romans 12, the verse is immediately before Romans 13. This is what Paul says. So, it's all part of the same argument, right? He says, beloved. So, beloved. He's talking to followers of Jesus here. Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God. For it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, you feed him. And if he's thirsty, you give him something to drink. For by so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. So, let me get this straight. Christians, like followers of Jesus, are not allowed to take vengeance for themselves with the sword.

[24 : 09] Nope. But governments can sometimes? Like, non-Christian, pagan? Yes. Sometimes the instrument that God is going to use to mete out justice are the governments of the world and not spirit-filled Christians.

And if that feels really bizarre to you, again, welcome to the kingdom. Like, let's put aside the government part for a second. Let's stop thinking about for them a second. Let's just think about us as believers.

If you are a follower of Jesus, you are a part of his kingdom. And it is an upside-down kingdom. Everything in Scripture says stuff like this. You find your life by losing it.

By dying to yourself. Like, you defeat your enemies by loving them. By refusing to return evil for their evil. That's how you overcome them.

How do you lead? You want to be the leader of everybody? Then you stoop to be the servant of all. And sometimes you entrust the vengeance of God to something other than your own hand.

[25 : 23] And that's really hard to do. It's a tough verse, right? It's okay. You can say it. Yeah, it gets worse. So, like, not only does this verse God tells us He's appointed governments, it says He's appointed leaders as part of those governments.

And if we were to put together a list of names from history, that would be a list that's crazy to us, right? I mean, just think about it. Abraham. Moses.

Nebuchadnezzar. Julius Caesar. Genghis Khan. George Washington. Napoleon Bonaparte. Ronald Reagan. Joe Biden.

Donald Trump. Like, those are all really different names. And they all have their own agendas, and some of them may honor God, and many of them don't.

But at the end of the day, this verse is telling you they're under God's authority, and they're God-ordained leaders or a God-ordained part of the world. And so that means it's not just suck it up and pay your taxes.

[26 : 33] It's also followers of Jesus must respect, honor, and pray for our leaders. Pay to all what is owed to them, taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, and honor to whom honor is owed.

That is not a suggestion. The Bible says you owe them that. 1 Timothy says, we are to pray for kings and those in high authority.

That means regardless of how good or bad, how much you agree or don't agree, you are called to earnestly pray that your leaders will lead well.

And I promise you, there are days that I wish that wasn't in the Bible just as much as you do. Like, you know, again, all cards on the table, like, I'm not, you know, just completely emotionless human. There are people in elective office every day, and particularly in seasons like this, that say and do things that infuriate me, that I get really frustrated with.

[27 : 42] And so you need to know that so you can actually hear what I'm about to say. What that verse means, if nothing else, is that there's really no room for insults or mockery to be a part of how Jesus' people do business.

Or maybe to say it more plainly, followers of Jesus don't get to play politics like everybody else gets to play politics. Now I understand there's probably some complexity here in, again, a democratic republic where the way we change, like the way we interface with each other is primarily through influence instead of violence, right?

That's a good thing. And so you can probably have a reasonable discussion about the place of things like satire and irony and good-natured humor to kind of make a point or to criticize.

But pretty bluntly, we don't get to deal in mockery and insult. We don't get to deal in shaming, even if we have cultural license to do it.

And that's especially true when you think your leaders are shameful. Here's maybe a little less charged example, right? So I love sports. Like, I love the competition of it.

[28 : 53] I love the struggle. I love the rivalry. And if anybody's in here ever been to like a really charged sporting event, right? Like you go to that arena, you realize really quickly you can get away with some stuff.

Like you can say some stuff and do some stuff that in normal society will get you punched in the face, right? Like you're allowed a little bit of extra rope in there, right? But even in that context, if I'm a follower of Jesus there, right?

What that doesn't mean is even if I can get away with it, it doesn't mean Jesus has given me liberty to say whatever vulgarity comes to my mind and heart to someone else. I am still a follower of Jesus in that context.

And in the same way, we can't play politics like everybody else because of that common grace and again also because it's God's kingdom.

It's upside down. Like we do get to call out shameful behavior, but we do it while honoring and showing love, even as enemies shame themselves.

[30 : 02] You know, as terrible as our politics are, I'm afraid they are really, really good at one thing, and that's revealing what's in us as a people, as a country.

It's not good. I mean, we all see what gets posted on social media. We all hear what people say around the dinner table. And more importantly, God sees it.

A world of people that don't know Christ sees it. And I know it's not comfortable or easy to do that. I mean, like we're literally saying, I'm not going to treat my leaders with the same lack of respect and disregard that everybody around me does.

That is not easy. But I think this is one of those reasons, this is one of those places why Jesus says stuff in Scripture like, why are you going to call me Lord and not do what I say? If you're a Christian, you don't have the license to deal in shame and disrespect.

You can criticize, you can promote change, you can point out evil. We're going to see in a minute, you always are allowed to resist evil. But you don't dishonor. If you want to say something, if you want to add something to the conversation, I think you have to run it through that filter.

[31 : 20] And that's hard. So now you're thinking, okay, okay, but let's hit a what about here. What about if the laws of a state or nation directly contradict God's laws?

What about if I am ordered to reject God or to worship someone other than Him? Am I just to go along with that? Well, thankfully no, because while this verse and others in Scriptures do tell us that followers of Jesus honor and submit to the government, it also tells us that followers of Jesus also resist the government and speak the truth.

So in Acts chapter 4, there's this scene where Peter and John have been hauled in for preaching about Jesus.

And they're intimidated. And one of the things that the ruling council does says is, hey, we're going to let you go, but you've got to cut out all that preaching about Jesus stuff. And they say in Acts 4, but Peter and John answer them and they say, well, whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than God, you have to judge, for we cannot but speak of what we've seen and heard.

That is a really polite way to say, no, we're not going to do that. That's a form of disobeying the government. That's civil disobedience. There's a difference between blind obedience and a type of submission that always locates itself in the given authority of God.

[32 : 54] And that's not the only place you see that in the Bible. Famous story from the Old Testament. An ancient king has set up an idol to himself to be worshiped.

And there are three Hebrews, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that he says, we're going to play this music and then you're going to worship this idol. And they say, we're not going to do it. And he says, well, if you're not going to do it, then we've got this big bonfire going over here, and you're going to get thrown into that. And their answer to him is, well, we're still not doing it, and you should know that God is perfectly capable of saving us from that, or maybe not.

Maybe we get burned up. But either way, we're not bowing down to that idol. Into the fire. Now, I do want to point out something, that the bar for civil disobedience in Scripture is usually pretty high.

And usually it's around something like you being directly asked to disobey God or worship someone other than God. And I think there's also a difference between disobeying unjust laws and organizing like a broader resistance or a rebellion or something like that, right?

[34 : 18] I mean, let's think about this. So you are always allowed to resist evil. You are always allowed to resist evil. But some of the times what resisting evil looks like is you saying no, and then you being willing to accept the consequences even unto punishment and harassment and death.

That's what you see followers of Jesus, followers of God do. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego didn't immediately try to bust their way out of there.

They simply said, You're not in charge. God is. And if it's His will that we get burned up, that's fine. As it happens, He didn't. He stepped right into and saved them.

And He can do that. But they entrusted Himself to them. So if the question is, like, when is it appropriate to take up arms? Like, to physically resist a government? Man, that's an even more complex subject.

Like, same question as with obey your parents. Like, when is a government so bad that I'm not obligated to be a part of it anymore? That is a heavy question, and one that followers of Jesus have been wrestling through over the years.

[35 : 24] Come to the forum? We don't talk about that kind of thing. What I do know is that line is probably farther than you think it is. And at best, at best, it's a secondary consideration for a citizen of God's kingdom.

When Jesus was here, overthrowing the Romans is what everyone wanted Jesus to do. Like, if you ever look back on Jesus' disciples and like, Why were they always like, We've got to overthrow Rome.

Why didn't they see, like, what Jesus— Because they feel like we feel. The thing that was most oppressive, most egregious to them is that they were under the foot. They were being forced to submit to a government that was oppressive, that they didn't agree with.

And everyone wanted Jesus. Throw these Romans out, and he wouldn't do it. Even to the point of his sentencing. When Jesus is standing before Pilate, again, just to me, one of the most intriguing scenes in all of history, even from a human point of view, it's this rabbi from a small town in Israel has somehow found himself in a room with the ruler, the Roman ruler of this region.

Even that would be a remarkable story. But then if you flip the other side and you realize, like, this Roman ruler is standing here with the one who spoke the world into existence.

[36 : 50] And they have this interchange. So Pilate calls him in because he wants to know—he's trying to get a handle on what's going on, and everybody's saying he's a king and stuff.

And so he pulls him in and says, What's the deal? Are you a king or not? And so in verse 36, Jesus says, My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I may not be delivered over to the Jews, but my kingdom is not from this world. And then Pilate says, So you are a king. And Jesus answered, You say that I'm a king. But for this purpose I was born, and for this purpose I've come into the world, to bear witness to the truth.

Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice. And then a chapter later, after things get a little more hairy, and Pilate really, like a riot's happening, he doesn't know how to handle it, he comes back in agitated, and he says to Jesus in verse 9, chapter 19, Where are you from?

Jesus doesn't answer him. So Pilate gets even more agitated, and he says, Will you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?

[38 : 02] And Jesus answered him, You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given to you from above. Jesus says, I'm not here to take what you want, because I don't care about what you want.

Jesus trivializes the concerns of Pilate. You care about money and spears and horsemen and earthly crowns, you can have them. My kingdom does not depend on any of that.

And at the same time, he is submitting himself to this wicked ruler because of the authority given to him by his father.

He submits to him because he says, You could have none of that if my father hadn't given it to you. So he submits to the unjust judgment. And even as he submits, that statement's a double-edged sword, right?

It both acknowledges the things we've been talking about, but it's also kind of a way of saying, You don't go one inch farther than my God's apportioned for you.

[39 : 08] And so Jesus entrusts himself to that. Not because he has confidence in the government. Not because he thinks Rome is an unfettered good. But because he trusts his father. It's an astonishing thing.

So let's just take a quick beat here. Because that's a lot, right? And frankly, if you're thinking, Man, I'm going to have to wrestle with this.

I'm not sure I'm on board with all that. That's like the hard thing for me. I guess I would say, Welcome to the last 2,000 years of Christian thought on this subject. You are not the first one and not the last one to wrestle with how we interact with the government.

But so is not to leave us with anything, no practical application. I do think we can take from the text today some things that are helpful for how we navigate this political moment.

And so I'm just going to give you a very few simple, like, from the text, where we can draw out some things I think you can do and some things I think you can't do.

[40 : 15] Okay? The first is this. So we'll start with the stuff I don't think you can do. You can't apply moral principles inconsistently for your own benefit.

It's just very simply hypocrisy. Jesus would never condone it. And frankly, both people on the left and the right do this all the time. You want some examples?

Like, here's what I mean by that. So in some seasons, a political party will say that the character of a candidate matters. We say character is what really matters.

But when it's convenient, then we say, Ah, character doesn't really matter. It's what policy matters. Right? Like, when their guy lies, you know, character matters. When our person lies, let's not be too quick to judge.

And again, what's funny is you probably have in mind what you think I'm saying there, and I can give you manifest examples from both sides of people doing that. Same thing about, like, we say we want truthful and honest and fair reporting and debates until it is embarrassing or damaging to our person or the person, the thing we're trying to do.

[41 : 25] Like, then it becomes much easier to say, Maybe we should just obscure those facts a little bit. Now, I'm not saying that the takeaway from that should be it's all dirty, don't participate in it.

I think the Christian voice is really important. And I'm not even saying both the parties are equally bad all the time. This isn't some kind of both-side-ism sermon, right? Like, you're allowed to care about this and to make judgments.

What I am trying to tell you is both of our political parties are prone to hypocrisy, and they are going to ask you to justify it. They're going to ask you to carry that water.

And the reason for that's really simple. Both parties want your vote more than they want your faithful obedience to Christ. And I think really the way to avoid that is not to just say I'm not going to participate or even to say I'm never going to endorse a political party.

It's just to recognize it and to say that as a follower of Jesus, you're probably never going to feel completely at home in a political environment. Like, there should always be a little bit of dissonance, right?

[42 : 28] Like, if you believe that either one of our current political parties is a direct, mapped equivalent to the kingdom of God, I would say something has gone wrong. It's okay to support a party, but don't be so uncritical that you become a hypocrite because that is a testament to the world.

Another thing to watch out for is that religious political syncretism can become idolatry. So syncretism is just a big word that means the merging of religious systems.

And so in the Old Testament, this happened a lot. And most of the time when Israel started walking away from Yahweh, it wasn't they just abandoned God.

It was like they did God and something else. Like, God and Baal. God and Asherah poles. Like, they tried to have both of those. And if you're not careful, just about anything in life, including politics, can become a religion, right?

And some of this is like really overt, and when it gets overt, it gets strange, right? Like, again, so a couple examples. So after the assassination temp on Donald Trump, which again was thankfully unsuccessful, Christians started saying some really strange things about that wound on his ear, right?

[43 : 46] Like trying to make connections between like that blood and the blood in Leviticus 8. Leviticus 8 is not about Donald Trump.

It's not about Kamala Harris. It's not about politics. Neither of them are priests. All of the Bible is about Jesus. Unless you think that sounds like you're picking on a Republican example, I've seen in several instances Democrats hold up or reverence political figures, even in church with the same

kind of anointed or salvific tones surrounding a candidate with like a reverence befitting only of Jesus.

Doesn't mean you can't support somebody for a host of reasons, but if you are trusting any political leader to save you, to be what only God can be, that's not respecting the government.

That's just idolatry. And I think that leads us to kind of one other thing you can't do. Don't trade your soul for a political victory. Now I get it.

Like, I hear myself, right? And so I read the same headlines. I understand where we are as a country. And so you might say, Elliot, that's all good sermon stuff, but really that's just pie-in-the-sky spirituality.

[45 : 05] Because if you don't play this game, you can't win. You're not going to win. To which I would say, you know what? You might be true.

Don't win. What does it profit a person to gain the entire world and lose their own soul? Elliot, don't you know what will happen if fill-in-the-blank gets control?

Yeah. Politics have significant consequences for you, your country, your family. You're allowed to care. You're allowed to care. But hear me.

God never needs you to be a hypocrite so His kingdom can advance. God never needs your sin to be honored. That's the whole point of witness.

You know, the word martyr literally means to be a witness. And what I mean by that is, like, if you think about throughout the history of God's church, there have been so many people who, like, their final act of witness was to say, I'm not going to bow down to sin.

[46 : 16] I'm not going to bow down to the things of this world. And they went to their grave for the Lord. Like, if the death of those saints is a pleasing sacrifice, and the death of Jesus is a pleasing sacrifice, like, if those literal deaths don't render their lives meaningless, is it not at least even conceivable that losing at a political game could do the same at some point?

Christian participation in the democratic process can be a faithful witness, even if it looks like it's a failure. Martyrdom doesn't negate the value of life, and political defeat doesn't negate the value of political engagement.

Does that mean we shouldn't try? Of course not. It just means you're obligated to pursue holiness more than political outcomes, even as you pursue those outcomes.

And I would say probably a morally compromised victory is probably less likely to advance God's kingdom than a Christ-like defeat. And it's a paradox.

The gospel is proclaimed in death and defeat. Let's not despise it if that's what God asks of us. And I know that's foolishness to the world, but the Bible says it's God's wisdom to those who love Him.

[47 : 38] So, you got anything positive in that bag before we go? Okay. Anything we can do to make this mess better? Any reason to have hope? Friends, as we close, we are children of the King.

We always have hope, and we can always make a difference. And so, here's a few things I think we can do and would make a difference. The first is this. We can absolutely refuse to hate our enemies.

I think so much of our current political discourse actually has kind of this insidious undercurrent.

And it really goes something like this. The world would be a lot better place if those folks just didn't exist.

And I would say no matter how at odds you find yourself with somebody, no matter how vile you believe their beliefs is, you can refuse to hate them.

You can refuse to wish evil on them, to hope they get theirs. And I think another application of that could just very simply be like, don't immediately assume the worst.

[48 : 43] Like, if you're talking to someone and they find out they're not voting, you find out they're not voting for who you're voting for, don't let that cross into immediate suspicion. That doesn't mean you're not going to find yourself at odds with people.

Like, disagreements can be severe, and it can affect relationships. And sometimes, following what your conscience is means you just find yourself opposed to people. I mean, that's part of life. But you can absolutely do that without hating.

And I promise you, if we do, like, the world notices that. Somebody will notice that. Also, you know, I don't see anything in these verses that say you can't, like, you can absolutely advocate for positions, you can work for change, you can speak the truth, you can vote your conscience, and

you can pray for God's kingdom to come.

Like, it is absolutely okay to want good governance. Like, it is okay to get involved and advocate for policies, and to some extent even for parties.

Like, you're allowed to care. You're allowed to try to change minds, but just don't love it too much. Don't obsess about it too much. Because if you do, it'll morph into idolatry and fear and rage and hypocrisy.

[49 : 59] And again, back to what Jesus says. I mean, this key thing, you cannot overcome evil with evil. And that's part of the trick of this world is it wants to convince you you can.

You can't. You cannot defeat evil with evil. And the answer to that is not to be apolitical. It's just to be more and more oriented towards being a disciple of Jesus wherever you go.

We have a leader. The government is on his shoulders. His law of liberty is the law of our people. And one day every knee will bow to that.

And we can trust in that. And because of that, because we know who we serve, you can rest secure in the arms of the king. So look, if you haven't agreed with anything else I've said today, or if you hear nothing else I say, I would ask you, this is one thing I would ask you to do as a pastor in this church.

I think this is something that could be helpful. So after election night, regardless of what the outcome is, whether the outcome is something that's made you really happy, like really hopeful for the future.

[51 : 09] Maybe it's something kind of neutral, like you're not really happy, but you're just kind of like, ooh, dodged a bullet, you know, like that kind of thing. Maybe you're really and legitimately concerned for the future of our country and what it means for your family.

Any of those things, wherever you're at, go into a quiet place. Like take whatever that emotion is and go into a quiet place before God.

Just put it before Him, whether you're excited or whether you're scared, and say, those are not the things that define me. Maybe this is a good place to just quote Scripture, right?

Like maybe you quote from the scenes at the end of the play where it says, To Him who sits on the throne and unto the Lamb be glory and honor and praise.

Like maybe you just lay that before the Father. You know, I don't like what happened there. To Him who sits on the throne. Maybe it's again, you go grab that verse from Isaiah and you say, Unto us a child is born, and the government will be on His shoulders.

[52 : 13] And of the greatness and goodness and peace of His kingdom, there will be no end. You can speak that over whatever joy or whatever fear or whatever angst you have.

You can submit that to the Father and say, at the end of the day, I will be completely safe. There might be trials ahead, but I will be completely safe because I belong to an indestructible king and an indestructible kingdom.

Amen? As the band comes up, if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus, I know this is kind of a strange sermon to walk in on.

Man, we're so glad you're here with us. And I think the thing I would say, like, as a takeaway from this is, you don't have to live or die by your politics. Like, you don't have to be a follower of Jesus to see how this stuff can easily take over your life.

And I would say to you, it doesn't have to be the end all be all. Like, there is hope beyond the election. There is hope beyond that.

[53 : 14] And His name is Jesus. We'll have a prayer on the screen behind us. That's a way you can express you want to come to Him. If you want that, just come forward. You can just ask Him, Jesus, I don't know if that's true, but I want it to be.

I want to know that peace. If you are a follower of Jesus, again, I would invite you to wrestle with it. You're allowed to wrestle with it.

But Jesus is your King. Jesus is your King. And it's okay to say, you know what, again, He's a loving God.

If you feel like, maybe I've gone off track here, just tell that to Him. His arms are open wide. We're not going to be perfect in the execution of this, but we can always draw near to our Father.

We're going to come to a moment of communion here. We're going to come and take this bread and this cup, and we remember that Jesus always resisted evil up to death.

[54 : 23] He submitted to the things His Father told Him to submit it to, but He trusted Himself only to the Father. We have that same communion with Him. We are safe because Jesus is indestructible.

And that's the thing you can do when you're communing. You're saying, I am part of that. Wherever Jesus is seated, from now till eternity, I will be with Him.

Nothing can steal that from you. No power of hell. No scheme of man. God, some of these are hard sayings.

Help us to have wisdom to navigate these moments, but help us also to be courageous to do the hard things, to trust you and not our own hands, to work for goodness and justice and righteousness, but to do it without becoming an instrument of evil.

Father, we can't do that without you. We need you every moment. When we fail, just give us your grace again and again. Pray for our country. Pray for all the world.

[55 : 41] Thy kingdom come, thy will be done. In Jesus' name, amen.