
Politically Incorrect: #2
"The Problem of Dual Citizenship
Oct. 19, 2008 **Mark 12:13-17**

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But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." 16 They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied.

17 Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him. NIV

Believe it or not... I survived last Sunday's introduction to our "Exploring the Intersection of Faith & Politics" series (even the Elders' meeting that afternoon) and so we continue this morning... but before we begin let me remind you WHY I believe this study is so important. Not, to stir up division or cause problems in the church... we ought to be mature enough to be able to discuss things over which we might disagree... but rather to explore the relationship between our Faith and our Politics. I believe strongly in the separation of church & state... but NOT in the separation of faith & politics! Our faith ought to play a role in EVERY part of our lives... not just part of it. It also isn't to endorse a particular candidate, party or even platform... but rather to explore another way... the way of Jesus. It is to ask in our political quandaries, what would Jesus do? How would Jesus vote? How do disciples of Jesus interact with the world around us (including the government) to be salt & light?

Now I realize not everybody is comfortable with this discussion... but I think its one that we must have! Christians often sit back and lament the state of our country today... but are AFRAID to speak out or DO anything about it! And now here we have an opportunity to speak out... to speak a word for God in the midst of all the political rhetoric... we can't just stick our head in the sand and let the world work it all out!

I am afraid that another reason we are afraid to talk about politics in church is because many Christians are confused about their citizenship. Remember we saw in Matt 5 and Jesus' Sermon on the Mt. that Jesus deliberately used a politically charged term when he talked about the "Kingdom of Heaven." Kingdom is a political term for government or nation... empire. So to talk about the "Kingdom of Heaven" was to purposefully contrast the way of God with the ways of the world! It was to say to Rome and the citizens of the Roman Kingdom... there's another kingdom out there! You don't think that was politically charged, think again! Time & time again the Bible speaks about this new Kingdom that Jesus established...

John 18:36

36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." NIV

And as citizens of this kingdom, Peter called us "aliens & strangers" (cf. 1 Peter 2:11-12) and Paul...

Philippians 3:20

20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, NIV

I've got a passport that identifies me as a citizen of the United States of America... that entitles me to all of the rights & privileges that goes with it. And it is absolutely the greatest country on Earth. I'm proud of my citizenship... I am proud to be an American... But I'm also a citizen of heaven... when I was baptized into Christ, I became a member of the Kingdom of God... that's what I mean by "dual citizenship". I've got a buddy who is a missionary in England. He's from Murfreesboro so he was born a US citizen. He married a lovely lady over there who was a British citizen. They've got two boys born there (one in Scotland, the other in England) and so THEY are both British citizens AND US citizens... dual citizenship Because his wife also has dual citizenship in Canada (her mother was Canadian) their kids

also have the option of choosing to be Canadian citizens as well.. but they would have to give up one of their other two. They're coming back to the states next year and if she wants to become a US citizen, she'll have to give up one of the other two as well. Confused yet? I think a lot of Christians get confused, too, about their dual citizenship! We are citizens of both the United States AND the Kingdom of God... **but which should come FIRST?**

For the most part it is not a big deal. There's no problem. Because we live in a wonderful country that gives us the freedom to worship as we see right... and to assemble together without fear that the government is going to come in and shut us down... we don't see any conflict. But its not that way everywhere... in some countries it is illegal to practice Christianity. And it hasn't always been easy in our country either. During the Civil War, David Lipscomb (who was an influential leader in churches of Christ) was an outspoken critic of the war. His sermons often called Christians to not participate in the violence & killing that had Christians shooting at fellow Christians! He said that isn't right! Because of this, one day he was preaching up in Columbia, TN and an officer on a special mission from General Nathan Bedford Forrest appeared in the congregation, wearing the insignia of the government... the Confederate States of America. He had been sent to determine if Lipscomb was guilty of treason for his preaching. Undeterred by the man's presence, Lipscomb presented his lesson as faithfully as he knew how. When the officer reported on whether or not the sermon was treasonous, he said this. "I have not reached a conclusion as to whether or not the doctrine of the sermon is loyal to the Southern Confederacy, but I am profoundly convinced that he is loyal to the Christian religion." (Hicks, Kingdom Come, 146.) My point is not to argue the legitimacy of war... but to recognize that this was a strong, religious conviction Lipscomb held as a matter of his faith... and it put him at odds with the government of his day. He had to decide which 'kingdom' he was more beholden to... and it was obvious to the officer which kingdom came first.

Its not always easy... the Kingdom of the world is VASTLY different from the Kingdom of God! The Kingdom of heaven calls us to... but the kingdom of the world... "not store up for ourselves treasures on earth..." vs. "to invest for retirement"... "love your enemies"... vs. "route out your enemies" ... "turn the other cheek"... vs. "give him a good left hook!" And so its in these conflicts... when kingdoms collide that we're left to wonder... what are we to do?

I think that's the issue Jesus addresses in **Mark 12:13-17**. Look again at what is going on there...

13 Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words.

They say "politics make strange bedfellows" and that is certainly true here. These two groups were many times more different than Republicans & Democrats. Pharisees were loyal to God (supposedly) & the faithful Jewish religion. Herodians were in league with Rome and represented the civil authorities. But their common enemy, Jesus, has brought the two together. At least they had their hatred of Jesus in common. And here these two groups come at Jesus 'to trap him in his words.' Already sounds like politics, right?

14 They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.

Interesting that they know Jesus to be a man of integrity... not swayed by the political winds! He's not out gathering polling data so he'll know how to answer the question... He is who he is. So, these partisans come at Jesus in a political way and with a political question...

Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? 15 Should we pay or shouldn't we?"

Taxes are ALWAYS a political hot-button issue, aren't they? And Jesus handles it masterfully!

But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." 16 They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. 17 Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him. NIV

Now, we might draw a lot of lessons here... (pay your taxes, respect the authorities...) but the overwhelming lesson they would have heard that day... **“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s”**... WHO was Caesar supposed to be? Right, “God”! Jesus is saying... “Caesar is NOT God!” Of all the gall! To infer that there was a difference between the two! Imagine that! On the coin that the fellow had... the image of Caesar was stamped on it... and the words inscribed just below it... “Long Live the Son of God!” To the Romans, Caesar (i.e. the Empire) WAS their God... and Jesus was saying, oh no he’s not! That is idolatry, isn’t it? What does that say for us? If we mistakenly place our citizenship in the kingdom of the world OVER the Kingdom of God... aren’t we guilty of the same idolatry? THAT’S the problem with dual citizenship! We’ve got to be careful not to get our kingdoms confused! Not to put the wrong kingdom FIRST! We should see ourselves as citizens of God’s Kingdom FIRST and FOREMOST!

WHEN WE SEE OURSELVES AS CITIZENS OF HEAVEN FIRST....

1. It changes how we perceive ourselves... our identity

We aren’t just “Christian Americans”... we are “American CHRISTIANS”... Christians FIRST... country second. When we are “born” we are by law citizens of the US... but when we are born again... we become citizens of a greater kingdom.

Philippians 3:20

20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, NIV

And so when it comes to making “political” decisions... (who to vote for, which platform to support, etc.) We are NOT just concerned with what is best for America... but our primary concern should be what is best for the Kingdom of God! That’s what I mean by allowing our faith to inform our politics.

2. It changes how we define our family... ‘our people’

When Jesus was told that his mother & brothers were outside looking for him... thinking he was ‘out of his mind’... Jesus told those listening to him... **“My mother & brothers & sisters are those who hear the Word of God and DO what it says.”** (Mk 3:31-ff) He wasn’t renouncing his family, but he was emphasizing God’s family over anything else. This was the problem Lipscomb saw with the Civil War... there were brothers in Christ on both sides of the politics... KILLING each other over the politics of the kingdom of the World! No matter how just the cause... he saw a fundamental problem with that.

3. It changes who we look to for ultimate HOPE... SECURITY... and PEACE!

Those are all things that we want... but let’s be honest... no government or Kingdom of the world has ever been able to produce! We don’t have to put our hope in the kingdom of the world (or in how this election turns out) because... our hope is in Christ.

1 Peter 1:3-7

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith-of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.NIV

We don’t have to rest our SECURITY in the might of our little kingdoms...

Psalms 46:1-3

1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah NIV

It means we don’t have to expect PEACE from the government either. Since the Fall of man, governments have been trying to bring about peace... and we’ve NEVER been able to achieve it! The dawn of the 20th century looked like an unprecedented time when peace might finally be a reality and spread across the world. Two world wars later, the 20th century (with all of its technological advances) had become the bloodiest century in history. Maybe its because we’ve been trying to establish ‘peace’ ourselves... instead of looking to the “Prince of Peace” who might actually be able to give it!

We don't have to wait on the Kingdom of the World to do something about our problems... before WE get out there and get after it! Our world is in a mess, there is no doubt! From poverty to healthcare, from abortion to same-sex marriage, from protecting the environment to protecting the family... Jesus didn't wait on the governments of the world to get involved... he called his followers to get after it. He didn't call on the kingdoms of the world to change the world... that's why he established the kingdom of heaven and called us to be a part of it! So, what are we waiting for?

In closing... I know we've all been discouraged and maybe even frightened by the economic crisis and the troubles which are plaguing all the kingdoms of the world right now. Our government has done what we would expect it to... they have come together, passed more legislation and spent more money... But what has been the response of the Kingdom of God? How should WE respond? What should WE do? This past week, Max Lucado posted on his web site a wonderful prayer that states some of what I'm talking about so well... I would like to make OUR prayer before we close...

You Have Our Attention, Lord (October 2008)

We're listening, Lord... you have our attention...

Our friends lost their house

A co-worker lost her job

The couple next door lost their retirement

It seems that everyone is losing their footing

This scares us. This bailout with billions.

These rumblings of depression.

These headlines: ominous, thunderous-

"Going Broke!" "Going Down!" "Going Under!" "What Next?"

All this Dow-dipping and finger-pointing and credit-squeezing... What is next?

We're listening. And we're admitting: You were right.

You told us this would happen.

You shot straight about loving stuff and worshipping money.

Greed will break your heart, you warned.

Money will love you and leave you.

Don't put your hope in riches that are so uncertain.

You were right. Money is a fickle lover and we just got dumped.

We were wrong to spend what we didn't have,

Wrong to neglect prayer and ignore the poor,

Wrong to think we ever earned a dime. We didn't. You're the one who owns it & gives it all!

We're listening. And we're praying.

Could you make something good out of this mess?

Of course you can. You always have.

You led slaves out of slavery,

Built temples out of ruins,

Turned stormy waves into a glassy pond and water into sweet wine.

This seems impossible for us... but we know that what is impossible with us is always possible for you!

We've heard enough from financial (& political) experts,

We come to you now on behalf of our country and ask for your help...

Through Christ,

Amen