

Scripture Reading: Genesis 41:

“46 Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt. 47 Now in the seven plentiful years the ground brought forth abundantly. 48 So he gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities; he laid up in every city the food of the fields which surrounded them. 49 Joseph gathered very much grain, as the sand of the sea, until he stopped counting, for it was immeasurable. 50 And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Po-tif-Phe-rah priest of On, bore to him. 51 Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: “For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house.” 52 And the name of the second he called Ephraim: “For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.” 53 Then the seven years of plenty which were in the land of Egypt ended, 54 and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. The famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. 55 So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do.” 56 The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt. 57 So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine was severe in all lands.”

'King of Kings & Lord of Lords'

Last week we saw how God was blessing Joseph in his personal life with a wife and children, right in the midst of his important work for Pharaoh. I trust such examples will continue to help us manage the various responsibilities that we often face in our lives and to remember that God loves to bless his people.

Of course, the work that Joseph was given to do fell in the civil realm which is what we will now begin to consider. As I mentioned in prior weeks, I hope it will give us much to ponder with regard to this important topic and of course unlike our Congress or State Legislators, I would not ask you to undertake a task that I was not also willing to perform. So, as I prepared for these next few messages I had to reflect on what I believe about the civil realm: In doing so I have reviewed some past messages, reflected on my years of service at the state capitol & opened a few of those books on the bookshelf!

Much of what I share this morning by way of background will not be new for some of you, but I did find it has been almost ten years since I gave a message focused on our role and responsibility when it comes to the civil realm. So, before we dig into the more challenging questions that are raised by the actions that Joseph took as a civil ruler I think it would be good to have that review and to make sure we are all on the same page with some the terms that will be used.

I was reminded of the importance of this in reviewing a book called Law & Liberty which I may not have read in the past, but it certainly reminded me of the important point that Dr. Rushdoony always seemed to be making when “political” questions were considered. Dr. Rushdoony writes, “It is difficult nowadays to discuss government because the word government has radically changed its meaning.

***[written back in 1984!]* In my book This Independent Republic, I pointed out that originally the word government was never applied in this country to the state. The word government meant, first of all, the self-government of the Christian man, the basic government in all history. Second, and very closely and almost inseparably linked with this, government meant the family. Every family is a government; it is man’s first church and first school, and also his first state. The government of the family by God’s appointed head, the man, is basic to society. Third, the church is a government, with laws and discipline. Fourth, the school is an important government in the life of a child. Fifth, business or vocations are an important area of government. Our work clearly governs us and we govern our work.**

Sixth, private associations, friendships, organizations, and the like act as a government over us, in that we submit to these social standards and we govern others by our social expectations. Seventh, the state is a form of government, and originally, it was always called civil government in distinction from all these other forms of government.”

I would add that this major shift in the past few hundred years is very pervasive and yet most never give it any thought: I used to give a simple test when I was trying to teach people the importance of this when looking at the proper role of civil government. *[give the school example]*

Dr. Rushdoony goes on to rightly point out that civil government is no longer one among many governments, but “civil government now claims jurisdiction over our private associations, our work or business, our schools and churches, our families and over ourselves. The word government no longer means self-government primarily and essentially; it means the state!”

As we study the actions taken by Joseph as a civil ruler, we will be confronted by some pretty serious questions: Did Joseph act responsibly? Does Joseph give us an example that can be useful in other times & places or was this only a special case like the later time when Joshua would be commanded to wipe out all the nations of Canaan. Did Joseph’s actions accomplish what they were intended to accomplish, or did they lead to unintended consequences for the future?

Thus, before we dig into all of those types of questions, we should first consider what responsibilities we have today in relation to our own civil government: Something we did some ten years ago in our journey through the Gospel according to Luke. As I pointed out two weeks ago, Luke records for us how Jesus began His ministry by reading from the 61st chapter of Isaiah, proclaiming among other things that Messiah had come “To proclaim liberty to the captives.”

In our study of God’s Kingdom as it is was presented by Dr. Luke in both His Gospel account and the Book of Acts, we learned that the Kingdom impacts individuals and communities. It impacts those in the Church and those outside the Church. As God showed King Nebuchadnezzar in his dream, “the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”

In our Advent & Christmas celebrations this year we continually pointed out how the coming of Jesus changed the world, and that certainly includes the realm of civil government. That is why Jesus is declared to be the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This is why the 2nd Psalm teaches that the Kings of the earth should kiss the Son! In other words, saying that Jesus is Lord of all of life means that His authority must impact all of those various areas of government and we do not stop when we reach the civil realm.

- This is a controversial cutting edge issue today, as it was in Rome!
- The early Christians understood that they were NOT a new religion which could simply be accommodated like the other religions of that day.
[Rome was VERY tolerant of the various religions, but it was in the same way that we see in the activists today who are willing to bankrupt bakers and florists who want to practice what they believe!]
- Advancing Christ’s Kingdom today means proclaiming that ALL Kings and magistrates must bow to the authority of Jesus, just as we must do in the other areas of our lives!

When it comes to considering how Christians should be involved in the civil realm today, I would again suggest that we have two ditches to avoid: On the one side we could simply say it is best to just ignore what goes on in politics: This is certainly supported by the many pietistic views that we can find in the Church today:

- ✓ Jesus is coming back very SOON
- ✓ Why polish the brass on a sinking ship

- ✓ Satan is the prince of this world
- ✓ Or that voting is always choosing between the lesser of two evils.

If you asked them about my sermon title and what it means, they would certainly affirm that Jesus is Lord of Lords and King of Kings... But they might not be real clear as to what it actually means in the various types of governments we just discussed.

- The Lordship of Jesus is NOT something that only applies inside of our heads intellectually or only in our homes & Churches!
- There must be practical fruit in all areas of life!

The other equally dangerous cliff is to think that it is our JOB to advance God's Kingdom by grabbing the reigns of political power and simply dominating all those around us.

- This cliff has ruined Christians on the left, right & middle in our nation!

We have seen attempts over the years to use the power of the state at various levels to encourage good "moral" choices: Whether on the left with government education, welfare or telling parents how to raise their kids... Or on the right with mandating prayer in school, prohibition or exporting American "values" around the globe.

- As always, both inaction and improper actions are wrong for the faithful Christian!

We must remember that we live in a nation where the actions taken by men in our early years have meant that we have enjoyed liberties and responsibilities that many others don't share and God will hold us accountable for what we have been given.

Thus it is important for us to understand the foundation of true civil liberties and to teach our children!

The Bible is full of examples of good and bad government and the Book of Proverbs spends much of its time teaching how a good King would rule. We must understand the difference between believing that our rights are God-given rights that are to be protected by the civil magistrate and the secular humanist view that our rights are derived by man's wisdom and enforced by the civil magistrate:

As Rousseau famously said, "In order that the social compact may not be an empty formula, it tacitly includes the undertaking, which alone can give force to the rest, that whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body. This means nothing less than that he will be forced to be free"

This stands in stark contrast to the Declaration of Independence which flows from solid Biblical foundations when it states: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,"

We should also understand the importance of knowing and believing the doctrine of the depravity of man! In a perfect world there would be no need for divided government or other checks and balances. Again in contrast to this we have the secular humanists who demand that we accept the inherent "goodness of man" AND that "good" people could be trusted with power, even unlimited power!

This did not work well in France and later these same forces gained vast power in the 20th Century, leading to the slaughter of tens of millions of men & women trying to help them be "free"!

- As Christians we must be ready to defend and advance true civil liberties when & where we have opportunities.
- Obviously this includes proper instruction of the next generation!

We should also remember the example of the Apostle Paul as we seek the Lord's will in what should be done today by individuals or as a church. Whatever problems we may think we face in America today, they would certainly be matched or exceeded by what the Christians in the 1st Century faced under the Roman Empire. The Apostle Paul was a Roman citizen giving him certain privileges: We find in Acts 16 an account of Paul using these rights to chasten civil magistrates who had abused their power: It can easily be missed as it follows the account of the conversion of the Philippian jailer

Acts 16 "35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go." 36 So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace."

- Paul is free to continue his ministry to the Gentiles!
- But that is not what he does...

37 "But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, & have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out."

The Apostle Paul has held them responsible by not simply going away quietly and it has the intended impact...

38 "And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. 39 Then they came & pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city."

- The Apostle Paul could certainly have argued that he had more important things to do than try to hold some local officials accountable
- He could have said "what difference will my making a little noise make anyway!"

The reality is that he DID take the time and this is something we need to consider when we think about whether we should take the time to make sure our voter registration is current, take time to find out a little about who is running for the offices we are allowed to vote for and then to actually take the time to vote! There is much more that could be done with our time and talents in this area, but if all the Christians in America simply did this, it would make a significant difference! No matter what we might think of President Trump, the reality is that he was in fact elected to the most powerful position in our modern world, largely as a result of the focus placed on the new Supreme Court opening which motivated vast numbers of Christians to vote in various swing states.

However, as we do all of this, we must remember the most important principle:

- We must live in the liberty that Christ has given us!

The true liberty that we have in the Gospel: Where Jesus challenges us in John 8 saying, "'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

- The watching world must see how the Lordship of Jesus impacts our lives as we live as free men & women!

WE are those who should understand that the other six areas of government which we discussed are FAR more important than what should or does take place in the civil realm!

- We should be a disciplined and righteous people!
- Our families should be strong and godly
- Our Churches should be glorious and bold in their proclamation of God's Truth!
- Our children should be in families or schools where they learn to be wise rather than fools.
- Our vocations and businesses should be shining examples of honesty and hard work.

- **Our associations should be strong and effective whether it is in caring for our neighborhoods or ministering to the poor and needy.**

I think it should be obvious that IF every Christian in our nation were committed to such priorities you would see a much reduced need and role for the civil magistrate! Put another way, we will not reduce the size and scope of today's civil magistrates in America unless and until such actions are taken!

And it is very sad that such repentance and revival must be called for in a nation that has enjoyed such blessings in the past... Because as we will see in the coming weeks, the vast majority of people in the world today and certainly down through history have not had anything close to such opportunities!

But even as we rightly focus on these other important areas the civil arena is not to be ignored because as we saw in the example of the Apostle Paul there are times where we can, and must, hold them accountable! And as we learned in the Book of Acts, there are times where they simply will not leave us alone! Peter & John, and later the Apostle Paul are persecuted and at times had to ask the key question, whom should we obey, God or man!

- **They understood the nature of the battle and WHO was in control!**

We see this clearly in the prayers that we find in Acts chapter four after the Disciples were arrested and released: Acts 4:29 Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, 30 by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness."

- **Luke then weaves the bold proclamations with bold living of the Gospel on this Biblical path...**

32 "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. 33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. 34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need."

This is the balance that we must have if we are serious about carrying out God's Great Commission. We must boldly confront the world with the truth when we have the opportunity and we must BOLDLY live out this truth before that same watching world. And all the while we must NOT forget the BIG picture: God is in control and that in Psalm 2 we hear the Father say to His beloved Son Jesus, "Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession."

Communion Meditation: Psalm 17

**"Hear a just cause, O Lord, Attend to my cry; Give ear to my prayer which is not from deceitful lips.
2 Let my vindication come from Your presence; Let Your eyes look on the things that are upright.
3 You have tested my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me and have found nothing; I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress. 4 Concerning the works of men, By the word of Your lips, I have kept away from the paths of the destroyer. 5 Uphold my steps in Your paths, That my footsteps may not slip. 6 I have called upon You, for You will hear me, O God; Incline Your ear to me, and hear my speech. 7 Show Your marvelous lovingkindness by Your right hand, O You who save those who trust in You From those who rise up against them.
8 Keep me as the apple of Your eye; Hide me under the shadow of Your wings,
9 From the wicked who oppress me, From my deadly enemies who surround me."**