

Topical Sermons:

Jesus, Elephants, & Donkeys

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. All morning, an instructor had been explaining leadership to a class of police recruits.
 - 1. Calling a man to the front of the class, he handed him a piece of paper on which was written: "You are in charge. Get everyone out of the room without causing a panic." The recruit was at a loss for words and returned to his seat.
 - 2. The second man summoned tried: "Everybody outside. Go!" No one moved.
 - 3. A third man glanced at the instructions, smiled and said, "All right, men. Break for lunch." The room emptied in seconds.
- B. Leadership can be a very difficult endeavor.
 - 1. Because leadership can be such a difficult endeavor, it's often hard to know who is in charge & who isn't.
 - 2. In just over three weeks, this nation will be going to the polls to elect the 44th President of the United States.
 - a. Many want to know if that 44th President will be John McCain or Barack Obama. Who is going to oversee the troubled economy? Who is going to lead the war in Iraq?
 - b. Who shall be in control of this nation come noon on January 20, 2009?
- C. I do not know who will be inaugurated as President on that day, but the control of this nation will not change. If this world stands until Inauguration Day, God will be in control of this nation as he has always been.
- D. Tonight, we want to think about God's control of the nations & the implications of that control.

II. GOD REIGNS OVER THE NATIONS.

- A. God is the supreme King.
 - 1. After God delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians at the Red Sea, Moses extolled God by saying, "The LORD will reign forever and ever" (Ex 15:18).
 - 2. "The LORD is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land" (Ps 10:16).
 - 3. "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness" (Ps 45:6).
- B. I am fairly certain that God never intended for one man to have authority over another.

1. He intended to be the only King mankind would ever need.
 - a. We see that God intended to be mankind's only king from the way he dealt with the Israelites.
 - b. For many, many years the Israelites had no king.
 - 1) As we see in the Book of Judges, the Israelites often had no human formal leader. God would raise up a leader if his people were enslaved by some other power; otherwise, the Israelites had no King but God.
 - 2) In time they grew weary of not being like all the other nations on the earth, and they begged for a king.
 2. What God says to Samuel after the Israelites request a king is telling: "They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Sm 8:7).
 3. God, because is the supreme King, was the only King the Israelites needed & the only one he truly intended man to ever have.
- C. In the course of time, God saw fit for nations to have rulers. Even then, it was God who remained in ultimate control.
1. Nebuchadnezzar learned that lesson the hard way.
 - a. He boasted about the great Babylon he had built.
 - b. As he was boasting, a voice came from heaven and said, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will" (Dan 4:31-32).
 2. That is the message we learn from Paul: "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" (Rm 13:1).
 3. Granted, the idea that God has established government does not fit well with the American political philosophy.
 - a. The Declaration of Independence 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.*"
 - 1) Nations have never at any time derived "their just powers from the consent of the governed."
 - 2) It is God who has given all nations under heaven "their just powers."
 - b. The Preamble of our Constitution states: "*We the people of the United States*, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

- 1) Granted, Madison & others in writing the Constitution did not declare that they were giving authority to our republican democracy.
- 2) However, notice the emphasis on “We the people.”
- c. At Gettysburg, Lincoln said, “This nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and . . . government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”
 - 1) That is great political oratory, but it’s poor Scripture.
 - 2) Government is not “of the people.” Government is “of God.”

III. IF GOD NEVER INTENDED MEN TO GOVERN OTHER MEN, WHY DID GOD ORDAIN CIVIL GOVERNMENTS?

A. The short answer is “Sin.”

B. Sin changed forever the relationship between husband & wife.

1. After the Fall, God says to Eve, “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gn 3:16).
2. Prior to the Fall, we don’t find the Eve was to be in submission to Adam. The fact that Adam names her may demonstrate that even prior to the Fall, Adam had some authority over Eve, but it isn’t clearly spelled out until after Adam & Eve sin.

C. We see clearly in the NT that civil governments were ordained due to sin.

1. Speaking of those in authority, Paul writes, “He is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer” (Rm 13:4).
 - a. To me, the most interesting thing about that statement is where it’s placed. If you back up just a few sentences you read this: “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (Rm 12:19).
 - b. Paul has just told the Romans, “Don’t you retaliate—leave that to God.” Immediately thereafter, Paul says, “Those in government carry out God’s wrath.”
2. While he does not attribute punishment to God’s vengeance, Peter uses much the same language about the role of civil government: “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good” (1 Pt 2:13-14).

D. What does it mean that God has ordained civil government to punish wrongdoers?

1. Morality can be legislated.
 - a. If we speak about abortion or homosexuality or pornography or some other moral issue and how we believe the law ought to be, we’ll hear that you cannot legislate morality.
 - 1) When people say that morality cannot be legislated, they are really saying that they don’t want to be bound by what is right.
 - 2) Most who would say that wouldn’t mind at all if two homosexuals moved in next to me & flaunted their lifestyle in front of my kids all the time. It’s okay for me to have to endure their morality, but they don’t have to tolerate God’s morality.

- b. The idea that morality cannot be legislated doesn't quite work out logically.
- 1) Several laws in this state & this nation are the legislation of morality.
 - a) Is it immoral to murder someone? If it is, then the laws against murder are morality legislated.
 - b) Is it immoral to cheat on my income taxes? Since Jesus said that I'm to pay the government what is due, are income tax laws moral laws?
 - c) Is it immoral to bear false witness? If it is, then laws concerning perjury are legislating morality.
 - 2) Furthermore, the Founders, while no means truly Christians, understood the importance of morality.
 - a) In his Farewell Address, George Washington stated: "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. . . . Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."
 - b) In the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, the US Congress said, "Religion, morality, and knowledge, [are] necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind" (Art III).
 - 3) Those who say that morality cannot be legislated are really not being consistent.
- c. What does the Bible teach about the legislating of morality?
- 1) About civil authorities, Paul writes, "If you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer" (Rm 13:4).
 - a) Notice that the civil authority is to carry out "God's wrath" on those who do wrong.
 - b) Since punishment is the carrying out of "God's wrath," can we properly think of anyone being punished for any reason other than a violation of God's will?
 - a) Peter says that the civil authority is "to punish those who do evil" (1 Pt 2:14). Can anything be "evil" that is not a violation of Scripture?
 - 2) Anytime we speak in such terminology, several objections are usually raised:
 - a) Objection #1: Whose morality are you going to legislate? Are you going to legislate your morality or my morality?
 - The purpose of this objection is to say that any "god" is equal to our God.
 - Logically, this doesn't hold up well, either.
 - Most people will readily admit that certain things are immoral: murder, child molestation, etc.
 - We understand that moral awareness comes from God: "When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even

though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness” (Rm 2:14-15).

- b) Objection #2: You want to create a police state! You want to control what everyone does.
 - Such an attempt would surely fail; it would not be conceivable to control what everyone does.
 - Furthermore, such an attempt would be unbiblical.
 - God himself has given us freewill; we may choose how we respond to him: “If it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell” (Josh 24:15).
 - Even in the OT when immorality was punishable by death, “Big Brother” wasn’t watching in order to catch people, but punishment came if you were caught.
 - “If a man is *found* lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman” (Deut 22:22).
 - The Israelites weren’t to go around looking for immorality to punish, but they were to punish it when they found it.
2. Serving in government is service to God.
- a. Political candidates often say that they are serving the people of this country.
 - 1) In his farewell address, Bill Clinton said, “I am profoundly grateful to you for twice giving me the honor to serve, to work for you and with you to prepare our Nation for the 21st century.”
 - 2) Dwight Eisenhower said in his farewell address as President, “So, in this my last good night to you as your President, I thank you for the many opportunities you have given me for public service in war and in peace.”
 - b. While Clinton & Eisenhower both wished to be patriotic & humble in their remarks, the thanks really should have gone to God, not the people.
 - 1) In Rm 13:4, Paul says of the civil authority, “He is *God’s servant* for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the *servant of God*, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer.”
 - 2) Twice Paul refers to those who serve in civil government as God’s servants.
 - a) The term Paul uses is the same as the word “deacon.”
 - b) The concept here is that civil servants are serving God in carrying out justice.

- 3) There have been those in the Restoration Movement who have declared quite emphatically that no Christian can serve in the government.
 - a) David Lipscomb is likely the most famous of those who held this position. He wrote, “The Christian has been clearly forbidden to take vengeance [sic] or execute wrath, but he is to live peaceably with all men, to do good for evil. Then a Christian cannot be an officer or executor of this higher power.”
 - b) But, if the civil authority is a “deacon” of God, does it not stand to reason that we should pray for Christians to fill those positions?
3. In carrying out justice, the civil authority has the right to put to death.
 - a. There are many who see the death penalty as inconsistent with Christian principles.
 - 1) By and large, the Roman Catholic Church opposes the death penalty.
 - 2) On March 25, 1995, Pope John Paul II, sent a letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church. In that letter are these words: “It is clear that, for these purposes to be achieved, the nature and extent of the punishment must be carefully evaluated and decided upon, and ought not go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity: in other words, when it would not be possible otherwise to defend society. Today however, as a result of steady improvements in the organization of the penal system, such cases are very rare, if not practically non-existent.”
 - b. The problem is that Scripture clearly teaches the proper use of the death penalty.
 - 1) Paul says, “If you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain” (Rm 13:4). The word “sword” in Gr refers to a large knife used for killing.
 - 2) When Jesus was silent before Pilate, the proconsul said that he had power to release or crucify Jesus. Jesus answers him saying, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above” (Jn 19:11).
 - 3) After the flood, God says to Noah, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image” (Gn 9:6).
 - a) Even though these words come from the OT, I believe they are applicable today.
 - b) First, we find this same idea repeated in the NT; Second, the reason God says such is that man bears his image, something which has not changed since the Creation.
4. In the administration of justice, government leaders protect the Christian.
 - a. Paul asks us to pray “for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (1 Tm 2:2).
 - b. In Acts 23, we read of a plot to kill Paul:

- 1) Paul's nephew informs his uncle of the plot & Paul sends his nephew to the tribune to inform him of the plot.
- 2) The tribune instructs two centurions to ready two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen & two hundred spearmen to provide Paul safe passage to Caesarea.
- 3) We have every right to avail ourselves of government protection, just as Paul, an apostle of Jesus did.
- 4) Are you availing yourself of the blood of Jesus Christ this evening?