

Topical Sermons:

We the People

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I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. As we mentioned a couple weeks ago, the *legal* basis of governmental power in this nation is the people.
 - 1. The Preamble of the Constitution reads: “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.”
 - 2. At Gettysburg, Lincoln declared, “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.”
- B. It is just as true now as it was a couple weeks ago that governments derive their powers from God, not man.
 - 1. Paul writes to the Romans: “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).
 - 2. While God is the One with authority & the One who gives authority, “We the People” play an important role in our government.
 - a. Many of the Founding Fathers understood the dichotomy between the sovereign rule of God & the rule of the people.
 - 1) While the Declaration of Independence states that government derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, that document also says the rights governments are to preserve come from God, not the government. “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.”
 - 2) It seemed for a while that the Constitutional Convention was going to fail.
 - a) Benjamin Franklin rose at that point and declared, “The longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this Truth—that God governs in the Affairs of Men. I also believe [that] without his

concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political Building no better than the Builders of Babel.”

- b) Why would Franklin urge prayers in the convention if he were not convinced that God reigns & that “We the People” can influence God through our prayers?
- 3) In a private letter to a minister, John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the United States, wrote, “Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.” Jay saw that a) God had established this nation & b) that Christians had an obligation in this nation.
- b. If God is going to bless this nation (or any other nation), God requires much from that nation.
 - 1) When God was about to send his people into the Promised Land, Moses says: “I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly and turn aside from the way that I have commanded you. And in the days to come evil will befall you, because you will do what is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger through the work of your hands” (Deut 31:29).
 - 2) That principle worked throughout the years of monarchy.
 - a) God told David: “If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel” (1 Ki 2:4).
 - b) We see that through the OT: God blessed kings with peace, prosperity, & long life as long as they followed him. Yet, he never hesitated to strike down an evil king.
 - 3) The Lord greatly desires that nations follow after righteousness.
 - a) The Lord says to Solomon, “When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chr 7:13-14).
 - b) “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov 14:34).
- C. What can “We the People” do to exalt this nation through righteousness? Tonight, we will examine that important question.

II. WE CAN SUBMIT TO THE AUTHORITIES.

- A. Scripture teaches that we are to submit to those in authority.
 - 1. “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).
 - 2. “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be 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).

3. If you think about it carefully, submission to the government shouldn't be too difficult if we first commit ourselves to God.
 - a. It is illegal to download pirated music & movies from the Internet. To do so is tantamount to stealing, for I am taking something I haven't paid for & I'm denying the author compensation.
 - b. It is illegal to go through a stop sign without stopping. If I do that, am I not breaking the "Golden Rule"? I sure wouldn't want someone running a stop sign if my family is at an intersection!
- B. Yet, as you know, my primary obligation is to God and not to man.
 1. My primary obligation is to the Lord Jesus for he "is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tm 6:15).
 2. Having a primary obligation to God may mean that I need to disobey man to honor God.
 - a. When the king of Egypt commanded two Hebrew midwives to kill the male children, the "midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live" (Ex 1:17).
 - b. When Ahab was about to go against Ramoth-gilead, he called prophets before him to tell how the battle would go.
 - 1) Jehoshaphat, who was with Ahab, wasn't convinced when four hundred prophets kept prophesying how well things would go.
 - 2) So, Ahab sent for Micaiah. The messenger told Micaiah just to go up & make the king happy, but Micaiah replies, "As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I will speak" (1 Ki 22:14).
 - c. When the Sanhedrin ordered the apostles not to preach in the name of Jesus, they replied, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).
- C. Unfortunately, I fear that this discussion is becoming less & less theoretical in this nation.
 1. I believe that we are heading rather rapidly in this nation where we could find true Christians facing much persecution.
 - a. At the college of Alameda, a state community college in California, a student stopped by to give her favorite professor a Christmas gift just before Christmas break last year.
 - 1) The professor told Kandy Kyriacou that she was having some health problems & Kyriacou offered to pray for her professor, and they began to pray.
 - 2) About that time, another professor entered the office and told them to quit praying. Both the professor who consented to the prayer & the student has been suspended from campus for praying together.
 - b. A California couple was recently denied a marriage license because of their religious convictions.
 - 1) Because California allows homosexual "marriage," licenses in that state now ask for the names of "Party A" & "Party B" rather than "Bride" & "Groom."
 - 2) One couple marked "Party A" & "Party B" out & wrote "Bride" & "Groom." The license was rejected & the couple was told that in California they had to be "Party A" & "Party B" rather than "Husband" & "Wife"!

2. What are we going to do if we face persecution?
 - a. We must understand there are consequences to government disobedience.
 - 1) Simply doing the right thing in the eyes of God does not remove punishment from man.
 - a) When Nebuchadnezzar ordered Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego to worship his golden image, they replied, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. **But if not**, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up” (Dan 3:16-18). While Daniel’s three companions believed God would deliver them from Nebuchadnezzar, they realized he might not.
 - b) When Darius ordered that no one pray to anyone but him, Daniel continued to pray to God and ended up being thrown into a den of lions. Granted, God delivered Daniel from the lions, but did Daniel know that God would do that?
 - 2) God, however, does not always deliver the righteous from state punishment.
 - a) God did not keep John the Baptist from being beheaded for preaching against Herod’s improper marriage.
 - b) God did not keep Stephen from being killed by a mob for preaching against the Jewish aristocracy.
 - c) God did not keep James, the son of Zebedee, from being killed by Herod the king.
 - b. We must also be prepared to explain why we are disobeying.
 - 1) Honestly, informing the authorities why we disobey is fundamental to the foundation of this country.
 - a) The Declaration of Independence states, “The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.”
 - b) The Founding Fathers spend most of the document detailing the abuses of George III & why they are forming a new nation.
 - 2) We find that same principle in Scripture.
 - a) When the Sanhedrin told Peter & John to preach in Jesus’ name no longer, the apostles replied, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20).
 - b) After Paul was arrested in the temple, he stood before the council & said, “It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial” (Acts 23:6).

- Granted, Paul is quite shrewd in mentioning the resurrection of the dead, for this begins a debate between the Pharisees & the Sadducees.
- Yet, Paul also demonstrates courage, for the argument became so intense that the tribune was afraid that Paul would be torn in pieces.

D. My brethren, let us follow God & no man!

III. WE ALSO PAY TAXES.

- A. Scripture teaches the importance of paying taxes.
1. “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (Mt 22:21).
 2. “For this reason [that government authorities punish wrongdoers] you also pay taxes” (Rm 13:6).
 3. “Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed” (Rm 13:7).
- B. Let us honestly pay what is due.

IV. WE CAN HONOR OUR LEADERS.

- A. “Pay to all what is owed them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed” (Rm 13:7).
1. God takes disrespect very seriously.
 - a. Take the case of Elisha & some small boys (2 Ki 2:23-24).
 - 1) What a strange narrative! A prophet of God gets angry because some boys make fun of his bald head, he curses them with God’s authority, & two bears come out and tear 42 of the boys.
 - 2) What’s taking place here? Elisha, as a prophet, is God’s anointed & making fun of him demonstrates a lack of respect for God’s leadership. God shows that he means business.
 - b. When David was being pursued by Saul, David had a chance to kill his enemy & his men tried to persuade him to do so. David, however, says, “The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD’s anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD’s anointed” (1 Sm 24:6).
 2. What are some ways that we can honor our leaders?
 - a. We must be ever so careful about speaking against them.
 - 1) “You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people” (Ex 22:28).
 - 2) Paul was very respectful in his address.
 - a) When Paul made his defense before Felix at Caesarea, he says begins his address: “Knowing that for many years you have a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense” (Acts 24:10).
 - b) As Paul begins his defense before King Agrippa, he says, “I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations

of the Jews, especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently” (Acts 26:2-3).

- c) Notice what Paul does **not** say, “You idiots! You have no right to judge me today.” Rather, he speaks respectfully.
- 3) How careful are we not to speak evil against a ruler of our people?
 - a) Do you tell jokes about those in authority?
 - b) Do we say evil about them because we disagree with their policies?
- 4) Not speaking evil of a ruler of our people does **not** mean that we ignore error:
 - a) “Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, because John had been saying to him, ‘It is not lawful for you to have her’” (Mt 14:3-4). Herod was in an adulterous relationship & John called him on it.
 - b) Acts 23:1-5.
 - Notice what Paul says to Ananias: “God is going to strike me, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?” (v 3).
 - When informed that he has spoken thus to the high priest, Paul offers something of an apology: “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people’” (v 5).
 - Some say that Paul’s response shows poor eyesight, but Paul looked “intently at the council” (v 1).
 - It is my belief that Paul’s “apology” was no real apology at all.
 - It seems that Paul’s statement that God would strike Ananias was a divine prophecy, for Ananias was killed by the Jews about a decade after this encounter.
 - I believe Paul is being sarcastic & saying, “He’s not acting like the high priest, for he’s violating the Law terribly.”
 - The point is that although Ananias was the high priest did not mean that Paul could not call him on his error.
 - b. We also need to pray for those in authority.
 - 1) “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 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 1:1-2).
 - 2) Let us lift up in prayer those who lead this state & nation!

V. CONCLUSION.

- A. In just over a week, “We the People” will elect a new President of the United States.

1. While “We the People” shall vote, I’m convinced that God remains in control.
 2. I’m convinced that regardless of the outcome, God, through his providence, will select the best person to fulfill his purposes.
 3. Even wicked rulers have fulfilled God’s purposes in the past: Through Moses, God says to Pharaoh, “For this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth” (Ex 9:16).
- B. God will raise up the ruler that best fulfills his purposes, for it is God who reigns over all. Do you allow God to reign in your life?