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The Church and Politics
Part 1 – Whose Side is Jesus on?
Joshua 5:13-15

1. The Commander in Chief.

- Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Jude 1:9; Revelation 12:7-9; Exodus 3:3-5, 14; Revelation 17:14, 19:14-16; 1 Timothy 6:15-16; Romans 14:11-12; Isaiah 45:23; Philippians 2:9-11

2. Whose side is Jesus on?

- 2 Thessalonians 3:10; Luke 12:33; Acts 4:32-37; Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 8:31; Joshua 5:14-15

3. Whose side are you on?

- Joshua 5:14-15

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The Church and Politics

Part One:

Whose Side is Jesus On?

I'm going to say two words and I want you to tell me how they make you feel: church, and politics.

We might as well say "oil and water" – we feel like those two words don't go together. Some of us might be okay talking about politics – "out there" – but not "in here." Just the word politics brings up the expectation of animosity and arguments. But politics is a fact of life. If you have two people in a room, you're likely to have three different opinions and agendas. At its basic, politics is about the way people of different opinions and agendas relate to each other. But politics has become an easy description for the ways that a person or a group of people gain or keep power. Our national political system has become a means to gain power and wealth. Lately it seems like politicians and parties have become puppets to corporations and industries.

Our challenge, Church, is how to have a positive influence in this country of ours while not compromising our commitment to the Kingdom of God, because there is the Kingdom of God and then the kingdoms of this world. But we *can* be politically engaged while still being fully devoted to Jesus; we submit to a King; we vote for presidents.

Your priority, Christian, is to be fully devoted and committed to the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, and not to the kingdoms and institutions of this world. Period, full stop. But you are in this world to influence it with the love of God in Jesus Christ. And you can do that *as* you engage in politics, not by removing yourself from it. But as you do this, your first commitment is not to being a republican or a democrat. Your first commitment is not to being an American. Your first commitment is to Christ. *That* commitment informs all other commitments. We live, bleed, and die for Christ and the Kingdom of God. We do not live, bleed, and die for the Republican party or the Democrats or even for America – not unless it happens to be in the service of Christ.

So how do we engage in politics as believers in Jesus?

What do we do? How do we vote when we can find plenty of ungodly attitudes in both candidates? And how do we vote when there are unbiblical values in both parties?

What if a faithful approach to politics isn't about whose candidate will win? What if God is asking us to be citizens of the Kingdom that has real implications for our neighborhoods and real hope for our country, but is not determined by popular votes?

That's why we are in this series on Church and Politics. We'll have three Sundays before election day on Tuesday, November fifth, and then one Sunday after (assuming the election is settled by then).

You heard me say over the last month that God led us to that series in Ecclesiastes to address the growing anxiety we all feel these days, by helping us get our focus on Christ first and only. I am especially concerned for our younger generations. U.S. teens are in a mental health crisis. In a recent study, **60%** reported experiencing depression, **66%** reported high anxiety, **75%** reported feelings of loneliness, and **35%** reported having had suicidal thoughts, according to the *Global Youth Culture* study.¹ Can I speak to those of us who are in our 30s and up – if that’s you, please look at me: God will hold us accountable if you and I don’t get our act together and stop stoking the anxiety of political crisis in this country. Because if our young people don’t see Jesus in the way we respond to civics, where are they going to see it? From Donald Trump? From Kamala Harris? I don’t think so. Our younger generations need to see that *our* focus on Christ is the hope for *their* lives. But if they see us pushing political parties and posting repugnant memes, we are reinforcing their own anger and anxiety and hopelessness.

We are at the point now where we need to be reminded of our ultimate hope and loyalty, which is the Kingdom of our God and his Christ, *before* we consider how to vote. And I trust that living for Christ will inform you how you should vote.

So to start this series, we’re going to travel back several thousand years to the early days when Israel was not a nation and only a lineage. Long before the days that Israel demanded to have a king, they were about to enter the Promised Land. Under the leadership of Moses, God had brought the Israelites out of Egypt and to the edge of the Promised Land. They were a bit nervous, so they sent spies into the land, and the spies came back with a faithless and fearful report, which the people believed and so they rebelled against God’s leading through Moses and as a result, they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. At the end of that time, Moses was gone, and Joshua was leading in his place. Once again, they were about to take the Promised Land, and Joshua sent spies. The spies scouted the hostile territory, managed to escape with the help of a woman named Rahab, and returned with a report to Joshua. But this time they took faith and crossed the Jordan River and were poised to move against the highly fortified city of Jericho. What happened next in the story is what’s going to guide our conversation today. The Israelites knew they needed to overthrow Jericho because it stood between them and the Promised Land, but they didn’t yet know how they were going to do it; Jericho had high walls and impenetrable defenses. *We* know what happened next; we know that they marched around that city for seven days and God himself destroyed the huge, multi-layered walls. But that hadn’t happened yet in the story.

So here’s Joshua, the Commander of the Lord’s people, in the plains of Jericho strategizing what to do about Jericho. That’s when he has an encounter with a supernatural Soldier that appears to him, and it’s clear to Joshua that this man is a Warrior.

(This is such a great story!) Let’s pick it up there:

“When Joshua was near the town of Jericho, he looked up and saw a Man standing in front of him with sword in hand. Joshua went up to Him and demanded, ‘Are You friend or foe?’ ‘Neither one,’ He replied. ‘I am the Commander of the LORD’s army.’

¹ https://onehope.net/crisismode-guide/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=searchads&utm_campaign=campaign05&gad_source=1&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI3tus18aYiQMVGzStBh0VETQREAAAYASAAEgKShfD_BwE

At this, Joshua fell with his face to the ground in reverence. 'I am at Your command,' Joshua said. 'What do You want Your servant to do?' The Commander of the LORD's army replied, 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.' And Joshua did as he was told." (Joshua 5:13-15, nlt)

Maybe you can already see where we are going with this, but stay with me because the point of all this is powerful. From this amazing scene in Israel's history we are going to see where *our* loyalty lies as we think about the church and politics. So first, see...

1. The ***Commander*** in ***Chief***.

Joshua is the commander of Israel's army, and God has done some amazing miracles already up to this point. But before they can launch into their conquest of Canaan, Joshua encounters *his own* Commander, THE Commander in Chief. But how do we know who this mysterious heavenly warrior is?

There are times in the Old Testament where heavenly warriors or messengers make appearances, so the question for us in this story is, was this the appearance of an angel or was this actually God? Well, there *are* times people in the Old Testament have encounters with angel warriors and angel messengers. The angel in *this* story does identify himself as the Commander of the Lord's army, so he could be the angel Michael, who is the archangel and leader of the angel army (Daniel 10:13, 21, 12:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Jude 1:9; Revelation 12:7-9). But in this case, there are huge clues that leave little to doubt about who this is. This heavenly appearance is what's called a *theophany*, which means it is God appearing in human form. Let me quickly show you why: We know this angel is not just any warrior, but a *very* high-ranking commander of Heaven because of the Hebrew words that are used to describe him.

Also, did you notice that he is alone? The fact that he is alone, and not with another messenger, also sets him apart, because typically in the Old Testament when there are angel messengers, they arrive in pairs – like in the stories of Sodom and Gomorra and also Abraham and Sarah.

But there are even bigger reasons to show us this supernatural soldier was God: First, notice that Joshua bowed down to worship this angel, and the commander angel does not stop him. Yet all throughout the Bible, angels do not allow themselves to be worshipped, because they know only God deserves worship. This one allows Joshua to worship him.

Then the angel commanded Joshua to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. An angel cannot make the place of his presence holy; only God would make the ground holy. This is the same thing that happened when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:5). That was when God himself commissioned Moses to deliver his people from slavery in Egypt. Joshua came after Moses as the leader of God's people. So it was important for God to validate Joshua's vital leadership in exactly the same way.

Finally, the story goes on to say that the Lord (God) then gives Joshua instructions about how they are going to defeat Jericho by marching around it. In other words, Scripture records their conversation and uses the name "Yhwh" which is the name God gave for himself to Moses and his people (Exodus 3:14).

Those are reason enough to remove any doubt about the identity of this angel. The point is clearly made that this appearance is God himself – the Commander of all commanders, the Chief of all Chiefs. In Revelation, which is the last book of the Bible, it describes the last great battle between the forces of Satan and the Kingdom of God. The Commander in Chief appears:

“Together they will go to war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will defeat them because He is Lord of all lords and King of all kings. And His called and chosen and faithful ones will be with Him.” (Revelation 17:14, nlt)

And again it says, “The armies of heaven, dressed in the finest of pure white linen, followed Him on white horses. From His mouth came a sharp sword to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will release the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty, like juice flowing from a winepress. On His robe at His thigh was written this title: King of all kings and Lord of all lords.” (Revelation 19:14-16)

There is no doubt about who is Lord! The Bible says:

“For at just the right time Christ will be revealed from heaven by the blessed and only almighty God, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords. He alone can never die, and he lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him. No human eye has ever seen him, nor ever will. All honor and power to him forever! Amen.” (1 Timothy 6:15-16, nlt)

Jesus himself is the commander in chief of this story, and he is commander-in-chief of our church; and of you, Christian. He is the Lord of all things! And by the way, don't you think our country would be better off if our elected officials would readily recognize who their commander-in-chief is? The Bible says that one day, they all *will*:

“For the Scriptures say, ‘As surely as I live,’ says the LORD, ‘every knee will bend to Me, and every tongue will confess and give praise to God.’ Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God.” (Romans 14:11-12, nlt [Isaiah 45:23])

And again it says:

“Therefore, God elevated Him to the place of highest honor and gave Him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11, nlt)

Of course, it would be better for them and us if our presidents and leaders would acknowledge Jesus *now*, instead of later. But let there be no doubt; Jesus is Lord of the Republicans and the Democrats and every other party and race and tribe and tongue.

So Joshua is confronted with *the* Commander, and he asked God the same question we are asking in this election season...

2. Whose *side* is *God on*?

Notice that Joshua asked God, “Are you for *us*, or for our *enemies*?” What is interesting about that question is there is a very revealing but arrogant implication: “God, we are right,

aren't we? You are on our side, aren't you?" It's not really a question, it's an assumption, much like what we see today; it seems that those who are Republican Christians think God is on their side, and Democrat Christians assume he would be on their side. Isn't that the question – who's side is God on?

There's a story about a man who had lived in a small town and had been a staunch Democrat all his life. Now, he was 90, and his health began to fail. His doctor told him: "George, I'm sorry to tell you this, but, from the state of your health, I'd say you'll not live beyond the year." The next morning, the old man asked his son to take him down to the courthouse so he could change his voter registration from Democrat to Republican.

His son protested, "But Dad, you started this town's Democrat Party and you attended every function since then. Why would you want to become a Republican?" The old man said, "Son, if someone has to die, it might as well be one of them."

For the sake of fairness, here's another story: a first-grade teacher in the Midwest was explaining to her class that she is a Democrat and how nice it would be if a new Democrat president took office. She asked her students to raise their hands if they, too, were Democrats. Everyone in class raised their hands except one little girl. The teacher was surprised, so she asked the girl, "Mary, why didn't you raise your hand?" Mary said, "Because I'm not a Democrat." "Well, what are you?" asked the teacher. The little girl said, "I'm a Republican and proud of it." The teacher couldn't believe her ears. "My goodness, Mary, why are you a Republican?" "Well, my momma and papa are Republicans, so I'm a Republican, too." "Well," the teacher said in an annoyed tone, "that's no reason for you to be a Republican. You don't always have to be like your parents. What if your momma was a criminal and your papa was a criminal, too, what would you be then?" Mary smiled. "Then we'd be Democrats."

Okay, so back to our question: whose side is God on?

Well, if you were to read into the Bible looking for either Democratic or Republican Party policies, you'd find plenty of both. For example, The Bible clearly teaches that we are expected to work for what we get:

"Even while we were with you, we gave you this command: 'Those unwilling to work will not get to eat.'" (2 Thessalonians 3:10, nlt)

That's mostly a Republican approach to the economy. So we can forget those entitlements like welfare. But wait – Jesus said:

"Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven!" (Luke 12:33, nlt)

And the Bible says of the early church:

"There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need." (Act 4:34-35, nlt)

This is clearly a Democratic ideal of caring for the poor among us. So which is it?

There are many examples you can find in Scripture of *both* party's agenda. So what does that mean? It means this, and I want you to hear me carefully: the Bible was never written to be a political party platform! The Bible describes the character and nature of a God who would go to the greatest length possible to rescue people from sin and death through the sacrificial death and resurrection of his one and only son. The Bible is for people to know God's love, to be called his children, to be free from sin, and to be citizens of heaven. It was never meant to be used as a blueprint for partisan politics!

We learn from the story of Joshua's encounter with God that God is on *neither* side and at the same time he is on *both* sides. God is on the side of God. God is not a Republican or a Democrat, but he is on the side of both Democrats and Republicans. God is on the side of all people because he sent his Son to die for all people. God is on *your* side! He loves you more than anything:

"I have loved you, My people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to Myself." (Jeremiah 31:3, nlt)

The Message Translation says it this way:

"I've never quit loving you and never will. Expect love, love, and more love!" (Jeremiah 31:3, nlt)

God is for *you* and for every one of us. If you are a Democrat, God loves you and Christ died for you to give you abundant life. If you are a Republican, God loves you and Christ died for you to give you abundant life. If you are a libertarian, God loves you and Christ died for you to give you abundant life. If you are a human being, *a person*, God loves you and Christ died for you to give you abundant life.

"What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?" (Romans 8:31, nlt)

So Joshua asks God, "Are you a Republican or a Democrat?" and God says, "Neither one. I am the Commander of the LORD's army."

And that declaration causes an immediate reaction from Joshua:

"At this, Joshua fell with his face to the ground in reverence. 'I am at Your command,' Joshua said. 'What do You want Your servant to do?' The Commander of the LORD's army replied, 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.' And Joshua did as he was told." (Joshua 5:14-15, nlt)

This, my friends, is the point of all of this: Joshua wanted to know which side God had allegiance too. And God answered it by saying, "Neither side. What I want to know is will you be allegiant to me?"

So the answer to the question of whose side is God on is another question...

3. Whose *side* are *you on*?

The answer to Joshua's question (about whose side God was on), was indicated in an action by Joshua: to take off his shoes and to kneel before God. If you have come to this place

asking the question, “whose side is God on?” *the real question is this:* will you acknowledge God in Christ as the commander-in-chief of your life? Joshua recognized that this was the Great God, so he took off his shoes. Joshua recognized that God was asking him whether or not he would give God his total allegiance. And Joshua said, “Tell me what you want me to do, and I will do it.”

Will you say that to God today? Will you recognize him as Christ the King of Kings and Lord of Lords? Will you bow before him and tell him you will do whatever he asks?

This is far more important than any political party, and right now, in this place, it is more important than any presidential election. Will you settle this with Jesus? If you have not accepted him in your life, you can do so today. Or maybe you would say you already have. So will you bow before him and give him your allegiance instead of a political party?

Prayer

Let me tell you something: if you recognize that Jesus is Lord of your life, and you live for him and obey him, he will direct you through the Holy Spirit. I’m telling you: don’t say you are a Republican and try to force Jesus into your side. Don’t say you are a Democrat and use Jesus to justify your side. You must be on the side of the Kingdom of God – on Jesus’ side, and then like Joshua, ask him what he wants you to do. Then worshipfully DO IT.

Communion

Voting...we’ll talk next week about how important that is...voter registration forms in the foyer.

Benediction

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.