

## **The supremacy of Christ is our anchor.**

Today we are taking a brief diversion to think through something important, and extremely relevant to our lives at the moment, and my hope is to give you perimeters for how we as a church will get through the year!

So we turn to discuss politics - specifically how we as Christians can and should participate. [This is not my preferred way of preaching, but the climate at times necessitates direct thinking.]

We must start with an evaluation of who we are and then think about how we live in light of our identity.

I've titled this talk "politics in exile." Because it helps us locate our place in the stream of culture we find ourselves in.

Now exile is not often seen in a positive light. When people are exiled it is because something has gone wrong. They have been removed from their place either because of their own bad actions or the harm being done by others.

But for Christians, exile, while still hard is a really good thing. Brought out of our prior place by the saving work of Jesus.

**Ephesians 2:1–7** “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—[3] among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. [4] But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—[6] and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (ESV)

Once residents living under the reign of the dark prince, we have been granted mercy and love, raised out of that death to life in Jesus. This profound hope is open to all who believe and it is the source of our identity. This is what makes us sojourners and exiles.

**Philippians 3:20** “our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,” (ESV)

No matter what land we find ourselves in it is not the final promised place of peace and dwelling with God. And all of our experience here is to stir our desire for that place. We are just passing through.

But being exiles does not equal passivity where God has placed us. It does not mean that we don't care what becomes of culture. “However, it does mean that we exert our influence as very happy, brokenhearted outsiders. We are exiles. “Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come” (Heb. 13:14).” And we would really like more people to join us!

So it is right then to think through how we might act. What of Christian influence in the political climate? How are we affected by the noise of our time and how can we push back against the kingdom of darkness as good citizens?

Without a doubt you should participate, but you should engage in politics and public discourse Christianly so that your witness is unhindered.

When it comes to politics we have to be aware of the cultural **sickness** from which we are not immune; anchor ourselves in the **solution**; and rally around some **strategy** for engagement as exiles.

Now, I am very aware that there are other voices with more wisdom and expertise than me. And it seems they can't print the new wave of books and papers fast enough. So I expect you will encounter other perspectives that hopefully get us to the same place.

What we are covering today is the result of my own wrestling. And having a fair bit of experience in the political world I hope gives me some insight.

A loving nextdoor neighbor first took me door-to-door canvassing when I was nine-years-old and ignited in me an obsession with politics. Eventually I would become Student President at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, until an unfortunate arrest for inciting a riot...

After grad school - where I studied political science - I was responsible for the grassroots efforts in an 18 county region in Ohio for the Bush/Cheney presidential campaign. Then I served as a Presidential appointee at the Department of Energy, the State Department, and the Environmental Protection Agency.

I also have the logo of the Republican party tattooed on my body! (Either you think we could be friends right now or you want to run me off the platform!)

Credentials or not, we don't need an ounce of that experience to diagnose the problems of our political climate. The divisiveness, bitterness, fear, and tribalism that shapes public discourse and political engagement. And that's just what you read on social media before coming this morning! It is the virus that has ravaged the land and has the potential to lead us as believers into danger.

## **1) Sickness**

When it comes to the misplaced priorities that can lead to toxicity in political engagement we have to recognize that the dragon runs deep. And here we just want to be thinking about the church.

While exile throughout redemptive history has had different causes and outcomes, Old Testament exile is discipline whereas New Testament exile is identity, the tendency still remains to get things terribly wrong.

As we study the Prophets we see what seems to be a stubbornness in the people of God who fail to trust in his provision and protection. Read through Isaiah and you will learn the rhythm of warning against disregarding God and the peoples' continual turning to Assyria or Egypt for help in fear of Babylon.

Over and over again God promises through the prophet to care for his people, and just as often they fall for the trap of trusting the strategies of man, the political and military muscle of foreigners.

**Isaiah 2:22** “Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?” (ESV)

People that had experienced generations of Yahweh’s covering. Deliverance from slavery, a land to call their own; yet they couldn’t help but run to other “masters” when things got uncomfortable. Endorsing evil if it meant a better circumstance (or the hope of one).

Through Jeremiah God says it a bit more directly... **Jeremiah 2:20** “For long ago I broke your yoke and burst your bonds; but you said, ‘I will not serve.’ Yes, on every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down like a whore.” (ESV) Unwilling to submit to the Lord they find new masters at every turn.

In doing so they find themselves disciplined, into exile, yet again to learn dependance on God.

Many things have changed but still today we have the same sickness, a tendency to convince ourselves that the strategies of man will solve the crisis. That trusting in the political muscle of others will save. “Put not your trust in princes... in whom there is not salvation.”

I know because I was sicker than most, living this tendency like it was my identity. Tying spiritual maturity with faithfulness to a political party. Red or blue this can happen to you.

Subtle ways... latching onto things that sound good and right but missing half of what God actually calls his people to, the things we are supposed to value and stand for.

David Brooks, *The Second Mountain* “Once politics becomes your ethnic or moral identity, it becomes impossible to compromise, because compromise becomes dishonor. Once politics becomes your identity, then every electoral contest is a struggle for existential survival, and everything is permitted.”

That is supposed to be out there, but it is an infection even in the church. We've lived this haven't we?

Recognizing this tendency, which is in all of us regardless of place on the political spectrum, gives us a diagnosis tool to check ourselves before we wreck ourselves. Prayerfully asking why I am passionate about some things versus others, why I quickly move to anger, why I am so absorbed by the drama of it all.

And watching out for this sickness must happen in the community of the church. Idols are hard to unseat because we don't think they are idols, so we need each other to gently say "your sickness is showing..."

Admitting the problem is the first step toward recovery. We need a solution. And oh man do we have one!

## **2) Solution**

This is huge, it is earth-shattering, probably the first time you have heard it! Here is our solution for the sickness of consciously and subconsciously latching onto politics as our hope. This is the manna for exiles engaging in politics.

The supremacy of Christ.

To lead ourselves out of the valley of deep darkness that is the political cultural experience we must be more gospel-centered than we have ever been.

Let the sovereignty of God in all things outweigh fear of who might get into office, trust in Jesus, don't run to princes.

**Colossians 1:15–20** "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16] For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. [17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18] And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. [19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."  
(ESV)

## **The supremacy of Christ is our anchor.**

The supremacy of Christ trumps political power among exiles. Jesus is before all things, he determines our place, our time, and the rulers in heaven and on earth. His decree wins the day and his redemptive plan is heading to completion regardless of who wins at the ballot box.

But to be clear in how he wields his supremacy, how it is unleashed on the world. Because we can read and embrace the truth of Jesus powerfully reigning over all things and think we need to achieve or help him gain some of this power now. But when we do that we get his supremacy wrong.

**Luke 24:13–27** “That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, [14] and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. [15] While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. [16] But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. [17] And he said to them, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad. [18] Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” [19] And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, [20] and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. [21] But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. [22] Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, [23] and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. [24] Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” [25] And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! [26] Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” [27] And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” (ESV)

With a wrong view of power the disciples assume and hope that the revolution was kicking off... and it was, by suffering and death.

**Philippians 2:5–8** “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to

be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (ESV)

This is what Jesus does with his power. He takes on weakness for our sake. He unleashes his rule and eternal reign over all things by serving, by taking on pain for the joy that is set before him. And this is the way of the kingdom.

The supremacy of Christ kills the fear that tempts us to trust in political power and endorse evil as a means to an end. His sovereignty shapes how we advocate for those things Jesus values and calls us to value as well. With a posture that Jesus models for us and empowers us in. This is what we need, a vision of Jesus before all things.

And when we have a thorough-going trust in his authority, his giving over of himself, we are motivated to the action he sets before us.

### 3) Strategy

In both Old and New Testament exile, God uses his people as a redemptive influence where they are.

Exiles are meant to positively impact the places they live. **Jeremiah 29:7** “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” (ESV)

Of course we prioritize spiritual welfare but in Jeremiah the exiles are told to settle in, build homes and marry off children. Rooted in a place to make it flourish. So this is what we do.

And we step into it through healthier public discourse and engagement as individuals and churches.

Let me just give you three practical steps.

**Seek out difference.** The church should be the healthiest multicultural institution because what binds us together is far deeper than ideology or ethnicity. So we should have a head start here. Make the church a safe place to have different political views.

You can model this for others by intentionally investing time and life with someone that sees things differently.

The gospel is adorned when people that have no worldly reason to be together flourish as a family. They will know us by our love for one another, love that transcends politics.

It is okay to talk about politics. The gospel we preach has implications, it shapes how we live, evenly politically. Don't avoid the intersection of the two even if it seems controversial but instead engage issues with truth, grace, wisdom and compassion. The gospel, the fullness of Christ impacts all of life and we show that to be true when we at least talk about it. Things don't have to be tense, we can ask more often, "Help me understand?"

**Refuse to Sacrifice the Gospel for Political Gain.** This is more for me than you; so I have to ask myself, are the things I am doing or saying in the political realm jeopardizing my witness of the gospel. Under the supremacy of Christ, I long for others to know him and find forgiveness, real life in him. Am I revealing my greatest hope in the way I engage or am I blindly wearing hypocrisy for the sake of political power?

"Being Christian exiles in American culture does not end our influence; it takes the swagger out of it. We don't get cranky that our country has been taken away. We don't whine about the triumphs of evil. We are not hardened with anger. We understand. This is not new. This was the way it was in the beginning — Antioch, Corinth, Athens, Rome. The Empire was not just degenerate, it was deadly. For three explosive centuries, Christians paid for their Christ-exalting joy with blood. Many still do. More will." John Piper

Seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.

**[Give yourself away] Foster Civil Society in and around the church while you preach the gospel.**

**Philippians 2:1–4** "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. [3] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." (ESV)



Show the world where you stand by making statements with your life. Form partnerships with local organizations, or create your own, to care for the least among us for the glory of Christ. Be the church that saves children from the ash heaps... foster, adopt, befriend those facing the hardest of life's decisions. Let it be known it is the gospel that motivates our work, we love because we have been loved.

More than ever the church has an opportunity to bring renewal where we are. We can turn off the TV and meet our neighbors. Volunteer at the library, serve on the PTA or neighborhood council. Building relationships with people so that their welfare will be tied to ours. It will change our perspective and how we participate. You will know how to pray...

**1 Timothy 2:1–2** “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, [2] for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” (ESV)

### **The supremacy of Christ is our anchor.**

We can only defeat the sickness and become energized for the strategy when we are living under, tethered to, the supremacy of Christ.

The fix to our political climate; how to engage in politics Christianly is to be more deeply about Jesus, trusting in him come what may. We vote our conscience but we let Jesus shape our conscience before preference, pundits, or party. We don't lose no matter the outcome at the polls.

The greatness of Christian exiles is not success but service. Come what may, we witness to the way of truth, beauty, and joy. We don't own culture and we don't rule over it. But we serve it with brokenhearted joy and longsuffering mercy, for the good of man and the glory of Jesus. Are you willing to live like this?

You can, anchored in the supremacy of Christ.