

Where Are All The Political Sermons?

The other day I was reading the account of John the Baptist. As you probably know, Herod beheaded him while he was in prison. But do you know why he was in prison in the first place? It was because he told Herod that it was wrong for Herod to be sleeping with his brother's wife:

Matthew 14:3: "For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife.

4 For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her."

Now that's rather interesting, isn't it? This can only mean that John had been preaching against the sins of Herod. Instead of limiting his preaching to the topics of righteousness and Jesus and the gospel, he took some time to address the sins of the nation's political leaders.

This is not at all an unusual thing; in fact, it was quite common in the Old Testament. For example, Nathan confronted King David after he murdered Bathsheba's husband:

2 Samuel 12:7: "And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;

8 And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.

9 Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon."

But Nathan wasn't the first person to preach against the sins of the king. The prophet Elijah confronted King Ahab after he had Naboth killed and stole his vineyard:

1 Kings 21:20: "And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord."

Likewise, Jehu rebuked Jehoshaphat when he formed an alliance with the wicked king Ahab:

2 Chronicles 19:2: "And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord."

I could give many more examples, but I think you get the point. All throughout the Bible we see men of God standing up to the political leaders of the day and rebuking them for their sins. They did not ignore the problem; instead they confronted it. They didn't let it slide under the rug while they focused on other issues; instead they refused to tolerate it and called them out for what they had done. Yes, that's right: they *called kings out for their sins!*

Tell me: when was the last time you heard a sermon addressing the sins of our political leaders?

How long has it been since your preacher rebuked the government for passing an immoral law? For the vast majority of people, the answer is *not once in your whole life*. The closest most pastors ever get is maybe, maybe preaching a sermon against abortion – but that's as far as they are willing to go. No pastor is going to rebuke their state senator for committing adultery, or discuss the bills that are being considered by the state legislature and condemn them for Biblical reasons. It's just not going to happen.

The reason churches don't do that anymore is because they have made a deal with the government. The government has agreed to give churches tax-exempt status as long as the churches never discuss politics, politicians, or political matters. Since churches crave money above all else, they agreed to the deal. They willingly sold themselves out for money, and agreed to not preach certain topics in exchange for more tax dollars.

But it didn't used to be that way. You may be surprised to learn that when America was founded, churches had no qualms whatsoever about preaching political sermons. There is a series of books entitled “Political Sermons of the American Founding Era”, which record a whole series of political sermons that were preached in the 18th century. Here are just a few of the sermon titles, to give you an idea of the sort of things preachers used to talk about:

THE ESSENTIAL RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES OF PROTESTANTS
BRITAIN’S MERCIES, AND BRITAIN’S DUTIES
CIVIL MAGISTRATES MUST BE JUST, RULING IN THE FEAR OF GOD
A CALM ADDRESS TO OUR AMERICAN COLONIES
A SERMON ON THE DAY OF THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION
DEFENSIVE ARMS VINDICATED
THE REPUBLIC OF THE ISRAELITES AN EXAMPLE TO THE AMERICAN STATES

Here is a quote from one sermon, written in 1775. This part of the sermon was addressing the idea of taxation without representation:

But an American can have no possible influence in the choice of an English senator; and an English senator, when he taxes an American, cannot tax himself also, because he has no property in America to be taxed: yet self-taxation is the sole pledge of the taxer, for security of the taxed. He, who does not tax himself, taxes others without feeling: he may, therefore, tax without propriety, and without measure; may take, not only a fifth, or a fourth, but the half, or even the whole of property; and make the wealthy subject an impoverished slave. The wisest forms of government, adverting to the imperfection of human nature, have, as much as possible, avoided leaving one man at the mercy of another; they have ever contrived some rational restraint on action, some bond of reciprocal safety.

The point of this passage was that it was immoral for someone to pass a tax that did not also apply to themselves. If people had the power to do that, then they could act “without feeling”. Since it cost them nothing to take money from others, they could take as much as they pleased and not feel any consequences.

Could you imagine a pastor preaching a sermon on that subject today? Of course not; it's unthinkable. Churches avoid politics as much as possible, because they care far more about tax dollars than they do the Word of God. But note that the point of these sermons was *not* to support one party over the other. What these sermons were doing was looking at the political actions that were taking

place in society and placing them in a Biblical context. What did the Bible have to say about taxation without representation? Was there Biblical support for the American Revolution, or was it a sin against God? How did the laws being considered conform to the Word of God? What did God think about our Constitution?

You see, the laws of a nation are a serious matter, and the Church used to care if the laws were just or unjust. Pastors wanted their congregations to know how to apply the Word of God to their governments. They wanted people to understand how to look at a law (or a politician) and tell if it was right or wrong, Biblical or unbiblical. So they preached about politics – just as the prophets in the Bible did.

Is it a sin to preach a sermon on a law, and evaluate that law against the Word of God? Of course not; why would it? God surely cares about whether our laws are just or unjust, and God *definitely* wants His people to have discernment and wisdom. Are pastors today teaching people how to evaluate their governments (and politicians) from a Biblical perspective, and compare their actions and laws to the Word of God? No, they most certainly are not.

Why? Because it would endanger their tax-exempt status. If churches started preaching against ungodly politicians and ungodly laws – which churches *did not hesitate* to do in the 18th century, when this nation was founded – then the government might take away their tax-exempt status. That would cost churches money, and that is just *unacceptable*. Churches will gladly compromise on preaching the Word if the government pays them to do so.

Here is a question for you: could you imagine Elijah or John the Baptist agreeing to not talk about the actions of their kings in exchange for tax-exempt status? It's unthinkable, isn't it? John the Baptist was willing to go to prison *and death* in order to “speak truth to power” (to borrow a modern phrase). He preached the whole counsel of God, and he excluded no one and nothing – no matter what it cost him. Do you think that Elijah would *ever* have made a deal to be silent about certain issues in exchange for money from the king?

But *that is exactly the deal that modern churches have made*. We have sold out our responsibilities to preach the whole counsel of God in exchange for money, and I assure you that God does not smile on that. What God wants us to do is *preach the truth*, not minimize our tax liabilities. He wants us to be *faithful*, not rich.

This is how Jesus put it:

Matthew 6:24: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

Did you see that? You *cannot* serve God and mammon. It can't be done. If you choose to serve God, then you must be willing to sacrifice everything – including money. However, if you sell out God in exchange for money, then you are no longer serving God. At that point you have become God's enemy, because you have chosen to disobey God in exchange for cash. You have accepted a bribe and perverted the Word of God, and you *will* be held accountable for that.

Paul was able to say that he preached the *whole* counsel of God:

Acts 20:27: “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”

Paul didn't hide anything or avoid any topics; he preached *all* of it. The modern church can't say that, can they? We avoid all sorts of topics because we know that if we preach *that* passage, or address *that* issue, it will cause problems. Paul was so willing to preach the whole counsel of God that he

willingly faced *death*. It's unthinkable to imagine Paul compromising his message in exchange for tax dollars.

You see, Paul had a very different approach. He understood that we are to preach the Word “in season”, when people will hear it, and “out of season”, when people will reject it:

2 Timothy 4:2: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine.”

Do you see Paul saying “Preach the parts of the word that won't increase your tax liabilities?” Of course not! The Bible commands us to preach the truth – *all* of the truth, *all* of the time. The churches of this country have refused to do that for a very long time, and that is a heavy strike against them. God *will* hold pastors accountable who refused to preach the Word, and who sold out in exchange for money. We are to preach *everything* – because *that is what God requires*.

After all, if you are willing to sell out God in exchange for money, then what does that say about you and your commitment? When you stand before Christ and are judged for your life, do you think Jesus will tell you “I'm so glad you disobeyed me in exchange for money”?