

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 14:3-4: “For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife. 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. John must not have limited his preaching to the topics of righteousness, the Messiah, and the gospel. He took some time to address the sins of the nation's political leaders.

This wasn't an unusual thing for prophets to do. In fact, it was common in the Old Testament. For example, Nathan confronted David after the king murdered Bathsheba's husband:

2 Samuel 12:7-9: “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; 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. 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.”

Nathan wasn't the only Old Testament prophet who preached against the sins of a 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 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 didn't ignore the problem; instead they confronted it. They didn't let it slide while they focused on other issues; instead they refused to tolerate it and called their rulers 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 some people the answer is *not once in their entire life*. Few pastors are going to rebuke their state senator for committing adultery, and even fewer are going to tell their congregations what the Bible has to say about the latest bill which

is being considered by the state legislature. It's just not going to happen.

One of the reasons churches don't do that is because they've 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 modern churches covet money, they agreed to the deal. They willingly sold themselves out for money and agreed not to preach on certain topics.

But it didn't used to be that way. When America was founded, churches had no qualms about preaching political sermons. There's a book entitled "Political Sermons of the American Founding Era" that records 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's a quote from a sermon that was written in 1775. This part of the sermon was addressing the topic 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 didn't 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? There are many churches that avoid politics as much as possible because they care more about money than they do the Word of God. But note that the point of these sermons was *not* to support one party over the other. These sermons were looking at the political actions of the time and placing them into 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. There was a time when the churches of this country deeply cared about whether those laws were just or unjust. Pastors wanted their congregations to know how to apply the Word of God to what the government was doing. They wanted people to understand how to examine a law and tell if it was Biblical or unbiblical. For that reason pastors preached about what politicians were doing – just as the prophets in the Bible did.

Is it wrong for pastors to preach a sermon that evaluates a law against what the Bible says? Of course not. God surely cares about whether our laws are just or unjust, and God *definitely* wants His people to have discernment and wisdom! I am afraid that there are few pastors today who are teaching people how to evaluate their governments (and their politicians) from a Biblical perspective.

Why? I suspect the answer is simple: doing so would endanger their tax-exempt status. If churches started preaching against ungodly politicians and ungodly laws (which churches didn't 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. It seems that churches will gladly compromise on preaching the Word if the government pays them to do so.

Here's a question for you: can you imagine Elijah or John the Baptist agreeing to not talk about the actions of kings in exchange for money? I believe they would be horrified at the very thought of doing something so terrible. John the Baptist was willing to go to prison *and death* in order to “speak truth to power”. He preached the whole counsel of God, and he excluded no one and nothing – no matter what it cost him. Elijah would *never* have made a deal to be silent about certain issues in exchange for money from the king.

But *that's exactly what modern churches have done*. They have sold out their responsibility to preach the whole counsel of God in exchange for money, and I am convinced God doesn't

approve of that at all. God requires us to *preach the truth*, not minimize our tax liabilities. He wants us to be *faithful*, even if it costs us something.

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.”

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 else – including money. However, if you sell out God in exchange for money then you're no longer serving God. At that point you've become God's enemy because you've chosen to disobey God in exchange for cash. Churches have taken a bribe in exchange for their silence – and God will hold them accountable for that.

The apostle Paul was able to say that he had 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! Many modern churches can't say that. They avoid all sorts of topics because they know that if they preach on *that* passage, or address *that* issue, they will have problems. Paul was willing to face *death* in order to preach the whole counsel of God. It's unthinkable to imagine Paul compromising his message in exchange for money.

You see, Paul had a very different approach to preaching. He understood that we must 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 *all* of the truth, *all* of the time. Some of the churches of this country have refused to do that for a long time, and that's a heavy strike against them. God *will* hold pastors accountable who refused to preach the Word and sold out in exchange for money. We must preach *everything* because *that's what God requires*. If a church is willing to sell out God in exchange for money then what does that say about its commitment to the truth?

One day each of us will stand before God and be judged for what we've done. When that day comes, will we be able say that we taught the whole counsel of God?