

Paul and Politics
Acts #26 | 25:1-25:27
March 28, 2021

Pre-Sermon Remarks

- Palm Sunday | Jesus is King
- **PRAYER (Pray for Renew Church in Oregon City)**

Rulers Everywhere | Acts 21-26

- Jerusalem:
 - Claudius Lysias | Roman commander
 - Ananias | High priest
 - Roman centurion | Unnamed
- Caesarea: *Ananias, Lysias again, but also...*
 - Felix | Roman governor of Judea
 - Drusilla | Jewish wife of Felix
 - Tertullus | Lawyer for Sanhedrin
 - Porcius Festus | Replacement governor
 - Josephus called Felix brutal and incompetent, so he was replaced
 - Agrippa II | Jewish King
 - Bernice | Agrippa II's sister (Agrippa, Bernice, and Drusilla are siblings)

Paul's Political Appeals

1. Paul appeals to his citizenship | 22:25
2. Paul requests a prison transfer | 23:12-22
3. Paul argues his case in court | 24:10-21
4. Paul appeals to Caesar | 25:11

Appeal to Caesar

⁷When he arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him and brought many serious charges that they were not able to prove. ⁸Then Paul made his defense: "Neither against the Jewish law, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I sinned in any way." ⁹But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, replied to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem to be tried before me there on these charges?" ¹⁰Paul replied, "I am standing at Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as even you yourself know very well. ¹¹If then I did anything wrong and am deserving of death, I am not trying to escape death; but if there is nothing to what these men accuse me of, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar!" ¹²Then after Festus conferred with his council, he replied, "You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you will go."

Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice

¹³Several days later, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived in Caesarea and paid a courtesy call on Festus. ¹⁴Since they were staying there several days, Festus presented Paul's case to the king,

saying, “There’s a man who was left as a prisoner by Felix. ¹⁵ When I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews presented their case and asked that he be condemned...¹⁸ The accusers stood up but brought no charge against him of the evils I was expecting. ¹⁹ Instead they had some disagreements with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, a dead man Paul claimed to be alive. ²⁰ Since I was at a loss in a dispute over such things, I asked him if he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding these matters. ²¹ But when Paul appealed to be held for trial by the Emperor, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I could send him to Caesar.” ²² Agrippa said to Festus, “I would like to hear the man myself.” “Tomorrow you will hear him,” he replied.

Paul’s Politics

1. Was Paul conservative? | Romans 13:1-7, 1 Timothy 2:1-4 (pray for authority), other passages about traditional family values, etc.
2. Was Paul progressive? | 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 (some have more money, so there should be equality), 2 Corinthians 4:2-11 (re-evaluation of the Torah), Galatians 3:28 (egalitarian), other passages about women and slaves in leadership
3. Was Paul apolitical? | 2 Timothy 2:3 (don’t get involved in civilian affairs), 1 Thessalonians 4:11 (live a quiet life, keep to yourself)
4. **Some even argue that he was libertarian (freedom) or revolutionary (causing riots)

Why is this Important? Because we live in an age where politics has become the de facto religion of our nation. In fact, America is itself a type of religion. **POLITICS = POLIS = CITY/SOCIETY**

Politics as Religion

- Most of Europe and other western countries experienced decline in religion over time
- America held steady from the 1930’s to roughly the year 2000
 - In the last two decades, 70% drop in religious participation
 - The “nones” represent a full 25% of our nation
 - There are some reasons to not be fully “gloom and doom” (clearer lines)
- In a recent *Atlantic* article, Shadi Hamid argues that politics has taken the place of religion

Shadi Hamid [I]f secularists hoped that declining religiosity would make for more rational politics, drained of faith’s inflaming passions, they are likely disappointed. As Christianity’s hold, in particular, has weakened, ideological intensity and fragmentation have risen. American faith, it turns out, is as fervent as ever; it’s just that what was once religious belief has now been channeled into political belief. Political debates over what America is supposed to mean have taken on the character of theological disputations. This is what religion without religion looks like...

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Since the end of the Obama era, debates over what it means to be American have become suffused with a fervor that would be unimaginable in debates over, say, Belgian-ness or the “meaning” of Sweden. It’s rare to hear someone accused of being un-Swedish or un-British—but un-American is a common slur, slung by both left and right against the other. Being called un-American is like being called “un-Christian” or “un-Islamic,” a charge akin to heresy. This is because America itself is

“almost a religion,” as the Catholic philosopher Michael Novak once put it, particularly for immigrants who come to their new identity with the zeal of the converted. The American civic religion has its own founding myth, its prophets and processions, as well as its scripture—the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and The Federalist Papers. In his famous “I Have a Dream” speech, Martin Luther King Jr. wished that “one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed.” The very idea that a nation might have a creed—a word associated primarily with religion—illustrates the uniqueness of American identity as well as its predicament.

Big idea: Paul lived out the politics of the Kingdom (and we should too)

What Did Paul Believe?

1. God alone is sovereign | Daniel 2:21, Proverbs 21:1
 - a. ...he removes kings and sets up kings
 - b. The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.
 - c. Ultimately, sovereignty means that a) God is the rightful ruler over everything, and b) nothing can ultimately thwart his purposes
2. Earthly kingdoms have a God-given role | Romans 13:1-7, 1 Timothy 2:1-2
 - a. Protection, provision, the ability to live peaceful lives
3. Earthly kingdoms bend toward empire | 2 Thessalonians 1:5-8
 - a. ...that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— ⁶ since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us,
 - b. Paul knew the storyline of Scriptures: Egypt, Babylon, Rome
 - c. Psalm 2 - why do the nations rage, kings make all sorts of plans?
 - d. Proverbs 29:26 Many seek the face of a ruler, but it is from the LORD that a man gets justice.
4. Jesus came to inaugurate God’s kingdom | Romans 1:3
 - a. *Son of David language*
 - b. Paul knew about the Sermon on the Mount, he knew this was *big*
 - c. The Sermon on the Mount begins in June, what it means to live in the Kingdom
5. The kingdom of God is universal | Colossians 1:15-20
 - a. ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For everything was created by him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and by him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.
6. Jesus demands full allegiance as king | Philippians 2:9-11

- a. In this famous hymn, we often focus on the humility of Jesus, but half of the song is about his exaltation and rulership!
- b. ⁹For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—¹¹and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

An Aside on Baptism

- The word “sacrament” was not originally a Christian term. Over 150 references.
- First used by Emperor Julius Caesar as a pledge or a vow that a soldier took
- Tacitus used the language of “receiving the sacrament”

R. Alan Streett The church in the first century, as the locus and earthly manifestation of God’s kingdom, was the antithesis of the Roman Empire. Through baptism, believers sided with the kingdom of God and rejected Rome’s dominant narrative that it alone possessed a divine right to rule the world. Another kingdom under another Lord had arisen to challenge Rome’s claims and ethical practices. When Christ-followers submitted to baptism they committed an act of resistance against Rome by becoming part of a movement that challenged Roman ideology, its hierarchical social order, and rejected Caesar as the ultimate Lord. For many of the original believers, baptism was the initial step that led to persecution and even death...Baptism was a “boundary crossing ritual,” i.e., a proverbial line drawn in the sand. When crossed, it meant breaking formal ties with the past, declaring fealty to another Lord, and accepting a new and alternative identity—Christ-follower. As such, baptism was a political act of subversion or a rite of resistance against the prevailing power structures of the day. Is there any wonder that the early believers were challenged to count the cost before taking the plunge?

- *What if getting baptized meant that you couldn’t say the P.o.A. or sing T.S.S.B?*

7. Jesus’ kingdom has a different ethic | Romans 14:17

- a. 17 ...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.
- b. **N.T. Wright** Instead of the [Roman] eagle with its talons and claws, Jesus summoned people to a different kind of empire: peacemaking, mercy, humility and a passion for genuine and restorative justice. Saul of Tarsus, born and bred a Pharisee in a world shaped by the wisdom of Greece, the religion of the east, and the empire of Rome, came to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was Israel’s Messiah and world’s true Lord, and that this Jesus had called him, Saul, to take the ‘good news’ of his death, resurrection, and universal lordship into the world of wisdom, religion, and empire.

8. The kingdom is now and future | 1 Corinthians 15:23-26

- a. ²³But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward, at his coming, those who belong to Christ. ²⁴Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he abolishes all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵For he must reign until he puts all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy to be abolished is death.

Application

Shadi Hamad “neither Trumpism nor wokeism will fill the God-shaped hole in America”

1. Be less political | The politics of America are less important than the kingdom
 - a. Do your political interactions make people want to be part of Jesus’ kingdom?
2. Be more political | The politics of the Kingdom have real-world implications **SOTM**
3. Think cosmically | America is too small a prize for the Son of God
4. Act locally | Paul used every opportunity he got to tell people about Jesus
 - a. Feed the hungry, care for the widow and orphan
5. Pray for Jesus’ return | We long for his return

Benediction

From Ephesians 1 Our allegiance is to Christ, raised from the dead and seated at the Father’s right hand in heavenly places. He is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.