

Giving Up Our Misunderstood Kingdoms for Lent...for Life

Based on Luke 19:28-44, John 18:28-36, & Acts 1:6

A Message Offered by Toby Jones to the People of ChxUCC on 3/24/24

Every year, when Palm Sunday rolls around, I am reminded just how easy it is for us to confuse our kings and kingdoms and to convolute and confuse our loyalties. Given that 2024 is a presidential election year, this chronic confusion has reared its ugly head again.

The original Palm Sunday, nineteen-hundred-and-ninety-one years ago, shows thousands of people lining the streets of Jerusalem, revealing just how thoroughly they had missed Jesus's point. Despite everything he had told them, the king-starved people of Israel wanted Jesus to restore the Davidic throne, expel the Romans from Israel, and usher in a new united and independent government based in Jerusalem. In short, the people of Israel wanted an earthly king, not a spiritual savior.

But this was not what Jesus came to do. In John 18, Pilate asks Jesus point blank, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were," he continued, "my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. No, my kingdom is from another place."

So, even though Jesus came to bring a *spiritual* kingdom, a reign characterized by human service, the people of Israel wanted him to be a *political* king and ruler over the nation of Israel. Even after being crucified and then risen from the dead, his disciples practically repeat Pilate's question in Acts 1:6, saying, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?" It's like they won't take no for an answer. Their hunger for a powerful, political ruler to sit on the Davidic throne will not be satisfied by any other answer from Jesus.

I've always believed that this is why Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem during that Palm Sunday donkey ride down from the Mount of Olives into the city gates. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...if only you had known on this day what would bring you peace...But it is as if it is hidden from your eyes." No matter how hard Jesus tried, no matter what he said, no matter what he taught, the people wanted him to be their earthly king, their ruler, their *political* savior.

But if you fast forward to 2024, it seems that we – the people of today – are taking the men who are our *political* rulers, our presidential candidates, and trying to turn them into *saviors* – spiritual, sanctified, divine-appointed beings - who will somehow usher in the kingdom of God on earth. And the candidate on the other side of the political fence we have somehow deemed the anti-Christ,

Satan's minion from Hell itself, who will, if elected, quite literally take us and our country to hell in a handbasket. Listen to this from a January 17, 2024 New York Times piece by Thomas Edsall:

Donald Trump, his family, and his supporters have been more than willing to claim that Trump is ordained by God for a special mission, to restore America as a Christian nation.

In recent weeks, the former president posted a video called "[God Made Trump](#)" on social media...He has also screened it at multiple campaign rallies. The video begins with a narrator...declaring: "On June 14, 1946, God looked down on his planned paradise and said: 'I need a caretaker.' And God gave us Donald Trump." Why was Trump chosen? The video continues: God had to have someone willing to go into the den of vipers. Call out the fake news for their tongues as sharp as a serpent's. The poison of vipers is on their lips. So, God made Trump.

The video claims to quote God directly: God said, "I will need someone who will be strong and courageous. Who will not be afraid or terrified of wolves when they attack. A man who cares for the flock. A shepherd to mankind who won't ever leave or forsake them. I need the most diligent worker to follow the path and remain strong in faith. And know the belief in God and country."

The video, along with Eric Trump's [claim](#) that his father "literally saved Christianity" and the image Donald Trump [reposted on Truth Social](#) of Jesus sitting next to him in court, raises a question: Does Trump believe that he is God's messenger, or are his direct and indirect claims to have a special relationship with God a cynical ploy to win evangelical votes?

*I posed this and other questions to [Barry Hankins](#), a professor of history at Baylor and the editor of *The Journal of Church and State*. Hankins replied: "Over the years, there has been a growing chorus of voices saying Trump is the defender of Christians and Christianity. As [David P. Gushee](#), a professor of Christian ethics at Mercer University, explained: Some of Trump's Christian followers do appear to have grown to see him as a kind of religious figure. He is a savior. I think it began with the sense that he was uniquely committed to saving them from their foes (liberals, Democrats, elites, seculars, illegal immigrants, etc.) and saving America from all that threatens it. In this sense, Gushee continued, "a savior does not have to be a good person but just needs to fulfill his divinely appointed role. Trump is seen by many as actually having done exactly that while president."*

Can you hear all that religious language being used to talk about and describe a *political* leader? It shows that we are equally confused as the Palm Sunday crowds were but in the opposite direction.

An April of 2013 article from The Guardian revealed that 13% of Americans believed Barak Obama to be the anti-Christ. In a December 2, 2019 article in Rolling Stone written by Alex Morris, Mega Church pastor Robert Jeffress is quoted as saying, *“What I want to say in closing is this election is not a battle between Republicans and Democrats. It’s a battle between good and evil, light and darkness, righteousness and unrighteousness. . . This is the last chance we have, I’m convinced, to turn this country around.”*

Again, note the religious language we are using to talk about our political elections and leaders. We are sorely confused. It seems that we are still suffering from the Palm Sunday confusion that our ancestors fell victim to all those centuries ago. But in their case, they were looking to Jesus – their *spiritual* leader – to be a *political* one, while in our case, we look to our *political* leaders to be our spiritual saviors, as if they could somehow save the world.

To put it bluntly, no matter who you may be supporting in the 2024 election, Donald Trump is neither the second coming of Christ nor the anti-Christ, and neither is Joe Biden. They are both very flawed humans, leading equally flawed and human political parties. Neither has divine power or sanction to save the world nor to send it to hell. It is nothing short of idolatrous to offer either of these men – or any other political leaders – that kind of authority or support. Remember, as followers of Jesus, our ultimate loyalty must NEVER be given to any political leader, or party, or nation. Let me say that again... as followers of Jesus, our ultimate loyalty must NEVER be given to any political leader, or party, or nation.

Therefore, I am calling upon all of my Christian brothers and sisters, regardless of political party, to give up confusing our political leaders with spiritual or religious saviors. It is a horribly costly and idolatrous mistake that is taking an already struggling – even dying – church and pounding more nails in its coffin. We must remove all religious – or even religious sounding – terminology from our election talk and from our talk about political leaders. They are NOT gods, nor are they divinely appointed leaders on some religious crusade. They will NOT be ushering in the kingdom of God, nor will they be making America a Christian nation. That is the work of the church, NOT the government.

It’s bad enough that Jesus was mistaken for a political messiah all those years ago in Jerusalem. Let’s not add insult to injury by mistaking Donald Trump and Joe Biden for religious messiahs or anti-Christ. They are broken men, leading broken political parties, in a very broken and dysfunctional political system. We can and should participate in the process and vote. But let’s not give either of

these men the kind of allegiance, hope, or trust that only God deserves. They cannot and will not save us nor our nation. In the words of Jesus, throughout this election year, let us “render unto Ceasar what is Ceasar’s; but render unto God what is God’s. Amen.