

Intro:

Last week we began our discussion on Jesus and politics, focusing in on some general observations and then the passages in the book of Proverbs that talk about government. Today we focus on Jesus: How does Jesus relate with Politics? We'll be looking at:

- 2 encounters with Jesus
- 2 questions, based off what you wrote last week.

Two encounters:

John 18:28-38

This is at Jesus' sentencing for death. He's had his last moments with his disciples, he's gotten betrayed, he's been interrogated by the Jewish leaders, and here he is, facing Pilate, the Roman governor. A lot is at stake here, not just for Jesus of course, but Pilate as well. There are a lot of details worth thinking about, but at another time. Our focus is on there exchange here, starting in v.35. Two things to note, and then we'll talk about the implications.

Jesus is about the kingdom of God (the government of God) a reign that touches on everything that exists. It's so broad and encompassing, Jesus can say something like what He says in v.37- he is about truth, he is the truth in fact.

This government is radically unique and different from human government, especially in the way it goes about things.

Some important notes:

- This is not about how Jesus is separate from politics. There's a way of reading the life of Jesus where we say he was not trying to be the political king, deliver Israel from the Romans, and so on. That is definitely true. But sometimes the next step is taken- well, Jesus doesn't have anything to do with politics, with nations, with governments. That is clearly not true.

His kingdom is not of the world, but it is surely in it.

His kingdom will one day be the kingdom of the world (Rev. 11:15, Phil. 2:11, I Cor. 15:25)

- Yet this is clearly not about theocracy now, or else his disciples would have used their force to make sure Jesus was king.

- So there is a tension! And it's good, because it keeps us continually on our toes, constantly asking these questions.

Summary:

Jesus is about the government of God.

This government is radically unique and different from human government, especially in the way it goes about things.

Matthew 22:15-22

This is a fascinating story. It comes during the last week of Jesus' life as the Pharisees are increasingly getting agitated with Jesus and all that he represents. So they try to trap him, the Pharisees along with a group of people known as the Herodians- real interesting because Pharisees and Herodians hate each other, especially from a political standpoint (one group wanted more Jewish rule, the other played favorites with Rome). Jesus is a challenge to everyone, isn't he?

In any case, they try and trap Jesus about this issue of the imperial tax- the tax Rome, the conquerors of the region, imposed on all the peoples and countries they conquered. What does Jesus think? Should the Jewish people pay or not?

If Jesus says yes, then he'll probably lose favor with the Jewish crowd given that the Jewish people hated that tax.

In fact, when Jesus was a boy, there was a famous revolt caused by that tax, one that Jesus was probably very aware of. The Pharisees would love to see Jesus lose favor.

But if He says no, than the Pharisees and Herodians could easily turn Jesus to the Roman authorities.

Jesus gives the famous answer, one that avoids the trap and yet pushes his listeners to think even more about God, the government, and so on. Two potential messages I want to focus on from this story:

- *Jesus calls for total allegiance to Him. He does this as He asks the crowd to think about the coin that is used to pay the tax- whose image is on it? And whose inscription? The answer Caesar, of course. But there's more here- on each of these coins it describes Caesar as Son of a divine god (Augustus) and also a high priest. Each coin, then, essentially attempts to get everyone in the Roman empire thinking of their ruler as worthy of total allegiance. But Jesus, in a pretty simple way, brushes that aside and gets people thinking about the greater issue- giving God*

the allegiances He is due. In fact, he's really sticking it to the Pharisees and Herodians, because here they are trying to get him trapped on an issue of allegiance to Rome or the popularity with Jews, and Jesus is like- wow, you guys miss the total point of it all- giving God what He is due, something Jesus knows they are not doing.

Yet Jesus calls for submission to government in the context of total allegiance to Him.

There's more that could be said, but I want to keep it at that for now.

In Summary:

Jesus is about a total government of God.

This government is radically unique and different from human government.

Jesus calls for total allegiance to Him.

Jesus calls for submission to state in the context of total allegiance to Him.

Now, I think this story transitions well to the questions you asked. Let's go to them, and we'll open it up for discussion afterward.

Questions:

- How do we support/submit to government when we don't like what's going on?

1. Realize we will get persecuted. Matthew 10:17-18, John 15:18ff...

2. Acts 4:19-20- Disobedience

There is a place for disobedience, particularly when government asks you to do something wrong.

3. Acts 22:22-29, Acts 23- Using the political means for the right ends

4. Transform society by doing what we ought to do...

Jeremiah 29:4-7, Gal. 6:10

Again, this is where Christians differ. Do we do it by setting up an alternative society? Getting engrossed in the political process?

I would say one thing: honoring a democracy does mean trying to participate in it.

- When we get involved with Biblical values, aren't we legislating morality?

Great question, especially in light of the above tension- there's this kingdom, government, rule of God, yet the way he wants to go about it is not by domination or theocracy at the moment.

Response:

All laws are based on someone's worldview and morality. There are no moral-free laws.

The question is: which worldview/morality is most helpful?

Secularism? Christianity? Islam? Hinduism?

Bible: based on an original created order and vision for goodness.

This includes a certain tolerance when it comes to allegiance to Jesus: there was no forced belief.

We can't transfer a laws direct per say, but there are some principles that we for sure need to transfer, including tolerance. (note difference view of tolerance).

So there's a definite good rationale for both trying to influence law with our worldview and morality. Christians did it in the past- Wilberforce, who made the abolishing of slavery, was a Christian. Christians do it today- one of the main forces that got the US to get involved in the Darfur crisis was Christians. Christians are one of the main voices in the attempt to stop child prostitution, and so on.

Yet there's a definite balance, too, because of the kingdom tension noted above between influence and total theocracy. And then there's also the real comment by Paul that we need to be careful in demanding certain moral behavior from unbelievers. 1 Cor 5:12.

Which leads to one of the best thing we can do as a Christian: live like one.

Challenge:

- Total commitment, allegiance, even when it's not popular?

- Commitment to involvement, and doing it in the way of Jesus? (More or less involvement, etc)