

Honor PF

MORAL DILEMMA

The existence of political diversity like this in the one Body of Christ shouldn't shock us. After all – no party and no candidate falls completely within a Biblical framework. Hence the title of this series – the Moral Dilemma. Making a choice between two options, neither of which perfectly align with morality.

We don't preach this because it's a cute series for a specific season. This sermon series is mission critical.

In Jesus' prayer in **John 17** for the Church, he prays for a unity so strong that it is what will cause the world to take notice. It's only AFTER the Church has unity – “*THEN the world will know you sent me and have loved them...*”

We won't walk in the purposes God to reach our region or make one dent in the darkness. It's when the world sees **unity in the midst of diversity** that its convinced of God's love.

So again, the question we've wrestled with - how do we best walk in and demonstrate unity in this incredibly divisive season in our nation?

Isaiah 30:1-2, 8-17 - Partners in Calling

Partnerships

The Separation of Church and State - in our culture we've taken this to mean religious ideas and values should have no place in political and public discourse. But really the separation of Church and state is about a prevention of a theocracy, one religion or even denomination being endorsed as THE religion of our nation.

I say all this because religious values will absolutely find a place in politics. Every person in America votes based on their values - religious or secular. So for us to be faithful to as Christians in the political arena is to hold to our Biblical values and convictions.

Sometimes our holding to a value overlaps with the values of a political platform.

That's how **partisanship**, support of a party because of its causes, is formed.

But between election cycles we also see **partnerships**.

When our values or a cause we champion – for example sex trafficking - overlaps with the values of another group, a partnership can be formed to advocate for the cause.

The Civil Rights Movement - was the result of partnerships fueled by Biblical values.

MLK - was a minister before he was an activist.

And he once said – “***I didn't get my inspiration from Karl Marx; I got it from a man named Jesus, a Galilean saint who said he was anointed to heal the broken-hearted.***”

Both Christians and non-Christians labored to see the Civil Rights Act come to fruition. It was partnership done right – and to the benefit of our nation.

In the Bible, Israel's history similarly shows partnerships done right...

Joseph working alongside Pharaoh in Egypt to save countless lives.
Esther using her role in Persia to do the same.
Daniel working in Babylon, and so on...

But in the Bible you also see partnerships done wrong.

Early in the book of Isaiah you see Isaiah warn Judah that any alliance and partnership with Assyria was going to be a train wreck.
Predictably- and as Isaiah already spoke prophetically - Assyria eventually turns on Judah.

The Israelites' proposed solution to the Assyrian problem -- an alliance with Egypt!
And again we see a common theme in Isaiah – you can trust in nations, or you can trust in God.
And again we see a common theme in Israel's history – they trust in nations instead.

Now... you could conclude that the nations are all bad and evil and God will never use them...
But God would later use Persia to usher his people out of captivity and back to Jerusalem!

So what was the issue here in Isaiah 30?

It was their way of putting their trust in something other than God.

It's why Isaiah reminds them in verse 15: "...trust [in God] is your strength"

Now for us in pews in America we aren't partnering with nations.
But we do feel the pull of partnerships, good and bad. Pulls on where we place our trust.

I made mention of the Civil Rights movement that led to the Civil Rights Act being signed by President Lynden Johnson. But you also don't have to continue far in history to see how partnerships can also go wrong.

Billy Graham was once known as America's Pastor. Like Isaiah was known and had the ear of Israel's kings, Billy Graham knew every president from Harry Truman to Barrack Obama. But one particular president, **President Nixon**, used his relationship with Billy Graham in opportunistic fashion so that Graham would deliver specific messages to his massive following. And post-Watergate, Billy Graham had to deal with the consequences of this partnership gone wrong, along with compromising things he said along the way.

Its why in a 2011 as he approached the end of his life, Billy Graham said if he could change anything: *"I would have steered clear of politics. I'm grateful for the opportunities God gave me to minister to people in high places; people in power have spiritual and personal needs like everyone else, and often they have no one to talk to. But looking back, I know I sometimes crossed the line, and I wouldn't do that now."*

While this quote gives us healthy caution, we should also walk with a healthy confidence. The political sphere is an important tool through which we follow Biblical instructions to do justice, love our neighbor, and work for the common good of where God has placed us.

So the question becomes – what does being an advocate and a voice for God’s truth look like for the Church in America and our unique cultural context?

I want to quickly look at four qualities of the prophet tonight before returning to the Assyria and Egypt problem we see in Chapter 30...

First...their **ROLE**

You see before there were independent courts, elections, and checks and balances, religion often provided the only check on political powers. For the Israelites there was a higher power than the King – God. And Prophets spoke to the king on God’s behalf and served as a counterbalance and accountability.

It’s why Isaiah 30:8 reads – *go write this in a book as a witness that these leaders refuse the Lord’s instructions.*

God was saying I see what they’re doing, and I’m going to hold them accountable.

From counseling to confronting, the prophet was supposed to have a voice in the King’s ruling. But as the kings continued to walk in rebellion and ignore the word of God, they also ignored his prophets, even had them killed. And we see the prophetic voice shift from the courts to the wilderness. Yet they kept speaking and they kept prophesying.

The Church should have a voice that speaks up and speaks out when our nation breaks from truth and morality.

But again - what does that look like in 2020? We don’t have a king and we’re people in pews.

Well to begin, let’s consider this comment from a recent comment section in 2020:

“Listen to me, you fat cows-living in New York, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy, and who are always calling to your husbands, “Bring us another drink!” The Sovereign Lord has sworn this by his holiness: “The time will come when you will be led away with hooks in your noses. Every last one of you will be dragged away like a fish on a hook! You will be led out through the ruins of the wall; you will be thrown from your fortresses”

OK ...That’s not words from an internet comment section.

Those are actually the words of prophet Amos... not addressing New Yorkers but Samaritans.

But I share this because this is the posture many believers seem to borrow and operate from behind a screen. We simply go off and then log off and call it prophetic witness.

We like to claim the tone of the prophets for ourselves, but I think we'd do well to remember **their not just their role but their RETICENCE**

We should note that for the prophets of the OT there was an almost **universal hesitancy** at their calling

In Isaiah 6 we see Isaiah hesitate initially at his call to speak God's word and truth to the Israelites as a prophet.

Moses all but flat out said no at the burning bush and angered God.

Jeremiah wanted nothing more than to be relieved of his duty.

Ezekiel – in his own words upon his calling –

"I went in bitterness and turmoil, but the Lord's hold on me was strong."

But meanwhile in our culture in 2020 - the trap social media provides for us is we can rush to comment and speak out on everything. From things we know very little about to articles we didn't even read. Often confronting people we barely even know.

Proverbs 29:20 serves up the warning:

Do you see a man who is hasty in his words?

There is more hope for a fool than for him.

It's the same reason James advocates a slowness of speech...

So when I go to type up a challenge or retort or step into a debate ...I ask myself am I in a rush to do this? Because if it's spoken in haste and sent in a quick emotional flurry— chances are it borders on foolishness flows from self-righteousness.

But that doesn't mean I don't speak. We should consider the prophet's **RESPONSE...**
A vocal obedience to speak out on behalf of God.

Proverbs 31:8 – Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. Ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice.

What does Proverbs 31:8 look like in a nation like ours?

After all we have no king. All of what we're talking tonight isn't apples to apples.

We have a constitutional republic. A government with checks and balances built in.

You can point to 2 things in our culture that help us speak up - **Advocacy and Protest.**

In simple terms advocacy is work done on the front end to make sure the government does the **right** thing in upholding peace and justice for all.

Protest is what's done when they did something **wrong**.

When there's protest we don't care for that doesn't like up with our personal concerns, there's a verse almost universally applied - Romans 13:1, which reads

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

This is the word of God we should rightly apply. And yet often the application of Romans 13 simply goes something like this: ***Romans 13 for thee, but not for me.***

Because when it is our own personal rights being infringed upon - we quickly realize the value of protest! We quickly jump to Proverbs 31:8.

One could say that in our representative democracy where elected officials are public servants, Romans 13 isn't an injunction on protest any more than it encourages the people in our nation - where the government is created by and subject to the people per the constitution - to speak up and speak out.

But protest – like all tools – can be used in a way that does more harm than good. But that doesn't mean we throw it away. It just means we do it responsibly.

Rosa Parks was someone who protested through the simple act of where she sat on a bus. She once said –
“From my upbringing and the Bible I learned that people should stand up for rights.”
She took a stand by where she sat on a bus.

It reminds me of a quote from **Rufus Miles**, which says:

“Where you stand depends on where you sit.”

This statement of his went on to become known in political science as Miles Law.

It speaks to this reality:

the viewpoints you are most likely to take a stand on flow from the seat or position you occupy.

Your context shapes your perspective, and that perspective informs your politics.

You may vote one way because you want to take a stand on this issue.

They may vote another way because they want to take a stand on that issue.

And listen if our contexts shape our perspectives that shapes your politics... that means...

- 1.) Your political views weren't shaped in a vacuum.
- 2.) Some factors you *didn't even control* shaped your political views.

Where you grew up, how you were raised, what you experienced, how you were educated, who you were related to, your wealth or poverty... these all shape your perspectives.

This isn't about some false equivalency. There's black and white and right and wrong. But in the midst of the vast areas of grey politically... this fosters unity in the midst of diversity.

And look if you say things like...

“I don't understand how anyone could do this...”

“I don't know why anyone would vote this way...”

Ultimately when you ask these questions... it doesn't say anything about them as much as it's a telling statement about yourself. You don't understand. Not because of some egregious error. But based on your seat you have a limited perspective. You don't understand. So find someone who diverges from your seat, your context and your perspective... and listen.

It probably won't change the way you vote. But that's not the point.

It will grow the way you love.

The love we're called to be known by as Christ followers that allows for unity amidst diversity.

Lastly we should look at the prophets common: **RECIPIENT**

We read in Isaiah 30:10-11

"They tell the prophets, don't tell us what is right. Tell us nice things. Tell us lies. Forget all this gloom. Get off your narrow path."

Who is they? The leaders of Israel.

The common recipient of the OT prophet's critiques was quite often their own tribe.

What's practical application for an ancient text about prophets and kings when we're talking parties and presidential elections?

Mind your logs or log out.

Jesus says in Matthew 7:4 - before you go and try to take the speck out of another person's eye, take the log out of your own.

"How can you think of saying to your friend 'let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye' when you can't see past the log in your own eye?"

Now what we're talking about in this series is bigger than simple person to person... we're talking politics. But the principle remains: the humility we need to actually have a fruitful dialogue or debate will only come after some self-reflection.

You see when it comes to our political leanings, left or right, red or blue, we all too often minimize or even turn a blind eye to the problems in our own party's platform to solve these other issues we consider priority based on our convictions...

Until you've wrestled with the logs within your own camp recognized the moral dilemma it presents you with, **and** realized the grace you extend to yourself as a result... you'll likely withhold that same grace from others. And our public discourse needs more grace, not less.

Our political discourse would immediately improve the moment we stop treating people with different views as mentally and morally inferior and recognize we're all faced with a moral dilemma.

Each camp has logs to be dealt with. Until you've wrestled with the logs within your own camp and realized the grace you extend to yourself as a result... you'll likely withhold that same grace from others and administer more division.

And again – this isn't about some false equivalency or moral relativity. There's black and white and right and wrong.

We have to be faithful to the truth of scripture as it applies to ALL issues.
BUT we have to recognize that to be faithful to scripture in this way will often mean to openly critiquing each side.

But I find it ironic in light of the above that when Assyria comes to put the Israelites under siege a couple chapters after Isaiah 30 - they mock Israel's thoughts of joining forces with Egypt.

The Assyrian commander calls Egypt a *“splintered reed of a staff, which pierces a man and wounds him if he leans on it.”* ...Lean on them in alliance and they will break and give you splinters, maybe even get something in your eye in the process.

But what they didn't realize is they were in the same boat.
They had problematic logs in their own platform. And they too would crumble.
God promises through Isaiah to judge the Assyrians the same way he would the Egyptians.

Our political parties throw shade at each other's platforms in much the same way.
Yet just like Assyria and Egypt – neither are eternal and both carry an expiration date.
Ask the Whig Party. The Constitutional Union Party. Or the Federalist Party.

How foolish we can be to forfeit our unity for what is temporary.

One of the statements Isaiah makes that would have been most mind blowing for the Jewish audience would have been in **Isaiah 19**. It says:

“In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance.”

The same way **Galatians 3:28** would say there is neither Jew nor Gentile but we are all one in Christ, the same is implied here – Egyptian, Assyrian, Israel – all God's people.

How much more red and blue, republican and democrat, progressive and conservative, independent and indecisive... all one.

And again let me double or triple down on this at this point...

...this isn't about convincing you to vote a certain way.

God didn't make the Assyrians Egyptians, he didn't make the Egyptians Assyrians.

No he made them both his people. One in him.

He does the same with us. Engage politically. Vote according to your conscience.

But may we learn to extend grace to the other tribe. The “them” to our tribal “us vs. them.”
Because in Heaven it will be a “we” under the blood of the lamb.

And may we remember - **candidates and their platforms will win or lose on Nov 3rd**
But the Church wins or loses by our love and unity every day in between.

And as Jesus outlines in his prayer in John 17 – we will only make a dent in the darkness and division if we walk in unity Meaning ultimately our nation will win or lose where it matters based on how we love one another between elections. It's our unity that will point to Jesus.

In Jesus the roles of prophet and king come together.
He is the good and perfect king and the good and perfect prophet.
Jesus speaks the words of God the Father perfectly because they are one.
And as King he rules perfectly according to them.

Our government will come and go.
But as Isaiah prophesied *“Of the increase of HIS government and peace there will be no end.”*

So let me close and ask - where is your trust?
It's the theme throughout Isaiah.

May we remember Isaiah 30:15 –
In repentance and rest is your salvation,
*in quietness and **trust** is your strength*

For others of us... may we remember
the promise in Isaiah 40:31
*But those who **trust** in the Lord will find new strength.*
They will soar high on wings like eagles.
They will run and not grow weary.
They will walk and not faint.