Pastoral Concerns in an Election Year

Sermon

If you're here for the first time, I want you to know that our service today is very different than what we normally do. Normally we go verse by verse through Scripture, but from time to time when we are in between series of Scripture, as we are right now, we will deal with different topics.

This morning myself and the elders of River Ridge Trevor want to address the Elephant in the room and on everyone's TV screens, the election.

- **First, I want to give you an incentive to vote as a Christian**. God has sovereignly chosen you and I to be citizens of this great country, and we need to vote. I'm going to make an argument for voting and not staying home as many are tempted to do.
- **Second, the pastor/elders of this church are going to pray.** I firmly believe that more than information this morning we need prayer and we need to get our minds onto the Lord.

Before we start, a small disclaimer. There are many outside of the church and even within the church who feel that politics should not be addressed by the church. I agree that the primary focus of our church must be on preaching the gospel, equipping the saints for the work of the ministry, the Word of God, and corporate worship – this is what I am to devote myself to, not neglect, not be distracted from. However, to say that Christians shouldn't address politics is kind of like saying, Christians shouldn't address oranges they should only address fruit. Politics are a subset of the word of God…especially now where politics are less about infrastructure and economics and more about sexual orientation, the family, and the redefining our rights and when life begins. Politics often bleeds over into the church and into theological/biblical issues and when it does it is the churches job to respond. ***This isn't because the church is becoming political, it's because politics are becoming more and more theological.*** When politics become theological the church needs to raise its hand and say, "time out! You are in God's lane now!"

I thought of how to address the election. I could get up and talk about all of the different issues the Bible speaks clearly about: Life, borders, immigration, religious liberty, family, sexuality. But I'm willing to bet that in our congregation…most of us would probably agree on these issues. We could do several weeks of discussion on these topics. My pastoral concern this morning is try to reach the Christian…there may be one or two here…who is looking at both candidates and saying, "I'm just not going to vote." I can't get behind either of these candidates – for various reasons. I want to try to show why it's unbiblical and why it's our responsibility to vote as Christians, under God, in ***this country*** that God has placed us in.

The Word of God is our source of knowledge and wisdom. 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

> **All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17)**

The Word of God matures us and equips us with the wisdom and discernment for every good work – that also means voting. This is why I want to be a church where we go through God's Word

expositionally…verse by verse. The devil would have us to depart from here and get distracted. ***Like the slow turtle that wins the race, we will continue slowly, deeply, richly, sinking our roots down into the wisdom forming Word of God***. If you and I can learn the Scriptures, it will permeate every area of our lives, even our political views. God's Word will equip you to know truth and be able to discern lies. By the way, we don't have to be up-to-date on every fleeting fad the world brings about. ***Political and social fads are like grass, the grass grows and it withers, but the Word of God remains forever. We as a church will focus our attention on the Scriptures.***

To vote or not to vote…that is the question this morning.

> **Proverbs 29:2 – "When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan."**

The Bible is very clear that God holds us accountable to specific roles as Christians that we are to fulfill in obedience to Him. God chooses these roles for us, we do not choose these roles. Also, God providentially works all things according to HIS PLAN with HIS DESIRED OUTCOME. You are "*who*" you are, "*where*" you are, "*when*" you are in history ***by God's design***. Esther was placed in her situation in Persia, "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). She couldn't run or avoid her situation…and she didn't.

> **The lot is cast into the lap, but its *every decision* is from the Lord. (Prov. 16:33)**

God is pervasively and absolutely governing all things. Everything happens according to God's design, will, and sovereign plan. He is God and we are not. God chose for me to be: first a child of God, a man, a husband, a father, a pastor, ***and a citizen of this great country***. With those roles come responsibilities. As a husband, I am to love and lead my wife, my home, and I am to be the spiritual leader of my children.

Contrary to the postmodern secular opinion, we don't get to choose or redefine who we are and what responsibilities we have. We don't get to redefine when life begins – life is life within the womb and begins at conception – God formed David and formed Jeremiah while in the womb (Jer. 1:5; Ps. 139:13). Luke describes John the Baptist in the womb…not as a fetus, but as a baby with emotions and personhood (Lk. 1:41). God designed and gave purpose to every human being even before they were conceived. We don't get to redefine gender – God made us male and female – "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created Him; male and female He created them." (Gen. 1:27). We don't get to redefine what the family should look like, what marriage should look like, what sexuality should look like. God is the Creator of life, of gender, of family, of sex - God decides, we do not.

Take the role of a husband. Many men will say, "I don't feel like I am a leader." Or many women will say, "I don't feel he's qualified to lead." But these opinions really don't matter…God has made man to be a man and woman to be a woman. For the husband and father, ***you ARE*** the leader of your home because God says you are and you don't get to abdicate that responsibility because of her faults or your inabilities, difficulties, insecurities, or laziness to carry out the task. If I abdicate my responsibility to be a husband and father it's disobedience to God. God is the one who decides these things about me.

Now…why we should vote. God has sovereignly and providentially chosen you and me to be citizens of the United States of America – here and now, for such a time as this. It's an extreme privilege!

We need to ask ourselves: What responsibility to my country do I have as an American citizen? Part of what's unique about being an American is that our form of government ***makes its citizens the leaders.*** Do you know that? You and I are the leaders in this great country. Our government is not run by the president…it's structured in such a way that it's run "by the people, for the people". It's the citizens who lead this country because the citizens elect their officials who are meant to serve the people – by the people, for the people. The president is supposed to be the servant to the people. This means that in a very real way, we live in a country where you and I are called to lead. How do we lead? We lead through voting. You are called to lead this country, and you do not get to decide whether or not to lead.

So here is my <u>primary</u> argument for voting - to not vote is to abdicate the responsibility that God has sovereignly and providentially placed you in.

You did not choose to be an American citizen, God chose you to be, and you cannot abdicate your responsibility to lead through voting because you don't have all the facts, don't feel equipped to vote, can't fully support either candidate, don't like either candidate. You must use the wisdom God has given you, with Bible in hand, with prayer, and make the decision. You can't abdicate your responsibility anymore than I can abdicate my responsibility to be a man, husband, father, and pastor. If I fail to lead my family, Satan has no problem doing the job for me. If we fail to be a restraining force of evil in this country, Satan will have no problem leading this country for us. Listen to some words of wisdom from Solomon about this (forgive me for not having these verses up on the screen – just listen)

> **When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, but when the wicked rise, people hide themselves. (Prov. 28:12)**
>
> **When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, and when the wicked perish there are shouts of gladness. (Prov. 11:10)**
>
> **Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. (Prov. 14:34)**

When righteousness prevails, the nation rejoices, is exalted, there is great glory, and the Word of God and the people of God flourish. You have to understand something – choosing a flawed candidate doesn't mean you support everything about that candidate. I love what one pastor said about this – "voting is not a sacrament". A sacrament is something that must be kept totally free from any impurity. Every candidate has flaws…and shame on me if I ever think there is a candidate without flaws. There are no candidates without flaws because Jesus is not on the ballot. We are called to think biblically and prayerfully about who the best choice is even if we cannot fully support any candidate. Paul is beside himself when he learns that the Christians in Corinth are taking one another to court. "You mean you guys don't have the wisdom to make judgment about issues within the church?".

> **Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! (1 Cor. 6:3)**

Christians are often called to make wise decisions in the midst of two imperfect opposing choices. We have to discern and judge based on the wisdom of God's Word. ***Not based on personalities, but on policies***. We have to judge between two options and discern which is the best option. God has given us His Spirit and His Word to guide us in every important decision we make. None of you chose to marry your spouse because there were no flaws. You made the best decision you could! ***My wife looked me over and thought…well I suppose I could do worse!*** Every candidate has character

flaws and personality traits that are unlikeable. Our government isn't perfect, our candidates aren't perfect, but we are called to make a wise decision nonetheless. Praise God that one day the perfect government will come – which is not a democracy, not a constitutional republic, not a dictatorship – it's a THEOCRACY. Jesus Christ will come and rule and reign.

> **For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Hab. 2:14)**

We're going to now worship and then pray together as a church. I want to start by reading a passage from 2 Chronicles: ((Chris comes up))

> if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

This is a promise for the people of Israel but I believe the ***principle*** applies broadly to God's church as well.

- **First, we are to humble ourselves before the Lord**. We need to confess our pride and our tendencies to walk in accordance with our own ways and to stiff-arm God. We need to return to the Scriptures and submit to their authority.
- **Second, we are to pray and seek His face**. Revival always begins with prayer and fasting and repentance and seeking the Lord's face. He is a God of compassion, slow to anger, abounding in mercy and faithfulness. He is greatly to be treasured. He is to be obeyed and worshipped. He is glorious and worthy of our praise.
- **Third, we are to turn from our wicked ways** – this means repentance of areas of known, habitual sin that we are engaged with.
- **The promise given to Israel is that He would heal their land**. Now this promise is not given as a promise for the United States, this promise is given specifically for Israel. Nevertheless, history shows that God responds to His people when they humble themselves, seek His face, and repent of their sin.

Let's now enter into a time of worship and prayer together.

Corporate prayer:

God, you are sovereign over all. You are a Loving Father. Your love is perfect and unconditional. You do not treat us as our sins deserve. You have proven your love for us by sending your Son to die for our sins. Nothing is outside of your control. Everything you do is right. Everything you use for the good of your people…to conform us into the image of your Son. Nothing happens outside of your plans, and every plan is perfect. You are HOLY. You are far above and beyond us. And You are HERE. You have not abandoned us and you never will. The blood of your Son has atoned for our sin and we are sealed by the Holy Spirit. You are faithful and true. You are merciful and just. God you see the evil in the world around us. You are already reigning over it on your throne over all things that have fallen apart.

God we, your church, confess to you our sins. We so often fall short of your glorious standard. Forgive us God! Cleanse us with the blood of your Son Jesus. Help us to humble ourselves and to honor you in all of our ways. Teach us to walk uprightly. Give us the power we need to love and obey you. Satisfy our hearts with your presence.

God we as a nation have sinned against you. We have forsaken you, the fountain of living waters and sought to satisfy our thirst in lesser things. We have forsaken the Creator and we worship the creation. We have professed to be wise and boasted in our wisdom and have instead become fools. You have made yourself plainly known to us, and we have suppressed the truth. We have exchanged your glory for images and ideologies and idols. We have gone after impurity and dishonored our bodies. We rejected your truths and embraced lies. You have given us over to all manner of dishonorable passions. Our men lie with men, and our women lie with women forsaking what is natural for what is unnatural. We commit shameful acts in your sight. Our country is given over to futility of thinking. We care more about what Hollywood actors think than your Word. We as the church have failed to be a light to those who are around us and to stand for what is right. Forgive us Lord. Heal our land.

One day Jesus, you will return and make all things right. While we wait for you, help us to be the salt and light that you call us to be to the world around us. Help us to pray for our leaders and to stand against evil. May your Kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen.

Benediction: Psalm 146:3

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. [2] Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, [3] though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. [5] God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. [6] The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. [7] The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

I'm going to now start us off in prayer

Three issues to think through and pray through.

1. Life and abortion

If you are here and you have been in any way affected by abortion just know that we understand that this is a tough topic for you. We are here to help you heal in any way that you need to. Also know that there is forgiveness for all sin through Jesus Christ. There is grace for you…but we also need to declare truth and speak clearly and firmly about this issue because God does. As we are given the privilege and responsibility to vote, we should vote in such a way that reflects God's view of life within the womb.

> For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. (Psalm 139:13)

God formed David, and God knit together David IN THE WOMB. This seems very clear to me that a child within the mother's womb is intended to live and flourish by God. There is purpose, there is intentionality by God. To take the life of the child that is within the womb is to forcefully prevent what God intends to live.

> Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations. (Jeremiah 1:5)

God formed Jeremiah in the womb and had an intention and calling for Jeremiah. He consecrated Jeremiah and appointed Jeremiah a prophet to the nations. All of this happened in the heart and mind of God prior to Jeremiah's day of birth. The "fetus" being formed in the womb is being formed by God.

> In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, [40] and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. [41] And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, [42] and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! (Luke 1:40-42)

One thing that is significant about this story is that Luke, the writer, is a doctor. He is extremely specific when it comes to details in a story. He is writing from a historical perspective. The baby, John the Baptist, in the womb of Elizabeth is spoken of as reacting to the voice of Mary and leaping in response. Notice that Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, doesn't call John a "fetus"…but a baby with feelings who is overjoyed at hearing the voice of Mary. This is miraculous to be sure, but John is spoken of as a person here while still in the womb.

No one is more qualified to speak about when life becomes life than the Creator of life, God. God clearly regards a child as a human being with purpose, intention, a calling, and personhood while still in the womb. People say all the time that we should not vote according to our religious beliefs. My answer to that is that EVERYONE votes in accordance with their religious beliefs or lack thereof and voting is by its very nature, forcing your view onto others who have opposing views. My personal view: our laws and our government as well as our educational systems has failed to protect the life of the child because we have as a nation departed from the truth of God in the Scriptures. We have begun to lean upon our own understandings and we have rejected God and His Word which is clear. When I hear people appeal to science and refer to the child as a "fetus" my mind is drawn to Romans 1:22 – "Claiming to be wise,

they became fools." To think that our logic has become so twisted and depraved that we will actually forcefully remove a living human being from a mothers womb in the interest of "free choice" should tell us how far we've sunk away from God in our country. 100 years ago this would be an UNTHINKABLE atrocity. Both parties and both candidates in this election have strayed from truth…but that doesn't give me an excuse to stay home on election day. We can't let our emotions here get the best of us…we need to make wise and calculated decisions regarding how to best protect life by the way that we vote. We need to pray and continue to pray for God to end abortion in our country and ask for forgiveness for straying from God regarding our responsibility as a nation to protect all human life. Joe Collins is now going to lead us in prayer together.

PRAYER

2. My next pastoral concern is for religious liberties

This is a very broad topic. But there are many subtopics that politics have crossed over into where they are changing lanes from economics and infrastructure to relabeling and redefining humans created in the image of God. We have begun to redefine gender. We have begun to redefine what is a family. We have begun to redefine sexuality and marriage. As Christians it's easy to see that our religious liberties are being stripped from us. In some states now, it is legal for the government to take children away from their parents if the parent doesn't affirm their own child's desire to become transgender. The parent and the pastor are being removed from the position of spiritual advisor over children and the government is setting itself up as the authority. The early church was clear to submit to governmental authority, UNLESS that government forced them to do anything that went against God's word.

> We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." [29] But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:28-29)

When Peter and the apostles were faced with the charge by the ruling council to no longer teach the name of Jesus, they immediately responded, "We must obey God rather than men." May God give each of us the boldness and courage to say the same thing should the time come when we are called to civil disobedience.

We are heading down a path where civil disobedience may very well become the norm. America is an asterisk on church history regarding persecution. We haven't experienced persecution in the normative way that the church has experienced persecution historically. We need to pray for God to steer this election and move on the hearts of our government officials to allow us to worship and to live in such a way that is in line with our biblical convictions. Our responsibility as Christians is to be salt and light in the world around us and to be a restraining force for evil. We should pray and we should vote for a candidate that will best protect our religious liberties and rights to worship and live in accordance with God's Word. John Germain is going to now pray for us to be salt, and light, and to retain our religious liberties as citizens of God's Kingdom first.

PRAY – John Germain – religious liberties

3. My final pastoral concern is for unity in the church and in our country

Our country is sick right now…we are not the united states…we are the divided states. And the church often bites and devours one another rather than pursuing unity. We are in a broken place right now, but if God can bring revival to the entire city of Nineveh He can bring about revival in the church and in our country as well. All throughout Scripture there is a principle: as the people of God go, so goes the nation. This was certainly true for the people of Israel. God gave to the people of Israel a template to bring about revival if they fell off course:

Brian Calendine is now going to lead us in a prayer of repentance and confession and a plea to God to heal the brokenness in the church and in our country.