



Pastor Ken's Sermon

SERMON – 5TH PENTECOST

MARK 5:21-43

JUNE 27, 2021

“KINGDOMS IN CONFLICT?”

I got a letter in the mail soliciting support for a documentary about religious freedom in America, featuring Phil Robertson. If you don't know Mr. Robertson, he is the patriarch of the family featured in the reality TV show “Duck Dynasty” – about his family and their very successful business manufacturing duck calls – duck “commanders” - the best in the land. It's not on anymore, but when it was, I would occasionally join my daughter – who became a bit of a “ducky” for her devotion to the program, and I enjoyed it. Mr. Robertson is a Christian man with a compelling life story, and every episode, after all the fun and frivolity, ended with him leading his family in prayer before a meal. He insisted on that feature by the way or, he told the producers, he wouldn't do the show.

The photo of Mr. Robertson on the envelope, to me at least, was arresting. It portrays him with two guns – one over his shoulder and another in his left hand, dressed in fatigues, ammunition belt prominently displayed, holding overhead in his right hand a King James Bible. It's a promo for a film – I get it, you want something eye catching. The film is produced by an organization called “*Citizens United Foundation*.” And that word “citizen” that grabbed my attention. For the next couple of weeks, I focusing my messages on a question that was submitted a while back by one of our members who wanted to know what the Bible says about “*civic citizenship*” and “*how are we to be responsible citizens with respect to a biblical world view.*”

I'm going to enter those questions today by way of a Lutheran teaching known as the doctrine of “*God's Two Kingdoms*”, by way of what Jesus may have meant when he spoke about “the kingdom of God”, and three of our Bible lessons today. The word “citizen” only appears in the New Testament, even if nearly the whole of the Old Testament concerns the relationship of God to the nation of Israel. It was of no little benefit to the Apostle Paul that he was a Jew and a Roman citizen – that opened doors for him to share the gospel to a wide audience and on not a few occasions the citizenship status saved his life.

But Paul's most helpful statement on the issue of citizenship was Philippians 3:19-20. Contrasting what might be called “the world view” of Christians with that of non-believers, Paul said, in verse 19, “*their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach (meaning their desires) and their mind is on earthly things...but “our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.*” That sums up pretty well what the Bible says about “civic citizenship” – Christians believe we are from another country with its own language, set of values, morals, and customs. Most anything “*of this world*” therefore ought to be held up to scrutiny on our part. Does the _____ ‘fill in the blank’, square with our identity as disciples of Jesus and line up with God's divine, revealed will for us - the Bible?

Yet, Lutherans believe God IS active in the world – that God has NOT ceded rulership of this sphere to Satan. Our doctrine of the “Two Kingdoms of God” says that God rules “as with the left hand” through civic authority or, brace yourselves, the “political” realm – God's word active over creation and its creatures. We experience this “rule” of God as the governing authority God grants...governments, of which Christians are “citizens.” And we ought to be darn good ones – the best of citizens. This is our calling, to love our country, respect its laws and seek the common good. But this teaching can be a burden when government in whole or in part is evil or adopts laws at odds God's will, as governments often do.

Jesus talked about the “kingdom of God” often – 53 times in the gospel of Matthew. Yet there is little to suggest that God in Christ ever intended to relate to the world as he did by way of the nation of Israel. Instead, by use of this phrase our Lord introduces another government - another form of God’s rule – “as with the right hand” through the Gospel which teaches repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This is God’s “spiritual realm.” Here God rules not over God’s creatures but IN us. Beginning in baptism we become “citizens of heaven.” From that moment we are taught our new language, morals, and values.

Jesus never offered a clear definition of this kingdom – he never fleshed out “citizenship.” Instead he opted to illustrate it by way of parables about farming, fishing, women baking bread and merchants investing all they have in a fine pearl. Jesus did not give “hard and fast rules” about citizenship in His kingdom. But he more than strongly suggested it was a kingdom of love and grace, which makes it a kingdom that is resistible. It is humble, charitable, and much to our chagrin at times, co-exists with evil, as a farmer does a field with brimming with wheat and choking with weeds. For its citizens, the experience can be disheartening.

Whatever Jesus meant when he said His kingdom is at hand, or is like, I humbly submit, with due respect to my brother in Christ Phil Robertson, that the image of him on the letter I got last week isn’t it. Next week, our nation will celebrate its founding, when colonists became United States citizens through revolution – which are almost always violent. Our Lutheran doctrine of God’s Two Kingdoms concedes that in this sinful world there is need to rule by the political realm, sometimes with “the sword”. But when told, at a moment when some resistance might have come in handy, that his followers had a couple of swords at the ready, Jesus told them to put them away, and when one of them used his anyway, Jesus healed the wound he’d inflicted.

We’ll say more next time, but for now what might a “biblical worldview” look or sound like – how might we be “responsible Christian citizens”? Well for starters we might say things like this...*“The Lord is my portion...it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of God.”* We might adopt Kingdom notions of equality- eager to see other’s need met by our abundance, never assuming charity to be a zero-sum game where if one person gains the other loses. And we’d strive, as our Lord did, to strike a balance between witness in the public square – as Jesus made in healing a woman, and when called for a *“say nothing to anyone”* conviction, content to let the smile of God upon our good works be it’s only and most adequate reward – all because *“our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus.”* And living like that is precisely how we wait. AMEN