

Service theme - Growing in Christ: How to live as a Christian in a secular society.

Here are the other Bible Readings from this Sunday, before the Bible portion for the sermon:

- Amos 8:4-7 – skimping, cheating, taking advantage of others... these actions were rampant among God's OT people at the time of the prophet Amos. God does not allow these sins to go unaddressed. This reading is all law, pointing out sin and the punishment that remains along with unrepentant sin. Hold on for news of the gospel coming in our next Old Testament lesson. For now, we learn this important principle: our God does not ignore the times when his people join the sinful ways of the society around them. He identifies sin and calls for repentance.
4 Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, 5 saying, "When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?"-- skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, 6 buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.7 The LORD has sworn by the Pride of Jacob: "I will never forget anything they have done.
- Psalm 38 – in a world which often minimizes, rationalizes, and covers up sin, we ~ as Christians ~ air an honest confession. We admit that we have failed to serve our God, failed to obey his will, and failed to glorify him. We rely fully on him for forgiveness.
O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath.
For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me.
My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.
All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you.
I wait for you, O LORD; you will answer, O Lord my God.
I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin. O LORD, do not forsake me; be not far from me, O my God. Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Savior.
- Luke 16:1-13 – Jesus leads up to the point he is teaching (vs.13): you cannot serve both God and money. Don't let money be your master. Serve God... but, **do** use money. Use money to serve God **in line with His good will**.
1 Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. 2 So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.' 3 "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg-- 4 I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.' 5 "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 6 " 'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied. "The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.' 7 "Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' " 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied. "He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.' 8 "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. 9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. 10 "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. 11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? 13 "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

Sermon: 1 Timothy 2:1-7 - *1 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time. 7 And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle--I am telling the truth, I am not lying--and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.*

Hey, kids, what's a citizen?

A citizen is more than someone who lives in a country. A citizen has the legal rights and protection of that land.

A birth certificate is one way to show that someone is a citizen of the U.S.A. All of you, I believe, are citizens of the U.S.A. **(Hand out a card, with "I am a US citizen" printed upon it.)**

But did you know that you are also a citizen of another kingdom?

Let me show you what I mean... Can I have a volunteer sit in this seat? **(Face him/her toward front wall, away from power point projector.)**

- **Have them hold up hands, in order to project shadow onto wall. Click up "birth certificate" in one hand – showing citizenship in this earthly kingdom.**
- **Then, click for a crown that appears above the shadow of the child's head & project a baptismal certificate in the other hand...**

The message there reads: "our citizenship is in heaven & we eagerly await a Savior from there" (Philippians 3:20). On the other side of your card, I've placed that reminder for you: "I am a Christian and... our citizenship is in heaven."

You see, we Christians are citizens of God's kingdom. [Bring child out from the projectors light.] We don't have a crown that people can see as we go about our daily activities in this world. But the fact remains: even though this is invisible, you are a prince/princess of heaven, a citizen of God's kingdom. The Bible says, "The kingdom of God is within you" (speaking to us, believers in Jesus). How is it that this is true? God brought us into his kingdom when God the Holy Spirit brought us to faith, and gave us the blessings and the protection of him – our Savior, King.

Our citizenship here, in the U.S.A, will only last for as long as we are alive. But how long will our citizenship and time living in heaven last? Forever. **Kids return to seats.**

1 Timothy ch.2 reminds us that a Christian is a citizen of two kingdoms. Our verses today give a practical answer to this question: how does our citizenship in the kingdom of God affect our activities as citizens of the nation in which we live?

I've been in conversations over the years where people, understandably, look at what's going on in our society and in our government and question: "How do I live as a Christian in this world? Should I pack up and move to Timbuktu, away from this all? If I stay here, what would be the most beneficial way to help the situation? Should I stand on the street corner and hold up protest signs broadcasting the evils we see? Should our church get involved on the political stage – is that the only way we'll help our nation/society?"

Let's look to God's Word for answers.

Read vs.1-2. *1 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives...*

Look at who Paul encourages us to pray for. All people, yes. But he gives particular mention to prayers for kings and all those in authority.

If **we** think this is tough to do, it certainly was not easy for Paul and the Christians of his day to hear!!! Paul was commanded to write these very words at a time when wicked Roman emperors held reign.

Contrary to what we might naturally think, that did not give Christians the right to rebel against the government. Jesus had made that clear: "Pay your taxes. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's." *You are to obey/honor those whom God has placed in authority over you, except when a government / secular authority commands you to disobey God. Then you must obey God, rather than men (Acts).*

That all established... What would you say is the most important things we as Christians can do for the benefit of our community and nation – the earthly kingdom in which we live?

Listen to this commentary from Martin Luther on this section of 1 Timothy ch.2:

The first [thing] is that you Christians respect every public officer and that you pray for them, because you hear what it means to keep the realm in peace. When a government official fails or is overthrown, then nothing good is left in this life. Then you will be unable to come to love, to obey parents, rear children, or support the poor. We must forget about all [this] if public offices do not stand firm in peace. ... Therefore it is the first work of Christians that we respect all public officers and pray for them. [Luther's Works, digital edition, Lectures on 1 Timothy, ch.2]

You hear why praying for our rulers is so important. Yet, I wonder: how often is it the last thing we think to do? Many times we are quick to complain, gripe, and mock those holding positions of authority / public office. We fail to discuss differences and our views respectfully and honorably.

Adults, how often do you forget that the 4th commandment applies not just to kids – but to you too? Beyond the home, God commands that we respect and obey those in authority over us in the state/government. Who among us has kept the fourth commandment?

Think about it! Jesus came to obey God's law. This included actually submitting to the government . He placed himself under their laws and ultimately allowed himself to be sentenced to their cruel and bloodthirsty punishment. And he didn't rebel. But he took even more than an unjust punishment from hands of men. He received God's punishment of hell – the just punishment that you and I deserved for each and every sin we've committed.

Remember what Jesus has done to make you citizens of His kingdom. **Look at vs.5-6:**

- See the 1 – 1 – 1 there: 1 God – 1 in the middle, to bring God and people together – 1 payment from him, Jesus, to free us from our sins and the clutches of the devil

In view of God's mercy and grace, offer him your service. Our verses today open our eyes to service beyond the doors of this church. We cannot divorce our service to our God from our lives and activity in our community and nation – the earthly kingdom of which we are citizens.

But how does that fact play out as a church? Should our church be trying to enact political change? To become a player in our nation's politics? No! You, citizen, are certainly encouraged to vote on those issues that are contrary to God's Word. [Here, at church, you learn what God's Word says.] And certainly vote for those who protect freedoms that are in line with God's Word. But God makes clear the purpose for our church: God wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

We never want to shift off of our goal of bringing spiritual change through calling sinners to repentance, and through leading people to drink of the Living Water of Jesus.

With that in view... how can you do something to help millions (even billions) of people all at once?
Answer: pray.

Pray that we may have a peace in our nation, that order is maintained, that life is protected. So many of you serve in this way (maintaining peace and protecting lives). And we give thanks for it. Besides all the worldly blessings this brings, our main concern is spiritual: where such peace and order are enacted and maintained, in a land like ours with religious freedom, there God's Word can be freely spread ~ we can teach it openly, and we can reach out to the lost without fear of punishment.

Read vs.3-4. *3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*

Often when we think of reaching out to the lost, we're thinking of those in Timbuktu, India, Nepal, China, etc. Maybe we think of a neighbor down the street. But what about the neighbor who lives across the street, but stands on the other side of the political aisle from us? When God says, he wants all people to be saved, fill that "people" in with specific people: he wants all "republican & democrat" people to be saved by knowing and believing the truth Jesus is Savior. He wants all "American born & foreign born" people to be saved by knowing and believing the truth Jesus is Savior. He wants all people who live in "Fayetteville & Washington DC" to be saved by knowing and believing the truth Jesus is Savior. He wants all those who work at "Goodyear & Cape Fear & Bragg & City hall" to be saved by knowing and believing the truth Jesus is Savior.

May our God's desire remain our desire, as long as we remain citizens of a nation / a kingdom here below.

Conclusion: Paul wrote these words of 1 Timothy sometime after getting released from his 1st imprisonment in Rome. But by the time the Bible book 2 Timothy is written, Paul is once again imprisoned (2 Timothy 1:8,16). He is expecting that he'll soon face execution for holding to his Christian faith – our Christian faith (2 Timothy 4:6). Church history tells that Paul was beheaded in Rome. This was under the rule of Emperor Nero. Some have described him as crazy. He was cruel: he targeted Christians. The Roman historian Tacitus tells: he covered Christians with the skins of wild beasts and set wild dogs loose on them to tear them to pieces; he burned them on crosses or poles, lighting up his gardens. That was the world of Paul's day.

Yet God still called on His people then, as he calls on us to pray for all – pray especially for wise, fair, stable rulers & leaders. But even when they show themselves to be wicked, cruel or enemies, pray for them. We still obey them, except when they tell us to disobey God. Otherwise, we obey. And we pray for them. Here is yet another thing that marks Christianity as unique in the world. We pray: "Your Kingdom come, Lord." We pray that we are kept in the faith, and that all the lost – including those who act as our enemies – are brought into God's kingdom through the Holy Spirit's gracious working in them.

May our God use us as beacons of Christian love, who carry the message of God's love wherever we go on this earth, for as many days as we have on this earth. Amen.