

I Thought We Weren't Supposed to Talk About It?

Purple Part 1

Sermon Date: March 24, 2024

18 For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Philippians 3:18-21

Introduction

You may start today asking, “Why on Earth are we doing a series on politics? Won’t this cause division?” This is my 5th Presidential election as a pastor and there hasn’t been a single general election that wasn’t significantly divisive. I will also add that there hasn’t been a single Presidential election that wasn’t considered “the most significant election in the country’s history”, but we’ll talk about hyperbole in another series. After pastoring through 5 extremely divisive Presidential elections in which people have lost friends, been angered at family members, posted stupid stuff on social media, and sometimes even left the Church, I want to play offense this election.

Here’s how this is going to work. Today, we start a four-part series titled *Purple*. This series is titled *Purple* not because purple is the combination of blue and red, the colors that represent the Democrat and Republican parties. This series is titled *Purple* because purple is the color of royalty, of majesty. This series is not about the position between the political parties, but the view from above. My prayer within this series is that you would begin to take a perspective that is above, one that is engaged in our civic life and is consciously involved as you feel called to but never loses our focus on Jesus. A perspective that far more importantly is focused on a kingdom that cannot be shaken, an eternal kingdom. We’re going to do something that we’ve never done before. We’re going to do a 4-part series that is sprinkled throughout the year. My concern is that if we did the entire series right now, you’ll forget

who you're called to be and start acting like the rest of the country by the time November rolls around. Throughout the year around key election dates, we're going to walk through the 4 parts of *Purple*. Now, here's the risk: people will assume that we're responding to the issues of the moment, that we're saying something because of a point a candidate made in a debate or a headline the media is obsessing about. Here's what we did - all the messages are already written and published online. You can head to donkeysandelephants.church and check out all 4 parts of the series now. If you're a pastor who is watching, feel free to use all the content and graphics in your own church because we want to equip you so that what could be a divisive season actually unites the local church.

You still may hear all that and think, "I still don't think we should talk about politics at all in Church, even if we're not talking about specific issues or advocating for a specific party." That is what today is about, title for today is "I thought we weren't supposed to talk about it". I am positive that others have the exact opposite view that "We should talk about politics and focus on specific issues and advocate for a specific candidate". Today I want to show you why it is so important that we talk about what many say we shouldn't talk about, why we must understand the significance of an elevated perspective, and what it means to pursue a citizenship that is in heaven. We'll get to Paul in a second, because we need to start with Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a theologian, pastor, and professor in Germany when the Nazi party won the elections. The Nazi Party did not take over the government unlawfully like some people believe today; they were elected in. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the pastor, was later involved in a plot to assassinate Hitler, known as Valkyrie, that led to his arrest and eventual execution. We need to understand Bonhoeffer's story to understand why the role of the church is so significant and what the separation of church and state really means. It does not mean that the church keeps its mouth shut about issues of politics. The phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear in the Bible. Rather, it is outlined in the First Amendment which says, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." It was never intended to silence the church; its only focus was to keep the government out of issues of faith.

So why is this so important? The answer lies in how the Nazi party won the approval of the people of Germany. It's been said before that Christianity is to blame for the actions of the Nazis because 95% of Germany claimed to be Christian. They're partially correct, but they do not understand the type of Christian that existed in Germany at this time. Some have even said that Hitler was a Christian because he placed himself over the Church. That is so far from the truth it angers me, but it reveals a simplistic understanding that is dangerous.

Joseph Goebbels, the minister of propaganda for the Nazi party, wrote in a letter that "He (Hitler) hates Christianity because it has crippled all that is noble in humanity." Hitler himself wrote in a letter that "When all is said, we have no reason to wish that the Italians and Spaniards should free themselves from the drug of Christianity. Let's be the only people who are immunized against the disease." So why was Hitler so interested and invested in religion if that's how he viewed Christianity? The answer is: control. Hitler needed a united Germany and religion unifies. Constantine did the same thing with the Roman Empire. He made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in 306 A.D., but he wasn't baptized until his death in 337 A.D. He didn't make Christianity the official religion because he believed. He did it because religion can be a powerful force to unify people. What Hitler proved is that if you can control the church, you can control the world.

Hitler created a position in his government that put someone under his authority over the German Church. The man who held this position was Ludwig Muller. We don't know much about the motivations and desires of Ludwig Muller; we only know his actions. Ludwig Muller slowly began to remove the symbols from the Church - the cross, baptism, the pulpit - and he began to replace them with Nazi symbols and Nazi flags. Muller then began cutting out parts of Scripture that he didn't like. Jewish references were removed except when they referred to Jews in a negative way. It claimed Mary was not a Jew and that Jesus' real father was a Roman soldier. It replaced the 10 Commandments with 12 completely different commandments including "Keep the blood pure and the marriage holy" and "Honor your Fuhrer and master." Lastly, he removed communion and replaced it with a copy of Hitler's autobiography and a sword. He used the Church as a pawn to advance his own agenda.

Bonhoeffer watches all this take place, and along with many other devout followers of Jesus, is steamrolled over by the force of people who would rather believe a gospel of “take power and seize control” over “take up your cross and follow Jesus”. So, Bonhoeffer is part of the creation of what is referred to as the *Confessing Church* and the *Confessing Seminary*. The Church held to the original Creeds of Christianity, and not the ones that were used for propaganda. Bonhoeffer started a seminary to train future pastors, whom he believed would be the only hope Germany had once the Nazi reign was over and society would need to be rebuilt. Bonhoeffer wrote articles, spoke often, and publicly pointed out the failure of the German state church as often as possible. He believed the Church must: 1) question the state, 2) help the victims of the state, 3) work against the state if necessary. He eventually concluded that he must be involved in the removal of Hitler. When his involvement in Valkyrie was found out, he was arrested and executed in the last days of World War II. Bonhoeffer was no lightweight; he is a man of deep conviction who was willing to do whatever is necessary.

How did this happen? How did a devout, religious people, who have boasted some of the greatest theologians in history, allow the Church to become a pawn of the government that executed 6 million Jewish people? How did the Church become a tool of genocide? And far more importantly, how do we ensure that it doesn't happen ever again? There's a piece of us that says, “We beat them, we won, that can't happen to us.” The one thing we can learn from history is that we do a terrible job of learning from history.

Let me be very clear on what happened that we seem to miss. First, the Nazi party did not forcefully seize power, they were elected in. Second, they did not come forth with an agenda of genocide, they slowly used every available means to convince the people that the Jewish people were the problem and they had a right to rule the world. One of the most important tools they used was the Church. They put their own people over the Church and then slowly shifted the beliefs, the symbols, and the practices of religion to fit their agenda. Ludwig Muller did not walk into the Church and change everything all at once. It is like the frog that is put in boiling water. If you drop a frog in boiling water he will immediately jump out. If you drop a frog in normal water and slowly increase it to a boil he will stay in because he cannot sense the difference. Through the removal of parts of scripture, the absence of the

symbols of the Church, the presence of Hitler's biography, the presence of the Nazi flag; the Church in Germany was slowly raised to boil where they did not even realize they were not a Church at all.

Things I'm Concerned About

I was listening to an interview with actor Zachary Levi and he said, "Ultimately, I think mental health is the most important thing we need to be talking about. I know that might sound weird, given all of the crazy things that are going on in the world right now. But I'm a firm believer that all of those things are all symptoms. If you traced all of those things like war, greed, murder, back to its roots source, it's all someone's broken heart, someone's broken mind that needs healing." This view is not uncommon. It's a broken mind or a broken heart, never a fractured soul that is full of sin. When horrific actions are taken, we point back to bullying in their past or trauma that people went through. I wholeheartedly acknowledge the difficulties that people have gone through, but I am unwilling to ever remove responsibility from the individual for their personal actions. When everyone is a victim, every action becomes excusable. Now we live in an age that is unwilling to admit that evil is a real thing. We believe there are corrupt systems, policies, and structures, but we are unwilling to say that there are evil actions by evil people. So, here's what's terrifying: we exited the 20th Century, the bloodiest century in the history of the world, where an estimated 231 million people died from war, and we concluded that evil is not a real thing.

If our belief in evil is evaporating, then so will our belief in a God who is good. If we do not believe in the possibility of evil, let alone the presence of evil, then we do not need a Savior who breaks the power of evil in our lives. When there is no belief in eternal life, in a heaven in which everything is perfect, pressure is instantly created on the life we currently live. When we stand confidently on the promise that heaven is awaiting us, we are willing to do what we can to make this world a better place, but we'll do it without an unhealthy sense of ownership because we know this world, as it currently is, isn't our home. When that belief in heaven is removed, unhealthy pressure is instantly created to get this world right, to force it to be right. When there is no heaven, we must now make this world a utopia. When we take matters into our own hands to create a utopia without God, the result is always, always

Hell on Earth. It begins with a desire to perfect society by our own hands, it advances to naming people and people groups as the problem, and the eventual conclusion is that it is morally correct to eliminate people and people groups who are deemed part of the problem or who just oppose the progress. When there is no basis for values and morality, progress becomes the highest virtue. It's not a far leap from that platform to believing that you are morally correct as you march 6 million people to the gas chambers.

The Nazi party did not believe that evil or heaven were a real thing. They believed it was their responsibility to create heaven on Earth. Hitler himself said "We are willing to work, but the volk (the people) must help us. It should never make the mistake of believing that life, liberty and happiness will fall from heaven. Everything is rooted in one's own will, in one's own work." What I'm laying before is the dangerous belief that if there is no heaven, we must create it. And if there is no heaven, it means there is no God, so there is no absolute standard for morality. The new morality becomes creating heaven at all costs, no matter what it forces us to do.

The Church

When culture gets off track there must be a critique of the culture to realign it, or at least keep the culture from flying off a cliff - more clearly, running people over. The critique of culture can never come from people who benefit from the culture. They are benefactors of a perverse system. Benefactors have never been the reformers. They cannot see what is wrong and even if they could they have substantial reason to turn a blind eye. So where does the critique of the culture come from? The answer is: From those who exist in the same society, but do not identify primarily with the culture they are in. Critique needs people who are immersed in the world, but do not primarily consider themselves as people of the world they are engaged in.

Paul was a Roman citizen. This is significant because it afforded him rights and privileges. Paul had the right to property, to contracts, to appeal court decisions, to sue, and to have a legal trial. Citizenship was no small matter. It is why in Acts 16:37-38 it reads, *"But Paul said to the officers: 'They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now*

do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.’ The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed.” Citizenship in the Roman Empire was a powerful thing, which is why it is so significant that in Philippians 3 Paul writes, *“our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”* Paul lives within the privilege and authority of his Roman citizenship but claims that our citizenship is not in this world; it is in heaven.

The people of God, the Church universal, are the only group positioned to help the world become a better place. Why? We are positioned with humility, understanding that we cannot rectify the problems we have created on our own. Not just because of the evil around us, but because of the evil desires still within us. We are positioned for action, believing that Jesus actually meant it when he said that we should “Love our neighbors as we love ourselves.” We are positioned to see things from an eternal perspective. We are not revoking our worldly citizenship or our American citizenship, but we proclaim that it is not our primary citizenship. We are citizens of heaven first and we pursue an eternal kingdom above all else. We take Jesus at his word when he commanded us to “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” in Matthew 6:33.

Implications

The first implication is on how we must respond. If we are not involved, engaged, aware, we have no ability to critique and correct. If we are not active, we lose our credibility. If we are not engaged, we don’t even know where we’re headed. The balance that must be struck is the awareness of what is going on in our world without the obsession and fear that everyone else is living out. It is vital that we are “seeking the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” Jeremiah 29:7

The second implication is understanding the difference between primary issues and secondary issues. The absolute most important issue is someone’s connection to Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit to live that out. As citizens of heaven, this is the primary issue. There are secondary issues, but I’ll let you fill in what those are. When we speak of secondary issues as if they are primary issues, we show that we are not actually citizens of heaven. Let me be more clear: there are people in your life who you

are more bothered by their political views, than you are about the fact that they do not know Jesus. This is a secondary issue. Yes, it matters, but not as much as primary issues. Warning: Do not lose your credibility to talk about what is eternal to voice your opinion about what is temporary. Do not lose friends, especially those who are not Christian, because you view issues differently. You may be the last line they have to connect them back to their Savior. Your citizenship is in heaven. And on top of that: your naggy social media post never changed anyone's mind anyway.

The third implication is actually the most dangerous for me to state. As I was studying this, I came across a picture that horrified me. A picture of the state church in Germany led by Ludwig Muller. At the front of the church is a Nazi flag, with a Bible on top of it. Granted, it is the edited bible. But to be really honest, I wonder how many people even knew it was edited because they had never read it in the first place. I'm horrified because the church let itself become under the authority of Hitler when the Church belongs to Jesus alone. Here's what Hitler knew: he couldn't silence or remove the Church, because the Church is too powerful. So instead, he would convince the Church that they were the same movement. It turned out it wasn't that hard, because people would rather seize power than take up their cross.

This is still what is taking place today. Every movement, every group, every activist, and every leader would love to have the support, backing, and power of the Church behind it. Here's how it's done: Virtue Signaling. Virtue signaling is when you publicly display your thoughts and sentiments so you can show everyone your character. Its when you post about sending your thoughts and prayers without actually praying. It's when you give voice to a movement without involvement. That's how it's viewed for individuals, let me explain to you how leaders and movements leverage virtue signaling: Bible verses. Let me give you the playbook: You state the problem you state your solution, and you attach a bible verse to it. When you do this you signal to the Christian community, "I'm one of you". Did you know Hitler quoted the bible in his speeches? Now, I am obviously not saying people shouldn't quote the bible. If your takeaway from this message was that people should quote the bible less, you've missed it. My point is this: every group, every movement, every leader knows that if they are going to do everything they desire to do they need the Church on their side. So when they incorporate the scripture into their agenda, we

should not take it as full evidence that they are following Jesus, instead we should ask a couple questions:

- 1) Is this verse being used in context?
- 2) Does their character give evidence that they are in pursuit of Jesus?
- 3) Is the kingdom of heaven the end goal? Or is it something else?

What I do not want to do, is I do not want to create such a high level of suspicion that we rob Christians in leadership from expressing their faith publicly. We need Christians in leadership. We need Christians in leadership. To work against would be the opposite of what we're after. But we cannot assume everyone who quotes a bible verse is doing it because they actually believe that the Bible is the word of God. There are many movements today that know they need the support of the Church in order for their agenda to be realized.

In Matthew 11:12, Jesus says, "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it." Can I tell you clearly, violent people are still raiding it. This is why Jesus says on chapter earlier in Matthew 10:16, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." The innocent as doves thing, we get. The shrewd as snakes is something we have sorely missed.

Let me be as clear as I possibly can: The age of the idiot Christian is over. Here's what I mean. The world is too complex, the voices telling you what is true are too loud, for the Christian who is not clear on their faith to survive. The people who listen to the talking heads more than they read their bible don't have a chance. The people who only listen to sermons to hear the pastor confirm what they already believe instead of using it to drive them to inspect their own beliefs and is actually true won't last. Your faith can be simple, it can not be simplistic. You can, you should, have a simple faith: That believes in the marrow of your bones that Jesus is Lord, he rose from the grave and is returning again. However, if you desire a simplistic faith, that does not need study, inspection, accountability, and community; your faith will not last. Or even worse, it will be manipulated by the latest movement and you

will be convinced you're following Jesus by trying to create heaven on Earth without him. The age of the idiot Christian is over.

We must learn what it looks like to be both in it and above it at the same point in time. Actively engaged in creating a better world, constantly mindful that we were created for eternity. Yes, citizens of America or wherever else, but our primary citizenship is in heaven. We should engage in the work that God has called us to do, even if it's politics, but take a position that has a higher perspective and is focused on an eternal kingdom. It's too risky not to talk about it, so we have to talk about it. We are Americans best when we are not Americans first. We are not red, and we are not blue; we are purple. Not the color between, the kingdom above. The color of majesty, of royalty, of our King who is still seated on the throne and is returning again.