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What Does God Have to do with the Election?
Matthew 22:15-21

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Did you know that sometimes even experts get it wrong? I have a friend whose brother-in-law is a hunting guide. A few weeks ago, out in the West, Iowa I think, he took some hunters out for some bird hunting. He didn't carry a gun, but in the tall grass, he saw a pheasant. Being an expert, he crept towards the pheasant, and at the last moment, snapped out his arm and caught the pheasant by the neck. Except it wasn't a pheasant. It was a skunk.

Today, you might have noticed that there is a presidential election coming up. If you haven't heard, it's Barack Obama against John McCain. And trust me, I'm not going to try to be an election expert this morning. I don't want to hunt for a pheasant and catch a skunk! It would be as foolish for me to tell you for whom to vote as it would be for me to prescribe a medicine for your illness or a legal strategy for your court case or the precise way to fix your automobile, although I, in fact do take inordinate pride in having managed to replace my air filter a few weeks ago, and, against all odds, the car is still running. Such is the extent of my mechanical ability.

For a pastor to tell you for whom to vote, that strikes me as more an Islamic concept than Christian. And, anyway concepts such as voting and democracy and political liberty are quite foreign to the Bible. Liberty and freedom are concepts that soar through Scripture to be sure, but these are spiritual concepts, not political.

And even if you say, "We want a Christian president," that doesn't get us very far down the road. Both presidential candidates are Christian. Both believe in God, believe in Jesus Christ.

So, what does God have to do with the election? Dare I say it? It could be that God is not intervening to make sure His choice, if He even has one, wins. In ancient Israel, there were no elections, but there were kings, political leaders, and this might have something to say to us. Read First Samuel, and you discover that God did not ordain kingship, did not ordain political rulers. Rather, God took it as a rejection of Him that the folks wanted a king. *1SA 8:19 But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. 20 Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles." 1SA 8:21 When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the LORD. 22 The LORD answered, "Listen to them and give them a king."*

The people want a king, want a political process. And God says, "let them." But God does not guide the process. It could be that today God is not as wrapped up in the election as we are.

More than that, even later, when the monarchy was established and accepted, and against a backdrop in which most nations revered their kings as divine, Israel said: our kings are flawed.

Even King David, the greatest king of Israel, the one admired and most revered, is shown to be flawed. Writer of great poetry, the Psalms, winner of great victories, described in Acts as a man after God's own heart, yet David did this evil: one day he coerced the wife of another man into sleeping with him. And when she became pregnant, he arranged for her husband, an honorable and brave general, to be sent into battle to die. And, though he was King, he was also subject to rebuke by holy people, namely the prophet Nathan.

And if you read 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, you will find that there are good kings and bad kings. Later on, there will be no kings at all, yet God still continues to work in the lives of his people.

Now, in Romans 13, we find that all leaders are placed there by God. But by the time we get to the Book of Revelation, the theology there is that the leaders are placed there by Satan.

Could it be that God leaves the electing up to us? It is part of the freedom that God has granted his children: the freedom to make choices, the freedom to live with the consequences of our choices. God will be with us, whether Senator McCain or Senator Obama is president. It is the American people, not God, who chooses our president. Do we really think God could not rest until Warren Harding was elected?

Whoever is elected will be flawed, will be faithful to God's purposes in some areas, and disappoint God in others. That's the nature of human leadership, that's the nature of the human heart.

Now then, which candidate will come closer to fulfilling God's agenda? Here we have to be careful. Because it is easy to claim Godly blessing upon our political beliefs, to pick and choose our issues and then say God is on our side. However, Jesus does not answer to us or our political agenda. We answer to him. He is not to be invoked to defend our political philosophies, but to challenge and inform them, whatever our political positions might be. For instance. . .

Would God prefer that we not have attacked Iraq and spent that money on food for the poor and increased access to health care? That's a Christian viewpoint that can be defended.

Would God prefer that we have attacked Iraq, taken on evil head-on? Sacrificed as a nation that terror be confronted, for the sake not just of our nations, but for all nations of good-will. That's also a Christian viewpoint that can be defended. The fact that it is one that I happen to agree with one point of view more than another does not make the other viewpoint invalid.

We also have to be careful not to make our political agenda God's political agenda. What might seem so incredibly important to us politically might make little difference spiritually. In fact, God's most important work in the political process might just be to remind us that it is not just our narrow political agenda, but God's wide concern for the least of people and for all people and for all nations that is central.

I hope that Christ challenges every political viewpoint. Reminds us that there is more to the Gospel than what one side or another appropriates for itself. Now politics is rough and tumble, has been since the beginning of our nation, but if a party is going to claim God's blessings for its positions, as both do, either explicitly or implicitly, then it is at least ironic that both go right ahead and use tactics that are not, shall we say, of the highest moral order.

Let me tell you about two offensive bumper stickers I have seen. "GOP...God's own party." And another: "Democrats help people. Republicans hurt people."

Both sides claim to be on the side of angels, but then resort to tactics that are less than Christian. Is it Godly, holy, proper, to use unChristian methods to attain Christian ends? It's an interesting question.

As Christian people, I would hope that we always be respectful of differing opinions, and if these opinions be un-Christlike, that we use only Christ-like tactics in showing them to be false.

Turning to our Scripture, they were trying to trap Jesus one day into saying something that would get him arrested. [Explain difference between Herodians and Pharisees, united ag. Jesus]]

"Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" Tiberius was emperor of the Roman Empire when Jesus was preaching, but every Emperor took the name Caesar as well. And Tiberius Caesar, like most emperors demanded to be worshiped as a god.

So, if Jesus says, yes, lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, the religious people (Pharisees) would accuse him of worshiping another god. And if he said, no, why that was treason against Rome.(The Herodians' point of view.) So Jesus says, who's on the face of the coin? Caesar? Well, then let Caesar have what belongs to him.

But Jesus' message is this: we must give to give to God what belongs to God. To live a life pleasing to God, that centers on God's platform of freedom, justice, mercy, reconciliation, forgiveness.

In other words, let the political world work the way it wants to. But make the focus of your life giving to God what God deserves. To Jesus, it is as if the political process is simply irrelevant.

And in the Gospel of John, Jesus makes this point of view even more explicit: My Kingdom is not of this world. It is ultimately defined not by political borders or by political activity or by political promises, but by holiness and spirit and faithfulness. God's Kingdom is evident in this world, but not defined by this world.

To head to a conclusion, I don't think Jesus endorses political candidates.

And, I hope, that whatever your political or social or moral views, that you will allow your faith to shape and guide you. Let Jesus challenge your heart, your point of view. And if you have a political view, whatever it is, make sure you can justify it according to your faith and according to the full gospel of Jesus.

As an American citizen, it is important that you vote November 4 if you want a say in deciding on the next president or senator or governor.

But as a Christian, voting is certainly not a holy obligation. God will watch over our nation, as He watches over every nation, and God will love our nation, as he loves every nation, even those that grieve him, no matter who wins.

The thought of President McCain for the next four years might bring sorrow to your heart. The words President Obama might send shivers down your spine. But God can handle either occurrence. The earth will continue to spin on its axis; the stars will not fall from the sky, no matter what happens. No matter who wins, Jesus will still love you, guide you, give you strength, give you hope.

To be sure, come November 4 half will be happy and half will be sad, unless of course, like 2000, all will be frustrated. And we will have to remember again that God loves our political enemies just as much as he loves us. And that to have won is not a sign of God's favor and to have lost is not a sign of God's disfavor. It's just politics. Voters decide elections. Not God.

So, come November 4, vote if you want to. It's an opportunity many people in many nations wished they had; it's a right that many people have died for. So, vote.

But remember, our primary identity is not that we are Americans. Our primary identity is that we are Christians. More than citizens of America, we are more profoundly citizens of God's Kingdom, which has rules and hopes and dreams that soar beyond the political process.

May I suggest our deepest obligation on November 4, is not to vote. And our best opportunity to make a positive change is not to vote. It is rather, to love the lord our God with all our heart and all our soul and mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves.

Because the best hope for the world rests not in those who claim citizenship in one nation or another or one political party or another, but in those who know themselves to be participants in a kingdom, of which Jesus Christ alone is Lord and King.

Amen.