

Talk Notes

Title: The Kingdom of God 9 – Thy Kingdom Come in Civic Life.

Meeting: Freshwaters

Date: 05/11/2017

Introduction

In my first 7 talks on the Kingdom I focussed on what the bible tells us about the Kingdom of God – I am now in the middle of a series of talks which examine the practical difference that the Kingdom of God can make to all areas of life. I am using the areas Heart 4 Harlow has recognised need to be advanced for the Kingdom of God to grow in our town.

Those 5 areas are

1. Commerce (Shops and Business)
2. Civic (Local Authority & Councillors, MP)
3. Art, Culture and Education (Schools, College & UCH, Arts associations)
4. Health & Wellbeing, (Charities and Community Groups, NHS and the care sector)
5. Churches

We are going to explore Civic Life this morning.

The Bible and Civic Life

Theocracy vs Democracy

As we consider the area of civic life I want to start by saying that I do not personally believe that theocracy is the best form of government for a nation in this period between the bursting forth of the Kingdom into all the World through Jesus, and when He will return.

Theocracy is the governance of a nation by divine authority and guidance. In Israel it took on 3 different forms during its history. Firstly through the covenant and the charismatic leadership of first **Moses's and Joshua and then the Judges**. Then came the period of **kingship** where the king was presented as God's representative, the anointed ruler.

Following the end of Israel's period of kingship with the exile, then a new idealised version of **priest and king** was taught. Jesus of course embodied both priest and king.

We know from the history of Israel that the theory of theocracy was distorted through the individuals who represented God on earth whether the early Judges, the kings or the post exilic priests. **When they were godly and walked closely with God then theocracy worked well – but when they were wicked and distant from God then often the direction of God was far from evident – while they continued to claim God's authority.**

Of course our own nation and that of many others have a bad history of kings who claimed God's authority for their governance and many atrocities were perpetrated in His name.

While I absolutely believe in the influence of the kingdom of God upon all governments and authorities, and believe that all should seek God's guidance and wisdom – I don't believe that any should claim divine authority.

Jesus himself resisted the pressure to become a national king in this present age – although He of all men could have truly ruled as God's true representative – a real theocracy.

However, when Jesus returns and we enter the 'age to come' then He will come as King – but it will be as King of the heavens and the earth – king of all nations and people's, not just one.

Not one special nation but one special people in every nation

This leads me into my second point – that Jesus ushered in a different concept. **Instead of one special nation, we have one special people in every nation.**

1 Peter 2:9-12

We are not to regard this world as our home – our primary allegiance is not to a nation state but to a holy nation of God's people throughout the earth.

Honour and pray for those in authority.

Let's read on a little further, **verses 13-17**. We are called to respect human authority – now there are those who say that if we disagree with those in authority – if we think that we are closer to the will of God than they are, then this gives us the right to dishonour them and even to challenge the rule of law they have instituted. However it is interesting that this was not written by a contemporary Christian in a free liberal democracy – but by Peter, a disciple of Jesus living under cruel Roman rule and well acquainted with the persecution of the church which would ultimately lead to his death.

Order is better than chaos, poor governance is better than no governance. We are called to respect the authorities and in **1 Tim 2:2** we are urged to pray for **'kings and all who have authority, so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity'**.

Does this mean that we should blindly obey every instruction of a tyrannical ruler or corrupt government – well no. There may well be times when the instructions of the government – or even the law of the land, contradict the clearly stated will of God. In such cases we may well quote Peter and John from **Acts 4:19-20** **'But Peter and John replied, "Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than Him? We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard"**.

So there are exceptional circumstances where we may need to take a stand against those in authority, or even to break an unjust and oppressive law, but, as **1 Peter 2:16** says, we have

to be careful that our Freedom in Christ does not become an excuse to do evil. Giving one example, try explaining to the families of victims of speeding drivers that as a citizen of the Kingdom of God you are not subject to these petty laws about speeding, particularly as you were late for church!

Our influence upon Civic Life

So praying for those who have responsibility to govern our land is essential, but we are called as ambassadors of the Kingdom of God to do more than that.

Let's read **Amos 5:21-24**

God was telling Israel, look all of your praise and worship, **all of your sacrifices and offerings mean nothing if there is not justice and righteousness in the land.**

We can't excuse ourselves by saying well that's all of those terrible non-Christian politicians, when we are not influencing Civic life through our life and testimony.

In our democracy **we can vote, we can lobby and petition – and we can build relationships with our political representatives so that they can see the values we promote lived out in the flesh.**

We can also choose to **get involved, to join a political party, to influence policy making, and even to become a political representative ourselves.**

Too often Christians are seen as those who shout from the side-lines- often declaring what is wrong, but rarely getting personally involved with what many regard as the dirty world of politics. Perhaps it is dirty because there are not enough Christians involved influencing for good.

Now some will point to Tim Farron and the harassment he experienced through the press and use it as an example of why Christians can't get involved in politics – I look at what happened to Tim and say it is exactly why we must be involved in politics. If there are enough of us engaged and involved – **if we are the ones who are engaged in debates, who are faithful activists, who are supporting the local council and even the national government then when we speak and identify with and support one another as Christian's, whatever our party political allegiance, then it is easier for us to speak out for what we believe, rather than for what we know the papers want us to say.**

Understanding our Civic Society

In order to effectively pray for and influence Civic Society, then we need to understand how it works and pray for and seek to be an influence for good in each sector. As I go through some headings, **see if the Lord highlights those that you are, can or should be involved in praying for an influencing.**

Citizens

I wanted to start with the heading of Citizens, those of us who live, work and play in our nation. All of the subsequent headings relate to people engaged in specific areas of public life – but all are also citizens. **Citizens have rights and responsibilities** and as Christians we are both Citizens of this nation, but also Citizens of the Kingdom of God. **Our citizenship of God's Kingdom should not cause us to come aside from our Citizenship of our nation, but instead should compel us to engage with and influence the Civic life of our nation.**

Politics

Under the heading of politics there are **politicians** – those we most readily think of are the professional politicians of Westminster and the devolved governments who fill our news bulletins day after day. They are called to represent us as Citizens in the business of government. **Their motivation at its best is to ensure that the governing of the country is done effectively for the good of all its citizens.** Too often personal ambition or party political dogma or advantage gets in the way and it is for us to remind them from time to time why they were elected. Our Political system at the moment is oppositional, it relies on one party governing at the other party 'opposing' them. **Too often, in my opinion, this leads to wasted time and energy in fighting one another rather than on working together to find solutions – I believe this will and must change in the coming decades, but we may have a rough ride while we transition.**

Then there are hundreds of **councillors** throughout the country who are called to represent the citizens of their city, county town or village. For the most part they are only paid expenses and they give their time voluntarily. Again at best their focus should be to ensure that the decisions they make are for the good of those they represent.

Then there are the **thousands of others** who are not elected, but are involved in the 'science of government' which is one definition of politics. They support, advise, lobby and debate with the elected representatives and exert their influence.

Administration

My next heading is the administration – **Civil Servants** at national and local level supporting the elected representatives, and implementing the policies they agree. We do not realise how much influence civil servants have – who do you think write the policies that the politicians present to us – it's the civil servants – of course under the politicians' direction – but **very often what is possible or even desirable is framed and presented by civil servants.**

You can have an influence on the civil servants not just by becoming one, but by engaging in policy discussions and by personal relationships with those who are civil servants.

Judiciary

The next important issue is the judiciary, the **courts and judges** who impartially apply the laws passed by the elected representatives. They are responsible for upholding justice in

terms of ensuring we abide by the law of the land, but of course if the laws are unjust then what they uphold will be unjust.

Too often the justice system can be corrupted by political influence, we need to pray against such corruption and challenge it if and when it emerges.

Then there is the **Police force** called to protect and enforce order on our streets and homes from those who break the laws in order to advance their own interests and desires at the costs of others. We need to pray for our Police officers and support those on the front line who keep us safe. We have a responsibility to ensure that they are fairly paid and sufficiently resourced.

The Press

Then there is the press, now if you will forgive the pun, **the press get a lot of bad press**. At its best the press play a vital role in **reporting well researched news accurately and impartially**. It helps **hold others to account**, it helps **inform us as Citizens** helping us to pray and act to encourage what is good and right and to challenge what is wrong.

Unfortunately the press of today's is undermined from within and without. From within there can be **too much bias** – stories written from a certain perspective without the inconvenience of the facts.

Then there are the challenges that the internet and in particular social media bring. Firstly there is the **challenge to respond immediately**, sometimes before facts are properly checked because if you don't others will report it first. Then there is the challenge that **good research and verification of facts and professional journalism is very expensive** – but it's really cheap to tweet a comment, write a blog or generally to put across your own view as if it were fact.

Many people now get their news exclusively through social media – the problem is that it can self-perpetuate bias. Social media works on the basis of **showing you what you want to see and telling you what you want to hear**. When you read or see something that agrees with your views you 'like' it – those things that challenge you with a different view you don't 'like' – **before long you are only presented with the news which you like and which agrees with your world view** – further justifying you in what you already believe – this results in polarisation.

We have a responsibility to support free press and good unbiased journalism – we should pray for the press, encourage them when they do well as well as challenge them when they get it wrong.

Public Servants

Then there are the vast army of those working in Health and Education – and the armed forces – people working in what at one time would have been considered vocations – **again at their best motivated more by the service that they provide to the wider community than their own personal gain**.

Conclusion

As representatives of Christ and ambassadors of the Kingdom of God we are called to understand, pray for and influence the civic life of our nation. We are called not just to jeer from the side-lines, but to get involved – to speak up for truth in the context of love, to build friendships and relationships that earn us the right to speak. To use our democratic rights of free speech and the vote to advance the good of all citizens and to recognise that part of achieving this is through advancement of the values of the Kingdom of God.

How could you be involved?