

SERIES: The Good News, as Reported by Matthew
SERMON: **Does God Care Who Wins this Election?**
SCRIPTURE: Matthew 22:15-22
SPEAKER: Michael P. Andrus
DATE: November 2, 2008

I suppose this could be a really short sermon. I could just answer the question found in my title, “Yes,” and we could all go home. But you know me too well to think I’d ever do that. Yes, God cares who wins the election on Tuesday, just as He cares about everything that impacts His people. In fact, there are Scripture passages that seem to indicate that God Himself will make the choice of a new President for us. Now I don’t mean that our votes don’t matter or that God Himself will stuff the ballot box (kind of like they’ve been doing for decades in Chicago). Rather what I mean is that behind what we intend is a God who superintends; behind reality is ultimate reality.

In Daniel 2:20-21 we read, “Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them.” Now please don’t think that God has such power only over kings or dictators, and that somehow in a democracy He lacks the power or authority to exercise His will. Frankly, I am greatly comforted by the fact that God is ultimately in control of this election no matter who becomes the 44th President of the United States. The results on Tuesday may please me or frighten me, but I know one thing for certain—they will not surprise God or force Him to adjust His plans.

There’s no point in trying to appear neutral in this presidential race, because I’m not, and you will undoubtedly be able to tell who I’m voting for from this message. But I will not tell you how to vote and I respect you if you disagree.

I have a good friend named Erwin Lutzer. He was my big brother when I was a first-year student at Dallas Seminary in the fall of 1966, and he has been a friend, though a long-distance one, ever since. For the past 30 years Erwin has been Pastor of Moody Church in Chicago. When I saw him in May at the Gospel Coalition, he handed me a book he had just written and asked me to read it.

The title: *Is God on America’s Side: The surprising answer and why it matters during this election season*. It’s a small book and I read it on the plane heading home. But it’s also profound, and I decided to share some of the concepts in this book with you today as we approach one of the most momentous elections in modern times. I am not going to preach his book but I do want to borrow some of the political principles he mentions, adjusting them and developing them to fit my own emphasis.

So my real topic this morning is going to be *Biblical Political Principles for Perplexing Times*. While this will not be my typical text-based exposition, I want to begin by reading a couple of very relevant Scripture passages. First, 1 Peter 2:13-17:

Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men:

whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

Then from 1 Timothy 2:1-4:

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Finally Romans 13:1-7:

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

The general tone and focus of all these passages is clear, and it is that government was established by God, for our benefit, and we should honor and respect those in authority. If that was true when the madman Nero was emperor in Rome (and he was when Paul wrote this letter), then how much more is it true for those who are given the privilege of choosing their leaders, as we are in a democracy? These passages tell us that we should pray for our leaders, submit to them, honor them, and, yes, pay taxes to them. Furthermore, freedom is a high value that we should pursue and enjoy, but we must be careful not to abuse it. Above all, we should do good and lead godly lives so that more people might come to the knowledge of the truth.

But in addition to the teaching of these three passages I want to offer you some further biblical political principles for the perplexing times in which we live. And I want to start with this one:

1. God can both bless and curse a nation. (Deut 28, Isaiah 63:10) Indelibly imprinted on most of our minds are those caustic words spoken from a pulpit in Chicago and broadcast *ad infinitum, ad nauseam* over the airwaves, “. . . not God bless America but God damn America.” They were words that shocked and outraged millions of Americans. They were spoken by a clergyman steeped in Marxist liberation theology rather than the Gospel of grace, and ordained

by a denomination, the United Church of Christ, that questions virtually every essential of the Christian faith and is on the wrong side of virtually every major moral issue.

Thankfully Rev. Jeremiah Wright's words were rejected by Americans everywhere, except by the most radical elements of American society. But at the risk of being misunderstood, and without justifying Rev. Jeremiah Wright's hateful attitudes or his sorry theology *in any way*, I want to say that there is *a sense* in which he spoke truth. God has blessed America and continues to do so, but in many respects America does not deserve that blessing, and there may well come a time when God chooses to curse our nation for her sins and her spiritual disobedience.

Of course, I would never *invite* God to curse our country, as Jeremiah Wright did. That's the most insane and foolish thing I can imagine. And I strongly disagree with the reasons he gave as to why America deserves God's condemnation—because of the war in Iraq, or because our government allegedly perpetrated AIDS as a weapon against innocent African Americans. If God judges our country it will be because we have turned our backs on Him and on His moral standards and on innocent human life. God surely cannot withhold his judgment indefinitely when we put 1.5 million babies to death every year.

Of course, ours would not be the first nation God treated to condemnation after pouring out His blessings. The whole history of Israel in the OT is the story of God's blessings for obedience only to be followed by chastisement when they were disobedient. In fact, in Deuteronomy 28, where God promises His people both blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, the curses are four times as long as the blessings. If you want a sobering experience, I encourage you to read that chapter at one sitting and ponder the truths of it.

Amazingly, God is actually described as fighting against His own people in Isaiah 63:10: "They rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them." Imagine, God fighting against His own people! And if God did that to a nation He clearly identified as His own chosen people, think about how He might judge America, a nation that has no grounds for claiming such a relationship! Don't forget for a moment that God can both bless and curse a nation.

You know, I find it a curious thing that America seems to be absent from biblical prophecy of the end times. We read about the revived Roman empire (possibly Europe today), about the kings of the east (possibly China and North Korea), of the north (Russia) and of the south (the Arab nations). But no one has offered a credible interpretation that sees the United States playing any kind of pivotal role in the end times. Could that be because our nation, the greatest and most powerful in the history of the world, may also be one of the shortest-lived nations in history?

2. God judges nations based on the amount of light and opportunity they are given. (Luke 12:47-48, Hebrews 2:2) There are multiple places in Scripture where the principle is established that God will not judge all people by the same standard, because they have varying degrees of

opportunity and knowledge. For example, in Luke 12:47-48 we read,

That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

Greater light means greater responsibility and a greater penalty for disobedience.

Well, how much light has the United States received? While we were never a Christian nation in the strict sense of the term, the Judeo-Christian underpinnings of our laws and government are undeniable. Scripture references adorn almost every government building in Washington D. C. We have Christian radio and TV emanating from every city in our country. A Bible can be bought in any bookstore, and many American homes own multiple copies. We have churches on every corner and have even sent tens of thousands of missionaries to foreign lands.

Yet we as a nation tolerate increasing secularism, relativism, hedonism, materialism, and every other ism you can imagine, all the while pushing God to the extreme periphery of society. In view of this I can't help but think of Hebrews 2:2: "For if the message spoken by angels (the OT law) was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" Friends, God judges nations based on the amount of light and opportunity they are given. If so, we could be in big trouble!

3. God sometimes uses exceedingly evil nations to judge those that are less evil. (Habakkuk 1-2) While America is fast becoming a wicked nation, we are by no means the most wicked on earth. In fact, I would choose to argue that while sin and rebellion are reaching historic proportions in our nation, we are still one of the least corrupt and most charitable nations on the face of the earth. No other nation in history has rebuilt the economies of their defeated enemies like America has. No other nation has brought the youth of those nations to her own shore to educate them. When a tsunami hits it's America that sends the most aid. Unfortunately, God doesn't grade on the curve. He grades by absolute standards—His own. And by *His* standards we are a wicked nation.

Still there are those far more wicked than we, denying even basic freedoms to their citizens, enslaving women under barbaric laws and customs, and teaching their children racism and hatred from the time they can read. Some of these nations are corrupt to the core; one cannot conduct even the most elementary business transactions without taking or offering bribes. Fear is rampant, freedom fleeting, and hope non-existent.

Here is the irony: God sometimes uses the more wicked to judge the less wicked. A case in point is seen clearly in the book of Habakkuk. This Jewish prophet was extremely troubled by the evil and wickedness he saw all around him in Israel, and he wasn't afraid to ask, "Lord, why don't you *do something* about all this sin?" The Lord responded to Habakkuk, "Guess what? I *am* doing something about it. I haven't told you about it yet because you wouldn't believe it. But since you've asked, let me tell you what I'm up to. I am raising up the Babylonians, that

ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own, and they're going to come against Israel and wipe her off the map."

Now the reason Habakkuk wouldn't have believed this is that Babylon was at that time an insignificant player on the international scene. It would be like God telling *us* that Finland is going to rise up and defeat the United States. No one would believe it.

Now God's promise to judge the sin in Israel doesn't satisfy Habakkuk. In fact, it creates an even greater problem for him. It seems to him that God is solving one moral problem by creating an even greater one. And so we find him complaining again to God in 1:13, "Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" At first Habakkuk didn't like God's *inaction*. Now He doesn't like God's *action*. After all, he argues, as bad as the people of Judah are, they aren't half as bad as the Babylonians.

Then God responds to Habakkuk, in effect saying, "Don't worry, Babylon will get theirs. I'm going to use Babylon to discipline Judah, but then I am going to throw Babylon away like a used rag." Habakkuk finally decides that prayer and praise are wiser than complaining. He says in the last chapter of his prophecy, "LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy." Habakkuk has tossed the white flag of surrender. He knows Judah must be disciplined; he accepts that Babylon is an appropriate tool for God to use. "But, Lord," he pleads, "while you're pouring out your wrath on your people, please remember to be merciful."

That may be the most appropriate prayer we can offer today. "In your wrath, God, remember mercy." As bad as things in our nation are morally, financially, and politically, as difficult as it is to understand what God is up to right now, as frightening as the coming discipline may be, the only safe place to be is as close to God as possible. I learned as a little boy that when I was being spanked, the closer I got to my dad the less it hurt. God loves His children, and though they may suffer from national or personal discipline, He has only their ultimate good in mind.

By the way, is it conceivable that God could raise up a nation more evil than we to destroy the United States as we know it? Yes, I think it's conceivable—whether Iran or Pakistan or North Korea or some group like Al Qaida that isn't even isolated geographically, or some combination of these. In this day of nuclear proliferation, anything could happen.

4. God sometimes judges a nation through its own chosen leaders. (1 Samuel 8). In the days of Samuel, a godly prophet and judge, the Israelites came to him, told him he was too old to do the job, and asked for a king. God wanted to rule Israel through judges in the form of a theocracy, but the people saw that the other nations had a king and they wanted one too. So God said to Samuel, "Warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do" (1 Samuel 8:9).

Samuel warned them but the people refused to listen to him. So he left them with this message: "When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the Lord will not answer you in that day" (8:18). But the people continued to demand a king, so God told

Samuel, “Listen to them and give them a king” (8:22), and He gave them Saul. But it wasn’t long before the people realized that this tall, young, good looking, charismatic leader was a huge mistake.

Is that going to happen to us? I don’t know. But I would caution us as evangelicals not to be pessimists or to expect the worst. I remember well the election of 1960. As a junior in highschool it was the first one I paid serious attention to. I remember evangelical preachers warning that if we put a Roman Catholic in the White House the Pope would soon be ruling our country and religious freedom would be a thing of the past. We were toast. Well, Kennedy won and we survived, didn’t we? Ironically history has generally painted the next four presidents after him as worse than he—Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter.

Some of you are not excited about either presidential candidate this year, and some of you think we may be toast. But no matter who becomes President on Tuesday, if we evangelicals are faithful to pray for him, we may actually help avert the worst possible scenario.

5. God’s judgments take various forms. (Galatians 6:7) We have a tendency to be presumptuous about God’s justice. In the weeks after 911 countless pastors waxed eloquent on the judgment of God as seen in the destruction of the Twin Towers. It happened again when Hurricane Katrina leveled the Big Easy. One hears occasional connections being made between the terrible forest fires that have plagued California this year and the fact that California always seems to be on the forefront of tolerance of gross sin.

Whether or not any or all of these events have been direct judgments from God, I do not know. But I do know there are judgments all around us that we tend to overlook. They are called the moral consequences of sin. When parents divorce, children are hurt (and 20 million of them currently live in a home without a father). When children live without a father the crime rate goes up. When people drink too much, others suffer and die. When people practice sexual promiscuity, they suffer from STD’s, unwanted pregnancy, and AIDS, to say nothing of what it does to their emotional, psychological, and spiritual health. When greed and corruption and irresponsibility run rampant, the financial system collapses. When people practice uncontrolled consumerism and materialism it corrodes their souls and the environment suffers. Galatians 6:7-8 is still true: “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”

All sin has both immediate and long-term consequences. When God has forbidden certain behaviors and we do them anyway, it seems to me that we ought to acknowledge the results as divine retribution. Let us never say that God has not visited His judgment on our nation just because we have never lost a war on our own soil, or just because we still have religious freedom, or just because our economy is still one of the strongest in the world. And the fact that God has not judged us more severely is a credit to His mercy more than to our own goodness as a nation.

6. When God judges a nation, the righteous suffer with the wicked. (Luke 13:1-5) Perhaps you have at times wondered why God doesn't judge the sins of America (or even secretly wished He would), but you should be careful what you ask for. Why? Because just as God's grace blesses the wicked as well as the righteous, so His judgment touches the righteous as well as the wicked. The former is what we call common grace. The latter might be called common judgment.

You see, when natural disasters happen, Christians die, too, not just unbelievers. When the financial system collapses, Christians suffer, too, even though they may not have participated in the greed. Christians, too, are victims of drunk driving and school violence and terrorist attacks. The temporal judgments of God do not always separate the righteous from the unrighteous. They touch more lives than just the guilty. Jesus addresses that in Luke 13, as He talks about the tragedy of the tower that collapsed and killed 18 people, some innocent, others guilty. And when Elijah prayed that it wouldn't rain on Ahab's Israel and it didn't rain for 3 ½ years, the widow from Zarephath suffered, as did Elijah himself (1 Kings 17).

That's why we should be very concerned about the great moral crises of our day, like abortion and drugs and alcoholism and child abuse and sexual promiscuity and pornography and gambling and cloning. Even though we may not be directly involved in these evils, eventually we may all experience the judgment of God on our degenerate culture. I have heard commentators say that values voting is passe this year, and the only thing people are voting on is the economy. How sad!

7. God sometimes reverses intended judgments. (Jonah 3) This, friends, is a blessed truth and the one I want to close with. I can't help but think of the city of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Assyria was a far more evil nation than ours, but when Jonah preached to that great city, the people repented and God relented. He did the same for Judah in the days of King Hezekiah.

It is not too late for America to turn to God in repentance. It's late, for sure. So bad have things gotten that one Christian leader said recently, "If God doesn't judge America soon, He's going to have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah." But as I said, it's not too late, but we will have to get serious soon about repentance.

Conclusion: Every one of us remembers where we were when we got the news of 911. I was in my office at First Free in St. Louis when my son Eddie called me from his office at IBM and said, "A plane just hit the World Trade Center." I immediately went into the staff lounge where there was a TV and watched the replay of the first explosion. Though some reporters were suggesting it may have been an accident, I knew instinctively this was intentional. I was watching the live broadcast when the second plane hit. And I remember the overwhelming sense of despair when I saw the first tower crumble into dust and ashes, thinking at the time there may have been as many as 25,000 people inside.

It was a Tuesday, of course, and I was already well along in my preparation for the next Sunday's sermon on Acts 2. But I knew immediately I would have to postpone that passage and

speak to what was on everybody's heart and mind. I turned to Isaiah 43 and prepared a new sermon on those amazing words:

*Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, (not if, but when)
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.
For I am the Lord, your God.*

The following Sunday, too, I continued to examine those stunning events by preaching on the subject, *What Do You Do When the Good Guys Don't Win?* The church was full both Sundays—3000 in attendance, about 25% above normal at the time. Visitors flocked in and virtually every member was in church unless ill. But by the third or fourth Sunday the number of visitors was back to normal and the occasional members were occasional once more. Lutzer wrote, “To borrow a phrase from R. C. Sproul, God was ‘allowed off the reservation’ for a few weeks after 9/11 to fulfill His responsibility to bless us. But once our nation felt secure again, God was safely tucked away, church attendance declined, and the so-called wall of separation of church and state was built a notch higher. God is even less welcome now in the affairs of our public life than He was before 9/11.”ⁱ

Of course, they still sing *God Bless America* during the seventh inning stretch at big league baseball games, but sadly that is just about the only spiritual remnant of revival I can think of that remains from 9/11. Clearly the God who was allowed to reenter public life for such a short time seven years ago was not the God of the Bible but the god of civil religion, the god who has been described as “a deity without sovereignty, a god without wrath, a judge without judgment, and a force without power.”ⁱⁱ

But friends, the God of the Bible is very different from the God of American civil religion. He is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. He is a God of mercy and grace who sent His one and only Son to the Cross to pay for your sin and mine and to offer us the free gift of salvation if we will turn to Him in faith.

Mark my words, friend, our survival as a nation lies not in any presidential candidate or in any political party. Oh, I believe there is a big difference between the candidates this year, and I believe there is still *some* difference between the political parties, particularly on the great moral issues. I think there is sufficient difference that the election of one candidate rather than the other could make a significant difference to our family structure, to our Supreme Court, to our support of Israel, to our economy, and most importantly, to the moral fabric of our nation.

But there is only one thing that will rescue us as a nation from the judgment of God, and that is

the repentance of our people. 1 Peter 4:17-18 says,

For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

Which category do you belong to today? The family of God? Or, those who do not obey the Gospel of God?

i. Lutzer, 12.

ii. Sproul, quoted by Lutzer, 13.