

AFTER THE ELECTION

Another election for President of the United States of America is scheduled for the day after tomorrow, Tuesday, November 3, 2020. This is something we go through every four years, but this time seems different to me and to many other people. Are you feeling stressed? I am, and I wouldn't be surprised if most of you are too.

A recent survey showed that “more than two-thirds of U.S. adults (68%) say that the 2020 U.S. presidential election is a significant source of stress in their life, a large increase from the 2016 presidential election when 52% said the same The survey also found that regardless of political affiliation, majorities say that the election is a significant source of stress (76% of Democrats, 67% of Republicans and 64% of Independents)” (<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2020/10/election-stress>, accessed 31 Oct 2020).

You might be wondering about my endorsement of a candidate but the pulpit is no place for this. I have been thinking about this morning's preaching opportunity with respect to my pastoral concerns for you. I am not trying to influence an election. My aim in proclaiming God's Word to the church, according to Scripture, should be for your upbuilding and encouragement and consolation (1 Cor 14.3 ESV). These aims are extremely important things in the last days when people are “fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world” (Luke 21.26). But as sincere Christians, “God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and of love and of self-control” (2 Tim 1.7 ESV).

I want to bring some biblical truths before you to consider now and especially to apply *after the election*. We might know this week who is the President Elect, or maybe not for weeks or months. But when you learn who won, how will you feel then? You probably respond, “Well, that depends on who wins!” Fair enough. But let me caution you against two extremes which would not be consistent with your Christian faith and godliness. Beware of being too positive or too negative in any case. If your candidate wins, you may be tempted to shout and sing and dance and gloat like the greatest thing ever in the history of the world has happened. Well, it hasn't. Be thankful for temporal blessings but always remember that only Christ's second coming will right all wrongs and bring in everlasting blessedness—not electing anyone to the White House. On the other hand, if your candidate loses, and perhaps the one you opposed the most has been elected, do not yield to a toxic mix of panic, depression, and despair. Some of you may be prone to imitate Chicken Little who cried, “The sky is falling! The sky is falling!” Well, it hasn't. Even if Nero were our next President, as a Christian you know that the fundamentals of our faith remain unshaken, certain glorious things are still true, and we're glory-bound in Christ Jesus! Neither a President Trump nor a President Biden could change that.

As I have been mulling over this subject of what we Christians should remember *after the election*, three great truths come to mind from God's Word. These are easily stated and easily remembered, and I want you to remember them when the election results are known. Deliberately call them to mind and meditate on them so that you don't lose your bearings spiritually, or become unhinged. They are truths about Christ, about government, and about the church, and here they are. After the election, 1) the Lord Jesus Christ still reigns, 2) the government is still ordained by God, and 3) the church is still triumphing in Christ. Admittedly there are many other important biblical truths to know and remember besides these, but I think these three are among the most important in helping us to continue as calm, cheerful, godly members of this society. Let's go through them one at a time.

The Lord Jesus Christ Still Reigns (Acts 2.36; Psa 2.1-4)

First, the Lord Jesus Christ still reigns. There is a widespread misconception among many professing Christians that we are supposed to make Jesus Lord of our lives by our faith or decision or some such thing—as if He weren't Lord already. I object to the whole idea of our “making Him Lord.” If people only mean we must repent of our sins and keep repenting of them, and trust in Christ and keep trusting in Him, well, then, of course that's right. But Jesus of Nazareth, once crucified and risen from the dead, has been exalted to heaven's throne and to the office of Lord and Christ by the absolutely almighty and sovereign power of God. Jesus Christ is, objectively and eternally, King of kings and Lord of lords, and no wicked powers of earth or hell can change that! No one can “make Jesus Lord” because God already has, and no one can dethrone Him either. The kingdom of God is not a democracy; it's a theocratic monarchy.

The apostle Peter stressed this in his sermon to the unbelieving Jews on the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts chapter two. His dramatic, climactic thesis statement at the end of the sermon is this: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (v. 36). This is not an exhortation for people to do anything but an announcement about what God has already done. When Peter said, “Let all the house of Israel know,” he is not asking their consent to know. It's just a prefatory comment to what they are about to know, because Peter is about to tell them, and then there is no way they could not know, at least informationally, that this was Peter's claim.

Of course Scripture affirms that Jesus, even before He completed His mission on earth, was the Son of God, the Christ, and the Lord of lords, but His triumph and glorification took a giant leap forward when He had made the atonement for our sins on the cross by dying in our place. And His resurrection from the grave, His appearances as the living Savior to His disciples, His ascension to heaven, and His present session there at the Father's right hand—all these are aspects of His triumph over the powers of hell. Christ's eternal glorification as the conquering Savior is well underway!

And beloved brethren, no matter what happens this week, all that is still true and real! No President of the United States can unseat the Lord Jesus Christ. Even all the ungodly people of the world, though they are engaged in an impressive conspiracy, have no chance whatsoever of thwarting God's grand plan to glorify Jesus Christ as Lord of all. “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished” (Prov 11.21). God even mocks their ridiculous attempts, as Psalm 2 testifies:

¹ Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed [Christ], saying, ³ Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. ⁴ He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision (Psa 2.1-4).

Listen, friends. Jesus is Lord, and the Lord reigns! This was true when the Roman Empire was throwing Christians to the lions in the coliseum, and during Muslim expansion in the lead-up to the Crusades, and when the Roman Catholic Church was torturing our forefathers in the Spanish Inquisition, and when Hitler was tyrannizing Europe. And it will still be true whatever efforts might be made by all who oppose biblical Christianity in this country.

Jesus is Lord! This is our faith, and our joy, and the basis of our confident expectation for the future. Don't be a Chicken Little Christian, running around in a panic, filled with dread and despair. You betray your own profession of faith when you think like that. After the election Tuesday, no matter what happens, the Lord Jesus Christ still reigns.

This victorious, effective reign of our Lord Jesus has vast implications for life in this world. Let us consider two of them, first, with respect to civil governments, and second, with respect to the ministry and future of the church.

The Government Is Still Ordained by God (Rom 13.1-7)

This sermon's second vital truth to keep in mind after the election is this. No matter what happens, the civil government coming after Tuesday is the exact one which the Lord Jesus Christ Himself will ordain and sustain. That has always been the case in human history throughout the world, and it shall be until "Kingdom Come," as they say, when Christ returns from heaven. After the election, the government is still ordained by God.

I wouldn't be able to say this so surely except for the fact that Scripture teaches it very clearly. In many passages this truth is assumed and implied, but it becomes explicit most famously in Romans 13. Please look at it while I read it aloud.

¹ Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. ² Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: ⁴ For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. ⁵ Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. ⁶ For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. ⁷ Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

This passage is all the more impressive if we remember by whom it was written and under what circumstances. Paul the apostle wrote it when Nero was the Emperor of the Roman Empire—the infamous Nero, whose very name is synonymous with cruelty and debauchery. When Rome burned in 64 AD, Nero blamed the Christians and systematically persecuted them. Nero was so evil that many Christians viewed him as antichrist. Claudius was the emperor before Nero, and he wasn't much better. He was a hot-tempered man who loved the brutality of the gladiatorial games and enjoyed watching public executions. This was the same Roman government which was to execute Paul within ten years of writing the epistle to the Romans.

And what counsel does Paul give the Christians about their view of this government, and their relationship to it? He tells them to view it as ordained by God and to live as good citizens under its authority, being subject to it and paying taxes and honor to whomever these things are due. Think of it! Christians, the beloved children of God, being subject to the most wicked rulers, honoring them and supporting their government!

We could have known that all civil governments are ordained by God before we ever came to this passage in the Bible. God established civil government with the power of the death penalty for capital offenders long ago, even from the time Noah got off the ark, when

this principle was announced: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image” (Gen 9.6). The fact that God is absolutely sovereign, ruling all His creatures and all their actions, certainly implies it. Nebuchadnezzar learned this lesson the hard way, that “the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men” (Dan 4.17). After Nebuchadnezzar’s public humiliation, he confessed that God’s “dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4.34-35).

In Paul’s argument, once it is established that whatever civil authorities exist are placed there by God, and possess divine authority to carry on the functions of civil government, then it necessarily follows that we Christians must be subject to them, and honor them, and pay taxes. Failure in this is to revolt against God Himself, Paul says—with Christ’s authority as an apostle, I might add.

And to drive home the point for us, all this is true of the current administration of President Donald Trump, and it will continue to be true after the election, whether he wins re-election or Joe Biden or someone else takes his place.

One news report says three quarters of us are concerned there will be widespread violence in the wake of this election, no matter the result (<https://www.foxnews.com/politics/three-quarters-americans-election-violence-poll>, accessed 31 Oct 2020). This concern has also increased dramatically from four years ago. It is perfectly obvious to me that such violence would be a flagrant violation of God’s revealed will for Christians in Romans 13. If this counsel is good advice for Christians under Nero, it still applies to us after the election on Tuesday. No matter who wins, it will be the Lord Jesus Christ who causes it to happen and invests him or her with the authority of President of the United States. I pray that especially all the Christians across the country will carry out the righteous conduct described in Romans 13, no matter the result of the election. That is because, after the election, the government is still ordained by God.

The third major truth I would like to bring out in this sermon also follows from the unshakeable sovereign reign of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it pertains to something much more important than civil government—the church!

The Church Is Still Triumphant in Christ (Matt 16.18; 2 Cor 2.14)

Because Jesus is Lord, after the election, the church will still be triumphant in Christ. Defying all hostile powers, Jesus boldly proclaimed, “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16.18). We all know that the church Jesus has in mind here is not a building or even an organization but a redeemed people, the elect of God called out from the kingdom of Satan, delivered from the powers of evil, and given life and liberty in Christ for all eternity. “The gates of hell” is an idiomatic expression for the powers of death—which is itself a symbol of all that is anti-God, miserable, and under a just curse for its evil.

This proclamation is the cosmic battle-cry of our Warrior-King Jesus Christ and a divine prophecy guaranteeing valiant conquest in His long siege against the enemy. It is very emphatic by the use of positive and negative affirmation. “I will build My church,” the risen Lord says, who has received all power in heaven and in earth (Matt 28.18). He first said this 2000 years ago and He has been building it ever since! And likewise, the devil and his minions

have fervently opposed the spread of the gospel, the salvation of souls, and the glorification of the name of Jesus Christ throughout the world, and all to no avail. Every single one of the persons for whom Christ died either has been saved already or will be in His time, and the host of Jesus' faithful disciples has already grown beyond all human measure, including individuals "for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev 5.9 ESV). From the little band of one hundred and twenty mentioned in Acts 1, adherents have increased to the point that those who identify as Christians number 2.4 billion, almost one-third of the world's population, far more than any other religion (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_religious_populations, accessed 31 Oct 2020). This is not to suggest that all these people are saved, but rather that in a very dramatic way, and against all opposition, the living, reigning Lord Jesus has been doing battle with the devil and prevailing over him, rescuing from his clutches every single sinner chosen by God from eternity to be saved. Six hundred million more people identify as Christians than as Muslims, the second largest religious group. Hindus, secularists, Buddhists, and other religious groups are much, much smaller.

When there were not nearly so many Christians in the world, the apostle Paul in his generation served Christ with good morale and confident hope that the gospel ministry was not in vain. He believed it was accomplishing exactly what Christ intended. That is why Paul could write the way he did in 2 Corinthians 2.14, "But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere" (ESV). Here, "Paul compares the irresistible advance of the gospel, in spite of temporary frustration, to a Roman *triumphus* ('triumph') in which the victorious general, along with his proud soldiers, used to lead in triumphal procession the wretched prisoners of war who were thus exposed to public ridicule" (EBC, in loc.). Nero in Rome might seem impressive and fume against the Christians, but God leads His servants in Christ anyway, and their trek is an unstoppable march to victory as the gospel spreads and the well-deserved fame of our Savior becomes more and more widely known. Nero couldn't do anything to stop it!

Call all this to mind after the election on Tuesday, beloved! Whatever the results may be, the church is still triumphing in Christ. Many professing Christians seem more concerned about the well-being of the United States than they are about the church, or they think the church's fortunes rise and fall with religious freedom in the USA, and that helps explain their obsession with politics and neglect of worship and fellowship and evangelistic witness. And then they are far too elated with political victories and dejected by political defeats.

Does Scripture reveal anything about the destiny of the United States of America? Of course it does! As a political entity, it is destined for the trash heap of history, if not before Christ returns, when He returns. That great judgment day is described symbolically in Revelation 14.8, "Another angel, a second, followed, saying, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made *all nations* drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality'" (emphasis mine). We read elsewhere in Revelation that *all nations* were deceived by her sorceries (18.23), and that includes our beloved nation with all the rest. You see, all that finally matters is that the one holy nation (1 Pet 2.9), the spiritual Israel which is the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it, alone, shall be saved. And because Jesus is Lord, it shall!

Now please don't misunderstand me. I love our country! Patriotism has deeply stirred me from my boyhood when I remember having bedroom curtains with artwork depicting themes from the American Revolution. I have held a secret security clearance and performed defense work as an electrical engineer for the US military, and I am glad to have rendered this

service. I proudly display an American flag and I love the national anthem. I know that important issues are at stake in this election. I fully intend to vote, as is my habit even in primary and local elections. I will not be very happy about certain candidates winning, and I will breathe a sigh of relief if my candidates prevail in the democratic process.

But after the election on Tuesday, I will remember that Jesus Christ is Lord, and whatever government comes about is ordained by God, and finally, that the church is continuing in triumph toward an ultimate victory over all our foes! As the hymn writer said so eloquently,

The church shall never perish! Her dear Lord to defend,
To guide, sustain, and cherish, is with her to the end;
Though there be those that hate her, and false sons in her pale,
Against or foe or traitor she ever shall prevail.

'Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation of peace forevermore;
Till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest,
And the great church victorious shall be the church at rest.

—Thomas Benson Pollock, 1871, *The Church's One Foundation*

Next Tuesday is completely in God's hands, the God we worship, and the God who loves us as His own chosen people, bought by the blood of Christ and preserved for His everlasting kingdom of grace and glory. My dear, dear fellow Christian! Keep everything in biblical perspective in these turbulent times! We are on the winning side already and our ultimate victory is assured. Let not your heart be troubled. The Lord reigns. He sets up rulers and casts them down at His good pleasure. And He is with His church to the end, to defend, guide, sustain, and cherish her for the praise of the glory of His grace, in this age and the age to come. "If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen" (1 Cor 16.22-24 ESV).