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Tillamook, Oregon

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Tyranny and the Church

March 10, 2024

Sermon Text: Assorted Scriptures
on *Tyrants as rulers*

Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 8

“On the last day of February 1528, a young man of 24 years was executed by being burned alive at St. Andrews (Scotland). He was Patrick Hamilton, and over the next 30 years some 20 men and women were to endure a similar death – sometimes singly, as in Glasgow and Cupar; sometimes in groups, two and then another four in Edinburgh in the 1530’s and finally, in 1558, a man of more than

80 years of age, Walter Milne, endured the last such fire in St. Andrews.

The explanation was to be found in the book which was prohibited reading in the Scotland of the 1530’s, William Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament. There, in the book of Revelation, it speaks of ‘witnesses’ being put to death, and shows that the sufferings of the Christian church between Christ’s first and second advents are not due, in the first instance, to human folly but to demonic evil. Certainly the Devil uses men and the way he does so is set down in that same Scripture. We read in Revelation 13 of Satan’s purpose being expressed through two ‘beasts,’ the one,

nations and their governments, the other false religion – religion that looks like a lamb but speaks lies as a dragon. By such passages God gave to the martyrs a true understanding of their sufferings.

Patrick Hamilton was condemned for affirming that the sacraments cannot save. The first charge against him at his trial was that he said ‘the corruption of sin remains in a child after baptism.’ Another charge was his statement that a man is not justified by works, but by faith alone.

These were the days of John Knox who, initially was himself a priest in the very “church” which burned Hamilton. We do not know the precise date, but Knox himself said of that day...”it pleased God to call me from the puddle of papistry.”
[*A Scottish Christian Heritage*, Iain Murray, Banner of Truth Trust]

This morning, I would like to turn your attention to a topic about which God’s Word has much to say. We can state the subject in question form:

What is the true church, the real body of Christ, to be in a time of tyranny? What is our role? What are we to do?

These are vital questions. They concern matters which, if we do not get them right, can result in Christ’s people being led down one of those detours which Bunyan’s Christian in Pilgrim’s Progress was deceived into following.

There have been times in the history of the church when such false paths were taken, all to the harm of the gospel –

“Revolution has been confused with Reformation. Revolution says that physical force must be used to further the progress of Christianity (the Crusades?). But such things are more likely to ruin a cause than to save it.” [Ibid]

Why should we consider this subject at the present time? I suggest at least two reasons:

1. Tyrants inevitably arise all

down through the history of the world. As Christians, we can expect to face the tyranny of a tyrant – even within the visible church both locally and nationally. There are little tyrants such as Diotrephes (see 3 John), and then there are much larger tyrants such as the Pope.

2. Second, it is important for us to hear what God's Word says on this subject because we here in our own nation are experiencing a bit of what it is like to be citizens in a nation ruled by a tyrant.

I do not want to inject politics into the pulpit, telling people how to vote or pushing for this or that candidate for some office. The pulpit of the Christian church is for the preaching of the gospel, the proclamation of the truths of God's Word.

But we are faced with a tyrant in this nation right now and we are compelled to consider what the Bible says about how we are to respond, about how God Himself views the tyrant, and what our hope

is in times of tyranny. And so, I want us to consider this morning what the Lord has said to us on this subject in order to give us hope and to keep us from being drawn off of the work Christ has called us to do.

I say that we are faced with a tyrant right now in our own nation. And I think in a way which our country has not seen before. All of this struck me last week when I watched the current President actually threaten the 9 justices of the supreme court for their ruling about Roe vs Wade. And it was indeed a threat. It wasn't the first time that the judicial branch of our government had been threatened by this administration. And this threatening has been permitted without consequence, regardless of the law of the land.

These are the actions of a tyrant. An angry, compassionless, selfish tyrant and those who secretly operate out of sight. It was the same in Israel centuries ago. Listen again:

Eze 8:9-12 And He said to me, "Go

in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here." (10) So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts and detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around. (11) Standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them, each man with his censer in his hand and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising. (12) Then He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.'"

Here then is this man, this tyrant, holding the office of President in our own nation today, threatening anyone who opposes the mass murder of babies or who stands for righteousness. And doing so before the entire nation to the cheers of his followers in congress.

It is necessary then that we take time this morning to hear what the Lord says about these tyrants.

What is a Tyrant? What is Tyranny?

“Tyranny is the arbitrary or oppressive exercise of power; it is the unjustly severe use of authority; despotic treatment or influence; harsh, severe; or unmerciful action.” [Oxford Dictionary]

There are many examples of tyrants in Scripture and I think that one of them in particular shows us what a tyrant is:

Exo 5:1-2 And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" (2) But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go."

Here is a tyrant. Notice what he is

and what he does. He sits on a throne. Rulers, as we know from Romans chapter 13, are appointed by God for the good of the people. They are to be a cause of fear to the wicked. But tyrants misuse their office. They refuse to humble themselves before the Lord and to carry out their office for good. They become a law unto themselves. “*Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice!?*”

A tyrant then is a king or president or congressman or governor who uses his or her office for personal power and control for their own glory and enrichment. Tyrants use the people who they are supposed to be seeking the welfare of. Inevitably you will always see a tyrant growing wealthier and wealthier.

What else do we see to be true of a tyrant? Tyrants *oppress*. Pharaoh had enslaved the Israelites. And to be more specific, *tyrants particularly focus their oppression upon the people of God. Upon the true Church*. Our current President claims to be a Christian and a member of the “church” of Rome.

But in fact he and his “church” are antichrist.

The anger and wrath of the tyrant is always particularly intense toward Christ and His people, just as Pharaoh’s evil was directed against God’s people, Israel. This tells us that the tyrant’s tyranny is fundamentally *satanic*. Tyrants themselves are slaves of the devil and instruments used by him in his efforts to destroy Christ’s church. This should be of no surprise to us:

Eph 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Tyrants are *lawless*

That is, they have no regard for lawful law, but are a law unto themselves. In our own nation, a tyrant disregards the law of the land – which ultimately is the Constitution. The *judiciary branch* (the courts and especially the

Supreme Court) *interprets the Constitution* and rules whether particular actions are in agreement with the Constitution or not. The *legislative branch* makes laws, but those laws must be *constitutional*. And the *executive branch* is to execute those laws, always functioning in agreement with the constitution. But a tyrant is a law unto himself. And thus,

1Ki 21:1-7 Now Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. (2) And after this Ahab said to Naboth, “Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house, and I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money.” (3) But Naboth said to Ahab, “The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.” (4) And Ahab went into his house vexed and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him, for he had said, “I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.” And he lay down on his

bed and turned away his face and would eat no food. (5) But Jezebel his wife came to him and said to him, “Why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food?” (6) And he said to her, “Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, ‘Give me your vineyard for money, or else, if it please you, I will give you another vineyard for it.’ And he answered, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’” (7) And Jezebel his wife said to him, “Do you now govern Israel? Arise and eat bread and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.”

Once more then we see the satanic nature of the tyrant. He or she is of their father the devil. Satan’s man is the man of lawlessness:

2Th 2:3-4 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, (4) who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God,

proclaiming himself to be God.

And so, under our current tyrant's administration, we are being told that the Constitution is out of date and needs to be re-written. The number of Supreme Court justices needs to be increased (so, of course, the tyrant can appoint his own lackeys to the court). All of this is lawlessness. Tyrants are lawless. They make their own laws.

What else do we see in Pharaoh and Jezebel and other tyrants in Scripture? -

- Tyrants are *without mercy*.
- Tyrants have *no fear of the Lord*.
- Tyrants conspire against the righteous – often inventing and then making false accusations of them. For example, here is the conspiracy against Daniel in the account of the Lions' Den:

Dan 6:1-5 It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be

throughout the whole kingdom; (2) and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. (3) Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.

(4) Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. (5) Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God."

- Tyrants are *demagogues*. This is a very insightful word. Here is the definition:

"A leader who makes use of popular prejudices and false claims

and promises in order to gain power.”

In other words, a tyrant uses lies, promises, and flattery, pretending to be a champion of some cause of the masses. But it is all pretense and lies. He could not care less about the interests of the people. He uses them to gain power.

For example at the present time we have a President who pretends to be a champion of women, a champion of so-called “reproductive freedom,” when in fact he cares nothing for women or freedom. He is a demagogue, making false promises and pretending to be a champion of women (ie, ungodly women at that who want to murder babies) when in fact he is only using them to gain power. His continued allegiance to his wicked son is evidence of this.

Tyrants rise to power then through demagoguery.

What is God’s Attitude Toward the Tyrant?

What does the Lord think of the

tyrant? His attitude toward them is *wrath*. This is a certain promise of the Lord to us. The tyrant will never prevail. His doom is certain:

Act 12:20-24 Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food.

(21) On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. (22) And the people were shouting, “The voice of a god, and not of a man!”

(23) Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last. (24) But the word of God increased and multiplied.

And again:

Dan 5:25-31 And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE,

MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. (26) This is the interpretation of the matter: MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; (27) TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; (28) PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” (29) Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made about him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. (30) That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. (31) And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

Our current President has stood before the nation and demanded that it be lawful to murder babies. He has insisted upon all sorts of sexual perversions to be legalized. He promotes a one-world order by defying God’s judgment at Babel. He persecutes the righteous.

What is God’s attitude toward him?

There is no doubt. God’s wrath is upon him and we know that one day, sooner or later, the Lord will call him to stand before the Highest Court to give account.

What, then, is the Church to do?

Psa 50:14-15 Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, (15) and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

Listen to John Knox:

“Stand with Christ Jesus in this day of His battle, which shall be short and the victory everlasting! For the Lord Himself shall come to our defense with His mighty power; He shall give us the victory when the battle is most strong; and He shall turn our tears into everlasting joy.”
[*A Scottish Christian Heritage*, Iain Murray, Banner of Truth Trust]

We must always be reminded of who our enemy really is and then utilize the weapons Christ has provided us with:

perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

Eph 6:10-18 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. (11) Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. (12) For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (13) Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. (14) Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, (15) and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. (16) In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; (17) and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, (18) praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all

It is easy to become discouraged in times like these – and we will be discouraged if we make the mistake of putting our trust in man. The Church’s role in the time of tyranny is the same as always. Our sword is the Word of God. Our power is the power of God unto salvation – which is the gospel. We must never permit a tyrant to dissuade us from the mission Christ has called us to – to preach His Word and to be a light in a dark world.

The church is not to become a political lobbying entity. [This does not mean that we never speak out against evils we see our nation’s leaders committing.] We are not to be immersed in efforts to correct social evils through human efforts. We are never to become an arm of the State. Nor are we to become a carnal army set upon overthrowing the government. These things are all powerless against the real enemy.

Our weapons are spiritual. The Lord Jesus put it exactly and plainly for us-

Joh 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."

Our mission, given to us by Christ, is not to renovate and save this present world. We are citizens of another kingdom, and we have as our King the One who is the King of kings. All of the nations and kingdoms of this present world are going to end.

2Pe 3:11-13 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, (12) waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! (13) But according to his promise we are waiting for new

heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

What are we to be in a time of tyranny? *The Church*. What are we to do in a time of tyranny? *Preach the gospel, God's power to salvation for all who believe*. What is our role in a time of tyranny? *To be salt and light in and to a world perishing in sin*. As for the tyrants, the Lord will deal with them. One little word will fell them.