

God's Ideal Government

God and Government

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Now I want you to look at this passage of scripture because, as I've been praying, I have suspended temporarily my series on last things, and I plan to pick them back up in the not-too-distant future. And so, you may recall that I preached on biblical church government and that has some relevance to today, and I also preached on the significance of holy Communion.

Today we're looking at government and I want you to see this. I'm struck with verse 1, "When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges for Israel." I'm struck that children do not always follow in their parents' footsteps. Good child rearing, effective child rearing, teaching children how to live, training them up in the way they should go is not the ultimately effective thing in how children should go.

I'll tell you the number one way to raise children: it's on your knees crying out to God and saying, "Lord, I'm a failure. Please intervene! Please intervene! Please change my children's hearts!" Because I will tell you, parenting that's effective can only produce whitewashed sepulchers, hypocrites who are very effective in appealing to other people because of their good manners and good behavior.

What God wants is heart change and we should never forget it. So effective praying, effective parenting is done on your knees pleading with God.

Now, I'm struck with Samuel and his sons. Samuel obviously was a preacher, and as I look back on my failures as a parent, it's all due to my being a preacher. I was gone night after night after night. Sometimes I left birthday parties, sometimes I cut short a vacation because I was obsessed with being a good pastor which meant be there (for the people of my congregation).

You see, in the first church that I had after being ordained as a seminary graduate, I had one of my elders say to me at the end when I left Kansas to move to Louisiana, he said, “You are a fantastic preacher, but you are a terrible pastor.” And I think those words just leeches into my brain and they colored a lot of my thinking.

So, night after night after night after night I was gone, and had it not been for my wife, what in the world would have happened to our children? I’m not saying I was never there. I was. I’m not saying I didn’t love my children. I did. But I was often an absent father.

As I see the story of Samuel here, I see a man who was on a preaching circuit. That’s what he was doing. He was preaching all over Israel and Judah. He was there faithfully serving people, but what was the result? We can see that his sons Joel and Abijah, what did they do in verse 3? We are told they “Did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.”

Now, my first point is this: hereditary power is stupid. Hereditary power is stupid, and I want to think with you for a moment about all of the pomp and circumstance and the lowering of the American flag in light of the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

Where did all that pomp and circumstance come from? Do you know where? Queen Victoria, who was the longest reigning monarch in British history, had a son named Edward VII, and Edward just was bored to tears by the morality of his mother, and he loved to escape austere Victorian England and go to Paris where he lived a debauched and depraved life, Edward VII, although he evidently was a pretty good dad. But he loved all of the frivolity and celebration of Paris and I won’t go into the sordid details of his twisted life, Edward VII. But what’s interesting is that when he returned to become King of England at the death of his mom in 1901, he was the oldest successor to a king or queen of Britain until now, King Charles III.

So, we have some striking parallels. Who brought in all of this grand pomp and circumstance? He found a man (Reginald Brett) who directed plays and theater and he brought him in. And all of the pomp and circumstance that you see is not an ancient tradition going back to the beginning of kings in England; it is of recent origin. It originated in the very early days of the 20th century.

So, when you look at that and you think, “Oh, how grand! Oh, how magnificent!” I’ve seen clips, I don’t watch regular TV, but I do read the news and I do watch clips, and I watched Queen Elizabeth being lowered

into the crypt and, wow, that was interesting with the bagpiper—all of that and all that pomp and circumstance—it’s all an invention under Edward VII to give a sense of the greatness of our family, Germans who had to rename themselves in World War I. And never forget this: World War I was a war fought between the descendants of Queen Victoria, first cousins. They were all inbred.

So, when you think about royalty, think about what inbreeding does to people. So, we have King George, we have Tsar Nicholas, and we have Kaiser Wilhelm and they’re first cousins. And were they out in the battlefield? Well, at a point Nicholas II visits the front, and his uncle says, “You need to get back home because your German wife is destroying the country.”

But what I want you to see is that it is these hereditary rulers who bring so much misery on the human race, and they use poor people as cannon fodder for their own ambitions. Should that surprise us?

Well, we read on here in verse 4, “The elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, ‘You’re an old guy and what’s going to happen when you’re dead and gone?’” And so, they said, “We want a king.”

And notice God’s response to this, because this is very important, this is fundamental and foundational to understanding God’s ideal government. And so, this displeases Samuel, and he goes to the Lord.

And the Lord says to him in verse 7, “Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.”

When human beings choose a king to rule over them, instead of God’s form of government, which we’re going to see in a moment, what are they doing? They are rejecting God as the king. God is the King, and he administers his kingly rule through human beings in a certain form of government.

Now, I want you to think about this. If you go back two weeks ago, when I preached on biblical church government, elders and deacons, you saw something that was very true, and this is this: Every single local church is to have at least two bishops. That’s in the Bible.

At least two bishops. Why? Because if you look at the words as they are used throughout the New Testament, every bishop is an elder and every elder is a bishop, and it’s always plural. There’s never one guy in charge. Every church needs at least two pastors because a pastor is an elder, he is a

bishop, and one-man rule is an abomination to God. What is biblical church government as we survey the New Testament? It is a plurality of elders or bishops or shepherds or pastors ruling together, and these people are chosen by the common people (Acts 6:5; Acts 14:23; Titus 1:3, 5; Philippians 1:1).

What might we call that form of government? Since the people cast their vote, as in Acts 6, and elect their representatives, what might we call that form of government?

Well, if we look at Greek philosophy it's called an aristocracy, but if we think about it, it's really a republic. Biblical church government in the New Testament is a republic. It has nothing to do with our so-called political parties who like to grab names and run with them. Biblical church government is republican in that the people, the ordinary people, choose their leaders. You see, that goes back to the priesthood of the believer. You and I are all equal, but we elect some of ourselves to become leaders over us who do have real authority to guide us and direct us. That is a republican form of government.

Now if you go back to ancient Israel, you discover that after the death of Moses and after the death of Joshua, that God raised up judges to deliver the people, and so what I want you to see is this republican form of government that is operative up until the time of Samuel, when Samuel ends up selecting King Saul, this form of government depends utterly on people being godly.

You cannot have good government where the people are ungodly. Why did Israel cry for a king? Because they wanted an earthly savior, a worldly leader. That's what they wanted, that's what they craved, and notice this is condemned, and you see it again in the second main clause of verse 7, "It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king."

Now, this is a very important principle to follow and that means this, notice he said, "I want you to warn them about the dangers of a central government."

You see the government of Israel all the way through Samuel was never a central government. They didn't have a standing army. They depended on citizen soldiers who were raised up by God when a crisis arose. That's clearly the history of Israel.

But when they cry out for a king, listen to what Samuel tells them starting in verse 10, 1 Samuel 8:10, because God told Samuel, "I want you to warn them about having a strong central government."

Listen to what he says in verse 10, 1 Samuel 8:10, “Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, ‘This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots.’”

In other words, the strong central government is going to have a standing military that’s always ready to do the will of the leader of the country. So, you’re going to get your sons drafted and they’re going to serve in the military. That’s the first thing, a standing army. “Some trust in horses, some trust in chariots but we trust in the Lord” (Psalm 20:7). That was Israel’s way of government until the time of King Saul.

Then he goes on and he said, “Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots.” What is he saying?

He’s saying with a strong central government, with a king, you’re going to have tyranny and one of the marks of tyranny is a standing army that has real power and authority and they’re under the control of the king. The king calls the shots, and he enforces his ideas with his standing army, and your boys are going to be drafted and serve there. Your daughters are also going to serve and they’re going to make, in verse 13, he’s going to have them work as maids, as servants.

Notice what he says in verse 14, “He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants.” Wait a minute, you mean they might tax my property to the point I lose it and then they turn around and give it to their cronies? Was he writing this in 2020 or something? I mean, this goes back over 3,000 years. This is the way of a king. He’s going to take your land and he’s going to give some of it to his rich friends or the people who he favors.

Then notice what he’ll say in verse 15, “He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants.” You see, there already was a tithing law. The tithing law under the Old Testament was all about helping poor people. It was honoring God with their wealth, but it was designed to relieve the needs of the poor. And one of the tithes was about making sure that when you went to Jerusalem for a real festival, you had enough money to buy good food and wine. Did you know that? Part of the tithe was used for a celebration. Wow. But what’s he going to do? He’s going to put his bite on top of it.

Many years ago when I was the pastor of the church in Alexandria, I did a series that went on for about four months on money, and I preached one sermon in the morning and one sermon at night, and my oldest boy had a pet black tarantula that he named Black Hairy, and so in order to illustrate what it means to pay interest, I took the Hebrew word and I put it in Black Hairy's aquarium, and I translated, it means bite. And there was Black Hairy, who I never put my hand in that cage without wearing my winter motorcycle gloves because I knew better, and so there was Black Hairy with his bite.

Well, I want you to understand that not only interest is a bite, but government taxation is a bite as well. Government taxation is a bite as well. And think about our taxes. Think about it. Throughout my life as a pastor, one-third of every dollar I made went, in one form or another, to the government, and that's because I had a low tax bracket. One-third of every dollar because I paid self-employment tax rather than Social Security, so I paid the full amount. But it averaged out to 33 1/3 cents every dollar I earned. I'd say that Black Hairy, that was a pretty good bite.

And see what he's going to do. This tyrant king, verse 15, will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage and give it to his officials and servants.

Have you ever heard about the spoils of an election? What are the spoils of an election? When you win, you reward those who support you, you reward those who've contributed money to you, you reward those who've had parties in their home and invited their rich friends so that they will give you money. You reward those people.

I think of Louisiana. I wonder if somehow or another, with another governor, I could get on the levy board. That's supposed to be the best paying of all the boards in Louisiana, and obviously they didn't do their job if you look back to 2005.

And notice verse 16, "Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves." Wow, become a slave. Why do people want a strong central government under a man with real power and authority? People would rather be slaves than take responsibility for taking care of themselves and their families. Let that sink in. Let that sink in.

And then he says in verse 18, "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." Wow. You want a king? You want a strong central leader? You want somebody who will have a standing army to enforce his decisions? Do

you want that so that you don't have to take responsibility, so you don't have to take care of mom and dad and grandpa and grandma, so you don't have to protect yourself? Is that what you want? And that's what they wanted.

And in verse 19, "the people refused to listen to Samuel.

'No!' they said. 'We want a king over us. 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.'" People want visible, tangible protection. It just works so well, doesn't it?

Verse 21, "When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the LORD. The LORD answered, 'Listen to them and give them a king.' Then Samuel said to the men of Israel, 'Everyone go back to his home.'"

And I'm struck here. Why do you think that politicians, presidents, mayors, congressman, senators, kings, the House of Lords, the House of Commons, are better than you? What does Jesus tell us? Well, I want us to look at a couple of things that I think are interesting.

First, turn with me, if you will, to Psalm 146:3. I love the way this is expressed in the Scottish Metrical Psalms, but this is what he says, 146:3 there on page 980. He says in verse 3,

"Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing." And in the Scottish Metrical Psalms it goes like this, "Put no confidence in princes nor for help on man to depend. He shall die, to dust returning, and his purposes shall end."

You are a fool if you trust Joe Biden. You are a fool if you trust Donald Trump. Which fool did you vote for? I don't mean that sarcastically. What I'm saying is we all want a king. We want somebody who's going to be in charge to take care of us. We want that deep down, but the Psalms warn us not to put trust in these people, not to put trust in them.

I want you to see something else. I want you to turn over to Acts 17:11. Think about what this is said about in Acts 17:11. Paul has been reaching out to these believers in Berea and notice what we are told here in page 1,723.

Acts 17:10,

"As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue." Now notice verse 11, "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." Do you know what the greatest

sound I want to hear when I'm preaching? I want to hear rustling pages. Why? Because if you trust me, you're a fool. Am I trustworthy? I'll try to be. I want to be. I pray to be. But if you just take what I say, "Bob said it, it's gotta be right," you're a fool. Biblical people, godly people, wise people, people who believe in Jesus and want to live a life that will honor Jesus, examine and say, "Wait a minute, did he say that?" And they might write a little note, "I'm gonna check that out in my Bible this afternoon if what he's saying is really true." You see, these were more noble because they were checking on the preacher.

Listen, dear ones, don't trust me. Don't trust any preacher. Test it by the book. There's only one standard of truth, and it's certainly not the *Texarkana Gazette*. It's not *Newsweek* or *Life*, do they even exist anymore, *Life* and *Look*? It is, what? It's not even the *Wall Street Journal*. Rupert Murdoch bought it just like he bought the *NIV Bible*, so we can't get the original anymore. What? Yeah, check it out. Put no confidence in princes. Don't trust preachers. Don't trust leaders. You've got to have leaders, but you need leaders that follow the pattern of the Bible. And so, they were more noble.

I want you to see something else. Turn to the right to the book of Galatians for a moment, Galatians 2 and that is on page 1,811. And down at verse 11, Galatians 2:11,

"When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?'"

What I want you to see here is this, as we turn over to Matthew 23. What I want you to see here is the best men in the world are sinners and come short of being what they ought to be sooner or later. If you know me well, if you know me well, and you're with me very long, sooner or later, I will disappoint you. I will upset you. I will make you wonder, "I can't believe that he preaches in the pulpit and yet, wow."

What am I saying? I'm simply saying that the Bible teaches us that every single, solitary human being on the face of this earth, in this life, still comes short of the glory of God.

If you analyze 1 John 1 and verse 8, you see something profound, "If we say we have no sin the truth is not in us, we lie, we deceive ourselves." He isn't saying, as he says in verse 10, "If we say that we have not sinned," He's saying if we say we have no sin.

If you're sitting here this morning, make no mistake about it, sin affects how you think, sin affects how you respond to things. It really does. Can you think clearly and objectively and make an objective clear analysis about everything? When you read papers, do you ever spot the fact that they're writing with a bias? They are. Why?

Because every single, solitary soul here today is biased. I'm biased. You're biased. And we think, and we speak, and we write from within the perspective of our own biases. And here's the clincher: If you think that you're not biased, you're a bigot. I'll say it again: If you think you're not biased, you're a bigot. Bigots imagine they're not biased, and therefore when they see opposing views they write them off as that's just the raving of a lunatic.

I want you to see something profound here on page 1,536, and it deals with the priesthood of the believer. One of the great doctrines of the Reformation when Martin Luther on October 31, 1517, nailed his 95 points to debate on the door of the university church at Wittenberg in Germany, one of the great doctrines of the Reformation was the priesthood of the believer.

Let's look at this for a moment. If men and women are all prejudiced, if men and women all have a bias, if men and women all have blind spots about themselves and their own natures, what can we do?

Let's look there, begin at verse 8, Matthew 23:8, page 1,536. He said, "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers."

You are all brothers. You are all brothers. You are all the children of God. If you're a believer in Christ, you're a brother. It makes no difference what your gender is, it's the way the biblical words are used. Brother or sister, you're brothers. You are alike, and when you elect leaders, you should elect people who are like you, knowing that they are also affected by sin.

Remember the doctrine of total depravity? It doesn't mean that people are as bad as they can be; it means that every aspect of the human personality has been affected by sin.

So, you choose leaders who are brothers of yours, brothers and sisters, people who love Jesus, but don't love him perfectly, because if they loved him perfectly, we'd be visiting them on November 2, which is the Day of the Dead when people of Hispanic origin go to the cemeteries. That's not All Saints Day, that's November 1st, but All Souls Day when you go to the graves of the rest of the folks.

There are no perfect people and notice what he says, "You have only one Mater and you are all brothers."

Look at verse 9, "And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

So, let's see if we can sum this up. One of the great doctrines of the Reformation is the priesthood of the believer. That means every single man, woman, and child here.

That means that you are equal. There's nobody who's superior to you. Do you really think that King Charles III is a better kind of man than you are?

You just don't know the man's story. You don't know the tape recordings they made of him. You don't know who he really is. Do you really think that Queen Victoria's son Edward VII was better than other people?

You just don't know his story, and there's a museum in Paris that shows many things about him. Kings are no better than you, nor are presidents.

When presidents take bribes, as they do, how are you going to get elected in the United States without taking bribes? Do you know what a television ad costs? You've got to accept bribes in order to be elected and what does a bribe do? It blinds the eyes to justice and truth (Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 16:19).

All I'm saying is this, it boils down to this: Politicians are no better than you or me. Most of them are worse. In fact, Daniel, in interpreting the vision that King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had had is striking. "The Most High rules over the affairs of men." Daniel never quoted this part of the dream to Nebuchadnezzar, but Nebuchadnezzar is confirming that this is what he had

dreamed after Daniel told him what he had dreamed. “The Most High rules over the affairs of men and he puts in power those whom he chooses and sets over people the *shafel* (לַפְּזִי),” Aramaic word, “the lowliest, laziest of men.” The lowliest and laziest of men (Daniel 4:17).

Now, this is a closing thought in this beginning of this series on God and Government: We have God’s ideal, but we also must remember that throughout history God’s ideal has rarely been followed. It was followed in Colonial New England, but it’s rarely been followed throughout history. Instead, people will choose a tyrant.

We want somebody who will take care of us. We want somebody who will protect us. So, we cannot confuse God’s will of decree, which is secret and includes tyrants and people like King Saul who did all of the things that Samuel describes, with what we might call God’s complecational will, that is, what pleases God.

What form of government pleases God? We’ve got the answer right here in 1 Samuel as we surveyed New Testament government and Old Testament government. What form of government pleases God? God’s will of his declared pleasure is very different from God’s will of decree, because God decrees tyrants sometimes to chasten people and cause them to seek his face. Without a tyrant putting a whip to our back, many of us would never pray.

So, we have to distinguish two things: what God declares pleases him versus what God decrees for his own purposes, which ultimately for the good of his people.

So, there in Daniel, we are told something about leaders, kings, those in authority, princes, powerful people: God rules in the affairs of men and nations and sets over people the lowliest, the vilest, the laziest of people.

You want somebody like that to rule over you? So, I urge you to do this: pray. Pray earnestly to God. Going to the ballot box and voting is good, and it’s important, I’m grateful for having the franchise, the ability to vote, but remember this: elections are often stolen.

I’m not making a comment about 2020, I’m saying elections are often stolen.

I think about a famous Texas president, you remember “Landslide Lyndon”? Stolen ballot boxes? This has been going on from time immemorial. If there’s a lot of cash involved, then hiding votes and stuffing ballot boxes is simply par for the course. It’s nothing new.

What am I saying? The most important single thing you can do between now and election day is, what? Pray. Pray.

Pray because the prayers of God's people change the world. God responds to the prayers of his people with brokenness.

So, summing it up: God's ideal form of government is not a king. Why should the son of a king rule in place of his father when he's probably a terrible person? It is a republic, and the model for church government is the model for good government, which is why early Americans in Colonial New England chose that model of civil government. Vote and pray.

Let's pray.

Lord, I pray that you would bless this first in a series of sermons to our hearts to change us how we think. And Lord, I want to pray also because I have not really elaborated on the gospel in this sermon, to remember what Jesus himself says about himself: He is the King, he is the great King. And when Israel rejected the republic that God had established, they rejected God as their King. Lord, we want King Jesus. I pray if there's anyone here today who has never bowed her knees or his knees to the King of kings and Lord of lords this would be that day, and it would be the day when they cast themselves on your mercy in the Lord Jesus Christ. For Jesus' sake. Amen.