

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, November 8, 2020**

A PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE ELECTION

Jeremiah 17:5-8; Psalm 146:5-10

I was intending to continue our profiles of Paul's friends and partners who are mentioned in Colossians 4. But I sensed the Lord nudging me to say something about the election today. If there is wisdom and value in what I say, it comes from the Lord and not from me. While I have my own political convictions, I know full well that I am not infallible when it comes to politics (or anything else). But God's Word, rightly understood and applied, is infallible. As *The Message* paraphrases 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another – showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us." Amen to that.

2020 has been a year like no other ... and it is not over yet. In some ways, the election of 2020 has been an election like no other. There have been other contested Presidential elections in our history. The outcome of the 2016 election has been contested by President Trump's adversaries for the last 4 years. Prior to that, one only has to go back to the 2000 election, which was finally settled by the Supreme Court more than 5 weeks after Election Day. Other contested elections in our history include the Presidential elections of 1800, 1824, and 1876. All of which is to say, as uncomfortable as the past several days have been, to have a closely contested election not settled on Election night is not unprecedented in American history.

When I put this message to bed a little before noon yesterday, there was not yet a declared winner of the Presidential election. Now we know that, pending the outcome of legal challenges by President Trump, former VP Joe Biden will be inaugurated as our 46th President in January. It doesn't become officially official until the Electoral College votes on December 14.

Regardless of the final outcome, every American should want every legally cast vote in every state to be counted. Additionally, we should all want no illegally cast vote to be counted. We should all want to be confident beyond a reasonable doubt that the outcome of the election is honest and fair and just. Regardless of our political affiliation, all Americans should be in agreement about these things.

Some of you may be happy or even ecstatic that former VP Biden has been declared the winner. You may feel a renewed sense of hope for America. You may be thrilled, or just relieved, that President Trump will not have a 2nd term. Or, conversely, you may feel disappointed. Or even angry. Despite the hopeful, unifying tone of President-Elect Biden's speech to the nation last night, you may be fearful about the direction a Biden Administration will likely lead our country.

You may wonder how so many Americans could vote for the other candidate, whichever candidate that may be. You may feel frustrated or perplexed about the state of our union and the soul of our nation. You may be distressed about the direction we seem to be headed as a nation. Regardless of your political viewpoint – regardless of whether you voted for Trump, Biden, or neither – there is clearly much in America to be concerned about.

In his BreakPoint commentary on Election Day (“today’s BreakPoint: Election Day 2020,” www.colsoncenter.org), John Stonestreet noted two opposite errors that Christians, as well as others, are inclined to make. The first is what the French philosopher and sociologist Jacques Ellul called “the political illusion,” which is the idea that politics is *the most important* aspect of life, and that *everything* rests on political outcomes (like who wins an election or which party is in control of Congress). As Stonestreet says, the political illusion means “if our guy is in office, all will be well; if their guy is in office, all will be lost.” He says: “to describe a particular candidate in messianic terms is to suffer from the political illusion. To describe him or her as the anti-Christ is also to suffer from the political illusion. No political candidate will ‘save Christianity.’ No candidate can ‘irreparably harm’ it either.”

No President or candidate for President is America’s “savior.” To think otherwise is to fall victim to the political illusion.

The other error that some Christians embrace is what Stonestreet calls “the political *delusion*,” which is the belief that political engagement is pointless and unnecessary, or even sinful, and that Christians should withdraw from involvement in politics and focus only on the work of saving souls. To embrace this delusion is to reject our calling as Christians to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16), and to live out our faith in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ in every sphere of our life here on earth.

Do we need Christians to be involved in the political life and leadership of our nation? Absolutely.

Do we need to be involved personally in the political life of our nation? Yes.

Should we look to politics or to a particular candidate to “save” us, or to “save” our nation from whatever it is that we need to be saved? No. No. A thousand times no. Donald Trump is not America’s savior. Neither is Joe Biden.

I think you already know this. But I thought it might be good to say it out loud.

In the days and weeks to come, until Inauguration Day next January and beyond, we need to remember where our hope lies. Regardless of who resides in the White House, Jesus is the hope of the nations, and the hope of our nation.

We who belong to Jesus need to remember where our unity is found. Red, blue, purple, Democrat, Republican, conservative, moderate, progressive, black, white, yellow, brown, male, female, our unity in the Lord Jesus Christ transcends every other distinctive in our lives.

As followers of Jesus, we must not allow politics to divide us from one another. What unites us – our faith in Christ – is greater than anything else.

As followers of Jesus, we need to remember where our strength and power come from. The greatest power we have is not political. It is spiritual. Political power is deceptive. It can easily lead you astray. It can lead you to embrace the political illusion and to put all your eggs in the political basket. Our strength and power come from our connection to the Lord Jesus Christ. Our strength and power comes from our relationship to God. Our strength and power come from the Holy Spirit, from God with us, dwelling in us, to give us all we need for life and godliness in this world. Regardless of who occupies the White House or which party controls the House and the Senate, it is the grace and strength of the Lord Jesus Christ that make us truly strong (2 Timothy 2:1).

We also need to remember to whom our ultimate allegiance belongs. In the midst of political wranglings, we may lose sight of what – or Who – really matters most. We may become so intent on winning politically that we temporarily forget that, win or lose, God still reigns. We may become so consumed with all things political that we compromise our witness to the Lord Jesus Christ, and we fail to demonstrate His love and grace in our words and actions and posts on social media. Instead of modeling winsomeness, we may allow anger, incivility, a judgmental spirit, or distortions of the truth to poison our witness.

In everything we do and say, we should ask ourselves: How does this reflect the love and grace and truth of Jesus? How does this reveal the character of Jesus? How does this bear witness to the truth of the gospel? How does this reflect the greatness and glory of God? How does this express my devotion, my allegiance, to the Lord Jesus Christ?

In times like this – and at all times – we need to think and act and speak like followers of Jesus. Because that is what we are. Nothing in life matters more than being rightly related to Him. Your identity in Christ is way more important than your identity as a Republican, Democrat, or Independent. Your identity in Christ is way more important than whether you think of yourself as conservative, moderate, or liberal. You and I are to bring every aspect of our lives, including our politics, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Because every square inch of this universe, and every second of your life, ultimately belongs to Him.

Let me share with you a couple verses from Jeremiah 17, where God is speaking to His covenant people through the prophet Jeremiah. We know it is God Himself speaking, because it says in verse 5: “this is what the LORD says.” In the old King James Version, it says: “thus sayeth the LORD.”

The Lord proceeds to pronounce a curse on those who put their trust in human leaders or human ingenuity or power, whose hearts turn away from the Lord and His ways. He says they are like “tumbleweed on the prairie,” blown here and there by every blast of the wind, living “rootless and aimless in a land where nothing grows” (17:6, *MSG*). The language is poetic and picturesque. I think you get the picture. They are not secure. Human leaders and their plans come and go. Those who turn away from the Lord and His ways will not prevail in the long run. This, of course, applies both to Republicans and Democrats, to conservatives and liberals.

But listen to what the Lord says in verses 7 and 8:

“But blessed are those who trust in the LORD,
 whose confidence is in Him.
 They will be like trees planted by the water
 that send out their roots by the stream.
 They do not fear when heat comes;
 their leaves are always green.
 They have no worries in a year of drought
 and never fail to bear fruit.”

The Message says:

“Blessed is the man who trusts me, GOD,
 the woman who sticks with GOD.
 They’re like trees replanted in Eden,
 putting down roots near the rivers –
 never a worry through the hottest of summers,
 never dropping a leaf,
 serene and calm through droughts,
 bearing fresh fruit every season.”

When elections are close and contested, when a pandemic disrupts life as we know it and threatens to overwhelm us with fear, the Lord repeatedly reminds us that *He. Is. Lord* – that God in heaven rules over all the nations, over the whole of His creation, every square inch of it. And He calls us to trust in Him, to stick with Him, to renew our trust and hope in Him day by day by day, in the midst of every setback, every disappointment, and every challenge we face in this life. When we like the direction of our country – politically, morally, and spiritually. And when we don’t. *Blessed* are those who trust in the Lord. You can go to sleep in peace tonight, and every night, with your trust lodged in Him.

As it says in Psalm 146:

“Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
 whose hope is in the LORD their God.
He is the Maker of heaven and earth,
 the sea, and everything in them –
the LORD, who remains faithful forever.
He upholds the cause of the oppressed.
He gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets prisoners free,
the LORD gives sight to the blind,
the LORD lifts up the fallen,
the LORD loves the righteous,
the LORD watches over strangers,

the LORD takes the side of orphans and widows.
But He frustrates the ways of the wicked” (146:5-9).

Do you hear that? God frustrates the ways of the wicked. They will not prevail against Him. The kingdom of God will triumph over all His enemies.

Psalm 146 ends with this:

‘the LORD reigns forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the LORD” (146:10).
[*Italics* added.]

I don’t know if you needed to hear this message today, but I believe it is what God wanted me to say. The Lord willing, we will return to the “Profiles in Partnership” in Colossians 4 next Sunday.

Until then, and always, may we not fall prey to either the political *illusion* or the political *delusion*, but trust in the Lord wholly, and stick with Him through thick and thin. Now and always, may God bless America, and may America – may *we* and all of our fellow Americans – bless God.

Lord, let it be so in us. Amen.