

The Spiritual Warrior at the Election Booth

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- [0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 31st of October 2004.
- The preacher is Paul Dudley. His sermon is entitled The Spiritual Warrior at the Election Booth and is based on Romans chapter 13 verses 1 to 7.
- We're going to start with some easy questions to start with and we're going to move to some harder ones. Just a show of hands. No calling out please. That's for you Steve Brown. Right.
- Here we go. Who is the leader of the current government? Well done. No, no, no. That's the, sorry I should have said the federal, federal government.
- Thank you for that Paul. A clarification on the question. The federal government, anyone? Yes? No, no, no. Wrong country. Oh come on, it's not that hard.
- [1 : 0 5] Yes? Yes. Thank you. Thank you. Gosh, we're going to have some troubles when we get to some of the later ones here. What system of government do we have here? Yes? Charity. Yes.
- Thank you. Any other takers? Thank you very much. Westminster. Who is the opposition, the shadow treasurer just appointed last week? Yes?
- Wayne Swan. Wayne Swan. Thank you very much. We have some people who have been paying attention here. Who here? Here's an easy one. Our local minister in this region. Not religion minister for you, Paul.
- I thought you'd step in there. I thought I'd just clarify that. Political minister around here. Who got in? Yes? Thank you. Kevin Andrews. Yes? Thank you very much. How many did the Family First Party get in the Senate?
- Yes? Oh, no, you've already answered a question. Someone else. Go on. How many? Yes? One. Well done. How many are in the House of Representatives? Yes, Steve Brown.
- [2 : 0 6] 150. How many of that, Steve Brown, are the coalition at the moment? Close. 85. 85. Close. 87. Thank you very much.
- How many? This one's for Paul Barker. How many extra seats did the, in the Senate, did the Greens get? Extra seats. Oh, he's dumped him.
- No, that is incorrect. They've got two extra seats in the Senate. Now, if you're like me, you'll find this quiz rather tedious, boring, mundane.
- Who cares? Let me make a confession. My voting, the way that I voted over the last two, not this last election, but the two previous elections, the way I voted was I voted for John Howard.
- I'm unashamedly I voted for John Howard because I taught his son and I wanted to be able to claim I taught the Prime Minister's son. That's how much I cared about politics. Many of these questions, I actually had to ask Michelle what I should ask you.

[3 : 14] It just goes to show you that the whole government and all this type of thing, to me, it doesn't seem that important. But as we saw last week, every area, every area of our lives as Christians is an act of spiritual worship.

It matters. It actually matters. We live in a spiritual age, as I said last week, where we want connections. Our society wants connections with the cosmos. We want to be spiritual people.

You know, we want to get in contact. And so we see there that there are particular spiritual actions that get you close to the cosmos. Gardening.

A great spiritual action. Talking to whales. Another one that's up there. A great spiritual action. All these things. Going to the top of a mountain.

There's all these sacred moments, society tells us, that are spiritual moments. I think as Christians we can do the same. We can say there are particular moments that are sacred in our lives.

[4 : 19] That is, we can turn places and times in our life that are sacred rather than seeing our whole lives as an act of spiritual worship. We can turn our buildings into sacred places.

This is where spiritual activity happens, just in this building. We can think that only spiritual worship or spirituality only happens when we sing or pray.

But as we saw in Romans 12 verses 1 and 2 last week, we saw that because of God's mercy, because of the mercy God has shown us in bringing us into relationship with him, because of this great mercy God has shown us, we are to live our lives wholly, all of our lives, as living sacrifices, acceptable to God.

We are to be transformed. We are to be separate from this world. We are to think differently from the world. We are to think God's thoughts after him. Therefore we are to, as verse 2 says there in chapter 12, It does matter what we do.

It does matter that we go to the polling booth. It does matter that we've got a government. It matters what we do at our kitchen sink. It matters what we do in our jobs.

[5 : 45] It matters how we conduct our sex lives. Every mundane, every lowly job, every high job, every moment of our lives are spiritual actions.

Well, we saw last week, we looked at how in verses 3 through to 13, Christians were to live their lives with other Christians. In chapter 12, verses 14 through to 21, we saw how we were to live our lives in light of those who persecuted us.

And in tonight's passage, we even see the way that we are to relate to our governments, how we obey them. So therefore, as we can see here, Paul's trying to help us understand that it does matter about governments.

So therefore, such questions like, is it okay to be involved in politics? Is there room between where the government and the church overlap? Is there an area there where they overlap? How should we vote?

Should we vote at all? What role does government have in the Christians' lives? Should we obey them all the time? These are all good questions, and questions that we need to think through if we are to live lives that bring honour and glory to God.

[7 : 00] So as you look in this passage, let me just suggest to you a few things that we're going to see in this passage. We're going to see that governments are established by God. God is the one that actually establishes all our secular governments around the world.

God is the one who is behind it. And we see that in verses 1 and 2. We see also what role they are meant to have in verses 3 and 4. That is, what roles do these secular governments have in this world?

How do they fit into God's plan? And at the end we're going to see how there's an example of how we ought to live our lives in light of that. Well, this is only just a little picture, these seven verses.

There aren't a great deal of New Testament passages that we've actually got to try and understand the secular government that is out there. The federal, state and all these different governments. How do we understand them?

There's only a few passages in the New Testament. And so what ends up happening is we have lots of books written from Christians' perspectives on how governments work and how they're meant to work and what they should look like.

[8 : 04] And what they do is they leap into the Old Testament and they start pulling out little passages and saying, well, because of this little passage, governments ought to be this way and governments ought to be that way. But what I want to do is I want to step back a little bit.

I went to the Impressionists. Did anyone else go to the Art Gallery just recently? I'm not a cultured man, but it was my day off. I had nothing else better to do. So I thought I'd better go get a bit of culture.

Went into the Art Gallery and I went and saw the Impressionists. And one of the things that struck me was if you got up close to some of these paintings, it was an ugly mess. It was very hard to see a tree.

It was just a stroke, you know, a bit of a blob there. And, you know, lots of strokes that were sort of, that was meant to be a house. And, you know, let me paint over here a horse for you. Yeah, there it is.

When you're up close, you just can't see it. But when you step back a little bit, the picture's just there. And you can see it all. And it's fantastic. Well, what I want to do in the next couple of minutes is I want to step back and have a look what the role of governments and authority is in the Bible.

[9 : 08] And particularly if we're going to think about governments and authority, we need to understand God's authority. We need to understand how God is king. So when we think of God, I guess, some things immediately come to mind.

We think that from the Bible that God's authority comes from himself. No one's come up to God and say, oh, God, we're going to give you the authority to be in charge of this world. Look, we're going to give you sort of rules here.

I wonder if you could just sort of be in control of this world, if that's okay. No, no. God's authority comes from within himself. It's not conferred. It's not granted to him. It comes from within him.

And he is the ruler of this world. He majestically speaks and he creates a world. He is in charge of it. He is its mighty ruler.

But we see a movement through the Bible. We see the way that humanity rejects God's authority. So we see a God who creates it. But then in chapter 3 of Genesis, we see a humanity that rejects God's authority, that doesn't want to obey his authority at all.

[10 : 19] But when we get to the end of the Bible, we see the picture is that in Revelation chapter 7, every knee will come and bow before God. Back to again being the way that it is in the beginning.

Obedying God. Every knee will bow before him. A final submission to the kingly rule and reign of God. But as we work through the Bible, we see that God, the way that he has his authority, is seen in four different ways.

I'm going to suggest them to you. They might be hard to remember, but I'm going to try and suggest to you there are four different ways that we see God's rule, the way that God shows his kingship in this world, that we see throughout the Bible.

The first thing is God brings about victory. He brings about salvation for his people. That is the act of God's kingship. Think of that great moment in the biblical history where Israel is on one side of the Red Sea and all of a sudden the sea just opens up.

I've always thought about this as a little kid. Imagine walking through and seeing a wall of water there. I'd always wanted to know whether you could put your hand into it or not. Could you sort of touch the fish that's just there?

[11 : 35] These walls of water. And you're walking in the middle of this sea. On dry land with these walls of water beside you. And you get to the other side. What a great moment of God's victorious salvation.

Here we see just a small picture of victory. A picture of salvation. There's the first thing. God's rule is seen in victory and salvation. The second thing that we see is God's judgment.

God's rule is seen by the way he brings judgment on those under him. Think of what it would have been like at Sodom and Gomorrah when fire and sulfur rained down from heaven.

That terrible moment of judgment. Think of all the other moments throughout the Old Testament of God pouring out his judgment on people and on disobedience. That's the second.

God's rule, his kingship is seen by his victory. Seen by the way he brings judgment. The third thing is the way that he creates a community. A possession for himself. The way that he establishes a kingdom of people.

[12 : 45] Back in Exodus chapter 19 we have this lovely picture of God saying you are my precious possession Israel. Not because you're more numerous.

Not because of anything that you've done. But because I loved you. Here's the third act of a king. Bringing a people to himself. The fourth that I want to suggest is the way that we see God's authority.

God's kingship. The way that people respond to that kingship. The way that they should acknowledge him, praise him and obey him. So there's four ways that we see God's kingship.

He brings victory. He brings judgment. He makes a community. And fourthly we see the way that people respond to it. But this way that God exercises this kingly rule over this world changes.

Because what we saw in chapter 3 is God separates himself from the people. So how does God bring about his judgment? How does God bring about his salvation? He brings it about by a mediator.

[13 : 49] Now this causes problems. It causes tensions. How can one person represent God? Moses was the initial person that represented God and his kingly rule.

Moses was the one who was chosen to bring salvation, judgment and bring a possession, bring a group together. But as Exodus chapter 20 says, this is an impossible task.

It's not appropriate in many ways to have this mediator figure. It's not going to work very well. We can't truly represent and carry out God's ways after him.

Well we see that in the Old Testament, don't we? The way that people continue to let God down, his rulers. In fact when we get to the kings, the great kings of Saul and David and of Solomon and the kings that follow, God also not only establishes his monarch, his representative king on earth in those men.

But he also has there to support them the laws, to keep them in check, to make sure that they obey him. And so God has these two ways of bringing about his rule and judgment, the laws and the kings.

[15 : 05] But again it just keeps on failing time and time again. As we read through the Old Testament it's just a sorry state. God's mediators bringing salvation and judgment and possession just failing time and time again.

But not only that, we see God's people failing in their response time and time and time again. It's not till we get to the New Testament that we see the fulfilment of all this that we see in the Old Testament.

We see the climactic establishment of God's kingdom. See Jesus came and he said the kingdom it's coming very, very soon. It's just around the corner.

We see Jesus bringing salvation. We see Jesus bringing judgment. We see Jesus bringing a people to himself. And we see also the human response to God's divine rule.

You see, Jesus is the one who brings about God's kingdom. God's kingdom has started. God's divine rule has started in this man Jesus. He brings two roles together.

[16 : 23] You see, he's the mediator of God's divine authority. He brings about judgment and salvation and possession. But he also fulfils the other role of being the faithful individual who obeys God and trusts in God perfectly.

He brings these two roles together in this one person. God's kingdom has started and Jesus is the first in it. The great thing is as we read in the New Testament is we can be a part of this kingdom now by faith.

By trusting in Jesus for him to be our perfect representative. We can trust in him and we can be a part of God's kingdom now. But there's a tension.

You see, why we can be a part of God's kingdom now by faith, the full realisation of that is yet to come. That's yet to come when Christ comes again. We live in the overlap of the ages.

The kingdom has begun but it's not fulfilled. We haven't got there completely yet. So here we see a picture of God's authority.

[17 : 33] We see the way that God appoints mediators but the way that Christ fulfils that role perfectly. The perfect mediator of God's salvation, judgement and possession.

We also see Jesus as the perfect human response. So we see there a picture of God's authority and the way that it should be.

But as we read in our verse tonight, chapter 13, verse 1, we see that God gives authority to secular governments. How do we understand these secular governments in light of this picture that we have of God establishing his kingdom, God bringing a people to himself, God being the great king?

You see, the picture that we have here, it would be good for you to have your Bibles open at page 923. The picture that we have here is we see that God establishes his authority here on earth in the secular governments but it's different to that of what we saw in the Old Testament.

So let me read to you verse 1. Let every person be subject to the governing authorities for there is no authority except from God and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.

[18 : 47] That is, all secular governments have been instituted by God. God is the one who has established them but they're not there to bring about salvation. they're not there to bring about a particular judgment in light of the picture that Christ has fulfilled but they do have a role.

Therefore, in verse 2, it says, if you resist authority you resist what God has appointed and those who resist will incur judgment. So there's consequences. God makes it very clear.

We are to obey the authorities that are above us. So the first thing that I want to say about our secular governments is that God is the one who has established them. The second thing that we see in verses 3 and 4 that God has a purpose in mind.

God's got a purpose in mind for the secular governments that are out there. Let's read in verses 3 and 4. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad.

Do you wish to have no fear of authority? Then do what is good for you will receive its approval for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong you should be afraid for the authority does bear the sword for the authority does not bear the sword in vain.

[20 : 00] It is a servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. God has a purpose in mind for our secular governments. It is there as servants to commend the good and punish the evil.

I'll say that again. The governments that are out there are God's servants to commend the good and punish the evil. You see we live in a fallen world and God uses the governments in this world to create a space to hold back evil to keep it in check.

It's there to punish the evil doers. It's there to hold it back. And the reason why God does this is so that there might be a space for the gospel.

So that the gospel might go out to the ends of the earth that we might proclaim it freely. God is securing a social space for the propagation of his gospel.

This is helpful for us to understand the role of governments. That is why John Howard and his government is there. It is there to provide a social space for the gospel here in Australia.

[21 : 17] Reflect on Australia at the moment. Reflect on the great freedom we have here to meet in this building. A month or so ago our family was involved in the Bibles for the persecuted.

Just little boxes that we had to put money in each day but it came with a little booklet and it spoke about countries where they are persecuted for believing in God for trusting in Jesus.

Places like Indonesia Malaysia Nigeria China and Egypt and they had individual stories there of terrible persecution of families torn apart of death terrible things happening.

It is a great privilege to be living here in Australia that we have a space where the gospel can go out. It is a great great privilege. Well as we think about this we think about God's great patience for this world.

See God sets up these world authorities and it's a part of his evidence that he is patient with this world. He's delaying his coming again that people might believe in him that people might trust in him.

[22 : 40] The reason why the sun comes up at the moment every single day at the moment is so that more people may learn to trust in Jesus. God in his mercy holds off that judgment day.

Governments play a role in that. They hold back the evildoers. They allow a social space that the gospel may go out and people may believe.

So the first thing is we see that God is the one who has established government. The second is God has a purpose in mind that governments are God's servants to commend good and punish evil.

And the third, while it's not there in the passage, is clearly seen that from what we've seen the governments that we have at the moment are only here for a limited time. They are there to help promote the gospel now.

The governments will not be there when Christ returns. They have a limited time and space. Well, that helps us get a bit of a picture of what governments are about.

[23 : 51] But it doesn't help us necessarily think about the little details. Like I imagine you were hoping that I'd tell you which party you should vote for now. Well, I'm not going to tell you what to vote for. That's something that you need to work through.

But my encouragement is to you, you do need to work through it. You need to think about who you should be voting for. Liberal, Labour, One Nation, the Greens, who are you going to vote for?

We need to be thinking about that, but thinking about it in light of the big picture. What about all the different styles of government? What about the democracy or capitalism or industrialisation or globalism?

Well, they're things that we need to work through and think about as well. We haven't got time to spend pouring over those, but they're things we need to think about. Which style of government is actually going to be serving itself or which government is going to be promoting a way of allowing the gospel to get in, that people may be saved?

need to need to need to be to be secure. We must remember the people of government is secure. That will help us spread the gospel.

[25 : 01] Well, let's try and think about how this might apply to us now. I think one thing is that as we look at the end of the passage in verses 6 and 7, it says that for the same reason you also pay taxes.

For the authorities are God's servants busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due.

What we see here is we are to obey our governments. That is, we are to pay our taxes. But not only that, to obey the road rules. That is, not trying to get that little 10% extra.

I live my life on the 10% extra. According to the police, if you're 10% just over, that should be within the bounds. Okay, so the speed limit is 100.

If I do 110, that's okay, it's only just a little bit over. But no, we have here that we are to obey our governments and what is set up there. We are to pay the taxes where the taxes are due.

[26 : 04] But is there a place where we can disobey our governments? We live in a country where we can worship freely. But what if our government turned and said that we weren't able to meet here anymore or to talk about Jesus?

Should we obey the government then? It seems clear to me that we are to obey God first, not our government. And so therefore I guess there are times where we need to work through where there are places for civil disobedience.

But we need to work out those lines clearly. I was a part of a bike riding club back in Bathurst. I used to love racing the bike. But there's this one old gentleman that would never ride with a helmet and he used to protest and said, I am never going to ride with a helmet.

The government can't tell me what I can and can't do. And so he used to get pulled up by the police quite regularly for not wearing his helmet when he was riding around the roads. We need to work out what is right and wrong to obey and disobey.

Well, as I reflect and bring this to a close, I guess some other things to think about is when it comes to a time of voting, make sure you research what you're going to do.

[27 : 18] We need to be praying for countries which are in the midst of persecution, that governments will come in, that will be good governments, that the gospel might go out. We also need to be thinking about what type of politics we want around and politicians, that it's okay to actually be involved in politics ourselves, but we must remember what it's there for.

My mother, as you know, is very ill. I spent a week with her a couple of weeks ago and it was a very significant week for me. In that week, my mum and my family came to realise that if she doesn't have an operation, she only has months to live.

Only months to live. She has liver cancer and bile duct cancer. She's going to be operated on this Saturday and it's her only hope of living longer than a couple of months, which is great and we're thankful for that opportunity.

But in the midst of that, it made me realise our lives will come to an end. Our lives will end one day. Seeing my mum having to face that was a great reality check.

I just happened to be reading a book at the time saying, don't waste your life. Don't waste your life. As I reflect on these last two sermons, we are to live lives that bring honour and glory to God every moment.

[28 : 54] That's our spiritual worship. Spiritual action is seen in every minute in everything that we do. Not that it might bring us to heaven, but it's done in light of what God has done for us.

Let us be people who don't waste our lives and get to the end of it and think, what a waste. Amen. Amen.