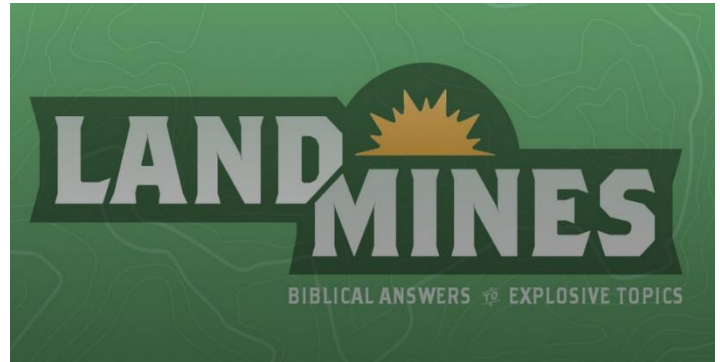




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LANDMINES: Biblical Answers to Explosive Topics



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Today we'll deal with what is probably one of the biggest landmines there is. If you want to end a party or create an issue, all you need to do is bring up either religion or politics. That usually results in people rolling their eyes and heading to the exits. But this morning we're going to look at how our religion should engage the politics in our world.

Politics was not created by American culture or by the 24-hour news cycle. Politics has existed since man first established any sort of government. The Bible speaks of it often. We read how the nation of Israel decided whether they would be ruled by God or ruled by a king. Biblical politics contained intrigue, such as the conflict that existed between King Saul and King David. Politics was involved when the nation of Israel was divided into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.

We see biblical politics perhaps more clearly however in the New Testament story of the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The religious leaders who were trying to garner political favor with Rome were threatened by this upstart Jesus and wanted Him off the political landscape. Pontius Pilate was worried about the impact of a religious uprising. The last moments of Jesus' life were steeped in political intrigue.

This sort of conniving and conflict continued throughout church history and still exists today. Politics impacts all our lives. But I'm thankful that the Scriptures reveal God's plans and purposes for human society which supersede those of politics. It wasn't really politics that got Jesus into trouble; it was God Who had planned that His Son would die. He simply used the politics of the day as the means by which His plan would play out.

When we're talking about politics, we're not thinking about Fox News or CNN or MSNBC. We're not talking Democrats or Republicans. Long before that, politics has been part of the human experience. As Christians, we need to understand how we are to navigate politics. How do we engage in politics without losing our testimony? How do we honor God and help our neighbors through political involvement?

I'll be honest—I love politics. My all-time favorite television show was "The West Wing," which followed the lives of the presidents and those who worked with them. Most of my favorite movies are political dramas that center in Washington, DC. I love seeing how governments work. My favorite biographies are those of presidents and statesmen.

But again, being honest, I no longer like these things as much as I once did. There was a time when political figures were honored and respected. To be sure, they were never perfect. Politics has always been characterized by conflict and struggle. But it seems that things have gotten increasingly nasty in recent days, so many of us are simply trying to steer clear of politics—which isn't a good place to be either. Nor is it right for us as Christians to think that politics is the end game we're shooting for, that through politics we'll be able to bring change in the world around us. We need balance to disarm this landmine in a way that results in the glory of God and His gospel.

Politics has been defined in two ways—one humorously and one seriously. It has been said that politics is the compound of two words: poly, which means many, and ticks, which are blood-sucking creatures. I'll leave that with you. The Cambridge Dictionary

isn't as funny. It defines politics as "the science by which we address our opinions on how a people should be governed." That's a good definition, because at the heart of politics is opinion. When we enter the coliseum of political thought, we're working from a place of opinion. We desire to superimpose our perspective on how a group of people should be governed. Today I'm going to be looking at American politics in particular, but if we went to Europe or Africa or Southeast Asia, things would be different.

We'll be asking the question, "How do I express my beliefs regarding how our country should be governed?" When we enter into a political conversation, we're dealing in the realm of opinions. Our opinions may be very good and wise—or could be terrible. But politics is intertwined with every part of our daily lives.

My street in Hinckley has been affected recently by all the rain we've had. Over the years, it has become more like a gravel road than a paved road. As I pulled out of my driveway this morning, I hit a pothole that made my steering wheel turn violently. At that moment, I had a political conversation with the nameless people who run the city of Hinckley. "What are they doing? Why don't they fix this? What are they wasting their money on? I did not buy a house on a gravel road; I bought it on a paved road. Let's get the stupid road repaired."

Politics can be as small as that. But on the bigger issues of life and death, politics is still part of the process whenever we express opinions on how people should be governed, how money should be used, and so forth. The questions are, "What sort of political mind will you have? Will it exclude God and be devoid of biblical reasoning? Or will you have one that reflects what Christ has shown us, incorporating the principles of biblical discourse?"

This is so important for us as followers of Jesus Christ. We are to take Christ into our world. Others often view Christ based on what they see in us, how we act in the workplace or in our families, or how we make decisions about money. We can't separate ourselves from Jesus. But when it comes to politics, we often act very separately from Jesus. We share our personal thoughts on certain people or certain issues, forgetting to include Jesus in our conversation. Even though we think we're leaving Him out, the people who are hearing us think Jesus is in the room. "Tim says he's a Christ follower, so what he thinks must be what Jesus thinks." If we're going to bring Jesus into the room, then His perspective should impact what we say. How does that happen?

This morning we're going to read Jeremiah 29, but before we do, I want to mention an important aspect of American politics. In our system, politics exists on a scale where two things are being weighed but are never in balance. In the United States, we believe we're endowed with certain rights both by our Creator and by our founding fathers, specifically the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

There are now over 300 million people living in the United States. My right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness will mean certain things to me but might not agree with those things in your life. As I pursue my freedoms and desires, this can become a counterweight to your pursuits. In this experiment that is the American experience, we have to figure out how to maximize my freedoms without reducing yours.

That's where the debate is taking place. Both sides of the aisle want freedoms, but it's not always possible. When one group increases their freedom, the other often loses some of theirs. That's when the game of politics begins, and we need clarity. We need someone to figure this out. Some people want nothing to do with politics, whereas others think politics is the only way to resolve issues and bring about social change. But neither of these extremes are the right approach.

For many of you, Jeremiah 29:11 is familiar. It might even be framed and hanging in your home. "*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*" However, most people don't have any idea what comes before that verse. We're going to get to that famous verse, but we'll also look at the first verses in the chapter and see how this Old Testament passage is very relevant to our times today.

We live in a political time when, at best, culture is indifferent to who we are as believers, and at worst, they're hostile to us. So how are we to live now that we're in the minority in our nation? How can we still bring about change? Jeremiah 29 gives us some timeless truths that will be valuable in our day.

Jeremiah 29:1–3 provides us with the context. The people of God were in exile and the prophet Jeremiah was writing to them. The Babylonian Empire, one of the largest empires in human history, overtook all of Israel. They ransacked Jerusalem in three stages. As all invaders do, they destroyed the city, set themselves up as conquerors, then left town. On their third invasion, they forced a migration of people from Israel to Babylon, which is northern modern-day Iraq.

The people they took with them were the best of the best—the smartest, the greatest craftsmen—people who could build up the cities of Babylon. They then said to the people in Babylon, "There's new property out west—good land, a lot of opportunity. Why

don't you go settle there?" That was a strategy to keep the edges of their empire populated with people who were loyal to them and squelch any potential future uprising. The Babylonians ruled Israel for 70 years this way.

When Jeremiah wrote this letter, thousands upon thousands of the best Israelites were headed into Babylon and they needed to know how to live there. Were they to revolt? Were they to hunker down and complain about their new situation? How should they live in a culture that was hostile to their religion and their way of life? From this perspective, Jeremiah 29 is also relevant to us in the 21st century. Here is what Jeremiah heard from God to tell those people:

⁴Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. ⁷But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. ⁸For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, ⁹for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the LORD.

¹⁰"For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ¹¹For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹²Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. ¹³You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

There are four truths in this text that I want to consider this morning and the first will be by far the longest.

Play your part in culture.

Amidst the political landmine of our culture today, we need to play our part in culture. There are many ways we can do this. If I were to poll this group, no doubt I would find people in all the different categories I'm going to give you. There are a lot of reasons to be in each political category. We'll look at some of the good and bad for each type.

There may be reasons for isolation.

This approach to engaging our culture is not to engage at all, but to isolate. This is a withdrawal from the culture around us. As Christians, we read in 2 Corinthians 6:17, *"Go out from their midst, and be separate from them."* We take Paul's words as meaning we're to have zero engagement with the community around us, and there are reasons to think this way.

One reason to stay out of politics is that our culture is sick and its illness is contagious—it makes good people sick. If we isolate ourselves from our culture, it's because we don't want to get sick. Isolation also provides a clear distinction between the church and culture. When the church and culture try to merge, the culture always wins out.

On other hand, it's not good for Christians to have no influence in culture. The Bible asks, "How will they know if they never hear? How will they know if they've never seen?" (Romans 10:14). But some Christians have determined to stay separate so culture's thinking does not contaminate them.

Sometimes isolation is geographical. Years ago, we had a family in this church who wanted to pursue isolation. They bought a cabin in Montana, and now they're living out there. They decided to keep their family away from culture's problems. So they bought 150 acres where no one bothers them.

There are other forms of isolation. Sometimes we just live our lives totally apart from the secular world.

There may be reasons for insulation.

A second approach to staying disengaged from culture is insulation. This is not a complete withdrawal but kind of an "in the world but not of the world" mentality. It appears to be a safe middle ground. Yet there is an inherent problem. Basically, those who insulate put on protective gear to stay uncontaminated from the rest of the people in the room.

These are Christians who put on spiritual "hazmat" suits. You know, those big yellow suits with hoods that protect people from nuclear radiation. Nothing gets in. But if you're in the room and nothing can corrupt you, are you really sharing life with the other people? You walk in with protective clothing, breathing like Darth Vader, "Good morning, Bob. Gasp. How are you? Gasp. I'm fine. Don't get too close." You're watching your little meter. "Too much radioactivity. I've got to keep this suit on." Then you wonder why

people think you're odd. But you're the only guy in the office or school or neighborhood walking around with a hazmat suit on. They wonder where the toxic spill is and you tell them, "You're the toxic spill."

Many of us are trying hard to be in the world but not of it, but we're not bringing about any change. Others wonder why you celebrate Halloween every day with your strange outfit. When they're told, "He's a Christ follower," they assume we want to keep our distance from those who are lost.

There may be reasons for vegetation.

Insulation isn't the answer, but maybe it's vegetation. I'm not talking about positive growth, but about being nearly dead. Some of you are so tired of the political process and cultural chaos that you'd rather just go through life basically numb to what's going on around you. You don't isolate or wear a hazmat suit, but you also don't let anything really affect you.

The result is you don't do anything of value for the Christian witness in your community or workplace. But we have not been called to become unconscious of our culture. God has called us to go and make disciples, to be aggressive in our desire to see people come into the Kingdom of God.

There may be reasons for domination.

There are some who find themselves tired of culture as it is. They remember when Christians were important in our nation, and they want to get back there. So they work to legislate all kinds of measures that are favorable to Christianity, without regard for the impact it might have on people, even if it makes many people unhappy. "The Bible says it's right, so we need to make this the law." They want to force everyone to live by Christian standards.

But Jesus never did that. Nowhere do we see Jesus coercing unbelievers into righteous living. Does He call them to change? Yes. But He never forces them to. What's crazy is He was God. He could have forced anyone to do anything, but He didn't. Our job is not to dominate or coerce people into the Kingdom of God; our job is to invite them in the Kingdom. All who are weary and heavy laden can find rest in the salvation of Christ alone (Matthew 11:28-30).

Still, we keep thinking, "If we can just get the right people on the Supreme Court or in the Oval Office or in Congress, then our day will come." But no matter what's going on in Washington, DC, the Christian's day has come, because God is always on His throne.

But the Bible calls us to permeation.

If none of these are the right approach, then how should we engage our culture? It's called permeation. Look again at Jeremiah 29:4-7. Notice what Jeremiah does not say. "Okay, so you're in exile. Thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I've sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, 'Find a cave and have nothing to do with the Babylonians.'" No, that's not what it says.

Or does this passage say, "To all the exiles from Jerusalem to Babylon, get your hazmat suits ready. Don't let the Babylonian ooze get on you"? No, it doesn't say that.

What about this: "To all the exiles from Jerusalem to Babylon, shrivel up and die. All hope is gone. You'll never see your house again." It doesn't say that either.

"To the exiles from Jerusalem to Babylon, rally the troops. Start a revolution. Let them feel the pain of taking us over." Is that what it says? No.

What does this say?

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile.

The role of the Christian in culture is to permeate that culture. While it might not sound especially spiritual, basically it means living life in our communities. Raise a family. Go to work. Enjoy the fruits of your labor. This also involves the multiplication of those who affirm what we affirm.

However, this is not a hostile takeover. Live life, then through your example show people why your way of living is good. Your life should impact more than you. Seek the welfare of the cities you live in." The way we permeate our culture is not to scream at

people about how bad they are, but to live among them in such a way that they are glad we're there. As a result, we'll be in a better place.

Can your employer say tomorrow, "I'm glad you're one of my employees and that you follow Christ, because you're one less person I have to worry about stealing from me"? Students, can your school say, "Boy, we're glad we have you in our school as a follower of Jesus, because you're one less kid we have to worry about doing shenanigans"? Can your neighbors say, "We're glad we have the Johnsons in our neighborhood. We don't get why they go to church and love Jesus, but we know they look after us and love us"? Are we seeking the welfare of our cities?

Your pastor is never prouder than when I run into someone who's in your inner circle at work and say, "I have a church member who works with you," and they respond, "Yeah, he's a great guy, isn't he? She's a great lady, isn't she?" Or when I find someone who I know lives in your subdivision and when I mention your name, the response is, "Oh, they're wonderful people. We don't worry when our kids are over at their house. "

That's permeating the community. It's slow. Sometimes it's arduous and difficult. The cultural ooze can get on us and we don't like it. We want to jump out of it. I'm a parent, so I get it. But this is how God want us to change culture. He says, "Live well among the people."

Be active in prayer for your community.

Not only do we impact our culture through how we live, we also pray for the community around us. Jeremiah 29:7 says, "*And pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.*" If you are doing more politics than praying, your politics will be futile. Essentially, you're telling God that the way you're going to change culture is by getting Washington, DC, involved. But prayer says, "God, You're the only One Who can change the culture and change my community. No law or president or governor or village official can do that. God, only You can. I'm coming to the One Who can actually deal with the concerns I have for my world."

Notice too that we're supposed to pray for the good of those around us. That means we cannot pray against them. We do have that kind of prayer, especially when we're frustrated or angry, but here God says to pray for their welfare, because that will result in our being taken care of as well. He says, "As I bring rain upon the unbelievers, I'm bringing rain upon you as well" (Matthew 5:44-45). Both of them share in the blessing.

We must pray for forgiveness.

What are we to pray for? First, before we pray for the culture, we need to pray for forgiveness for ourselves. The people in exile from Israel did not like the Babylonians. Think about it like this. What if Indiana came and invaded Illinois? Why they'd want to do that, I have no idea, but let's pretend they did. They came to Sugar Grove and announced that they were going to move us to Terre Haute as our new home, then we would have to live like they did. We would do jobs and pay taxes like they did. [Actually, we might like that, right? Bad illustration. But let's say the taxes are higher in Indiana and their politicians don't all go to jail.]

So we're set up in Terre Haute. Do you think we're going to like the people from Indiana right then? No. They robbed us of our lives. We were building lives here and they stole everything from us. So our prayers might not be kind toward them. We might even despise the people of Indiana. "Lord, strike them down; they're bad."

No, God told the Israelites that it wasn't the Babylonians who were responsible for their situation; He was. In Jeremiah 29:4 we read, "*...to all the exiles whom I've sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.*" He continues in verse seven: "*But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile.*" Who sent them there? God did. Verse 14: "*I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.*" The Babylonians were not to blame for the exile; God was. God said, "I allowed the Babylonians to rise up and cause you pain. I have allowed the culture to turn on you." Why would the God of the universe, the God of righteousness and justice and truth, allow bad things to happen to good people?

Turn to Deuteronomy 29:24-28. This is so important. With politics, we tend to blame culture. "How dare you take away the good life we were living? How dare you go after these sinful pursuits?

All the nations will say, "Why has the Lord done thus to this land? What caused the heat of this great anger?" Then people will say, "It is because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt, and went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they had not known and whom he had not allotted to them. Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against this land, bringing upon it all the curses written in this book, and the Lord uprooted them from their land in anger and fury and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as they are this day."

Why was Israel in exile? Not because of bad people. The Babylonians were not to blame; the Israelites were. God had told them, "I've promised this land to you; if you stay true to My word and My decrees, then this land flowing with milk and honey is yours. But if you start playing games and forget My decrees, then other armies will come and devour anything good you have." That's just what they did and that's just how God responded.

Listen carefully. It is not our culture's fault that we find ourselves where we are. The reason our culture is where it is today is because good people have stopped serving God in the way He has called us to serve. Instead, we've become part of the culture. We're angry that culture has run amok, but at some point, instead of standing for truth, we've started believing lies. Instead of standing for God, we've started believing in ourselves. As a result, the church has lost its testimony in the world, so now other opinions are taking over.

That's why our first prayers should be to seek forgiveness. "Lord, we have failed You. It isn't our culture; it's us. We have not done what is right in Your eyes, so we ask You to forgive our sins and heal our land." Second Chronicles 7:14 says, *"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."*

But we're too busy; we've got other things to think about. The American dream is more important than seeing America come to Christ. We do not like thinking that King Jesus wants to rule in America as He does in the heavens, because we don't like Him ruling our country—and that's Christians talking. "If Jesus is ruling here, then my American dream is out the window. If I can somehow live the American dream along with the Christian dream—as long as those two things don't interfere with each other—then I can happily live my upper middle-class life. Then I don't have to engage the culture or tell people I'm a follower of Jesus Christ, because I'll look like everyone else." Only after we've prayed for forgiveness will God perhaps be open to changing the culture.

We must pray for faithful leaders.

We also need to pray for faithful leaders who are responsible for the welfare of the city. Who was the leader in Babylon? Nebuchadnezzar. He was pretty bad. In fact, he was probably one of the worst rulers in human history. God really did not like him, because he opposed God at every turn. Yet it's pretty awesome that at one point in Nebuchadnezzar's life he was encountered by God's wrath and he repented. No doubt, this was the result of the people in exile who were praying for him.

The New Testament also tells us we are to intercede for all who are in authority (1 Timothy 2:1–2). We're to pray that God would put good and godly men and women in leadership in our country, states, counties and cities.

We must pray for fervency.

Along with forgiveness and faithful leaders, we must also pray for fervency. Have you ever thought that one way to change culture or government is to be part of it? To engage in it beyond simply voting? I've lived all my life in the city of Hinckley. I love my city and I pray for its welfare. For years, I thought that was all I needed to do. I was praying, serving and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Then the Lord threw me a curve ball. He said, "I want you to do something more." He gave me the heart to engage in something I didn't have time or energy for, so I kept pushing it away. "Lord, I don't think that's what You want me to do." But about six years ago He said, "I think you should serve on the school board." "What? I don't need any more meetings. Amanda wants to see me at some point in this thing we call our marriage. I've got to be around for that."

I will tell you, as much as I feel called to be your pastor, I sense that same calling to serve as a school board member on the Hinckley/Big Rock Board of Education. God has given me more avenues to seek the welfare of the city than I would ever have had outside that role and responsibility.

We need people serving in these ways. We need people serving as coaches, as homeroom moms, on local village boards and county boards. We need people serving in our state legislature. We need people serving as congressmen and congresswomen. We need judges. We need good and godly people to rise all the way up to the Oval Office. We have the freedom to do this. If you want to effect change, engage in these roles. Use your gifts and abilities. Use the mind God has given you.

Is this the only answer? Is it the supreme answer to our culture's problems? No. But it does help when we seek the welfare of the city. When I serve on my local school board, I'm serving my family and my kids in those schools. I'm making sure things are done in an orderly way and in ways that will help my community.

Be prudent as you consider your engagement.

Moving to Jeremiah 29:8–9, we see that we are also to be prudent as we consider our engagement. These verses bring up a potential problem. Jeremiah told the people to settle and seek the welfare of their city, but they also needed to be careful. *“Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the Lord.”*

Apparently there were prophets coming from Israel who told the exiles not to listen to Jeremiah and that the people in Israel were under great duress, but that was not true. In fact, they were having children and planting vineyards and living in peace, even though the culture was against them. But these prophets were riling them up. “Oh, if you only knew what was going on in Israel. It’s terrible! So rise up, exiles, and let’s fight those in power.”

Whether we like it or not, verses eight and nine remind us a lot of the talking heads on both sides of the aisle politically today. They’re working us up. “Things are terrible! Things are brutal!” But have you noticed that in our 24-hour news cycle, everything now is “breaking news”? Everything is an emergency. Every day on our televisions, no matter whether the channel is liberal or conservative, the big music comes and we see, “Breaking news!” What happened? Well, the President had lunch today. Congress met today. Everything is breaking news. Not too long ago, breaking news meant something big was happening. But we’re now in a place where everything is an emergency—even when it’s not.

These people were being worked up to believe there was an emergency. Notice that God told them, *“They are prophesying to you in my name.”* Be very careful, Christians, that you’re not being played by either side of the aisle. Both of them want you to think they’re with us. Be wary. Ask good and hard questions. Between politics and faith, one or the other is going to be king—and rarely is it faith. If you can find a politician who puts his faith first, God bless him. But usually politics is the priority. God told the people, *“They are prophesying in my name; I did not send them.”*

How are we to be prudent? Here are a few practical things.

As you engage in politics, be informed on the issues.

When a bill passes, don’t build your opinion of it based on a one-minute blurb on Facebook. Read the bill itself. Boy, if our politicians would only do that. They passed 2,000 pages of legislation and the Speaker of the House at the time said, “We’ll have time to read it after we sign it.” Are you kidding? Come on; we’re better than that. Christians, we can’t be angry at politicians who don’t read the bills when we don’t read them either. But we must read them not only through the lens of how they affect us, but also considering how they will affect others.

I’m called not only to love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, but I’m also to love my neighbor as myself. I need to think about how my neighbor would feel about a certain bill. Will it be valuable to him or am I dominating my neighbor without even knowing it?

Most political issues are deeper than one-minute sound bites and they affect a lot of people. It’s okay to have a view, but we need to do our homework. These issues are complex. There’s nothing more frustrating to me as a pastor than when someone takes a deep theological issue that I’ve studied all my life and they tell me, “You’re not right. Here’s my one-sentence view on that.” We can’t put the mind of God into a 20-second sound bite.

As you engage in politics, debate civilly. Don’t just criticize.

When we have to debate, we should be civil and not just critical. When it comes to political conversation, don’t demagogue or demonize. That’s unkind. If you have an issue with someone’s politics, address the issue with gentleness and respect for the person. Every political conversation we have is an opportunity for us to give a reason for the hope we have in Christ Jesus (1 Peter 3:13–17). We’re bringing Him into the conversation.

As you engage in politics, vote your values.

Political parties are a way of life in the United States, but our Christianity is far greater than any one political party. Is it wrong to be part of a political party? No. I’m not going to say that. I have an allegiance to a particular political party, but my politics never trump my Jesus. Even my political party blows it on some of the issues. I often have to choose between the lesser of two evils. Our job isn’t to enter the voting booth as a Republican or Democrat or Independent, but as a Christ follower. We need to vote the values of God—and not all issues are created equal.

This is a hard sermon to preach. This past week I got my property tax bill. As God is my witness, my property taxes went up \$1700. You think I was mad? No? Of course I was mad! Money doesn't grow on trees, at least not in Hinckley. I know it does here in Sugar Grove, but not in Hinckley. Can I tell you something? Taxation is not a life and death situation. In all honesty, I'm going to contest those taxes, which is a good Christian thing to do, but there are issues far more important than how much money gets taken out of my paycheck. There are actual life and death issues and matters of morality that are truly more important issues.

One day when I stand before God, He's not going to ask me how much I paid in property taxes. "Well, Lord, it was really bad on my gravel road in Hinckley." He's going to ask me, "What did you do for the least of these? I don't want to hear about your taxes." When I go to Jesus and say, "Jesus, my property taxes went up \$1700," do you know how He responds? "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's" (Mark 12:13-17). "Wait, Jesus. You're not helping me." No, not all issues are the same.

As you engage in politics, trust Christ over trusting candidates.

We have 23 candidates right now who are running for public office, including our incumbent President. All of them are telling you what they want you want to hear. All of them are telling you they're the answer and the hope. Conservatives got so violently angry that Barack Obama ended up with a messiah complex. He was cast as the hope for the change America needed. People were all worked up about that. Then the same people who got worked up thinking Obama was the answer are now saying Trump is the answer.

Listen to me. I don't care who is in office—Jesus alone is the answer. We want good men and women in office. Yes, we want to vote and help them. But never lose sight of the forest because of the trees. Jesus is the answer. He is our hope, our Redeemer and our King. Trust Him over trusting candidates.

Stay positive—we know how things conclude.

Jeremiah 29:10-14 states:

For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

No matter who is in the White House, no matter who has the majority in Washington, DC, no matter how many Supreme Court justices we have, you and I never have to fear. We never have to weep at the end of an election. We never have to ask, "What's going to happen now?" Regardless of whether there's an elephant or a donkey in the White House, God is still on His throne. We have hope in that, because God has plans for us.

Never forget that God is in control and God is in charge. Notice all the times in our text where God says, "I... I... I... I..." Not Nebuchadnezzar. Not the Babylonians. Not the exiles themselves. He's not concerned about any of them. He says, "I am the One Who has the king in My hand and he goes wherever I direct him."

So we can be confident that no matter how bad our culture gets, no matter how difficult our political landscape becomes, as Christians we have hope and a future, because we have been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. We know that no matter how dark the world becomes, Jesus is always in control and always in charge.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Note: This transcription has been provided by Sermon Transcribers (www.sermontranscribers.com).