

I. Recap and Introduction

- A. Jesus is the King of a kingdom, which we are citizens of. That Kingdom is:
1. Not *of* this world (but *for* this world)
 2. Both “now” and “not yet”
 3. Eternal (will never end and never be overthrown)
- B. Jesus never sought political influence; in fact, He avoided it (Jn. 6:15). Though He never waded into politics, His Kingdom collided with the Roman Empire. In the end, He was crucified because Rome perceived His Kingdom to be undermining theirs (Jn. 19:12). This is seen even in His birth, death & resurrection, and the messaging of the Church.

II. The Politics of Jesus’ Birth

- A. Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth presents Jesus as a deliverer, mirroring the exodus story by presenting Jesus as the new (ultimate) Moses, opposite of Herod as Pharaoh.
1. The wise men from the east asked Herod, “*Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.*” (Mt. 2:2, NLT) Herod would have perceived this as a direct threat: the Roman Senate, under Marc Antony, had given him the title of “king of the Jews”¹.
 2. When mentioning Joseph & Mary’s flight to Egypt in Mt. 2:15, he cites Hosea 11:1 (“*Out of Egypt I called my son*”), where Hosea spoke of Israel’s exodus out of Egypt.
 3. Herod’s decree to kill all the male newborns in Bethlehem and the surrounding region (Mt. 2:16) clearly mirrors Pharaoh’s order to kill all the male newborns of Israel (Ex. 1:16). Like Moses, Jesus was sovereignly spared from this slaughter.
 4. As Moses posed a threat to Pharaoh’s power, Jesus’ appearance signaled a direct threat to Herod’s political power.
 - a. Herod was a Jew by blood (the people of God), but completely given over to the politics of Rome. Later, when referencing Herod’s son, Jesus said, “*Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.*” (Mk. 8:15, ESV)
 - b. Leaven of Herod: being of the people of God but identifying more with political power and structures.

¹ Preston Sprinkle, *Exiles* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2024), 80 (citing Josephus, *War*).

- B. Luke’s account of the nativity has some political connotations that would have piqued a first century reader’s curiosity in three ways.
1. Luke specifies that Jesus’ birth occurred during the days of a census called by Caesar Augustus (Lk. 2:1). The purpose behind a Roman census was taxation: they herded the people to places where they could be counted and taxes extracted.
 - a. The people of Judea were not Roman citizens with representation in Rome. Taxes were collected to benefit the empire, not the people. It was a sort of political oppression. This census was a bad political memory.
 2. Luke 2:2 also mentions Quirinius, the governor of Syria. History tells us that about 10 years after the birth of Christ, Quirinius called for another census of the Jews². That census provoked an insurrection led by one named Judas (referenced in Acts 5:37).
 - a. By inserting Quirinius’ name into the narrative, Luke was provoking memories of political unrest in the minds of his readers³.
 3. The angels’ announcement of Christ’s birth specifically co-opted some of the political terminology of the day:

¹⁰And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Lk. 2:10-11, ESV)

- a. “Good News” – Luke used the word *euangelizomai* (“tell the good news”), which is a form of *euangelion* (“the good news”): the word we get “gospel” from. The word represented Roman propaganda in the first century. It described announcements of military victories, coronations of new Caesars, and was specifically used to describe the birth of Caesar Augustus⁴. The angels made declarations of good news *from another kingdom*.
- b. “Savior” – Emperor Claudius had been called the “savior of all mankind⁵.” To give that title to Jesus was implying a confrontation between him and a Caesar.
- c. “Lord” (*kyrios*) – translated “Lord, supernatural master over all; one who owns or controls estate land and property; ruler, master, lord, one who exercises authority over⁶.” This was a “Caesar” title; the angels applied it to Jesus.

² *Ibid*, 81 (citing Josephus, *War*).

³ *Ibid*, 82.

⁴ *Ibid*, 100.

⁵ *Ibid*, 99.

⁶ James Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages: Greek New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2001), #3261.

III. The Politics of Jesus' Death and Resurrection

- A. In Jesus' trial, the Jewish leaders put Pilate in checkmate when they said, "*If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar*" (Jn. 19:12, ESV). Pilate had to crucify Jesus because He was a rival to Caesar.
 - 1. Crucifixion was perhaps the most cruel, torturous means of execution ever invented. It was reserved only for those perceived as enemies of Rome (never citizens). Jesus' crucifixion was essentially a statement that He was a political criminal.
- B. Jesus' resurrection meant that He had endured and overcome the worst that Rome could throw at Him. Obviously, the greater significance for the world is that it demonstrates that He has overcome sin and the grave. But don't overlook the fact that it demonstrated His authority over Rome.
 - 1. This explains why the Roman authorities worked so hard to discredit the apostles' claims of resurrection (Mt. 28:11-15).
 - 2. This set Jesus apart from the emperors – there were no reports or claims of emperors overcoming death.
- C. The ascension had some political teeth, too. Celestial abnormalities (such as comets appearing) were sometimes pointed to as evidence that a late Caesar had "ascended into heaven and been adopted as a son of god⁷." By physically ascending into heaven – in front of a crowd of witnesses – Jesus demonstrated Himself to be *the* Son of God.

IV. The Politics of the Early Church

- A. The very symbol that used to strike fear into the hearts of Rome's enemies – the cross – had now become the symbol the Church rallied around. The apostles openly declared Christ crucified, before Jew and Gentile alike (see Acts, 1 Cor. 2:2), and His resurrection from the dead. They declared their *kyrios* was superior to Rome.
- B. Their self-descriptive terminology was political. The apostles could have referred to the gathering of believers using the word *synagoge* ("assembly"). This would have made sense, since we have been grafted into the covenant people of God, forming One New Man with them (Rom. 11:17-19; Eph. 2:14-16).
 - 1. Instead, the apostles used the term *ekklesia*, which also meant "assembly", but carried a clearly political application. Assemblies of believers were a *different* *ekklesia*.

⁷ Preston Sprinkle, *Exiles* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2024), 94.

- C. The Church consistently used words like *kyrios* (“Lord”) to refer to Jesus – Paul alone used the word well over 200 times in his epistles. Every time they declared “Jesus is Lord” or “Jesus is Savior”, the implication was, “Caesar *is not*.”

V. The Question of Allegiance

- A. Philippi was unique in that it was a Roman colony. Many Philippians had Roman citizenship (like Paul) and enjoyed its many perks: autonomous local government, land grants, and possible tax exemptions⁸, among other things. They may be the New Testament believers we can most identify with in the West (because they had rights).
1. As the Imperial cult grew in acceptance, it became harder for these believers to hold the line on matters like idolatry and sexual immorality, as their faithfulness would ostracize them from the community and deprive them of the benefits of citizenship. Paul challenged them to be very mindful of which citizenship was most important:

“²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.” (Phil. 3:20-21, ESV)

- B. Our primary allegiance will reveal what we perceive to be our primary treasure: temporal, earthly treasure (wealth, luxury, comfort, status, etc.), or eternal treasure. It’s not mostly about obedience, it’s mostly about *what we love*.

¹⁹Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also...²⁴No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other... (Mt. 6:19-21,24, ESV)

⁴⁴The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Mt. 13:44-46, ESV)

1. Paul made the same point in that passage to the Philippians (3:12-19): some had walked with God but sold out because of what they valued most.

*“¹⁸...many [believers] live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. **Their mind is set on earthly things.**” (Phil. 3:18-19, NIV)*

⁸ “Colony,” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003).

- C. The challenge is for us to be clear on which kingdom we love and identify with the most. We cannot properly relate to our political system until we have clarity on that question.

VI. How We Relate to Politics

- A. God does not fit on the political grid. He is not right, He is not left, He is not centre. There is only one nation that was ever established by God to be a demonstration of His Kingdom to the world, and even *they* couldn't assume God was in line with them.

¹³When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" ¹⁴And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" (Josh. 5:13-14, ESV)

1. Canada *is not* a beacon of the Kingdom of God to the world. Our parliamentary democracy was founded on several Christian values and principles, but that doesn't mean we were ever "God's nation." Our political system is a fallen system of man. Jesus will not rehabilitate or use this political system in His Kingdom, He will remove it in favour of His own (Rev. 11:15; Hag. 2:6-7,21-22; Dan. 2:44; 7:14,27; Ps. 2:7-9).
 2. The "One New Man" body of Christ is the body through which He manifests His Kingdom on earth [now] until His return [not yet].
 3. As Christians we are not primarily "right wing", "left wing", or even "centre." We must stay in line with *Him*. If we are called to engage in the political sphere, we do it primarily to bring the influence of the Kingdom to whatever party we work with...not to primarily advance the cause of the party we work with. Every party needs more exposure to the leaven of the Kingdom (Mt. 13:33).
- B. The Jewish people's exile in Babylon is a helpful framework for us to understand our relationship to the governments of this world.

*⁴⁵Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶Take wives and have 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...**¹⁰When 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." (Jer. 29:5-7,10-11, ESV)*

1. We vote based on policies we perceive will promote the welfare ("human flourishing") of the land and we bring the leaven of the Kingdom to every party.