

Lent 2020 - "The Politics of the Passion" Ash Wednesday Bible Study

"Politics" defined: *"the activities associated with the governance of a country or other area, especially the debate or conflict among individuals or parties having or hoping to achieve power."*

- 1) Most citizens in our day regard "politics" and "politicians" with distaste – at best
- 2) "Politics" is governed by the devil's platitude that *"the ends justifies the means"*
- 3) As such, it is widely accepted as a license to sin
 - a. Politicians routinely justify sinful conduct as necessary for the greater good (their power)
 - b. Whatever is therefore necessary for the acquisition and holding of power becomes acceptable
- 4) Politics is as old as civilization, and therefore also played a key role in our Savior's Passion
- 5) Our goal this Lenten Season is to:
 - a. Gain a better understanding of the historical context of our Lord's passion
 - b. Better understand the sinful mindset and motives of Jesus' enemies – then and now
 - c. Learn to recognize and apply the lessons of the past to our daily Christian walk and outreach

ESV (**Luke 20:1-8**) One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up ² and said to him, "Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority." ³ He answered them, "I also will ask you a question. Now tell me, ⁴ was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?" ⁵ And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why did you not believe him?' ⁶ But if we say, 'From man,' all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet." ⁷ So they answered that they did not know where it came from. ⁸ And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

- 1) From Matthew 21 we learn that these events took place on the Tuesday of Holy Week
- 2) The Greek word translated *"came up"* is literally *"stood over"* – the goal was always to intimidate

- 3) From Mark 11 we learn that they did not risk a confrontation in a crowd but surrounded Jesus as he was walking to a different location in the temple
- 4) The group that confronted Jesus represented a significant part of the Sanhedrin (priests, scribes, elders)
- 5) As those entrusted with maintaining good order, their question has the appearance of legitimacy
 - a. "Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority."
 - b. The trap was to get Jesus to claim that his authority was divine (his own or his Father's)
 - c. They would then demand further "proof," and were prepared to deny any proof provided
- 6) They had already tried this approach, and Jesus had provided an answer

ESV (**John 2:18-19**) So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

- 7) Note the wisdom of both answers
 - a. Both required faith to comprehend
 - b. Neither provided the means they sought to condemn him
- 8) By "these things" the Jews were referring to more than Jesus' teachings (all rabbis could teach)
 - a. They included his entry on Palm Sunday, the cleansing of the temple (twice), his miracles, etc.
 - b. Note that they do not challenge the rightness of the actions, only his authority to do them
 - c. The Jewish leaders were masking their evil intentions with a show of propriety
- 9) The counter-question Jesus asked was not an evasion – he would have answered if they had
 - a. The Jews knew that the support of the people must be destroyed before they could kill Jesus
 - b. Though they knew the correct answer to Jesus' question, whatever they answered would have only strengthened Jesus' support
 - c. The Jews also knew that the authority of both Jesus and John was identical (their work was one)
 - d. Had they answered Jesus' question, they would have answered their own
 - e. The Jews thereby condemned themselves by their own unbelief

10) John identified the motive of Jesus' enemies as the most loathsome of all "political" platitudes:

ESV(John 11:45-53) Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, ⁴⁶ but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." ⁵¹ He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. ⁵³ So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

11) The *only* cure for such a mindset is saving faith

Lessons from God's Word

- 1) As Christians, we are in no way immune from an "ends justifies the means" mentality
 - a. Lying in a "worthy cause"
 - b. Justifying other sins in the pursuit of what we regard as a worthy goal
- 2) We too can challenge Jesus with false dichotomies (this or that, yes or no)
 - a. "If God is truly all-powerful and truly loves me, why do his children suffer?"
- 3) We too can make demands of our God that are based on human logic
 - a. "Why do God's enemies prosper?"
- 4) Our words and actions can be motivated by pride, rather than by truth and love
 - a. Defending what we know to be wrong simply because it is *my* position
- 5) We too can place personal benefit above the greater good of kingdom work

- a. Refusing to consider a question on its own merits rather than personal benefit
- 6) We too can pridefully seek to "gain allies" in an unworthy cause
 - a. Causing or intensifying divisions among brothers by forcing others to choose sides
- 7) When confronted with truth, we too can find fault with the messenger
 - a. Focusing on the faults of the one bringing God's Word rather than on our own
- 8) We too can be unduly preoccupied with the approval of the masses
 - a. Seeking to blend in rather than stand out (to hide in the darkness rather than stand in the light)

Weekly Hymn Schedule

February 26

Hymns

140 (1-4)

367

263 (1-3)

March 4

Hymns

388 (1-3, 6)

143 (1-5)

261

March 11

Hymns

358

171 (1-5)

260 (1, 4 & 6)

March 18

Hymns

652

342

179

March 25

Hymns

360

155

794

April 1

Hymns

153

176

448 (1, 4-5)

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Mid-Week Lenten Services - 2020

The Opening Hymn *(As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)*

Invocation

Pastor: *In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Congregation: *(Spoken) Amen.*

Confession and Absolution *(TLH 318)*

P: *Acknowledging that we stand in the presence of our Holy God we humble ourselves, and in true repentance we confess our sins:*

All: *Before Thee, God, who knowest all, with grief and shame I prostrate fall.
I see my sins against Thee, Lord, the sins of thought, of deed, and word.
They press me sore; I cry to Thee: O God, be merciful to me!*

*O Lord, my God, to Thee I pray; oh, cast me not in wrath away!
Let Thy good Spirit ne'er depart, but let Him draw to Thee my heart
That truly penitent I be: O God, be merciful to me!*

P: Jesus Christ himself has been punished for your sins. God the Father has placed upon Jesus the iniquity of us all. According to His authority, and by His command, I announce to you the divine decree of our God that all of your sins are forgiven, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

All: *O Jesus, let Thy precious blood be to my soul a cleansing flood.
Turn not, O Lord, Thy guest away, but grant that justified I may
Go to my house at peace with Thee: O God, be merciful to me!*

The Reading of the Passion History

The Apostolic Creed

I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Pre Sermon Hymn *(As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)*

The Study of God's Word

The Response – *(TLH Hymn 174)*

**Throned upon the awe-full tree, King of grief, I watch with Thee
Darkness veils Thine anguished face; none its lines of woe can trace
None can tell what pangs unknown hold Thee silent and alone.**

**Hark the cry that peals aloud, upward through the whelming cloud!
Thou, the Father's only Son, Thou His own Anointed One,
Thou dost ask Him, can it be? "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?"**

**Lord, should fear and anguish roll darkly o'er my sinful soul,
Thou, who once was thus bereft that Thine own might ne're be left,
Teach me by that bitter cry in the gloom to know Thee nigh.**

The Prayer of the Day

The Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

P: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
And the love of God the Father,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

C: *(Sung by all) Amen, Amen, Amen.*

The Closing Hymn *(As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)*

Silent Prayer

Announcements *[All are invited to remain for fellowship and light refreshments.]*