

Note: If you're curious about the strange formatting,
it's just how I print out the sermon for easy preaching.

Refugees, Healthcare and All Things Political, Week 2

August 20, 2016

This has been quite a week in our national conversation!
All week I have been so grateful that God gave me last week's sermon,
Healthcare, Refugees and all things Political
Before the events of Charlottesville
as I sensed it was God speaking to us,
and not just me reacting to a crisis.

We are going to move the conversation forward this week,
but everything I'll say today is predicated on what was said last week.

I urge you to listen or read the sermon which is available on our website,
so you'll know the foundation that has been laid.

In unequivocal terms,
God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created all of them;

*Red and yellow black and white, they are precious in his sight
Jesus loves the little children of the world.*

This is echoed in our Declaration of Independence:

that all Men are created equal,
that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,
that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness....

Everything we allow in this country must be filtered through this strainer.
What doesn't make it through, gets discarded. PERIOD!

That being said,
let's turn our attention to some other hot-button issues of our day
and see how we as Christians are to contribute to the national conversation.

Now, here's the catch when determining what our government should do.

We'd love to think that there is one RIGHT answer.
And that the people who know their Bibles could *know* what that one right decision is.

Because, after all. the Bible never contradicts itself.
Oh?

Proverbs 26:4

Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
or you yourself will be just like him.

Proverbs 26:5

Answer a fool according to his folly,
or he will be wise in his own eyes.

So which is it?

It all depends on the *context*.

Sometimes the first is wise.

Sometimes the second.

A naïve person thinks that the Bible has a list of rules and decisions
that can be transplanted from one context in one time and place
and laid down in another context in another time and place.

That's not what the Bible models.

There are always Biblical truths that stand in tension with one another.

Wisdom is knowing what context you're in
so you know *which* Biblical principle you should apply.

That why we need God.

The Bible can *never* become our God.

God will *use* the Scriptures to give us understanding and wisdom,
but without dependence on God,
we become biblically literate fools.

OK, so let's take healthcare and refugees, for example.

For both issues, there are Biblical principles
that stand in tension with one another.

Can you make a Biblical case for universal healthcare and open borders? Sure

Can you make a Biblical case for government non-involvement
in healthcare and for walls around our borders? Sure

Let me show you.

You can make a strong case that God is always watching out for the needy, the poor, the foreigners, in short, the have nots:

Deuteronomy 10:18-19

He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow,
and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.
And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.

Exodus 23:9

Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners,
because you were foreigners in Egypt.

Job 31:32

(Job, discussing his devotion to God demonstrated by his welcoming of the stranger)
No stranger had to spend the night in the street,
for my door was always open to the traveler.

No walls there.

Matthew 25:25-36

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you invited me in,
I needed clothes and you clothed me,
I was sick and you looked after me, I
was in prison and you came to visit me.'

To care for the needy, the stranger (refugee or immigrant), the sick, is to care for Jesus.

Acts 4:32

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their
possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.

Here's an amazing example of distribution of wealth,
the haves giving to the have-nots.
That's socialism in its purest form.

So, let's write COMPASSION in capital letters on this side of the ledger.
There's no question about it; God's heart is *full* of compassion.

God's heart calls us to check our natural inclination for tribalism and greed at the door.

But how about the other side of the ledger?

How long did that distribution of wealth in the early church last
before some people started to figure out how to work the system?

No long!

A few years later, Paul writes to the Thessalonian church:

2 Thessalonians 2:8-10

We [Paul and company] worked night and day,
laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.
We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help,
but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate.
For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule:
“The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.”
We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive.
They are not busy; they are busybodies.
Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ
to settle down and earn the food they eat.

There were to be no free hand outs; not even in the church.

I heard an interesting statement that recently that gave me pause:

*“To do something for someone who is able to do it for themselves
is not compassion, it’s sin.”*

And the Thessalonian church was not the only church
having problems with their welfare system.

And in the church that Timothy pastored in Ephesus,
they were having trouble figuring out just who should get financial aid.
Here’s what Paul instructed:

1 Timothy 5:3-13

Give proper recognition [money] to those widows who are really in need.
But if a widow has children or grandchildren,
these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice
by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents,
for this is pleasing to God. . . .

Anyone who does not provide for their relatives,
and especially for their own household,
has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

So you didn't get money if there was someone in your family
who's responsibility it was to care for you.

And there's more . . . you didn't get money unless

No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty,
has been faithful to her husband,
and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children,
showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people,
helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

Unless you had to have lived an exemplar life!
And had no relatives who could support you
and were *so* old (you know, over 60! – HA!) you couldn't work.

The point? This is crucial.

In none of these cases are people being discriminated against.
(No one is being denied help because of something they were born with;
because of something over which they have no control.)

BUT while Paul isn't suggesting discrimination,
he *is* suggesting that we make distinctions.

In this case, distinctions based on both actual need *and* upon behavior.

It's easy to see how this applies to healthcare,
but how about immigration and refugees?

Did you see in this passage that Paul acknowledges a hierarchy of primary responsibility?
*Anyone who does not provide for their relatives,
and especially for their own household,
has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

First responsibility – my own household
Second responsibility – my own relatives
No mention that I'm responsible to provide for the whole world.

In fact, if I spread myself too thin, I will fail to provide for my own family.

I can, and in fact I must,
make distinctions which does NOT mean I am practicing discrimination.

Many of you saw my post on Facebook of our family vacation this last week.

These are John and my 7 grandchildren, the children of our 4 children.

These are the people for whom we have primary responsibility.

To properly take care of our family, we are going to have to say no to many requests that come in from the outside.

It is our responsibility to manage the resources God has given us wisely so as not to jeopardize the well-being of our own children.

Now if you know John,

you know that he is extremely generous with those outside his primary family, but these? . . . these are his primary responsibility.

To do that properly he does not discriminate (the picture makes that clear)

But he *must* make distinctions.

The Bible clearly calls for RESPONSIBILITY

which stands in tension at times with compassion

We must not spread ourselves so thin in the world economically or militarily,

that we cannot properly care for our primary responsibility – American citizens.

We must use good judgment.

So here we have two biblical principles

Compassion which must be universal and

Responsibility which necessitates making distinctions

These stand in healthy tension with one another.

Without them both, America (or the church or your family) would go into cardiac arrest.

Your blood can't flow in just one direction.

You need veins and arteries – give and take

People who only look through the lenses of compassion

will be unable to make the hard choices necessarily to thrive as a nation, church or family.

People who only look through the lenses of responsibility may well miss Jesus, the needy, disenfranchised person standing right next to them.

There is no perfect immigration or refugee policy
There is no perfect healthcare policy.

If we error too much on the side of compassion,
we'll have irresponsible people working the system.

If we error too much on the side of responsibility,
some truly needy people will be irrevocably hurt.

We're not going to get it all right,
We'll have to adjust and tweak it all the time.
But let's at least enter the conversation with respect for the healthy tension that exists.

Now I have one more word for you today.
If you think that you have something to contribute to the national conversation
(and most American's do)
Then remember your goal – you want your opinion to influence the outcome.
The key word is INFLUENCE.

If you want influence, then take this to heart.

Every time you attach a label to someone,
you dehumanize them and you diminish your influence.

Every time you turn a conversation into a win-lose debate,
you alienate the other person,
and you diminish your influence.

Every time you insult the opposition, you embolden their opinion
and you diminish your influence.

How easily we take the bait and feel noble that we've thrown down the gauntlet,
In so doing we may well have the power to WIN over the other person.
but you have lost the power to **WIN THEM OVER**.

2 Timothy 2:24-26

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone,
able to teach, not resentful.

Opponents must be gently instructed,
in the hope that God will grant them repentance
leading them to a knowledge of the truth,
and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil,
who has taken them captive to do his will.

That's INFLUENCE, which triumphs over winning.

I would suggest that *HOW* we argue our case will determine the future of America
more than the decisions we make.

While Jesus never minced words with the Pharisees,
he called them out in no uncertain terms for their hypocrisy and arrogance,
But he did so knowing he was going to die for them.
He was going to lay down his life so that perhaps he could win their hearts.

So, yes, take up the debate,
But before you do, check your heart against Jesus.

Benediction

Not much is said about the tribe of Issachar in the Bible,
but how they are remembered speaks volumes.

2 Chronicles 12:22

Of the sons of Issachar were men who understood the times,
with knowledge of what Israel should do.

May go grant us and our leaders an understanding of our times
with the knowledge of what America should do.

I'd always love to hear your thoughts and questions.

Please contact me at jspeer101@gmail.com