



“Change Begins Here”

Idea: Real hope for America will come through true repentance and a return to God.

Intro: Surely, last fall you just had to think that this year would bring some unique and special moments. After all, how often do you get to experience a year in which the numbers mirror one another? It happened in 1010, and it will come around again in 3030...another 1,010 years from now. We all knew 2020 would be an election year, and I am confident that we expected some surprises regarding it along the way. No one, however, could have predicted the things we have experienced not only in America but around the world this year. It has definitely been a year for the ages, and probably one we wish we could take a mulligan and do again.

This year we have witnessed culture wars and racial conflict like we have not seen in fifty years. Political upheaval, riots, lawlessness, and constant protests have paralyzed many of our nation's cities, including our own Richmond. There has been an ever-increasing lack of social decorum and mutual respect in society but especially within our government structures. Politicians are practically brawling with one another in debates and political anger abounds. Each side of the isle accuses the other of terrible atrocities and paints their political opponents as un-American if not inhumane. Then there are the professional athletes and sport leagues that have become billboards for personal and corporate protests. All of this vitriol, is expressed and compounded throughout social media, which is often nothing more than a cesspool of unmitigated rage spewed with no accountability.

If the political and racial components of 2020 were not enough, we have experienced a number of natural disasters. To date there have been twenty-seven tropical depressions, of which twenty-six became tropical storms. Eight of those became hurricanes, including three major hurricanes. These storms have resulted in the deaths over 140 people and billions of dollars in damage. Wildfires have also been devastating this year. According to the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), as of October 19, there have been 46,148 wildfires that have burned 8,404,047 acres this year. This is approximately 2.1 million more acres burned than the ten-year average. On top of all that disaster, COVID-19 shut down the world. Economies have collapsed, businesses have closed, and people have died because of the virus that came from China.

Is this what you expected to see in 2020?

All of these factors have made the current political season volatile and even confusing. This morning, I want to address the situation we find ourselves in today. Regardless of one's position on the issues, I believe we can all agree that the November 3rd election will determine the direction our society will take in the years if not generations to come. It seems this is truly a water-shed moment in our nation's history. There is an ideological divide that we must identify and understand. There are also major questions for us to ask of the Lord and how He will relate to us? Then, it is critical to realize the hope and change we long for in America will not and cannot be found in government policies, philosophical ideas, or social awareness.

My goal is not to tell you how to vote in so far as naming which candidates are “good” and which candidates are “bad.” Instead, I want to look at the issues and this moment in our nation's history from a biblical and theological perspective. I want to call your attention to how we as the people of God must respond in light of what we are experiencing in America.

Two Diametrically Opposed Platforms.

One of the beautiful aspects of the American experiment is that for 244 years we have expressed and debated various and many times competing ideas. We have disagreed even to the point of secession and civil war.

Through it all, however, we have remained centered in our convictions and commitment to the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. We have been able to come together for the sake of national defense and the good of our fellow man. Unfortunately, there has been an ever-increasing infiltration over the last fifty years in our beliefs and understandings of who we are as Americans. The shift has moved from conservative, originalist understandings to that of liberal and progressive ones. The divide has never been plainer than it is today. Therefore, it is important for us to identify this shift and reject it.

Now, before we lay out the key components in this ideological shift, it is critical we recognize that our chief loyalty is not to the U.S. Constitution or our citizenship in America. Our chief loyalty is to the Lord Jesus Christ because we are first and foremost citizens of His kingdom. With that said, we are His ambassadors in this world and in this nation. We are called to be salt and light in a country that is dark and in need of preservation (Matt 5:13-16). We preach the gospel and stand for truth.

Generally, speaking the two major parties in America have two diametrically opposed platforms. The Democrats are pro-abortion. They reject the sanctity of life. They want to expand the culture of death, evidenced by our own governor's actions and words last year in support of what is nothing more than infanticide. We watched Democrat Senators two weeks ago lecture Judge Amy Coney Barrett on her religious convictions that stem from the "dogma that runs deep in her." They fear she might one day be the deciding vote that reverses Roe vs. Wade. Democrats also reject the sanctity of marriage. Their LGBTQ policies undermine and punish proponents of traditional marriage while rewarding those of homosexual and transgender persuasions. In addition, Democrats prefer socialism over capitalism. They believe in wealth redistribution. They believe that what is yours, what you have built and earned, is not really yours. It belongs to everyone else. Democrats have also made it clear that they do not believe in the first and second amendments. They are and will restrict free speech and religious liberty. This suppression of free speech is on full display right now as the big-tech Democrat backers squelch news stories they deem "inappropriate." Religious liberty has been vehemently under attack in every Democrat led state during the COVID shutdown. On the flipside, the Republican platform, though flawed, believes in the sanctity of life, the sanctity of marriage, free speech, a free press, religious liberty, and robust capitalism.

There is no doubt that the two platforms are in opposition to one another. There is no wiggle room or common ground, which leads to a rift in the nation. No one wants division, but there are times and situations in which it is imperative. One such moment was December 7, 1941. America had resisted the pull to enter WWII. We did not want to have to make that decision, but the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor forced the nation's hand. 9/11 is another example of being forced into a decision. Today, in America there are certain platform issues and agendas that we as the people of God must resolutely be firm upon in our biblical convictions and never waver.

There are three such convictions:

1. The sanctity of life.

God is the creator and giver of life. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that life begins at conception (Psalm 139:13-16). It is precious to Him, so the taking of life, whether in or out of the womb is sin and brings judgment.

2. The sanctity of marriage.

In the Garden of Eden, God created Adam and gave to him Eve as his lifelong partner and spouse (Gen 2). The Bible affirms the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. Homosexuality is condemned and judged in both the Old Testament and New Testament (Gen 19; 1 Cor 6:9).

3. Religious liberty.

Our own Thomas Jefferson penned these words in The Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, 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..." The

Bible's advocacy for freedom is the foundation of this statement. God desires for men and women to be free so they might choose to worship Him.

There are many important issues that we should consider as we go to the ballot box, but there are none more important than these three. No person who calls themselves a follower of Jesus and one who believes the Bible should vote for any candidate who violates the sanctity of life, the sanctity of marriage, and religious liberty.

Regrettably, these three have been grossly violated for decades. Sixty million unborn babies have been murdered in their mothers' wombs since Roe vs. Wade made abortion on demand legal in America. Obviously, the issue of life encompasses more than just abortion. Drug abuse, violence, and euthanasia are just as important. The magnitude of the number of abortions performed over the last forty plus years glares back at us. Recognition of civil unions quickly moved to homosexual marriage. Now, transgenderism is becoming mainstream in corporate and religious America. The movement toward those two extremes has tightened religious liberties, so now one is threatened with hate speech if you dare speak against sin.

We cannot expect to be a nation blessed by God when we fail to value what He values. The truth is we should only expect God's judgment.

Two Major Questions

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage! – Psalm 33:12

Logic would tell us that if a people intentionally disregard God's Word and ordering of things, then He is not their Lord. It is clear that lordship necessitates obedience. Lordship brings blessings, while disobedience results in judgment.

God instructed His people that if they would listen and do the things He commanded, then He would bless them with life, provision, and protection (Deut 4:1). He equally warned that if they failed to listen and obey, then He would bring destruction upon them (Deut 8:19).

Now, America is not the new Israel. God does not have a special plan for us, and we are not a theocracy. The principle still applies though. Any nation who chooses to listen and obey the Word of God will experience the blessing and provisional hand of God upon it. The opposite is also true.

1. Will God give America what we deserve?
In light of our culture of death, sexual immorality, and idolatry will the Lord finally bring judgment upon us? Do we not deserve judgment? Sixty million babies have been sacrificed to the gods of convenience and pleasure.
2. Will God give America what we do not deserve?
Could He be patient and gracious with America a little longer?

There many illustrations of God's judgment, grace, and mercy. One of those is found in 2 Kings 21 and 2 Chronicles 33. King Manasseh is on the throne of Judah. His father Hezekiah had been a godly man, but Manasseh did evil in the sight of the Lord like the nations God had driven out of the land. He rebuilt the high places, erected altars to the Baals, made an Asheroth, and worshiped the stars. He went so far as to erect altars to idols inside the temple and offered his sons as burnt sacrifices. He practiced in the occult and led all Judah to do more evil than all the nations before them (2 Chron 33:1-9).

God sent prophets to warn Manasseh, but he refused to listen. God then sent the king of Assyria against Judah. Manasseh was captured and taken to Babylon. It was there in Babylon that his eyes were opened to his sin. He humbled himself before God and prayed.

“He prayed to him, and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.”

– 2 Chron 33:13

The thing that happened in King Manasseh’s heart is the very thing that needs to happen in American hearts.

Will God bring judgment on America as we deserve? I believe in many ways it is already happening. The moral decline we are witnessing is a symptom of the cancer that is eating at us from the inside. As we suppress the truth, the Lord gives us what we want (Romans 1:18). The judgment of God against America is His accommodation of our insatiable desire for sin. I believe in many ways liberalism and the progressive left is God’s judgment against our sin. If we refuse to acknowledge God’s Lordship and live by His rules, then He will give us what we do desire. Unfortunately, it is not what we need.

Will God give us what we do not deserve? Will He extend mercy and grant grace? God will because He is gracious and kind. He will stay His hand of judgment so long as there is repentance and faith on our end. Manasseh humbled himself. He turned from his wickedness and turned to the Lord.

One Source of Hope

The real hope for America will never be found in a political platform or a politician’s rhetoric. Hope, the kind that sees the future as being brighter than the past, comes through repentance and faith. It is found in Jesus. It is found in the God of the Bible. It is important for President Trump and Vice President Biden to debate and wrestle over policy. It is beneficial for us to do this on the local, state, and national levels. However, the only hope for lasting change, the change that is a blessing for all people is Christ working through His Church.

“...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.” – 2 Chron 7:14

Church, the change America needs begins right here. It does not begin at the ballot box. It will not begin on Capitol Hill or in the Oval Office. You will not find it in downtown Richmond. The change begins in your heart and my heart as we humble ourselves, pray, seek God’s face, and turn from our sin. Then and only then, will God hear, forgive, and heal the land.

Conclusion: On the night of November 3rd, 50% of America is going to be angry and disappointed. There is a good chance that 50% of the church will be the same. If that is your hope, prepare to be disillusioned. No, we must be better than that. We must have our eyes fixed on something, better yet, on Someone who is bigger.

America is in the shape she is in because the church has failed her. We have lost our first love. We have become enamored with the things of the world. We have loosened our grip on the Bible. We have condoned and many times modeled sin for others. The mainline denominations are no longer guardians of *“the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints”* (Jude 3). We are to blame for the decadence present among our people. Therefore, it is time we humble ourselves, pray, confess our sin and that of our nation, and plead with God for His mercy and grace.

Change begins here. We engage in the political, democratic process of our government. As believers we should vote based on biblical convictions, highlighting life, marriage, and religious liberty. More importantly though, we must humble ourselves and seek the favor of God.

We are calling for a day of prayer and fasting on behalf of America this next weekend.