

## ***Going There-*** **Politics** **Jeff Jones**

Hello everybody. So glad you are here today as we start a new series called *Going There*: A fresh take on issues that divide. It can be hard to “go there” sometimes. Have you ever been in a conversation with someone who brought up some uncomfortable thing and think, “Oh, you did not just go there did you?” It can be hard to go there, but it is also important to “go there” sometimes. This series is designed to guide us around the bigger issues that divide as we enter into a crazy political season in what has been one of the most difficult years our nation has faced. The stakes are high, which means emotions are running hot. This series is designed to look to God’s revelation, the Bible, to serve as a guide both for how we think about some of the bigger issues we are voting on and how we engage others with what we think.

Because people are so tense about all of these issues, one of my pastor buddies, when I told him that I was doing a six week series on this, said, “Well, at the end of this, you’ll either have the largest church in the country or the smallest.” That’s how high stakes all this feels right now. And even though I would encourage us all to relax a little, or a lot, I agree that the stakes are high:

### **1. Our vote matters.**

We live in the most powerful and wealthy nation on the planet, and our voting and our engagement helps steer what happens in ways that impact billions of people around this planet. How we as Jesus people steward our power is a big deal, and God holds us accountable to steward that power thoughtfully.

### **2. The unity of the Church is at stake.**

God is using his church to reach the world, and Jesus staked the whole mission, as we read in Jn 17, on the remarkable unity of the church, uniting people who are very diverse around a common connection to God and commitment to his mission. Our culture has never been more polarized and divided, and Satan would like nothing better than to have that same polarization in culture divide our church.

How we go through seasons like this can either unify us deeper or split us apart. What makes the church remarkable is how we can be so diverse and so unified at the same time.

### **3. The mission of Jesus**

It's never been more important for us as Jesus followers to be the very best versions of ourselves as we engage those outside of the church. Jesus called us to be light:

#### **Matthew 5:21**

**“...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”**

Far more important than our individual political views has to be our commitment to the mission of Jesus--to go through this season in a way that represents him well. If we don't, our culture will write us off as part of the problem in our world, and that would be on us.

So, as we enter into this series, let's pray for God's wisdom and our humility to rise to the surface. Let's all be open to each other's perspectives, even if they are very different than yours, and see these talks as a tool for humble dialogue where we listen and learn. Let's pray right now that God will elevate our perspective, able to see things from his point of view so that we don't get stuck down here just seeing what we can see in front of us. Let's pray that God will use this series to grow our wisdom and strengthen our unity as a very diverse church (pray).

With that in mind, let's get started seeking God's wisdom in his Word, the Bible, about how to navigate this season and how to think through these issues from an elevated perspective. How do we engage a political season like we are facing?

#### **1. Remember our primary identity, and focus.**

Paul gives us a very important reality check in Philippians 3:20:

### **Philippians 3:20**

**“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ...”**

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**“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ...”**

Though, yes, we are citizens here in this country, our primary citizenship as Jesus followers is not here at all. Our citizenship is in heaven, and our savior is not our favored political party or candidate but Jesus himself, who will one day return and fix this broken planet. Until then, our job is to represent him to this world. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul clarifies our role even further:

### **2 Corinthians 5:20**

**“We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”**

We are ambassadors here, sent here with a mission. 1 Peter 2:11 calls us aliens and strangers on this planet. We are immigrants and aliens and ambassadors here. We must always remember that.

When George Shultz was secretary of state, he had a practice with every new ambassador from the U.S. Before they went off to their country, he asked the new ambassador to go to the globe and point out their country. Every time they would point to the country they were moving to, until Mike Mansfield, then ambassador to Japan. He was the first to point to the United States, and said, “This is my country.” After that, Shultz told every new ambassador that story and reminded them of the reality that they while they are in the other country to never forget that their country is the U.S., that they represent us. The same is true for each of us as believers.

We represent Christ’s kingdom here, and we are made up of people from every culture, and our job is to represent the King of Kings, helping people connect to their creator and to make a difference in this world and see lives changed not

through power politics or legislating morality but through love, good works, changed lives, and by creating a counter-cultural community of believers called church that is a model of what God's kingdom is all about. That is our primary allegiance and primary mission. The church is here to represent a new administration, to be in a position to say,

**John 18:33, 36-37**

**“Are you the king of the Jews? ...Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king..."**

**Philippians 3:20**

**“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ...”**

Years ago, I heard Tony Evans, a pastor here in Dallas, say, “Jesus didn't come to take sides, he came to take over.” We represent his kingdom.

Over the centuries, many have gotten this all mixed up, thinking that their earthly nation was God's favorite or somehow part of the kingdom of God as a political entity. We always want to avoid that, even in a nation like America that has some unique roots and background—it is still part of the kingdoms of this world, to which we as God's people are sent as ambassadors. The church is not aligned with any one nation or any one political party within a given nation. By the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the Roman empire had embraced Christianity as its official religion, and Rome was sacked, and the empire was crumbling. Many were convinced that this meant the world was over. But Augustine, the key church leader of his day, wrote in *The City of God*, an important reminder:

The church belongs to the city of God. As a church, we also have a mission and a mandate, and it is not political. We believe that the ultimate solution to the problem of mankind is not political, but the Gospel—and that is what we are committed to as a church.

As we think through the issues that we will talk about in this series, it is also super important to remember our identity and allegiance. Our primary influence for how we think about these important issues cannot be our political party. I know that some of you were party people in college, especially your freshman year, but let's leave that party people thing behind and be Jesus people first and foremost. What is happening now more than ever in such a polarized culture is that we choose sides, choose our party, and demonize those on the other side. Over the last decade or so, cable TV, news outlets, and social media have shifted their focus on getting our attention, getting ratings, which has helped create a more we vs them culture than we've ever experienced. We stay in our echo chamber, reinforcing our perspectives about the "them" on the other side of the issues, and don't dialogue, don't listen, don't learn. We will talk more about this particular poison in a few minutes, but for now let's drive a stake in the ground and say that we want to rise above that. We want God to be the one who shapes our perspective and therefore look to the Bible, to his revelation to us, not a particular party or news outlet. Can we choose to allow our faith filter to come before our party filter?

### **Can we choose to allow our faith filter to come before our party filter?**

When we do that, we will realize things are not as black and white as we might think, and that the people on the other side might not be quite as stupid as we thought. As we will see in this series, looking at issues from an exalted perspective, a biblical one, will cause us to be way more nuanced and careful and humble in this journey we find ourselves in. When you look at the Bible to try to guess whether Jesus would be a democrat or republican, you might think that's an easy answer until you start really digging into the Bible itself.

On the one hand, the Bible would suggest that God would be a political conservative. He is pro-business and demands work rather than welfare for those who can work.

- \* **He is pro-business and demands work rather than welfare for those who can work .**
- \* **1 Thessalonian 4:11**
- \* **2 Thessalonians 3:7-13**

He sanctions capital punishment for murderers.

- \* **He sanctions capital punishment for murderers.**
- \* **Exodus 21:12**

He values the life of the unborn.

- \* **He values the life of the unborn.**
- \* **Jeremiah 1:5**

He gives greater wealth to some more than others and calls that good.

- \* **He gives greater wealth to some more than others and calls that good.**
- \* **1 Samuel 2:7**
- \* **Ecclesiastes 5:19**
- \* **Proverbs 10:22**

And, he upholds the family as the basic social structure for the church and world.

- \* **He upholds the family as the basic social structure for the church and world.**
- \* **1 Timothy 3**
- \* **Titus 1**

On the other hand, you can also read the Bible and come away convinced God would be politically liberal. He demands that governments care for the poor.

- \* **He demands that governments care for the poor.**
- \* **Leviticus 19:9-10**
- \* **Deuteronomy 15:7-11**
- \* **James 2:15-16**

He calls for massive debt forgiveness.

- \* **He calls for massive debt forgiveness.**
- \* **Leviticus 25:25-30**

He demands that we care for the environment.

- \* **He demands that we care for the environment.**
- \* **Genesis 2:15**
- \* **Psalms 24:1**

He pronounces judgment on those who don't pay fair wages.

- \* **He pronounces judgment on those who don't pay fair wages.**
- \* **Malachi 3:5**

He rails against the powerful and wealthy when they abuse that privilege with no accountability.

- \* **He rails against the powerful and wealthy when they abuse that privilege with no accountability.**
- \* **Jeremiah 6:13**

He is always for the immigrant.

- \* **He is always for the immigrant.**
- \* **Leviticus 19:34**
- \* **Leviticus 27:19**

And, he hates injustice of all kind, including economic, racial, and gender injustices.

- \* **He hates injustice of all kind, including economic, racial, and gender injustices.**
- \* **Isaiah 1:17**
- \* **Micah 6:8**

It's not so easy to know. And the reality is that the Bible talks about these issues and gives us the big picture perspective, but often it is the how to go about it where Christians divide along political lines. You have the biblical values and principles that we need to immerse ourselves in that will hopefully guide our strategies to best flesh those out.

### **Biblical Common Ground**

This is where we can find common ground, and this is way more important than what is below. What is below are the various strategies, ways of coming around those biblical concerns and principles in culture. We can find common ground here but may have different ways of going about it that does divide along political lines, and that's okay.

For example, biblically oriented Christians would all agree that poverty is a major concern as we face an election and move forward as a culture. But Christians might disagree on how to best attack poverty in a way that falls along the political lines. Some might prefer bigger government to attack poverty, while others might emphasize the free market and personal responsibility and personal generosity. Both agree with the biblical principle but split on how to live that out in a society. That's okay, and we need to be willing to be unified around the bigger principle even though we may have very different views of the best way to live that principle out. We can learn a lot by listening to those who share our same concern but have different perspectives about how to live that out.

This is one of the things I love about pastoring a church as diverse as Chase Oaks. I've been a part of churches in my distant past where pretty much everyone holds the same political positions and is easy for that preacher, because he can just fuel the we vs them spirit by cheering for one team and making the other team look stupid. That's not healthy though, and not what Jesus wants.



I know that because when Jesus came here, he started the church with twelve disciples. Interestingly, he chose a zealot, which was a very charged up political part that hated Rome and was at times even violent, and a tax collector, who had chosen to side with Rome and represent Rome. It might be today like choosing a member of Antifa along with someone who was serving in the Trump administration. Jesus choosing political opposites had to lead to lots of interesting conversations around campfires at night. But Jesus made his choices on purpose, because he was building a unity that was bigger than politics. He was building a unity where people could be in authentic community, united around a common Savior and a common mission, and have stark political differences. Our world is desperate to see that right now, and it is what God calls his church to be.

So, if you are here at Chase Oaks, wondering what side we are on. We are on Jesus' side. We represent his kingdom, and we take our perspectives from the Bible. I heard one pastor answer the question if his church was right wing or left wing, whose answer was: "We are for the whole bird." In this series, we aren't going to be looking at the issues from a partisan perspective, but a biblical one, to the best we can. So, let's come each week with open minds and humble hearts, and I'll do my best to do the same.

**"We are for the whole bird."**

## **2. Commit to unity within and civility without.**

In a series on issues it would be easy to assume the most important thing is the answer we arrive at. Biblically, that's important. But possibly even more important is how we get there and how we represent Jesus to those who disagree. That's why we must commit to unity within and civility without.

Within the church, our commitment must be toward unity. Paul gives us that challenge in such a strong way in Ephesians 4:

### **Ephesians 4:2-5**

**"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to**

**one hope when you were called; <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”**

We differ in so many ways, and one of those ways is politically. But let's remember what unites us. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one mission. There is room here for political diversity, in fact that is healthy. And the thing that makes the unity of the church amazing is our diversity, not just that we tolerate but that we appreciate. We want to be a church with that kind of diversity and unity. As we've talked about, we all care about various issues, and will have differing views about how to approach those that will divide us along political lines. And that's okay, in fact, that diversity makes us richer. There is room for diversity in the body of Christ, and we have to be committed to unity within as we go through the political process. When we do, it enriches our own views because we aren't just talking to people who think just like we do. We also need to be committed to:

## **CIVILITY WITHOUT**

Titus 3, gives us another important challenge, that is so important for us to hear and follow as we do engage with government and engage in dialogue with those outside the church:

### **Titus 3:1-2**

**“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.”**

That kind of dialogue politically is not just rare, it might be extinct. Things have gotten so nasty. But let's take a second look on how we are to engage. We are to be submissive to our leaders, to honor them, and to be committed to the common good, and in our engagement to avoid slander. Slander is spreading things about people that are not true or that we don't know are true. Slander is what fills news programs these days when talking about people we don't agree with. And we are to be peaceable, considerate, and always gentle.

A friend of mine is a believer whose politics are very different than mine. He has actually run major political campaigns you would know about in the past and has since dropped away from doing so because things have gotten so unreasonably

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contentious and partisan. Something he said challenged me a lot. His advice in all this was, “Even with those who are your most stark political opposites, listen to them long enough until you can answer the question, ‘Where are they right?’” That’s humility and civility, and it can be really hard to do. Many predict that this next election cycle might be the nastiest ever. Let’s rise above that. Let’s be engaged, but one way to be light in a political environment like this is to be committed to civility in that dialogue.

Let’s read the passage again, and this time ask God to cement it into our spirits so that we can rise above the mud-slinging that will be so common the next few months.

### **Titus 3:1-2**

**“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.”**

Most believe this will be the most contentious and uncivil political season ever, and as God’s people, as citizens of heaven, we must rise above all that.

That’s what the rest of this series will be, looking at the key issues we know from the Bible God is concerned about as we steward our power and move forward as his people. We will talk about life, poverty and immigration, business, race, and the environment. We will get into all kinds of trouble, but this has got to be the best place to look at these complex issues in a humble and reasonable way. We will find common ground in principles and may disagree with how to best work those out in society, and that’s okay. But let’s stay united where it matters most, and respect each other where we disagree as we all try to make this world better and push God’s kingdom purposes forward.

And I’ll close with this, just before we pray. As important as stewarding our power of the vote is and as much as we should engage our culture, let’s remember the bigger purpose that unites us and let’s remember what politics can and cannot do. Catch this quote from John Ortberg:

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*“Imagine that we elected all the right people to the right offices—President, congress, governors, right down to the school board, city council members, and dog catcher. Let’s imagine that all these ideal office holders instituted all the right policies. Let’s imagine that we got all the propositions right. Every piece of legislation—from zoning laws to tax codes to immigration policy to crime bills—is just exactly the way you know it ought to be. Would that usher in the kingdom of God? Would the hearts of the parents be turned to their children? Would all marriages be models of faithful love? Would greed and pride be legislated out of existence? Would human beings now at last be able to master our impulses in areas of sexuality and anger and narcissism? Let’s get a little more personal. Would you finally become the woman or man you know you ought to be? ... I don’t think so.*

-John Ortberg

The ultimate answer to the problems of this world and to the human condition have little to do with political solutions...not that we are to be disengaged. We’ve covered that. But we are to remember that ultimately we are here to do something much bigger than that, to represent something much bigger, and that what we are here to do does have the ability to change the human heart, to transform lives, to change communities. It is the church that is the hope of the world. We will come out of this series better informed but still with political differences. But let’s unite around the bigger mission of Jesus that actually can change the world.

Let’s pray.