

# KINGDOM CITIZENS

## A Weekly Guide to Walking in Radical Devotion

### Week 5

#### ***Is Jesus More Political Than Us?***

Preachers in America, myself (Rick) included, tend to separate politics from the pulpit as much as possible. This approach implicitly adds to the mistaken impression that politics is public, while faith is private.

For Jesus, this was not true. Everything about Jesus and His preaching was public, including His crucifixion. Pilate ordered a sign to hang above Jesus' head that read "King of the Jews", an unmistakable boast on the part of Rome to the Jewish people and Jesus' followers. The message was: This is what happens when you threaten Caesar.

In the book of Acts we get a clearer picture of the relationship Jesus and the Apostles had to political power. Acts 1:6-8 tells the following:

*"Then they gathered around him and asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'"*

Jesus' disciples clearly had the impression that His Kingdom was going to be *physically* restored, with Rome and all other empires placed under the feet of Jesus' rule and reign. However,

after the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 2:1-4) the disciples understood Jesus' words and began to put them into practice. In the power of the Spirit, they began giving witness to the resurrection and reign of Jesus in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

The rest of the book of Acts helps us understand just how political this new Kingdom is and gives us insight into what those first followers of Jesus believed and practiced as they fulfilled the great commission (Matt 28:19-20). Here is what we discover:

- Jesus takes His reign not through treaties or negotiations with political and religious powers, but through suffering love, death and resurrection. This is always Jesus' way. The Apostles continued the way of suffering love and sacrificing power in order to save others, and this is explicitly commanded to us, the Church. Suffering love is THE way of Kingdom Citizens. In Luke 4:6, we see Jesus being tempted by the devil. One of the temptations is to be given power to reign over all the kingdoms of the world. The only thing Jesus had to do in exchange was bow down and worship Satan.
- The strategy for Kingdom Citizens is always to bear witness to Jesus as the world's true King. Though the Apostles obey God rather than Caesar, there is never a call to violent sedition. Instead, they are called to faithfully point others to God through Jesus' way

of sacrificial love. The empire in the book of Acts is reoriented around Jesus, not Caesar, and the disciples of Jesus are prepared to obey God rather than human authority (Acts 4:19-20).

- The Church becomes a new community living out a new way of life in Jesus (Acts 2:42). Much about this new way of life will be diametrically opposed to the empires of the world, but there will never be a call to topple the empire or respond to sinful regimes with violence. The gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are clear about nonviolence. Imperial powers are not Jesus' biggest foe. Human rebellion is the much larger concern for the mission of God. In His goodness, Jesus redeems us from our rebellion, which opens up new possibilities and ways of living within the empire—not over it.
- The announcement of Jesus as Lord demands a response. Will we accept Jesus as Lord by faith and accept His reign in our life, or will we oppose Him? Scripture puts the question of acceptance and faith to us and to Caesar. What will we do with the fact that Jesus is Lord?
- Finally, the Apostles never assume the empire is a vehicle to be conquered and used for advancing the Kingdom of God. The Apostles and the early Church understood that the Kingdom of God would be announced through the Church to the world. Jesus and His Kingdom have implications for earthly kingdoms, but those kingdoms always exist in subordination to this true Kingdom. Neither the world in

which the book of Acts was written nor the world we live in now recognize the Kingdom of God as ultimate. The Church is the one place where Jesus is worshipped as the one true King, and we, His people, are surrendered to His way and reign.

When we surrender faithfully, the Kingdom breaks into earthly kingdoms slowly and in small ways. But it will finally and forever come in its fullness when Jesus puts the world right once and for all. Until then, we continue to write the book of Acts as Jesus' people and ongoing witnesses who announce His reign and live in His way.

As we face our nation's presidential election on Tuesday, we find peace in the knowledge that Jesus and His Kingdom are ultimate. The election is important, but not—as the media would have us believe—the final word. We are writing this continuing story of Acts, which may be a story of faithfulness or of rebellion. We will live out the suffering love of Jesus, or we won't. We will reorient our lives around Jesus and His reign, or we will not. I believe we will be faithful to Jesus in the next chapter of our story.

I pray that as we Kingdom Citizens vote this week, we will vote to honor Jesus, our one true King. I pray we will vote with suffering love for others in mind. We can debate about specific policies and people, but the Jesus way of living (voting included) is to honor God and the way of suffering love. We can disagree over the people and policies, but let's give each other the benefit of the doubt. As brothers and sisters in Christ, let's trust each other's motives for voting a particular way. Let's assume our brothers and sisters are voting to honor

Jesus and love others too. Let's not write each other off, but love one another deeply and learn from each other through compassionate listening. May we together bear witness to Jesus as we pray for His Kingdom to come and His will to be done.

## Scripture

### **Acts 4**

*The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. 2 They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. 3 They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. 4 But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.*

*5 The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. 6 Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. 7 They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"*

*8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! 9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, 10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that*

*this man stands before you healed. 11 Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone." 12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."*

*13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. 14 But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. 15 So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. 16 "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. 17 But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name."*

*18 Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! 20 As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."*

*21 After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. 22 For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.*

*23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices*

together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. 25 You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

"Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?

26

The kings of the earth rise up  
and the rulers band together  
against the Lord  
and against his anointed one.

27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. 29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

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. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), 37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

## Questions

1. What motivated the Apostles as they were on trial?
2. Describe a time when you felt put to a similar situation, one in which you needed to go against the norm or the flow in order to be faithful to Jesus.
3. In what ways did the Apostles demonstrate the suffering love of Jesus?
4. In what ways did they honor Jesus as their true King?
5. How did the Church respond to the arrest and trial?
6. What strikes you about this passage that can be applied to this moment for us as Kingdom Citizens?

## Prayer

1. Pray for our nation and the presidential election.
2. Pray for our local elections.
3. Pray for the nation's response to the outcome of the election.
4. Pray for God's people to have courage to bear witness to Jesus and his Kingdom during this election season.
5. Consider signing up for [Election Week Prayer](#) in Imago Dei's Prayer Space and spend an hour praying for our nation.

