

## **KINGDOM COME Podcast - Week 4**

This week in our Kingdom Come podcast, we consider the relationship between the kingdom of God and earthly government. How are Christians to view government? How are we to relate to governmental authority in a healthy way?

### **Monday, October 12 - Morning**

Romans 13:1-4

*Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. <sup>2</sup> Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. <sup>3</sup> For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. <sup>4</sup> For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.*

#### Comments:

During my college days, three cars full of students were headed off campus for a weekend of special worship services at a church a state away. All three cars stayed together and, winding along a country road, we were definitely speeding. Soon we heard the siren, and all three cars were pulled over by a state trooper. He asked us to get out of the vehicle so that he could speak with us. Then he pointed to the rear shelf of one of the vehicles where a Bible was sitting, and he said: Have you never read Romans 13? Yes, the state trooper was referring to our passage for today. He proceeded to remind us of our responsibility to "be subject to the governing authorities." Then he issued three speeding tickets and left us. We felt stung, not just that we were speeding and would have fines to pay, but that we knew we were wrong. Now, in our Kingdom Come series this week we will be looking at government, how God is sovereign over it and what our responsibility is to it. Our text is surprising in a number of ways. First, Paul is writing the small church that has been formed in the city of Rome, the capitol of the empire. This city was the center of Roman commerce and also the seat of imperial power. The Roman Empire represented more than a governing authority in the eyes of the people. It was intertwined with religion. The emperor was worshiped as a god, and the city was dotted with temples devoted to Roman supremacy. But Paul tells the believers to be subject to this civil power. Why? God is sovereign, and he established these powers for the good of humankind. This means, as Paul explains, that rebelling against the government is nothing less than rebelling against God himself. Of course, Paul is not endorsing the actions of the Roman government. Rome was perpetuated by an immense war machine that marched across much of Europe and the Middle East and North Africa leaving a wake of destruction. Subject people were often made slaves. The slaves in the kingdom were between thirty and forty percent of the population. Yet, with Rome, there also were plenty of benefits. First, during the time of the Jesus, there was a longstanding Roman peace. Commerce and trade expanded with the building of Roman roads. Most of all, there was order in the empire. There was a finely tuned system of justice that was not perfect for sure, but it held chaos and anarchy at bay. God created these powers to provide structure and order for a civil society. Paul says the best way to steer clear of the authorities is to do what is right. Jesus helps us with this because even he, the Son of God, subjected himself to this authority when it did wrong. That day on that country road in South Carolina, after we had

received a deserved rebuke from the state trooper, we knew we had done wrong. I was just glad that I was not driving at the time! But do we see that to obey the authorities is to obey God?

Let's pray:

Lord God, you have given order to our world. We are tempted to complain when the government does something we do not like. Help us to remember your sovereignty in all things and how you ordained the authorities for human good. For we pray in your name. Amen.

### **Monday, October 12 - Midday prayer**

Let us pray:

Almighty God, you have placed us in an unusual place in history and given us the opportunity to participate in choosing our own leaders. Give us wisdom to see your will and your ways. Help us to do all things with honor and respect because we desire to revere your name. Amen.

### **Monday, October 12 - Evening**

Luke 2:1-5

*In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to their own town to register. <sup>4</sup> So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.*

Comments:

The first time I was in Israel, I was on a walkabout. I was in the city of Jerusalem, and a shop owner explained that what I was looking for could be found at his wood carving shop in Bethlehem. He offered me a ride, and soon I was in a field on the outskirts of Bethlehem watching craftspeople make nativity set pieces from olive wood. It was then I realized that you could easily walk there from Jerusalem. It was between two and three miles away. In the days of Jesus, Bethlehem was a little town in Judah that really was in the shadow of the great city. Our text tells us about the series of events that brought Joseph and Mary there before Jesus was born. It seems circumstantial, and it was, but it was also more than that. God had promised that the coming messiah would be born there, but how can you get a couple from Nazareth in the north to Bethlehem in the middle of the country? They would have little reason to make such a journey. God brought this about through a Roman census. God's sovereignty in the smallest of details is seen here. Now, the Romans conducted such a census because of taxation. They needed to know how many people they had, where they lived, and what they owed. This was an effective way of getting a count. Now, this seems of little importance today, but it reveals the faithfulness of God to fulfill his purposes and promises. Do we know that God controls the details of our world in this way? He causes nations to rise and fall. He puts leaders in their places and then removes them at his will. The prophet Isaiah says that the nations are like a drop in the bucket to God. Yet, it was through this sovereign plan that God sent Jesus into our world. It was here that God's plan of redemption came to our world. That day in that field outside Bethlehem, I had the pick of all the carved pieces for a nativity set that I brought home in my backpack that summer; it has been used by our family ever since. But it is through God's sovereignty that we come to trust God is at work in all things, and he has purposed to bring us to himself through the child born in Bethlehem.

Let us pray:

Our loving heavenly Father, help us to remember your sovereignty when we go to the polls this fall, when leaders are selected, and positions in authority are filled. Give us confidence in your faithful love by showing us Jesus, the one born in Bethlehem. For we pray in his name. Amen.

## **Tuesday, October 13 - Morning**

John 18:19-24

*<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.*

*<sup>20</sup> "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. <sup>21</sup> Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said." <sup>22</sup> When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded. <sup>23</sup> "If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" <sup>24</sup> Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.*

Comments:

I recently heard about a tragic scene in the New York subway. The subway car was filled with passengers, and one mother was with her son. He looked to be only about eight or ten years old. He was in his school uniform. His mother was speaking to him and helping him get ready for school. Then he blurted out an expletive to his mother and struck her on the face. The subway car suddenly got quiet. Really? In what world does a son disrespect his own mother in this way? Here in a nutshell is the decline of civilization. Our scene for this morning is taken from the trial of Jesus. Jesus was arrested on contrived false charges, and he is forced to explain himself to the religious and civil authorities. Jesus knows they have been watching every word he says and following him in the city. He also knows his conviction is a foregone conclusion. Everything had been planned in advance. This whole event is a sham made to look fair and just. Jesus explains this to the high priest. Then it comes. One of the officials strikes him on the face. In any culture, this constitutes disrespect and dishonor, but even more so with the Jewish religious authorities. But they know what they are doing. Remember, this is an honor culture. It is not enough to falsely convict Jesus. They must shame and dishonor him with every chance they get. This is the only way to bring him down in the eyes of the people. They must show him to be weak and impotent, show him to be less than they are. They are putting Jesus in his place. Or, so they think. Jesus asked why they struck him, but they cannot answer his question without revealing their strategy. They want to win in every way. They must find a way to humiliate him at every turn. Here we see power at its worst, demeaning and defeating just to show its ability to do so. But we also see Jesus at his best. In the midst of such deep disrespect and dishonor, he does not show an ounce of dishonor. Why doesn't Jesus do anything? He knows that in this moment the Father is sovereign and is at work here, revealing the weakness of human power. Yes, they can bring about Jesus' death, but they cannot defeat his love. They cannot make Jesus hate or hurt others. Now, this is one little scene in the life and trial of Jesus, but it reveals whole worlds of difference in the way power is used. It also calls us to treat others with respect and honor despite how they might treat us. I think everyone on the subway fell silent because they knew. They knew how wrong it was. I think the room fell silent when the official struck Jesus. They had to know they were in the presence of love.

Let us pray:

Lord, God, our world seems to be brimming with dishonor and disrespect. We say things that ought not to be said, and we do what ought not to be done. We need a supply of your love and mercy that enables us to love one another, to seek to honor others as better than ourselves. For we pray in your holy name. Amen.

### **Tuesday, October 13 - Midday prayer**

Let's pray together:

Abba, Father, when the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do? Help me to remember that: You are in your holy temple; you are on your heavenly throne. Help me to trust that you observe everyone on earth, to remember that you are righteous, and that you love justice. Thank you that I can trust in you. For I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

### **Tuesday, October 13 - Evening**

John 19:1-3

*Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. <sup>2</sup> The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe <sup>3</sup> and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face.*

Comments:

Growing up as the middle of three boys, each 20-months apart in age, meant that we knew lots of conflict. I remember a game we played with other boys in our neighborhood. It was called "king of the hill." Perhaps, you played it when you were young as well. The idea was the person that could stand on top of the hill was the king. Sounds simple, right? Well, it was pretty easy to get to the top of the hill, but the truth is that you couldn't stay there for long. It was easy to knock the person on top off. In the ancient world, there was an intense game of thrones, a battle for supremacy in Israel. Of course, Rome held all the power, but Rome needed local governors to provide local leadership and rule. Israel and the Jews resisted Roman rule from the start. Rome addressed this problem by finding someone of Jewish ancestry, or with strong Jewish connections, that could serve the empire and keep the Jewish people happy. It was an almost impossible task. Rome seemed to always need to quash rebellions. The Jewish religious leaders presented Jesus to the Roman official Pilate as a threat. It wasn't enough for Pilate to support the chief priests. No, he wanted to break Jesus. The flogging mentioned here was meant to tear a man down. Thirty-nine lashes were given with a cat-o-nine-tails type of whip that tore the flesh away from Jesus' back, leaving him weak and wounded. They believed to add just one more lash would likely lead to the prisoner's death. But again, that wasn't enough. The soldiers dressed Jesus up as king for sport, placing a crown on his head. Of course, the crown was made of thorns. They took turns spitting on him and striking him. "Hail! King of the Jews." In the Roman world, there was room for one king on the king of the hill. They made Jesus laughable, mocking and taunting him. All through this torture and mocking Jesus said and did nothing in his own defense. Why not? His mission was to give his life for the healing of the nations, to create a new and different way. His response reveals the weakness of human power to stop the plan of God. This moment is a commentary on the use of worldly power, revealing it to be banal and empty. The beauty lies in Jesus' faithfulness and love. When we read this, we remember what human beings are capable of, and how they can use power in such diabolical ways. I remember the writer Philip Yancey telling about how he and some other boys, when they were young, tortured and killed a turtle. It all seemed so meaningless to destroy a beautiful

creature. Why did they do it? He said they did it because they could. So, why look at this passage today? It leaves us with no illusions about the sinful use of power in our world. It should also cause us to cry out for our true king, the one that went to the cross on our behalf.

Let us pray:

Lord God Almighty, it is humbling to consider how we as human beings have used power. We need hope for our future, but we know it is not to be found in us. We see Jesus bearing the weight of our sin and doing so with love and mercy toward us. Enable us this night to fix our eyes on Jesus. For we pray in his name. Amen.

### **Wednesday, October 14 - Morning**

Romans 13:5-7

*<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. <sup>6</sup> This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. <sup>7</sup> Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.*

Comments:

If we are members of Christ's kingdom, and Christ's kingdom is not of this world, then what allegiance do we owe to the kingdoms of this world? What do we owe our country? What do we owe our political leaders, our bosses, our clients, our husbands and wives, our parents? Those are all rulers of one sort or another. They lead us whether we like it or not, whether we choose them or not, whether they are good or not. What do we owe them? It's a tough question because we know our ultimate allegiance is to Christ, and loyalty to him will outlast our loyalty to other authorities in this world. But here we are in this world; we are citizens here even while we have citizenship in the kingdom of God. In the verses preceding today's passage, Paul tells the Romans to be subject to governing authorities since they are God's agents to bring justice against wrongdoers. So, it is clear that we are citizens of both earthly kingdoms and a heavenly kingdom. We are dual citizens. So back to the original question: What do we owe the earthly kingdoms to which we belong? Jesus himself gives us an instructive example. When he was being interrogated by Pilate the Roman governor after his arrest, he said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place." Interesting. We know that Jesus went to the cross like a lamb going to slaughter, that is to say he went willingly. He did not resist arrest, and he uttered few words in his defense. But he was not naive like a lamb. Rather, he was a king of tremendous authority who knew exactly what was happening, and he said that the reason he did not resist the worldly authority – which was infinitely smaller than his own – was because his kingdom was not of this world. Yes, he and his followers were ready to fight, but they would not be foolish enough to make their fight in this world. That would be beneath them. It would be a distraction and a waste of time. Doing so would dishonor and demean the gospel. For a Christ-follower, fighting the authorities of this world – even when they are wrong as Pilate was – is akin to an adult being lured into an argument with a child. In submitting to Pilate's authority, Jesus struck the perfect balance of a dual citizen. He acknowledged that his kingdom was separate and greater, and this gave him the ability to submit to earthly authority. In his case, the earthly authority was as wrong as wrong could be, but Jesus knew that God's purpose would prevail even while he was subject to injustice. So, what about us? Often the argument for Christians to

disrespect or disregard earthly leaders is that these leaders are wrong or immoral or that they hold different values. But that didn't stop Jesus from submitting, so why should it stop us? Oh, and what about the times when our earthly leaders are right and we are wrong, or when they simply have a different point of view? What about issues like tax policy, which foments so much emotion, but doesn't have a clear moral answer one way or another? If Jesus was subject to injustice, should we not be subject to these decisions? We should. It is a testimony of our citizenship in Christ's kingdom when we can lay down our rights in this world because we are firmly rooted in another one. We can acknowledge that the rulers in this world are commissioned to do good on God's behalf, and even when they fail to do so, our trust is in the Lord to make things right.

Let's Pray:

Dear Lord, I confess I have taken the bait of getting fired up by rulers with whom I disagree, whether politicians or bosses or parents. There have been times it has brought an intense hatred in my heart and cursing to my lips. I hate to see authority used against my wishes. Lord, please forgive me. Half the time I'm wrong and these rulers are in the right; I just haven't seen it yet. Half the time I'm right, but if I am right it is only because I am following you, and in these cases only you are able to bring your purpose to fruition. Resisting wrong or evil leaders on their own terms does not serve the advancement of your kingdom. Rather, help us to put our trust in you, both for the leadership we hope to see in the near future and for the ultimate culmination of your kingdom coming on earth. Amen.

### **Wednesday, October 14 - Midday prayer**

Dear Lord, you are our one true king. You are completely just and good. You don't need division of powers or checks and balances. We can submit fully to you in confidence that you are both just and merciful, and your intention toward us is good. Lord, help us to remember the kind of king you are. You are not like our earthly rulers, who often want to win at the expense of others. You are not that way. From your abundance, you give to all the members of your kingdom. You give, even, yourself. Jesus, you are our slain king, slain from the dawn of creation for our sakes, and yet you live today and rule over heaven and earth. You are our good king. You have already given us everything we need. We thank you. Amen.

### **Wednesday, October 14 - Evening**

1 Timothy 2:1-6, 8

*I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—<sup>2</sup> for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. <sup>3</sup> This is good, and pleases God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. <sup>5</sup> For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave himself as a ransom for all people... <sup>8</sup> Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.*

Comments:

When I studied abroad in Spain as a college student, I had a professor who was not very likeable. She taught a class on Spanish grammar that was only for the American exchange students. This professor was somewhat gruff. She seemed to take herself too seriously, and although she occasionally spoke in English, she struggled to build a rapport with the students. I

could see the eye rolls and gasps of exasperation that followed some of her statements. In the first couple weeks, no one disliked her more than I did. I picked up on her insecurity and awkwardness right away. I didn't think she was too smart. I saw right through her. Yet at the same time, I really wanted to learn what she was teaching. Occasionally I would stay after class to discuss the topic further. I regularly put my hand up to ask questions. After a short time, she seemed to warm to me. She called on me whenever I raised my hand. She came to me after class to talk about how things were going. By the end, we became pretty good friends, and I enjoyed her class. The rest of the students, well, they treated her with indifference at the beginning, and they treated her with indifference at the end. They probably never felt as frustrated as I had, but they also never made any effort with her. In today's passage, Paul instructs Timothy that the church should make an effort to engage and support its secular leaders. He says, "I urge then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – for kings and those in authority." This is one of the many places Paul teaches that Christians should be subject to secular authority. He taught that this authority was an extension of God's authority, even if leaders were less than perfect. Here he says to pray for our leaders, and the reason he gives is quite interesting: "that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." You see, political controversy and hatred of political leaders were as common in Paul's day as they are in ours. In fact, his entire nation was subject to a foreign oppressor and a government and emperor who did not have their best interest in mind. Some Jews wanted to revolt, and the majority – aware they had no chance to stand up to Rome – resigned themselves to simmering hatred and grievance. Sound familiar? I think there's plenty of simmering hatred and grievance going around in America in 2020 as well! But Paul says to pray for leaders instead of hating them for the sake of peacefulness, quiet, godliness, and holiness. Wait a second, how does submitting to and praying for political leaders lead to that? He explains in the following verses: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people... Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing." The reason to seek peace and to respect authority is spiritual after all. It's because Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and mankind, because God himself cares about mediation, reconciliation, and peace. He has gone to such great lengths to make peace with us when we were in the wrong. Should we not make an effort to be at peace with our leaders? If we agree with them, it's easy. But if not, then what we offer are prayers, and God can work through these prayers to make things right. He can even bring leaders to himself, as Paul says, "[God] wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth."

Let's pray:

Dear Lord, it can be hard to accept that you have established authorities in this world. Our political system seems geared toward exacerbating grievances and outrage. It's through hatred of the other that each candidate hopes to win. This is a shame. It is not your way. Help us to resist the temptation to be caught in this trap. You have given us a simple way to escape this: to pray for and engage our leaders. Doing so takes away their "otherness" and can give us compassion and a peaceful heart. And if they are truly bad and will not change, then through our prayers you will bring the change and justice that you desire. Teach us to trust your power to bring justice. Teach us to use our prayers rather than our outrage. Amen.

## **Thursday, October 15 - Morning**

Romans 9:17-18

*<sup>17</sup> For Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." <sup>18</sup> Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.*

### Comments:

When I was studying computer science in college, one day our professor took us on a field trip to a warehouse. Why? It was one of the first fully automated warehouses in the world. As materials came out of production, they were placed on shelves by computer-controlled forklifts. The central computer had the ability to keep track of the inventory, knowing exactly where everything was in the warehouse. When orders for goods were received, the forklifts would be directed to deliver them to the loading bays, where they would be placed on trucks for shipping to their customers. The best part of the trip was being taken into the warehouse and observing the forklifts adding and removing items from inventory. It looked like they were moving on their own, but no, they were being directed by the computer to complete their work. Scripture usually tells us what is happening in our world, but rarely do we get a peek into the plans of God at work. Here Paul tells us that behind the actions of Pharaoh was the all-powerful hand of God. As we read the book of Exodus and learn the story of Pharaoh, we see Pharaoh doing what he wants. He is making decisions for himself. But that was only part of the picture. Scripture tells us both that Pharaoh hardened his own heart and that God hardened Pharaoh's heart to fulfill his purposes. Which is true? Both are true. God is fulfilling his plan in and through the actions of human agents. We are told that God's reason for using Pharaoh was so his name might be known from east to west. Now, we consider this text to remember that God rules over all things. Nothing and no one operate beyond the scope of his will and purposes for our world. This is how we know that God's promises will be fulfilled and that God's plans to redeem our world will come to fruition. Now, the relationship between God and the actions of Pharaoh is far more complex than the relationship between the computer and the forklifts in that automated warehouse. Yes, God is bringing about his will in the world, but he is doing this through people that can make choices, people that are active. This is the marvel of the sovereignty of God. Yes, leaders and those in authority are at work in our world, making choices and determining policies. But God rules over all. Knowing this gives us comfort and hope for our world. It is this hope in which we live each day, looking to Jesus to bring redemption to our world.

### Let us pray:

Sovereign God, you created us, and moment by moment, you sustain all that is. Help me to be able to trust you when I see authority misused and leaders fail. Help me to trust that you are working still and that your purposes for your creation will be fulfilled. Remind me of Jesus and how you brought about salvation through the horrors of the cross. For I pray in your name. Amen.

## **Thursday, October 15 - Midday prayer**

### Let us pray:

Abba, Father, remind me when the winds of history change that I can trust in you. I pray for those living in fear of the future. I pray for those that are lost and hurting, those that need comfort and peace. Grant that I might know the joy of resting in you. For I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.



## Thursday, October 15 - Evening

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, <sup>2</sup> to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.*

Comments:

When I was in high school, I had the privilege of being a performer at Disney World. Before being set free into the Magic Kingdom, we were given an orientation and shown the way into Never Never land. Yes, there is such a place, the backstage of the park, a place only the cast is allowed to visit. We were also given the rules. As long as you were in the park, you had to live by the park's rules. After we spent some time there, it seemed like a world unto itself. Now, this is the way a nation works in our world. It has a life of its own and rules to go along with it. This past weekend we learned the two-kingdom view of our world. We understand that God's kingdom is the enduring kingdom, and that he is Lord and has authority over all. But then we find commands like this: Be obedient to rulers and authorities. Of course, we remember that God was the king for his people Israel. The people lived in what is called a theocracy, a kingdom ruled by the Lord. But the people wanted a human king. They wanted to be like the other nations around them. This seemed like a rejection of God, and in a way, it was. God granted their request. Sadly, the history of the kings of Israel is largely one of unfaithfulness to the Lord. Israel's kings led the people astray and brought judgment and misery to the nation. There is no perfect king or kingdom in our fallen world, only Jesus. The temptation for believers is to act like everyone else. When earthly kings and kingdoms fail, people feel they have a reason to rebel against them. For this reason, the history of our world since the fall is one of rising and falling kings and kingdoms. Literally, hundreds of nations have come and gone. Human rule has always been flawed and marred by sin. Now, this doesn't give us a right to be disobedient. God calls his people to be the best of citizens in our broken world. Rebellion and disobedience only make matters worse. The good news is that God is at work nonetheless. God purposed government to provide needed authority and structure for the functioning of human community and so there would not be anarchy. This flows from God's work at creation. God gave order to the chaos at the beginning, and he provided structure and purpose to our world. In the process, he honored humankind by giving people dominion over his creation, making us coregents in his world. But with this gift of rule there is also a responsibility. That responsibility is to serve him in all we do, and in this case to be subject to authority. This certainly is not the Magic Kingdom, but we are living in a kingdom with rules and responsibilities just the same. These, as followers of Jesus, we obey in submission to him. Only Jesus can tame the rebel heart, and he does this with the provision of his love.

Let us pray:

Lord God, you tamed the chaos at creation and made all that there is. You pronounced it all good. Yet, we know human beings chose the way of rebellion and sin. Show us in Jesus a new and living way. Enable us by your grace to be good citizens that the light of your glory may be reflected in our lives. We pray for our troubled country at a time when it is marred by division and rebellion. Provide peace in people's hearts so that there may be peace in our lives and also in the land. For we pray in your holy name. Amen.

## Friday, October 16 - Morning

1 Peter 2:13-17

*<sup>13</sup> Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, <sup>14</sup> or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. <sup>15</sup> For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. <sup>16</sup> Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's servants. <sup>17</sup> Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.*

### Comments:

Years ago, when the movie Braveheart came out, I was immediately attracted to the story because of my family's connection to Scotland. Braveheart is a fictionalized account of William Wallace, the Scottish commoner who led his people in a rebellion against the rule of the English in the 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. If you haven't seen the movie, it tells a good story but has much unnecessary violence. One interesting feature of the story is the cry for freedom for the Scots. At the first successful major battle, William Wallace rides amongst his fellow countrymen, getting them pumped up for battle. They are out-gunned and out-matched and ready to go home when Wallace calls them to arms with the rallying cry for freedom. This sounds wonderful today, but the Scots at the time did not have the same conception of freedom that we do today. For them, freedom meant the removal of arbitrary rule. They would have the rule of their own land and country and not pay taxes to the English. They were not pursuing a personal freedom to live their lives the way they wanted. This is what freedom has come to mean today. In 1859, John Stuart Mill published an essay entitled: On Liberty, when he defined freedom as we see it today. It means doing whatever we wish as long as we do not hurt someone else. It is a freedom without moral restraints. We have defined freedom in personal terms, not in terms of the community. It is in terms of doing what we want, not in being free to live and do as we were created by God from the beginning. In Mill's view, we have no duty to anyone but ourselves. Life is about our choices and not our responsibilities. Sadly, our world has fallen into line with Mill's definition of freedom instead of finding true liberty in Christ. The results of this view have been deadly for us. With the coming of the Jesus, Christians found themselves rethinking freedom. What did it mean? How would they live free in an ordered world? Peter says it simply: *Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's servants.* How do people that are truly free live in Christ? They live, knowing they don't have to continue to sin as they did before. Jesus has set them free from sin and death. This is not a license to live however we please. Our new freedom has opened the way for us to truly enjoy and serve God. Before we came to faith in Jesus, we couldn't do that. We were slaves of sin, trapped in lives that did not honor God. But now that has changed. We have a new freedom to live as God created us to live. This true freedom has moral opportunity, meaning the gospel opens the way for us to live holy before the Lord. It also provides us the opportunity to love our neighbor and not to think only of ourselves. It is this new freedom that brought about a change in our world.

### Let's pray:

Lord God, your word says that in Jesus there is true freedom, and that his truth sets us free. Show us in Jesus what the free life looks like. Open our eyes so that we might see how you made us to live from the beginning. Help us not to be distracted by idols, but to learn what it means to love you and to love one another. Thank you for redeeming us from the curse and setting us free. Amen.

## Friday, October 16 - Midday prayer

Let's join together in prayer:

Lord Jesus, you are the way, the truth and the life. You reveal to us the way to true freedom, how to love God and love one another. You are the word of truth from God that has become flesh and lived for a while among us. You are the life, opening the way to an abundant and full way of living to all who come to you. When we look for a savior, we see you. When we look for a teacher, we hear your voice. When we look for a model and example, you show us the way. Help me to focus my attention and my heart upon you today. Amen.

## Friday, October 16 - Evening

1 Peter 2:21-25

*<sup>21</sup> To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup> "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."*

*<sup>23</sup> When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. <sup>24</sup> "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." <sup>25</sup> For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

Comments:

Recently, I had to assemble a piece of furniture for our house. Before I start such a project, I always have some significant concerns. First, will all the parts be provided or will something be missing? And will the directions be clearly written with illustrations to make assembly easy, or will I be left to figure it out myself? In the most recent case, the parts were all present, but the instructions were limited and the pictures, well, were not helpful. Let's put it that way. As the Apostle Peter directs believers to obey those in authority, he reflects on Jesus. This is the example we should follow. We get a clear picture of how we are to live. And Peter speaks of Jesus' behavior at the worst of moments. What did Jesus do when he was treated unjustly? When he was beaten and mocked? Jesus knew he was being tried and prosecuted on false accusations. He knew that he was not being treated fairly. But he did not threaten. He sought no retaliation. Jesus gives us the master class in how to respond to authority, even when that authority has done wrong and misused power. Our temptation is to focus on our own rights, to demand justice, when I do not think Jesus expected justice in this world. I remember sitting through court proceedings one day and being very disappointed at the failure of human justice. Then afterward, I wondered why I expect it to always work when our world is filled with such sin and injustice. There is no indication that Jesus expected a fair trial or fair treatment. He knew what people were capable of. So, why did he not protect himself? Why did he not retaliate? Peter tells us that Jesus *entrusted himself to him who judges justly*. Yes, he entrusted himself to his Father and our God. That is what we are called to do each day. If we are looking for perfect justice, perfect government in our world, we must wait until Jesus returns and brings his kingdom in its fullness. I hope that happens today, but until it does, we must continue to entrust ourselves to the one that alone judges justly. God is faithful and just in all he does. He will provide justice in our broken world. Our place each day is to trust in him. I love the way Peter describes it. Jesus was treated unjustly, but in the midst of the cross, God was bringing about justice for the whole of creation. God was redeeming our world. This is what came of Jesus trusting his life into the hands of the Father. Those wounds of Jesus, his unjust suffering, have

brought about life for us all. We were the sheep going astray. We were the ones needing God's justice, and God provided for us in Christ. Now, Peter has given us the instructions. He has also provided an example to follow.

Let us pray:

Loving Father, your love reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. As we learn about you and your kingdom, you reveal our hearts and expose our fears. We look at our world and wonder how we are to live. You show us Jesus, and we are invited to follow you. Amen.

### **Saturday, October 17 - Morning prayer**

Let's pray together:

Lord God, today we spend time praying for those in authority. We remember in prayer our national and state leaders. Guide them by your sovereign hand of providence. We ask that you lead them toward selfless service and to see that the power they have has been provided by you for the benefit of others. Give them a deep sense of the magnitude of their calling and remind them that they must learn to depend on you. Help all of us to see their limitations so that we do not expect of them what only you can provide. Teach us how to honor them openly, but also to challenge them respectfully when necessary. Cause us to be grateful for them and the sacrifices they make. For we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

### **Saturday, October 17 - Midday prayer**

Let us pray:

Our heavenly Father, today we pray for our church leaders. We ask you to guard and protect our pastors and elders. Provide them with your wisdom so that they can lead as you desire. Keep them faithful in prayer, steady in your word, and unified in their mission to serve you and your church. We also pray for our deacons and the work they do, helping to dispense resources during this time of need. Provide for your church in every way, in financial resources and faithful leaders, so that the work of the gospel can flourish at Granada and in our city. For we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

### **Saturday, October 17 - Evening prayer**

Let us pray:

Our holy God, we come this evening, praying for parents and grandparents. Guide them by your Spirit as they raise and lead the young people of our church and community. We pray for teachers in public, private and home schools. Give them endurance and patience for the long days they face and the challenges they must address. Keep them healthy as classes return to in-person meetings. We also pray for college professors and staff that are working to serve their students. Guide the decisions they make and provide them the wisdom they need to move forward. In all these things, we look to you Lord, God. And, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **SUNDAY, October 18 – Worship**

**Please review guidelines below** for in-person worship. If you are ready to come back, reserve your seat using the link below. Seats are limited; RSVP is on a first come, first served basis.

RSVP here: <https://granadachurch.com/rsvp/>

9am - Heritage Service / 11am – Contemporary / 1pm - Spanish Worship

Our services may also be accessed at one of these platforms:

[granada.online.church](http://granada.online.church)

[Facebook Live](#)

[YouTube](#)



[granadachurch.com](http://granadachurch.com)



### **YOU ARE READY TO COME BACK IF:**

- You (and your children) are able to wear a mask that covers the nose and mouth for the entirety of the service.
- You understand your risk involved in public meetings and are comfortable with it.
- You have not had any cold or flu-like symptoms in the past 14 days.
- You have not had contact with a positive case of COVID-19 in the past 14 days.



### **YOU SHOULD WORSHIP FROM HOME IF:**

- You have traveled or left the country in the past 14 days.
- You feel ill.
- You have had cold or flu-like symptoms in the past 14 days.
- You have had contact with a positive case of COVID-19 in the past 14 days.
- Feel uncomfortable with the risk of meeting people in public.
- Have a previous condition that would put you at high risk from COVID-19.
- Your children would not be comfortable wearing a mask through a service.
- Not willing to follow social distancing guidelines at Granada.