JM Jason Mayfield

SERMON OUTLINE FOR PASTORS

THE POLITICAL DIVIDE

Living as Kingdom Citizens Above Party and Country

> We have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken. When followers of Christ live as kingdom citizens above party and country, we stop fighting our neighbors, stand against the real enemy, and represent the kingdom well.

MAIN TEXT
Hebrews 12:28

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SERIES
We're Honoring to All People, Week 3 of 5

BY
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AT A GLANCE

THE MESSAGE

1. The nation is fracturing over politics, and the data shows it: lost relationships, family estrangement, workplace conflict, and a widening chasm between opinions in a very short span of years.
2. Both sides are losing it, not one. He deliberately jabs Republicans and Democrats alike so the room understands the whole spectrum is out of its mind over this.
3. We are largely wanting the same things and fighting over the finer points, illustrated by two outspoken liberals describing America as the land of the free and the greatest democracy, that is what it was.
4. The church lives inside the political divide and navigates it poorly. Pastors and parishioners wave partisan flags in the pulpit and in the pews, and many in the room are party first, country second, kingdom last.
5. God's solution for the nation is not prayer in schools, the Ten Commandments in the courthouse, or all Christian officeholders, though that is his own preference and affects how he votes. The solution is Christ followers operating as kingdom citizens above all else.
6. First Corinthians 6 is about lawsuits, but the larger idea is the church appealing outside itself to the systems of this world. Believers who appeal to lesser powers get lesser results.
7. Christians should stay politically involved: vote, be informed, be aware, be involved, make your opinion known, but you can do that without being a turkey. And whoever wins, rightfully or wrongfully, God is placing that person for a purpose, as He placed wicked men over Israel and Judah.
8. America is 250 years old, and if it does not reach 251, you still win, because you have the kingdom.
9. The real opponent is not a Democrat or Republican neighbor. Ephesians 6:12 puts the fight against cosmic powers, which is a loftier enemy than any congressman.
10. Divider one, the algorithm: it has taken a great portion of your free will, it is optimized for clicks, negative political content spreads fastest, and it trains people to get angrier. It does not want you liberal or conservative, it wants you consistently outraged, and outrage makes money.
11. Divider two, your own assumptions: unfavorable views of the other party have doubled since 1994 and beliefs that the other side is more immoral have doubled since 2016. We assume total buy-in to a party's extremes, and Proverbs 18 says a fool takes no pleasure in understanding but only in expressing his opinion.

12. Divider three, extremes: open borders with no enforcement, abolishing police and prisons, deporting entire ethnic and religious groups. The boy in Matthew 17 fell into the fire and into the water, two polar opposites, and he was demon possessed. The extremities are where demonic activity operates.
13. Practice one, leave your politics in the parking lot. He is leading this church as an apolitical zone, wants conservatives and liberals both in the room, and follows Jesus in withholding some things and letting the Spirit of truth do the work.
14. Practice two, detox from the world. Constant noise and instant access drain us, so Romans 12 renewal of the mind through daily Bible reading, prayer, and worship washes off the world system. Some people are getting thirty minutes of Bible and twenty hours of cable news a week.
15. Closing aside, which he labels total hypocrisy: since 1972 conservatives report being very happy about ten points higher than liberals, with higher life satisfaction and meaning, and young liberal women report depression at roughly three times the rate of young conservative women. So if you want a better life, vote conservative.

WATCH IT PREACHED

youtu.be/uxti8JltB48

READ THE ARTICLE

jasonmayfield.com/messages/the-political-divide

PREACHING NOTES

Before You Preach

This is the third message in a five-week series on honoring all people. It preaches into one of the most charged subjects in any room: politics. The aim is not to move anyone left or right. The aim is to move everyone toward the kingdom.

Three cautions. First, the humor in the opening jabs both parties on purpose. Land both sides, or the room will hear a partisan sermon instead of a kingdom one. Second, the message uses a good deal of survey data. The figures below are as preached; know your sources before you use them. Third, the close is a self-described "moment of total hypocrisy" in which Pastor Jason states a political conclusion. Decide ahead of time whether you will use it, and if you do, frame it the way he did: as an aside, after the message, not as the message.

Introduction

Open your Bibles to Hebrews 12, and stick a finger in 1 Corinthians 6.

Happy 250th birthday to the United States of America. Or should I say the Divided States of America? By name, we are the *United* States, but many days it does not feel like we are getting along. Unless you have been living under a rock, you have felt the tension: in civil life, between neighbors, between fellow citizens. We have divergent political and other opinions, and it is impeding our ability to simply get along.

THE DIVIDE IN NUMBERS

Buckle up; there is a lot of data in this message. Some studies have found that:

- 1 in 3 Americans say they have lost a relationship over political differences.
- 1 in 5 people who are estranged from family cite political differences as the direct cause.
- 38% of both Republicans and Democrats say they would be upset if their child married someone from the opposing party.
- 1 in 5 American workers have been treated poorly by colleagues because of their political beliefs.
- 55% of human resources professionals say they feel minimally prepared to handle politically charged discussions at work.

Why? Because people are flipping out over this stuff. Imagine working in HR and someone comes in upset because a coworker voted Democrat. You would almost rather they had gotten in a fistfight; at least you would know what to do with that.

THE CHASM IS GETTING WIDER

Think about how fast opinions have moved apart:

- In 2008, presidential candidate Barack Obama said marriage was between a man and a woman. In 2012, President Obama reversed that position. In 2015, same-sex marriage was legalized at the national level.
- Fifteen years ago, it was entirely without controversy to define a man or a woman by biological markers. Today it is absolutely offensive.

Illustration: Steve Harvey and the tattoo. In a 2008 comedy special, Steve Harvey, one of my favorite comedians, did a bit about his 16-year-old son wanting a tattoo: "Not in my house. You're too young to make a decision that's going to affect your body for the rest of your life." Sixteen was too young for a tattoo. Fast forward to 2026: if you are a five-year-old boy, be careful walking through the house with your mother's purse over your arm, because someone might say, "He identifies as a girl!" and take you right down to the surgery center to chop your wee-wee right off.

And it is not just sex and gender that divide us. If there is a conflict anywhere in the world, we are taking sides as a nation. If one group is for Ukraine, the other is for Russia. If one side is with Israel, the other is with Iran. At some point we have to look at ourselves and say, "I live in Chunchula, Alabama. Does this opinion really matter so much that I ought to be arguing with somebody in Minnesota over it?" We are screaming at each other over fights we do not even have a dog in.

BOTH SIDES ARE LOSING IT

Say these with a smile, and land both sides:

- On crime, one group says crime should not be okay, and another acts like you should be able to do as much crime as you want without being punished.
- Republicans think you should be able to carry a gun but not shoot up heroin. Democrats want to take your gun and give you a needle.
- Democrats think that if scientists warn about an unknown virus, we should take precautions like wearing a mask. Republicans think that if you tuck a copy of the Constitution in your vest pocket, you will be protected from all diseases.
- The worst thing that could happen to the Republican Party is a Democrat saying you should not sit in the microwave for five minutes. Conservatives would say, "That's my constitutional right," and we would lose the next election because 400,000 Republicans shoved themselves in a microwave.

I toss those in so you understand that one side of the spectrum is not losing it. Everybody is. We are fighting over the dumbest stuff, and it does not matter where you are on the spectrum.

WE ALL WANT THE SAME THING

Republicans want to make America great again, and Democrats say that is an insensitive sentiment.

Illustration: Paul McCartney on The Late Show. I love late-night talk shows. When CBS announced the last episode of The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, I put it on my calendar and stayed up to watch. His big final guest was Paul McCartney, and the show is filmed in the Ed Sullivan Theater, where the Beatles made their first live American television appearance. Colbert asked McCartney about his first impression of America. *[Play the clip.]* McCartney said they thought of America as "the land of the free, the greatest democracy." Then: "That's what it was."

These are two outspoken liberals. The land of the free, the greatest democracy: that's what it *was*. If only there were a way for what it was when it was great to be that again. Is it just me, or did Paul McCartney just say he wants to make America great again?

We are all saying the same things, and we are fighting with each other over the finer points. Most of us really want the same thing, and yet because we are so against one another, we see little to no improvement in our national quality of life.

1. Party First, Country Second, Kingdom Last

It is pretty normal for the church to live inside the political divide, and I think we navigate it poorly. Pastors and parishioners wave their partisan flags proudly, in the pulpit, in the pews, and everywhere in between.

Many in this room, if we are honest, are party first, country second, and kingdom last. Don't believe it? Let's go look at the last 14 days of your posts on the internet.

God's solution for our nation's problems is not prayer in schools. The solution is not hanging the Ten Commandments in the courthouse. It is not having all Christian representatives in government, though that is my preference, and it will affect the way I vote.

The solution is, and always will be, when followers of Christ and the church operate as kingdom citizens above all else.

> **HEBREWS 12:28** ESV
>
> [28] Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,

Have the congregation say it: "I have received a kingdom." You cannot see it or put your hands around it, but we have inherited a kingdom. Hebrews 11 says we are "strangers and exiles on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13). I am an American. I do have a political affiliation. But above all else, I am a citizen of the kingdom.

> **1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-10** ESV
>
> [1] When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? [2] Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? [3] Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! [4] So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? [5] I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, [6] but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? [7] To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? [8] But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers! [9] Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, [10] nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

In its context this passage is about lawsuits among believers. But I want you to see something bigger: the church appealing outside itself to the governmental systems of this world. Paul is saying, "You have something greater than what you are appealing to. You have the kingdom, and you keep taking things to people who do not have it, as if they could give you a superior result."

When we as believers, kingdom citizens, appeal to lesser powers, we get lesser results. And frankly, it represents the kingdom poorly before unbelievers.

2. Stay Involved, and Know the Real Enemy

Should we completely disengage from politics? No. You need to be politically involved. You need to vote; stick that one on your fridge. You need to be informed, aware and involved. It is fair to make your opinion known. But you can do that without being a turkey.

We have to be careful not to think our wins and losses are tied to any particular political outcome. When a candidate you think is godless wins an election, whether rightfully or wrongfully, God sees all things. God is placing that person for a purpose. He placed wicked men over Israel and Judah to bring about His purpose (see Romans 13:1). When the person you think is the worst candidate wins, sit back and say, "Well, God is up to something." As Norman Hutchins sang, "God is up to something."

America is 250 years old, and if it doesn't make it to 251, you win. You win because you have the kingdom.

Now, I believe America is going to have a long, prosperous future. And I believe it will, because in this season a kingdom people is going to rise up, step into their purpose, and make an impact for good in this nation. Part of how we do that is by taking our eyes off those with opposing opinions and putting them on the real enemy.

> **EPHESIANS 6:12** ESV
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> [12] For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

We are not fighting our Democrat neighbors or our Republican neighbors. We are dealing with loftier enemies than some congressman from here or there. Today I want to pull a few of the enemy's tactics down to an observable level, so we can see his strategy to divide us and keep the kingdom from coming in this nation. Here are three things to stay vigilant against.

3. Beware the Algorithm

If you are on social media at all, or getting your information from the internet, you have unknowingly surrendered a great portion of your free will.

Back when news media started showing more partisan bias, especially with the rise of cable news in the mid-'90s, you still controlled what you took in. It was lopsided, but you got to choose your lopsidedness. Now, no matter who you follow or subscribe to, the algorithm decides what you see.

Illustration: The View. I do not watch The View. In my whole life I have probably watched it ten times, and there was probably chicken soup and ginger ale involved. Yet I know what they talked about this week. Why? The algorithm keeps putting it in front of me.

The algorithm is optimized for clicks, and researchers have looked at what draws the most clicks. The single strongest predictor of social sharing is political content. Negative political posts are 4.8 times more likely to be shared than generally negative posts. Toxic posts on X (formerly Twitter) receive 27% more visibility and 86% more shares than non-toxic ones. **The algorithm rewards hostility with visibility.**

Here is where it intensifies. The algorithm creates a feedback loop: when someone's outrage gets shared, they are trained to post more outrage. The platforms are effectively training people to get angrier and angrier.

What does that mean for us? If we know the scheme of the enemy, we can reverse engineer some things:

- **The world is not as bad as we think it is.** The person on camera losing their mind at a protest is not the average American. The average conservative is not tarring and feathering liberals, and the average Democrat does not live in a perpetual protest in downtown San Francisco.
- **People with other views are not as different from us as we think they are.**
- If we let the algorithm dictate how we think about and view people, we choose to be informed by neither reality nor the word of God. We are submitting our minds, willingly, to a world system, and that world system is controlling us.

People want to know if AI is the Antichrist. Facebook has a better chance of being the Antichrist than AI, because you believe everything you see on there.

The algorithm doesn't want you to be liberal. It doesn't want you to be conservative. It wants you to be consistently outraged, because outrage makes money. And outrage leads to disdain, bitterness and hate.

4. Beware Your Own Assumptions

While the algorithm programs our minds, it teaches us to look at "the other side" with deep disdain. Pew Research data from a few years ago backs this up:

- 62% of Republicans and 54% of Democrats hold "very unfavorable" views of the opposing party. That has doubled since 1994.
- 72% of Republicans say Democrats are more immoral than other Americans, and 63% of Democrats say the same of Republicans. That has doubled since 2016.
- 72% of Republicans and 64% of Democrats say people in the other party are more dishonest than other Americans.

More and more, people view anyone on the other side as closed-minded, dishonest, immoral and unintelligent. We have made enemies of fellow Americans who hold different beliefs from ours. And it has gone further: if someone we agree with 119% is friendly toward someone we disagree with, now *they* are our enemy. "You're weak. You won't hold the line." I'm just trying to buy a Double Quarter Pounder at McDonald's. I didn't think I needed to give the Democrat in line a piece of my mind.

There are preachers acting as if walking through life with some measure of decorum makes you a weak, deceived Christian. We hold a 250th celebration for America on the White House lawn, and if you go, someone says you are not patriotic. We hold a July 4th event where everyone on stage has to stand behind a bulletproof partition, because nobody wants to walk onto a stage in this climate.

Illustration: the shooting of Charlie Kirk. We think this is just happening, but there is a root to it. The man who shot Charlie Kirk had been sitting on the internet getting enraged. You say, "Well, I don't do that." But did you post something that fed it? Were you ugly to somebody? It plants a seed, and so much hate, maybe even from church people, travels down the line until it reaches someone who loses his mind. We participated in a world system when we have a kingdom. And we lost a young father in a public killing that many of us have watched over and over, and it hardly fazes us. We have a kingdom, and we settle for lesser things.

The longer we assume the worst about people, the bolder our assumptions get. We start believing that anyone in the opposing party has 355% buy-in on whatever that party is saying right now. But both parties have extreme ideas on their ends of the spectrum. I don't get on board with everything that comes out of every Republican's mouth. It stands to reason that not every Democrat gets on board with everything that comes out of every Democrat's mouth.

When we "otherize" people, our assumptions lead us to negative places. If you look at every Republican and assume they are racist, you will eventually treat them like a racist. You shouldn't be racist, and I think racists should be shamed. And for the sake of the country, we have to stand against socialism,

communism and Marxism. But if you look at every Democrat and assume they are a Marxist, you will treat them as your enemy rather than your neighbor. Maybe they are not. Maybe if we sat down and talked with them, we would understand why they vote the way they do.

It is understandable and reasonable to have no tolerance for major extremes. But we cannot assume that everybody buys into one. Guard yourself against assuming other people's motives and thoughts about their politics. There may be something you cannot see that, if you knew it, would make complete sense.

> **PROVERBS 18:2** ESV
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> 2 A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

Don't be a fool. Seek to understand. Do more than express your opinion.

5. Beware Extremes

> **MATTHEW 17:14-18** ESV
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> 14 And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, 15 said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he has seizures and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. 16 And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him." 17 And Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me." 18 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly.

"Often he falls into the fire, and often into the water" (Matthew 17:15). Two polar opposite extremes.

Make no mistake: I have strong political opinions. Some of them would be helpful in civil discourse, and some are probably superfluous. But I have an assignment that supersedes them. And the far left and the far right are dangerous places to find yourself.

First, because many of the ideas are crazy:

- **Open borders with no immigration enforcement?** Not everyone is the same. Some people want to come here because their country is horrible and they want to live the American dream. Some want to come here because they hate America.
- **Abolishing the police and prisons entirely?**
- **Deporting entire ethnic and religious groups** to preserve the national heritage of America?

These are extreme ideas, and if you believe them, they will drive you insane.

Second, look again at the boy in Matthew 17. He went into the fire and into the water, and he was demon-possessed. When we operate in the extremes, we open ourselves up to demonic activity. The

demonic is at the extremes. Keep a measure of consideration, nuance and diplomacy in your life and in our political culture, even as ambassadors of the kingdom (see 2 Corinthians 5:20).

6. How to Stay Kingdom-Minded While Politically Involved

I do want you to be politically involved. It is healthy for our nation. Here are two things to do.

LEAVE YOUR POLITICS IN THE PARKING LOT

This is how I am leading this church: **this is an apolitical zone.** I don't just want conservatives here. I want liberals here. I want everybody in this church.

I am not going to act like nothing is going on in the world. When things happen, I will address them, and at times my opinion will come out. But I am going to do my best to keep the main thing the main thing, and His name is Jesus.

Jesus did this. He told His disciples, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:12-13). If that is good enough for Jesus, it is good enough for me. I will preach the word to conservatives and to liberals, and to those who could not care less, and let the Holy Spirit do a work in each of them.

DETOX FROM THE WORLD

You have to take moments to turn off the noise and get into the presence of the Lord. Ever wonder why things that took no effort 30 years ago, like fixing a cabinet door, now feel daunting? We live under a constant barrage of information, noise and instant access. There was a time when we did not know what was happening everywhere in the world, and we were better off for it.

> **ROMANS 12:2** ESV
>
> [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

You need to know the will of God more than you need to know how bad some congressman is. If she was crazy four weeks ago, she is probably still crazy today.

This is one of the primary reasons I want you to develop a daily time of Bible reading, prayer and worship. **It detoxes you from the world and the world system.** I want us to be a praying church, so that there is breakthrough in your life, your family and your sphere.

It is also why we keep politics outside. Some of you do not need any more politics. You are getting 30 minutes a week with me and 20 hours a week or more with Fox News. You need to come in here and hear less of that and get detoxed. We are apolitical here not because politics does not matter, but because it may matter to you more than it actually does.

Christ loved the church "that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (Ephesians 5:26). You need to come in here and get washed off. We have to get some of the stank of the world off of you.

> **JOHN 17:14** ESV
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> [14] I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

We are set apart. We are called out. I appreciate congressmen, governors and presidents, but they are not my highest appeal. My highest appeal is Jesus Christ, "the ruler of kings on earth" (Revelation 1:5). The word is not something we fit into our little lives. The word is building our world, because we are not of this world. God has given Jesus Christ as head over all things (Ephesians 1:22).

We are going to be a detoxing church: washing, resetting, letting God do a work in us.

Conclusion: A Moment of Total Hypocrisy

As preached, the message closes with an aside that Pastor Jason introduced as "a moment of total hypocrisy" against everything he had just said. Use it only with that framing, or end with the detox section above.

Maybe you are here and you say, "I don't really care about politics. I'm neither here nor there." Here is something to consider.

At this church, we believe Jesus makes life incredible. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). I believe the gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to improve your quality of life in every way, and I am pro anything that improves your quality of life. I want you to wake up on Monday and like your life more than you did before you started coming to this church.

The data is not conclusive, but it is real:

- Since 1972, in regular surveys, conservatives have reported being "very happy" at a rate about 10 percentage points higher than liberals.
- Conservatives also report higher life satisfaction and a greater sense of meaning and purpose.
- Surveys in 2021 and 2022 found that young liberal women were almost three times more likely than young conservative women to report depression, and young liberal men about twice as likely as young conservative men.

To borrow from Bill O'Reilly, this is a no-spin zone. But if you want to have a better life, vote conservative. That is what the statistics say.

If you appreciate the word of the Lord this morning, give the Lord a hand and give Him praise.



ABOUT

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Pastor Jason Mayfield is the Senior Pastor of Citylight Church in Saraland, Alabama, an author, and the creator of POWER 27. He has given more than 20 years to the local church and helps pastors and ministry leaders lead BIG.

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