



# GOING DEEPER

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

August 7, 2016

### Discussion Guide

#### Jesus for President

##### CONNECTING:

45 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MIGHT PARTNER IN THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIVES.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they state they have held back.)

##### GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- Is the issue of politics something you expect to be addressed by a Church? Could you elaborate?

##### DIVING INTO THE TEXT:

60 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A SIMPLE ROAD MAP THROUGH THE TEXT. FEEL FREE TO USE THESE QUESTIONS IN WAYS THAT BEST FIT YOUR GROUP AND THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR OWN MEETING.)

- Using the notes, discuss the history of evangelical involvement within the political sphere. You might discuss people's perceptions and compare them which what you learn from this brief historical survey.
- Clearly, Jesus cares about politics. He was a political figure, but what was his political agenda? Read Colossians 1.15-20 out loud, slowly. Pause. Read the text once more seeking to imagine Jesus carrying out the actions outlined. Listen for words or phrases which might stick out to you.
- According to Paul, what are the aspects and scope of Jesus' political agenda? Do any of these surprise you? Could you explain?
- In verse 18, Paul notes that Jesus has assembled a people called the Church to join him in carrying out his agenda. What might it look like to pursue Jesus' agenda as the Church? (Note: Pay careful attention to Jesus' agenda making sure not to confuse it with our own ideology or agenda.)

- What might be the result among God's people should they follow Jesus in this way?
- In what ways have you witnessed Christians engaging in politics? In what ways are these similar or dissimilar to what the pursuit of Jesus' agenda might entail? What are the results of these kinds of engagement among God's people?
- Do you think it is possible for God's people to live today pursuing Jesus' political agenda? Could you explain?
- React to the following statement: God's Kingdom is made up of revolutionaries.
- Consider closing in prayer, seeking unity as God's people, fellow revolutionaries in Jesus' Kingdom.

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

### EVANGELICALS AND POLITICS

Since its full emergence in the mid-twentieth century, the evangelical movement has been somewhat reticent to engage in the political realm. Rather, evangelical churches and ministers have felt that their calling was to more important, spiritual tasks such as evangelism, missions, and discipleship. However, this "arm's-length" approach to politics began to change in the 1970's with the rise of Jimmy Carter, a devout Southern Baptist who unashamedly claimed to be a born again Christian. Carter's bold proclamation of faith coupled with his ascension to the presidency legitimized open evangelical involvement in politics.

The 1980's saw a dramatic rise of conservative evangelical involvement in the political sphere with organizations like the Moral Majority and Concerned Women for American. Sometimes this movement has been called the "Religious Right," and it has been credited with many of the conservative political victories associated with Ronald Regan and George H. Bush. While the amount of influence these groups actually had might be disputed, that evangelicals made their political voice heard in the 1980's is undeniable. Because of the attention given to the Religious

Right, many assume that all evangelicals support conservative political agendas, and have even equated the Religious Right with the Republican Party. This is in part because of the media and social-media attention given to organizations such as the Christian Coalition. However, evangelical involvement in the political sphere is anything but monolithic.

When one considers party affiliation, historically, the evangelical movement was Republican only when Northern and Mid-Western evangelicals were counted. However, when one turned to the South, the large numbers of white and black voters pushed the evangelical movement to a primarily Democratic base. In more recent years, Southern, white voters have increasingly transitioned to the Republican party giving the movement a more conservative and Republican flavor. However, this recent election cycle seems to be indicating that evangelicalism may be swinging back toward a more Democratic flavor with its emphases on social and environmental responsibility as well as civil rights issues like gay marriage. This is particularly true among younger evangelicals who are of the Millennial generation.

While the evangelical movement in any election cycle might bear the flavor of a particular political party, those who identify themselves as evangelicals rarely vote in bloc. Increasingly, evangelicals are hesitant to endorse particular candidates or parties but are trending toward backing candidates who share their core values and support specific stances on particular issues like abortion and sexual mores regardless of party. One might say that apart from old guard remnants of the Moral Majority, evangelicals are moving to engage in the political sphere on an issue by issue front, seeking to influence culture at strategic points by voting for candidates who will address their specific issue of concern.

## THE TEXT

### COLOSSIANS 1.15-18: JESUS' POLITICAL ALTERNATIVE

Paul's letter to the church in Colossae appears to be a letter written in response to a form of doctrinal teaching which was in error (Colossians 2.4, 8, 21-22). Some have argued that this error was not being

taught in the church but was associated with thinking taking place outside the church which might ensnare the young believers. Whether within the church or outside, the ideas Paul argues against involve teachings about the nature of Jesus, the existence and role of spiritual powers, and religious rules (Colossians 1.15-20; 2.9, 16-23).

After his standard greetings, Paul begins to address the Colossian believers by giving thanks for the work of redemption God has done among them, a work Paul likens to a new exodus from the Kingdom of Darkness and journey into God's Kingdom of Light. With this mention of God's Kingdom of Light, Paul turns to address the nature of the one who rules this Kingdom, Jesus.

Paul states that as the ruler of God's Kingdom of Light, Jesus is the image of God; that is, Jesus accurately depicts God's character. It is hard to miss the echo of people being made in God's image (Genesis 1.26-28), and Paul probably intended the echo. He seems to be saying that as a man, Jesus demonstrates the life all people are meant to live, a life stamped with God's character. However, Paul goes further by noting that Jesus is more than just a man. He is also the firstborn over all creation. Jesus is special because he stands as the one who reigns over all that exists and he holds this title by right of birth. Here Paul's mention of Jesus' birth is probably more metaphorical, addressing the legitimacy of his reign because Paul's next statement elevates Jesus by placing him at the cusp of creation itself. Paul seems to be wrestling with the idea that Jesus was human in all aspects while at the same time divine. The formulation of this idea defies words and our understanding, still today. However, Paul seeks to maintain the tension between the human and divine aspects of Jesus' nature. While human and accurately modeling God's image, Jesus was also the Father's agent of creation, creating everything that is, including the ordering of powers in both the visible (human) and invisible (spiritual) realms. This does not mean that Jesus had a human form at the time of creation, only that he was responsible for creation. Paul moves to conclude his thought about the

nature of Jesus by stating that Jesus is before (first among) all things and that he holds all things together. Because Jesus perfectly represented humanity in its true form and because he created all that is, he has the unique role of being first among everything and everyone; that is, no one and no thing is above Jesus. In this position of authority, Jesus has the unique role of sustaining all things, ensuring that things do not fall apart. Paul's conclusion about Jesus as being first creates another tension. Not all of creation responds to Jesus as first, a point Paul has noted in his mention of the Kingdom of Darkness. There are powers which oppose Jesus and his Kingdom. Paul addresses this tension by stating that Jesus has taken the leadership position of a group of people called the Church and that he has engaged in activity which defeated death and opens the way to a new way of life. Through his leadership of the Church and his defeat of death, Jesus has moved to assume his rightful place as supreme over all things.

### **REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:**

Politics. It is such a divisive word, particularly in this election cycle. In my 43 years, I cannot remember the level of anger and dis-ease which we are experiencing this election cycle. What has alarmed me the most is the heated discussions which have been taking place among believers during this cycle. Discussion may actually be too generous of a term. Diatribe might be a better descriptor. People I know and love deeply have entrenched themselves on opposing sides and begun to fire salvos and one another. Just this morning I opened up my browser to Facebook only to read "This post may make my fellow believers angry, but. . ." followed by an angry diatribe blasting fellow believers who didn't agree. As this was just another in a long stream of such posts by this person, my heart broke and then my fingers pushed the cursor to the "Unfollow" button. I didn't even finish reading the post. I simply could not take the hatred being spread, all in the name of Jesus. Isn't that amazing? Amazing in the terrible, awful, make you feel gross all over sense? In this political cycle, we as the people of God have lost more than civility. With each passing day we are losing our unity, the very bonds of love which show to whom we belong fraying over political parties,

ideologies, and candidates. We scream, red-faced, at one another through social media platforms and sometimes we just skip the computer screen and do it in person. Does anybody else see a problem with this? If something is dividing us, fraying the very essence of what holds us together, shouldn't that be an indication that we are doing something wrong? What else do we need, someone to say, "Here is your sign"?

So what are we to do about it? I have been pondering this issue ever since the political machines began to racket up, which seems like an eternity ago. What I have come to realize is that we seem to be at one another because the political system demands we be at one another. We divide because our political process is itself divisive, and we don't think it can be any other way. We have a two-party system which does not neatly address issues or agendas which we cherish as the people of God. So, we pick and choose and then we vote. It is the American way. It is the Christian way, or so I was told. Now I am not so sure. The greater the political fervor has become, the more I have turned to Jesus and said, "What am I supposed to do? How do I engage as if you were living in my place?" Jesus' answer has surprised me. More and more I have come to see just how political Jesus actually was. Jesus was incredibly politically active, but he didn't play politics. Jesus worked for political influence, but he didn't join a political party. Jesus sought a political role, but he didn't want any role in the existing system. Jesus was politically active outside the system. In fact, Jesus sought to tear down the system, to make an end of politics, parties, and governments as we know it so that he could create a new government, a Kingdom where he alone reigned. This was no spiritual Kingdom he sought. It was an earthly Kingdom, and he invited all who heard him to join in his quest. He called his followers "the church" and he gave them marching orders to function as subversive revolutionaries carrying on his mission to restore him to his rightful place as first over all things. To be honest, seeing Jesus in this light has done more than disorient me. I am not fully sure I understand all the implications, but I do see how joining Jesus in his revolution ends the fighting with my brother or sister. As fellow revolutionaries we don't need to

fight about parties, candidates, or even ideologies. We have one purpose and one purpose alone, the establishment of Jesus' Kingdom.

## REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

Politics. Typically, we have been told Christianity doesn't have anything to do with politics. Jesus was about spiritual stuff, not political stuff. However, if you consider the life of Jesus, he was a political figure to be reckoned with. The prophecies of Jesus' birth spoke of him in political terms (Isaiah 9.2-7; Luke 1.32-33). His actual birth made those in power fear him (Matthew 2.1-18). His message was nothing short of a call to join a political revolution begun by an invading Kingdom (Mark 1.14-15). In the end, his opponents gave him a political execution (Matthew 27.37). Jesus was political, but he didn't play politics. He didn't seek to be part of the system of his day. Jesus was clear. His desire was to overthrow the system and he desired a people who would join him in his subversive revolution which would put him over everything. This week, we encourage you to ponder Jesus from a political angle. Read the passages listed above. Ponder the true role of Jesus and his movement to retake that role in Colossians 1.15-18. Think about what it might look like to say "Yes" to Jesus' political agenda which involves saying "No" to politics. What might this look like? What might it look like to be a revolutionary? How might this bring greater unity among Jesus' people rather than creating disunity? Talk with Jesus as you ponder. Hold ideas before him and wait for him to address and teach you. Journal your thoughts and Jesus' answers.



SENIOR  
PASTOR  
**BLAKE**  
SHIPP

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