Faith that Sees Through Culture

Lesson 6: Where are we?

# Getting going

1. Henry Wade was the famous attorney of Roe v Wade. At one point, he had been the district attorney of Dallas. As district attorney of Dallas, he sent more people to the electric chair than any of his predecessors. After sending them to death row, he would go to them and evangelize them with his Bible in hand. What do you think about that? Did he do the right thing?
2. The Chamber of Commerce board from Otsego – Plainwell recently met at Peace. While they were here, I told them that I didn’t expect them to evangelize all the time. I told them that I expected them to do their work and do it well. That’s what I/we as the people of Peace want from them. Did I tell them the right thing?
3. What good can we do around here?

# Getting into the Word

1. In this lesson, we want to think specifically about where we are. We have to decide if we’re in a business world, a political one, a family one, a church world – where are we. Let’s start with God’s kingdom. According to the following passages, what is the Biblical answer to where God’s kingdom is?

* Matthew 16:17-19 “17 Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”
* Matthew 22:21 “Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”
* Matthew 28:19-20 “19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”
* Luke 17:20-21 “Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, 21 nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”
* John 18:36 “Jesus 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.”
* John 19:10-11 ““Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”
* Acts 20:28 “28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”
* Romans 13:1-6 “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. 2 Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 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. 4 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. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. 6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing.”

1. As Lutherans, we call this teaching the idea of “two kingdoms”. (We aren’t the only ones.) This is part of our lens that sees through culture. “Christians are citizens of and constantly live in two realms or kingdoms: the earthly society under government (the so-called kingdom of the left or the kingdom of power) and the life in the Church (the so-called kingdom of the right or kingdom of grace). That is, every Christian holds dual citizenship: they are citizens of their earthly country, and citizens of a grace kingdom that will find fulfillment in “better country” (Hebrews 11:16), a heavenly one. Christians live their lives in these two realms and are always present in them. Both kingdoms are going on at the same time and the Christian is active in both at the same time.” (pg 160) What do you think about this idea? Sound true? Too good be true? No good? Encourage you? Annoy you?
2. Some alternative ways of considering where we are and where God’s kingdom are below. How do they compare to the idea of two kingdoms?

* Theocracy – God rules and reigns everywhere
* Cultural redemption (or transformation) - “it is the job of Christians to redeem cultural activity and institutions to bring about the Kingdom of God everywhere”
* Me-ocracy – my desires and rules reign.
* Secularism – to conduct human affairs on the basis of naturalistic considerations

1. The idea of two kingdoms means a number of things. We start to get the lens of faith when we perceive that “the Lord’s kingdom cannot be walled in and reduced to an earthly institution. The Church cannot be limited this way.” At the same time, “people physically gather in local congregations. ... Christians never cease to operate apart from their faith, even in the so-called “public square”, which many want to limit to state matters only.” (pg 162) Has this truth helped you engage in the public square? How might it?
2. Because of this lens, Espinosa argues “the Christian should never step away from the public square” “the position that Christians become isolationists will not do. We cannot leave the world. We cannot pretend that the culture we live in doesn’t exist.” (pg 165) He also argues that “the Christian needs to be fed, and God gives His Church to feed His Christians. … The proper knowing of God is to find oneself in the place where God supremely expresses His love for his people. It is the place where faith is fed and nourished; it is the place where God protects us so that we are not overcome by the world; is the place where his love causes us to love him since he keeps pouring out up his children the forgiveness of all their sins. This is why going to church can never be about just amassing knowledge.” (pg 182) So Espinosa argues that we need to be in two places: the public square and a local church because of this lens. Do you agree? What has made this personally challenging for you?

# Going forward in faith

1. This lesson calls us to bring our faith into public in appropriate ways. The author shares one example. His friend Doug is president and CEO of a restaurant chain. He has an outstanding reputation. He has a dedication to sharing the gospel. One time he wanted to know about putting Scripture verses on the inside of the bottom rims of restaurant cups. He spent hours with pastor coming up with a long list. Whether or not you like that, do you think that was a real way to bring his faith into the public square? Is there anything you have done to bring your faith into the public square?
2. What’s a passage from this Scripture that impacted you?
3. How are you going to respond to this message?
4. Who is one person you’d like to share this with?