No Kings… But Jesus

Phil EuBank · Beyond the Ballot · 1 Samuel 8:7-9; John 19:12-15; Romans 13:1-7; Revelation 7:9-12

AT A GLANCE

On the last Sunday before Election Day, in the Beyond the Ballot series, Phil EuBank argues that Israel's demand for a king in 1 Samuel 8 is the same instinct that every election cycle reactivates: making a good thing ultimate. Voting is a gift and a duty, but a ballot can carry your vote, not your hope. Hope belongs to Jesus, the final king.

- Israel's mistake was never the form of government; it was making a good thing ultimate and asking it to carry hope only God can bear.
- When devotion shifts from Jesus to a tribe, curiosity dies and neighbors become enemies; leading with curiosity is the remedy.
- God's kingdom is no escape hatch to another world; followers of Jesus carry it into every room and conversation now.

> *"A ballot can carry your vote, but not your hope."*

EXPOSITION

Scripture engaged

> 1 Samuel 8:7-9 — 7The Lord told Samuel, "Do what the people tell you. They have not rejected you. They have rejected me. They don't want me to be their king. 8They are doing the same thing they have always done. I took them out of Egypt, but they left me and served other gods. They are doing the same to you. 9So listen to the people and do what they say. But give them a warning. Tell the people what a king will do to them. Tell them how a king rules people." (ERV)

> John 19:12-15 — 12After this, Pilate tried to let Jesus go free. But the Jewish leaders shouted, "Anyone who makes himself a king is against Caesar. So if you let this man go free, that means you are not Caesar's friend." 13When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out to the place called "The Stone Pavement." (In Aramaic the name is Gabbatha.) Pilate sat down on the judge's seat there. 14It was now almost noon on Preparation day of Passover week. Pilate said to the Jews, "Here is your king!" 15They shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Kill him on a cross!" Pilate asked them, "Do you want me to kill your king on a cross?" The leading priests answered, "The only king we have is Caesar!" (ERV)

> Romans 13:1-7 — [1]All of you must obey the government rulers. Everyone who rules was given the power to rule by God. And all those who rule now were given that power by God. [2]So anyone who is against the government is really against something God has commanded. Those who are against the government bring punishment on themselves. [3]People who do right don't have to fear the rulers. But those who do wrong must fear them. Do you want to be free from fearing them? Then do only what is right, and they will praise you. [4]Rulers are God's servants to help you. But if you do wrong, you have reason to be afraid. They have the power to punish, and they will use it. They are God's servants to punish those who do wrong. [5]So you must obey the government, not just because you might be punished, but because you know it is the right thing to do. [6]And this is why you pay taxes too. Those rulers are working for God, and they give all their time to the work of ruling. [7]Give everyone what you owe them. If you owe them any kind of tax, then pay it. Show respect to those you should respect. And show honor to those you should honor. (ERV)
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> Revelation 7:9-12 — [9]Then I looked, and there was a large crowd of people. There were so many people that no one could count them all. They were from every nation, tribe, race of people, and language of the earth. They were standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They all wore white robes and had palm branches in their hands. [10]They shouted loudly, "Victory belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." [11]The elders and the four living beings were there. All the angels were standing around them and the throne. The angels bowed down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God. [12]They said, "Amen! Praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honor, power, and strength belong to our God forever and ever. Amen!" (ERV)

The argument

Making a Good Thing Ultimate Is the Perennial Temptation of Politics — Israel's demand for a king, and why the form of government was never the issue

Phil EuBank observes that the first no-kings advocate in Scripture is God, though each time he says it he is whispering, 'except me.' Israel, weary of Samuel's corrupt sons and envious of nations with kings, kept asking, and God told Samuel, 'they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.' Samuel warned of new taxes and lost estates and freedom, but 'the facts weren't going to get in the way of their feelings.' EuBank cites scholar Jonathan Walton's argument that had the neighbors been democracies, Israel would have asked for a democracy. 'The form of government was never the problem. It was the hope they were placing in it. They had this thing that was good and they made it ultimate.'

> **Insight —** *Politics is a real good that becomes an idol the moment we ask it to deliver what only God can.*

Devotion Transferred to a Tribe Kills Curiosity and Manufactures Enemies — What John 19 shows about loyalty that outgrows its place

In John 19 the religious leaders warn Pilate, 'If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend,' then claim no king but Caesar, using the system of government against its officials to remove a perceived threat. Phil EuBank's point is that the most committed people let emotion

warp devotion, and the tendency is ours too. 'When our vote for a position becomes devotion to a party, a platform, or a politician, it brings our conclusion to the conversation, but it often leaves curiosity at the door.' Misplaced loyalty is never satisfied; it turns people who are wrong into enemies. His counsel is to vote conviction and conscience with Jesus as the primary filter, then be curious, since 'how could anyone vote for them?' says more about our lack of curiosity than about them.

> **Insight —** *Vote with conviction, but let curiosity about the neighbor who votes differently be the evidence that Jesus, not the tribe, holds your devotion.*

Romans 13 Defines What Government Is For, Not Which Policies Are Blessed — God uses every ruler, yet only one servant is also king

Phil EuBank says Romans 13 is the passage Christians run to when their side wins. He reads it after Romans 12, where Paul told individuals not to avenge themselves but to overcome evil with good; chapter 13 turns to what government is called to do. Paul names law enforcement, punishment, and taxation but 'never gives specific policies.' 'This isn't condoning exact policies. It's a distinction between what we are called to do as individuals and what the government is called to do for individuals.' God uses all leaders, good and bad, toward a plan we cannot imagine, yet that does not abdicate us; we participate as sojourners and exiles. Rulers are servants and ministers, but only one servant is also king: 'If you think some politician is that, you are going to crush them with your expectations.'

> **Insight —** *Trust that God works through every ruler without treating any ruler's policies as God's signature, and keep participating.*

Jesus Is the King Nobody Voted For, and His Kingdom Is Lived Into Now — Between a kingdom without a king and a king without a kingdom

Nobody votes for Revelation 7, Phil EuBank says: a multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language before the throne and the Lamb. Admitting he is snarky, he tells those who cannot imagine sitting beside someone who voted differently, 'you are probably in a row with someone like that right now.' He presses the titles: Messiah means rescuer or redeemer in the Hebrew Scriptures, and Christ is the Greek word used to translate it, so Christ is a title, not a last name, naming God's final king now. Secular culture offers a kingdom without the King; church people sometimes want the King without his kingdom. 'God's kingdom is not a place we escape to. It's a dimension we live into right now.'

> **Insight —** *Our citizenship in a kingdom no one can vote in or out frees us to be ambassadors rather than escapists.*

Hope Beyond the Ballot Shows Up as Small Practices of the Kingdom — How the Wednesday after the election becomes a witness

Because the kingdom is already ours to live in, Phil EuBank closes with practices instead of predictions. 'This week, forgive someone in a world that doesn't forgive anyone. Tell the truth when a lie would help your side. Refuse to turn a person into a punchline or a prop.' Find an afraid neighbor, bring a meal, listen without preparing a rebuttal. These do not complete God's kingdom, but they give glimpses of the king who wipes away every tear and makes everything new. No election takes that promise away. On Wednesday, he asks, be the person whose hope in God's final king has made you 'more loving, not less, more present, not checked out.'

> **Insight —** *The outcome of an election cannot revoke the future God promised, so the church answers it by practicing that future in small, costly acts.*

Cross-references

- Romans 12:21 — Paul's call to overcome evil with good, which precedes the shift to government in chapter 13
- Revelation 21:3-4 — The king makes his home with his people and wipes away every tear, so death and pain lose the last word

DEVOTIONAL

A ballot is a slip of paper, and a slip of paper is a thin place to hang a future. It can hold a name, a measure, a conviction carefully weighed. It cannot hold a hope. Israel learned this the long way, asking for a king like the nations had and getting one chosen for his stature. The thing they wanted was not evil. They made it ultimate. Now picture a different room. A multitude no one can number, every tribe and tongue, white robes, palm branches, voices crying out that salvation belongs to God. Nobody campaigned for this crowd. Nobody carried a precinct. The people we have learned to fear, dismiss, or blame stand shoulder to shoulder with us, all looking at the same Lamb. If that is where history is headed, Wednesday morning is not the end of anything. The deep breath we were invited to take at the start is the breath of people who are anchored. We can vote with conviction and carry compassion in the same hand. We can ask a question and then wait for the answer. We can set a meal before a frightened neighbor, forgive when forgiveness is unfashionable, and tell the truth even when a lie would help our side. None of it completes the kingdom. All of it is a glimpse, a window left open in a house not yet finished. The king who uses his power to give life rather than take it is already ours, and no one can vote him out.

Reflection

- Where in this election season have you asked a candidate, a party, or an outcome to carry hope that belongs to Jesus alone?

- Think of someone who votes differently than you. What would it look like to ask them a genuine question and listen without preparing a rebuttal?
- Which of the practices Phil EuBank names, forgiving, truth-telling, refusing to mock, or feeding a frightened neighbor, is the Spirit pressing on you this week?

Closing prayer

God, help us when we pick up the next half-true mailer, see the commercial we wish we could skip, or sit with someone convinced their side is the only side. Make us people of your grace, not without conviction but with compassion, curious and intellectually honest, leading with gratitude, love, and worship of you whatever the outcome. May we not seem delusional or checked out, but anchored: citizens of a different kingdom with an eternal king, the only king to whom our devotion belongs. In Jesus' name. Amen.

FORMATION

One thing to remember

Being a citizen of heaven first is the best way to love everything in your life, including the nation God has placed you in.

This week

This week, find a neighbor who is afraid and bring them a meal, then listen without preparing your rebuttal. Before you go, read Revelation 7:9-12 and ask God to make you more loving, not less, whatever Wednesday brings.

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