

Hope Church May 10th, 2026

FAQ's – nation-first Christianity

Luke 20:20-26

We're in this series *Frequently Asked Questions* – not surface stuff, but the kind of **questions people wrestle with**. Here's the one for today:

How do I follow Jesus while still loving my country well?

Because for many Christians, those two things can slowly get tangled together. One of the dangers Christians faces is **nation-first Christianity**. When loyalty to country quietly starts **outranking loyalty to Jesus**.

It rarely happens DRAMATICALLY. It happens through small shifts in the heart.

- We **filter Scripture through politics** instead of *letting Scripture shape us*.
- We treat the success of our nation like it's the same thing as the **success of God's kingdom**.
- We *defend our side with more passion* than we display the character of Jesus.
- We **expect Jesus is on our side** instead of *surrendering myself* to Him.

Today is not about not-loving your country. Loving your country can be a good thing.

- **BEING GRATEFUL** for where God has placed you.
- **CARING** for your community.
- Being **PATRIOTIC**.

These things can be healthy and good and even beautiful.

The DANGER starts when **love for country becomes greater than love for Jesus**.

When *protecting a nation matters more* than following Jesus.

Jesus **did not built on** FLAGS or BORDERS or POLITICAL PARTIES or EARTHLY POWER. He built

His kingdom on truth and mercy and justice and holiness and sacrifice and love.

So maybe the deeper question is:

- Is my faith shaping how I see my country?
- Or is my **country shaping how I follow Jesus**?

This is deeply personal to me because of my SOUTH AFRICAN ROOTS. I **lived through** what

happens when *faith and national identity become so intertwined* that people could no

longer tell where one ended and the other began.

When *faith and country* MERGE, CHURCHES often grow bigger but not deeper.

- The church's influence expands, but her **theology gets compromised**.
- *Truth gets watered down*.
- Commitment of believers fades.
- And the church slowly **loses her prophetic voice** because it becomes *too connected to power*.

Eventually the country itself can BECOME AN IDOL.

Some of the church's *most influential seasons in history* happened when CHRISTIANS had **no cultural power**. No political advantage. *No seat at the table*. When following Jesus' actually COST SOMETHING.

That's when the church was at its **strongest**. At its most **courageous**. At its most **faithful**.

And made the **greatest impact**.

Because history shows a pattern:

When Christians gain the throne, they often lose the Gospel.

When Christians lose the throne, they often rediscover the Gospel.

The tension between faith and politics is NOT NEW. We see it in the Gospel of Luke.

- The JEWISH PEOPLE were trying to figure out how to stay faithful to God while living under Roman rule.
- People were **exhausted and frustrated and angry** at an *empire controlling their lives.*
- And they were heavily taxed. Paying taxes to Caesar was *more than just about paying money.* It felt **spiritual.** It felt **political.** It felt **personal.**
- That's the tension that Jesus stepped into.

Verses 20-22:

Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be sincere. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said, so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. So the spies questioned him: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

Luke 20:20-22 NIV

- Luke says the religious leaders sent spies and they flattered Jesus: You speak the truth and you don't compromise.
- This isn't respect. They are **trying to manipulate** Jesus.
- Then comes the question:

Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?

- In Jesus' world, this **question was explosive**. It was a trap.
 - ⇒ Say **YES** – He sounds loyal to Rome.
 - ⇒ Say **NO** – He can be accused of rebellion.
- They are forcing Jesus to choose between **EMPIRE** and **REVOLT**.
- Everybody expected Jesus to pick a side.

Verses 23-25:

He saw through their duplicity and said to them, "Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription are on it?" "Caesar's," they replied. He said to them, "Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

Luke 20:23-25 NIV

- Jesus doesn't answer the question right away. He asks for a denarius.
- Because the coin *carried Caesar's image and the inscription: Son of the Divine Augustus*.
- This wasn't just money. It was **political propaganda** STAMPED onto silver.
- Every time someone used a denarius they were declaring Caesar's power and submitting to his demands for allegiance.

- And Jesus says:

Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar.

- Jesus ACKNOWLEDGES that earthly governments do play a role in life. That is part of the way life is designed.
- But then Jesus takes the conversation much deeper:

And give to God what belongs to God.

- And now the real question comes into focus: **What belongs to God?**

⇒ Not your Sundays.

⇒ Not your religion.

⇒ Not your church attendance.

- **You belong to God.**

- A denarius carried Caesar's image. But **you carry God's image**.

- Jesus is not just talking about taxes anymore. He's TALKING about worship. He's TALKING about allegiance.

Pay back Caesar in his own coin and pay God back in his own coin. God's own coin is human beings.

NT Wright

- We are **made in the image of God**. Our entire lives belong to Him.

Verse 26:

They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.

Luke 20:26 NIV

- Luke says they became SILENT.
- Jesus refused the categories they tried to force Him into.
 - ⇒ He did not **worship the empire**.
 - ⇒ And He did not choose **POLITICAL RAGE or NATIONALISM**.
- Instead, Jesus INTRODUCED something radically different:
 - ⇒ A people **fully engaged** in the WORLD but not shaped by it.
 - ⇒ A people that are *good citizens* without **giving their souls to political ideologies**.

⇒ A people that **participates in everyday life** but whose deepest allegiance belongs to another kingdom. God's Kingdom!

Jesus' answer is brilliant. He refuses the false choice they are **trying to force on Him**.

They BELIEVED you either **fully sided with Rome** or completely rejected society.

Jesus refuses both EXTREMES.

He is clear. Earthly citizenship matters. But no earthly power **deserves your ultimate allegiance**.

Jesus does not separate life into COMPARTMENTS.

- Faith over here and politics over there.
- Worship over here and public life over there.

Jesus claims authority over all of it. He even places Caesar under it. Caesar may rule over TAXES and ARMIES and COINS and BORDERS. But Caesar is JUST *a man who bears God's image* and **answers to the God who made him**. And that changes everything.

Earthly citizenship matters, but God's kingdom matters more.

- POLITICS is not our savior.

- POLITICS is **not our identity**.
- POLITICS can never *take the place that belongs to God alone*.

KINGDOM ALLEGIANCE.

- Jesus reminds us in **Luke 20** that my political views matter. But *my spiritual formation matters more*.
 - ⇒ You are NOT FIRST a **Republican** or **Democrat**.
 - ⇒ You are NOT FIRST conservative or progressive.
 - ⇒ You are FIRST a **follower of Jesus**.
- Jesus NEVER SAID that we should disengage from this world. We are **called to be involved**.
 - ⇒ To vote.
 - ⇒ To pay taxes.
 - ⇒ To serve our community.
 - ⇒ Even hold office if God calls you to it.
- But no party or nation or ideology **deserves** *my ultimate loyalty*.

- HARD REALITY CHECK: The Bible never says that a government exists to **make life easy for Christians**.
 - ⇒ The GOVERNMENT is not our savior.
 - ⇒ The GOVERNMENT is not the protector of our **Christian ideas** and **beliefs** and **morals**.
 - ⇒ The GOVERNMENT can **preserve order**. But it cannot *change hearts*. It cannot *save people*. It cannot *build the Kingdom of God*.
 - ⇒ When we expect politics to do that, our hope is in the wrong place.
- We should vote. We should **speak up**. We should *care* about JUSTICE and TRUTH and OUR COMMUNITIES.
- But **politics can never become** our identity or our security or our hope.
 - ⇒ If my *peace disappears* every election cycle.
 - ⇒ If politics *destroys my relationships*.
 - ⇒ If *winning matters more* than becoming like Jesus
- Then something in my heart has shifted towards **nation-first Christianity**.
- Jesus warns us that politics should not disciple us more **than Scripture does**.
 - ⇒ We spend hours scrolling news and listening to outrage and feeding our anger.
 - ⇒ We know every controversy.

⇒ But we struggle to sit with Jesus for ten minutes.

- Jesus reminds us in **LUKE 20** that my life belongs to God. **My loyalty belongs to God.**

My worship belongs to God.

And no party or nation or leader or ideology DESERVES what **belongs to**

Jesus alone.

BE A GOOD CITIZEN.

- Jesus calls His people to live faithfully in this world. To be GOOD CITIZENS.
- **Respect authority** – LIVE RESPONSIBLY – *drive the speed limit.*
- As Paul writes in **ROMANS 13**:

Be a good citizen. All governments are under God...If you're irresponsible to the state, then you're irresponsible with God, and God will hold you responsible...Decent citizens should have nothing to fear...Fulfill your obligations as a citizen. Pay your taxes, pay your bills, respect your leaders.

Romans 13:1-7 The Message

- Jesus reminds his disciples that **God is sovereign**, and no government EXISTS outside His authority. No government REIGNS outside of His permission.
 - ⇒ Not democratic or republican.
 - ⇒ Not socialist or communist.
 - ⇒ Not even a dictatorship.
- God can use flawed and imperfect kings. Unbelieving leaders.
- Jesus holds nothing back in **LUKE 20**. EARTHLY AUTHORITY is **real**. But it is never ultimate.
- As followers of Jesus, we need to **engage fully with governments without giving our hearts to politics**.
- We need to hold our convictions with humility.
- We need to *refuse to dehumanize people* we disagree with.
- Jesus challenges us in **LUKE 20** that every person bears the image of God – regardless of **race** or **class** or **wealth** or **immigration status** or **political beliefs**.
 - ⇒ Every politician I dislike.
 - ⇒ Every person on the other side.
 - ⇒ Every person I argue with online.
 - ⇒ Every person bears the image of God.

- In our world – right now – we need to remember whose image we carry. And we need to remember **whose image our enemies carry**.

What do we do when we deeply disagree with what is happening around us?

PRAY — before you react, kneel.

- Most people don't start with prayer. We SCROLL. We REACT. We REPOST. We ARGUE.
- But followers of Jesus are **called to something deeper**.
 - ⇒ We need to pray for the leaders – **1st Timothy 2:1–2**.
 - ⇒ We need to pray for people who make our lives a living hell – **Matthew 5:44**.
- Prayer RECENTERS MY HEART **under God's authority**. Prayer **changes me** – my attitudes and my expectations and my preferences.
- Prayer REMINDS ME that people **are not enemies to destroy**, but that they are image-bearers to love.

If you cannot pray for someone, you are probably not ready to speak about them
yet.

PRESSURE — accountability without hostility.

- Following Jesus is not passive. *Sometimes staying silent is not wisdom*. It is COWARDICE.
- As **DIETRICH BONHOEFFER** said during the reign of Hitler:

Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.

- As followers of Jesus, we often drift to extremes. We either **become combative** or we **stay silent and disengage**.
- But Jesus calls us to something better – *to speak the truth in love*:
 - ⇒ We need to vote.
 - ⇒ We need to speak up.
 - ⇒ We need to engage with leaders and hold systems accountable.
- How we engage matters. How we speak matters. How we vote matters.
 - ⇒ We need to speak the truth without distorting it.
 - ⇒ We need to **show courage without starting to hate others**.
 - ⇒ We need to *hold onto our convictions* without losing our character.
 - ⇒ We need to **refuse treating people like enemies**.
- Respecting the authorities does not mean BLIND APPROVAL.

- Because authority is never absolute. **Only God is.**

We do not engage like the world. We engage like people who belong to Jesus.

PRIVILEGE — use what you have for the good of others.

- If you have influence and resources and freedom and opportunity and a voice. It is not an accident. **They are gifts.**
- The question is: How can I serve others with what God has entrusted to me?

Privilege is not something to worship. And it is not something to feel guilty about.

It is something to steward faithfully.

Sometimes following Jesus in America start looking **more American than Christian**. *More shaped by politics than by Jesus*. More passionate about protecting a country than carrying a cross.

I've learned to love this country and her people deeply. I'm grateful for every part of it.

But my **ultimate allegiance** will never belong to a PARTY.

My **ultimate allegiance** will never belong to a FLAG.

My **ultimate allegiance** will never belong to a COUNTRY.

My ultimate allegiance belongs to Jesus and His Kingdom.

We kneel before we speak.

We engage without becoming enemies.

We use what we have for the good of others.

Because Caesar's image may be on coins.

But **God's image** is stamped on us.