No Kings…But Jesus

Series: Beyond the Ballot **Date:** Sunday, November 1, 2026
Passage: 1 Samuel 8:4–22; Romans 13:1–7; Revelation 7:9–12

Key Principle: *A ballot can carry your vote but not your hope.*

Good morning, Menlo, and welcome to all of you from Saratoga, Mountain View, Menlo Park, and San Mateo. This is the last time we'll gather to worship before election day this week, and while I know many of you, just like me, have already voted, the stakes feel high right now on a number of issues.

The title this week: No Kings…But Jesus is a phrase that didn't originate as a response to the recent protest movement in America or as a religious declaration by the modern religious right; it dates back to the 17th century, and people have used it for many different reasons.

Today I'm using it as a reminder to proponents of both political parties and those who feel out in the cold that whether you are hopeful or hopeless about the consequences of this week or you've decided they are irrelevant to your life, Jesus can give us an anchor in the storm.

If you aren't a person of faith, I'm so glad you're here, and I hope you discover that so much of the dysfunction we face today isn't because of the time we live in or the nation we are blessed to be a part of, even with its imperfections…it's because the common denominator is people.

People are made in the image of God but broken and in need of something bigger than themselves, and when we decide that isn't God, we create alternatives; politics and the power it creates have been a leading candidate throughout human history, and we're still feeling it today.

So today, we're gonna take a deep breath, explore some places where this has shown up in history, and see the gift of voting today, but the call of devotion forever through the lens of Jesus. But before we do, I'm going to pray for us; would you pray with me?

When was the last time you pushed to get something that you knew wasn't good for you? Maybe it was a purchase you knew wasn't responsible or a relationship you knew you weren't ready for. When we're kids, it's easy to spot because we beg or throw temper tantrums.

As adults, we can become more sophisticated, but we're often in the same boat. I recently had a birthday, and I'm at an age now where one of the things I have to watch is how late I eat at night. That late-night taco or burger sounds incredible now, but it will feel terrible later.

Before you feel like I'm targeting your political instincts, I want to start much earlier in our study than our current election. The first 'no kings' advocate was actually God but it always ended with, 'except me.' In the Hebrew Scriptures, God had been speaking through prophets for generations, and Israel was tired.

They were tired of the corruption they saw in their prophet Samuel's sons, and they were tired of seeing neighboring nations who had kings experience success in ways they wanted for themselves…God was hard to hear in a world with so much competing noise…

So they kept asking for a king like the other nations had. Finally God tells Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. 8 According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day,

forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. 9 Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."

This is ancient history, but God is referencing even older events in the life of His people, when He delivered them from Egyptian captivity. This has been an instinct from the very first people in the Bible: the pull to shift our devotion, to vote with emotion, and to settle for less than God.

Samuel tells them all of the unintended consequences of getting a king like the other nations have. The new tax systems that will be instituted, the cost to their families, their estates, and their personal freedoms- but they had already made up their minds- sound familiar?

Before you judge them too harshly, I'd encourage you to go watch some man-on-the-street videos where people are told things that their preferred party or politicians did but told that the 'other side' did it and then hear their outrage. When they are told it was their side, their attitude changes quickly.

When we value tribe over truth, when our vote for a position becomes devotion to a party or platform, we bring our conclusions to conversations, but we often leave curiosity and honesty at the door. If you don't know the story from here, Israel gets a king like every other nation.

Saul is chosen for his physical appearance while his qualifications, or lack thereof, are ignored. Things go from bad to worse, and while there were bright spots throughout Israel's history, no king fulfilled the role faithfully for Israel.

And in God's kindness, He would use this imperfect lineage of kings to bring about the ultimate King Jesus, who would be born from the line of David, redeeming a broken system with the true and forever kingdom God had always wanted to provide, and not just for Israel, for us too.

Part of what makes this hard for us to relate to is that we aren't actually a monarchy, and so while 'no kings' usually refers to a picture of modern power, it is more of a metaphor about abuse…anytime God pushes the 'no kings' idea in the Bible He really is whispering…except me.

Scholar Jonathan Walton makes the argument that if the nations around Israel had been democracies, Israel would have asked for a democracy. The form of government was never the problem. The hope they were putting in it was.

So no political party, platform, or even system of government lets us off the hook as followers of Jesus; if you are a follower of Jesus, you are a citizen of a greater and more permanent kingdom…not just in the future but right now.

We need to make sure the pressures of the moment never allow us to build monuments of love to something that isn't God. In other words, this week and in the elections to come remember: a ballot can carry your vote but not your hope.

When we turn the page to the New Testament, we have a different leader, but the same tendency, and it isn't isolated to just the Jewish people. In John 19 we see something that can still be true today; if we allow our devotion to shift toward someone or something other than God, that loyalty grows.

Not only will we compromise to maintain it, but we will also see other people as more than wrong; we will see them as enemies. In our day, it means that the circles we hang out in are usually full of people who agree with us. Maybe not coworkers or classmates, but we avoid topics with them.

When we dig into these topics, it's usually with people who agree with us and vilify those who don't. We say things like, "How could anyone vote for them or stand for that?" I've seen people argue that people who have suffered or died for their views deserved it…that's devotion talking.

When the religious leaders had Pilate, a Roman leader they needed on their side, in their sights, they put it this way: "…but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar."

The religious leaders are using the system of government against their governing officials to remove the threat of Jesus. The leaders would go on to confess that they have no king but Caesar; these were the most religious people, yet their emotions had warped their devotion…that tendency should make us nervous.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus was often challenged to 'take a side' in these kinds of situations, but He always prioritized the bigger kingdom and did not compromise for a short-term alliance or quick fix to an immediate problem.

The other tendency we share is for fear-driven formation to paint others as exclusively against us or the values we support. When our devotion shifts from truth to tribe; from Jesus to just us…we stop being curious about WHY others see or vote differently than us.

When we say things like, "How could anyone vote for that or them?" That says a lot more about a lack of curiosity than the information available. I'm not telling you to vote differently than your conscience, but you don't think everyone who votes differently than you is stupid, do you?

This week and in the elections to come, let's celebrate the freedom we have to vote through the lens of our faith and recognize that other followers of Jesus- neighbors, friends, and even family- are going to vote differently than us, and that's ok. Let's be curious about what we can learn.

Now, I know that this week some people will have their position or politician win, and sometimes, when that happens for Christians, we run to a specific passage in the Bible for support that this win justifies God's hand on that person and, in turn, that He condones all of their decisions.

The passage is found in Romans 13, a book that Paul wrote to a group of early Christians who had already watched the state kick Jews out of Rome for years before only recently letting them back in; they knew the power the state could wield and weren't naive about the potential abuses.

Here's the passage we sometimes pull out of context: "13 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, 4 for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed."

I know…a long passage and one that feels extremely awkward if you think about the different moments throughout history when governing authorities didn't feel anything like God-appointed. Paul has just told individuals not to avenge themselves but to overcome evil with good…

In chapter 13, he is shifting from our individual responsibilities to the collective call from God for government. This isn't an endorsement of all government policies throughout history; how could it be? They conflict with one another. Paul calls worldly leaders servants and ministers, even if they don't realize it.

This passage points back to where we started in week 1: God-ordained areas where government is supposed to act for the good of the people, and leaders will be held accountable for failing to do so.

Paul specifically called out law enforcement, punishment for crimes, and taxation for public good, but not specific policies. We love these categories as long as our policies are the ones in place, but 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.

Even with the call to honor and respect our leaders, or when we are told to pray for our leaders throughout the Scriptures…they are referred to as servants and ministers. Only one servant is also a king, God's final king, and it's for a different Kingdom, God's only Kingdom.

So don't use this passage to support your views on capital punishment, abortion, or immigration. Recognize that God is using all leaders everywhere, even bad ones, for a purpose and plan we could never imagine, but we can still trust, in service of an ultimate place for an ultimate kingdom.

And even though that is true, our call is still to participate as citizens of a different kingdom while being good sojourners and exiles in the nation and world we are blessed by today. In other words, "a ballot can carry your vote but not your hope."

And I know this is complicated. We have men and women who have served in the military or government officials who are a part of our community, and that idea of devotion is so tempting. Our honor and even loyalty to principles and the place we live can be a good thing…

…but it can also take the place of God in ways that feel good in the moment, but won't stand the test of time, and won't serve the nation or the people we love over time.

We called this series "Beyond the Ballot" because so much is available to us in how we live and lead, even if an election doesn't go our way. There isn't a clearer picture of that than in Revelation 7. The Apostle John was one of Jesus' closest disciples.

Later in his life, he faced persecution for his faith in Jesus, and church history records that after a failed execution with boiling oil, they exiled him to the island of Patmos. And while he was on the island, he received a revelation of a future reality with prophetic language and imagery.

In Revelation 7 we have one of the most straightforward pictures of that future when John records this, "9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

I'm kind of a snarky person; if you're new, you might still be figuring that out, but one of the ways this shows up is that some of you aren't sure you could sit in the same row as someone who votes differently than you… Revelation 7 is gonna blow.your.mind.

No one voted for Revelation 7, and all of the best and worst parts of human history will be in the rearview mirror of this moment, with only a restored and renewed heaven and earth ahead. This is the ultimate that we talked about from Bonhoeffer in week 1.

We have lots of politicians who claim to be servants, many with every intention to be, but there has only been one king who served us in the way we most needed. Maybe you're uncomfortable with me describing Jesus as king, especially if you aren't a person of faith.

I get it, especially if you have been in church or faith spaces where this idea of combining political power and a specific religious tradition was weaponized for a particular agenda while ignoring other very clear parts of the way of Jesus.

But I want to call out a title for Jesus in two languages. The first is the Messiah; the Messiah is a title that means rescuer or redeemer. For the Jewish people, it meant the one who would usher in a new kingdom; they thought it would be an immediate overthrow of Rome.

Jesus came to reveal a very different kingdom, God's ultimate kingdom, the one He was the ultimate king for. The second term, Christ, isn't Jesus' last name but actually His title. Christ is the Greek word we usually translate the Hebrew word Messiah with.

In other words, every time we sing about Jesus as the Messiah, our rescuer and redeemer, or read about Him as the Christ or Jesus Christ, we are being reminded that He is…TODAY, God's final and ultimate King. Every time we place our hope in another leader or ruler over Him we set ourselves up for profound disappointment.

A ballot is important; it can carry your vote, and you should ask it to if you haven't voted yet, but it can't carry your hope. If you head into this week thinking the outcome of this election will leave you without hope for your community or country, if that's on the table, remember the bigger kingdom you're invited into.

There are two extremes we have talked about throughout this series and together, we can demonstrate a different option this week and bring hope with us if we do, but in order to do that, it will take God's true and final King Jesus to be the ultimate king of our life, a vision for a forever kingdom that we live in light of.

The first extreme we see comes from a secular humanist world, and I don't say that to slander anyone. Our culture promises the kingdom described in the New Testament of peace and hope but without King Jesus, we get to be our own king, chart our own path and it isn't working.

We long for this kingdom because God placed it in our hearts when He made us but we are incapable of generating it by ourselves because of the brokenness of our own sin and foolishness, all of us.

But there is a second extreme that many of us who are church people struggle with, and that is when we're scared, we sometimes want the king without the kingdom. We long for Jesus and for Him to deliver us from this broken world through an escape hatch to another one, a better one.

But the problem is, God's kingdom isn't a place we escape to, it's a dimension we live into in the here and now, and if you're a follower of Jesus, it's something you bring with you into every room and conversation.

When we say we are called to bring hope to everyone by living out our identity in Christ every day…we are really saying we are bringing the kingdom of Heaven with us everywhere we go and to everyone we meet, as we are shaped by God's true and final King who saved us.

So what does this kingdom really look like? It's life under a King who uses His power to give life, not take it. Where people aren't disposable, enemies can become family, and justice doesn't depend on how much influence you have.

John actually gives us a picture later in Revelation: it's a kingdom with every nation, tribe, people, and language who are standing together before the throne. The people we learned to fear, dismiss, or blame are standing shoulder to shoulder, worshipping the same king.

Can you imagine that? A family bigger than anything that could divide it. And John shares a glimpse of where this is headed. Our King makes His home with His people and wipes every tear from every eye. Death, mourning, crying and pain don't get the last word because He is making everything new.

That's the kingdom we are hoping for, not just a world where our side wins but one where evil finally loses once and for all. Where nobody needs to be afraid of being forgotten, exploited or left behind. And that doesn't make what happens this week unimportant; there will be consequences.

Our neighbors will feel them but no election can give us all of that, and no election can take God's promised future away or your ability to live in light of it today. So while we wait for Jesus to finish what He started, we practice the life of His kingdom now. Forgive someone.

Tell the truth when a lie would help your side. Refuse to turn a person into a punch line. Find a neighbor who's afraid this week and bring them a meal. Listen without preparing your rebuttal. These things won't complete God's kingdom but they will be glimpses of hope for a world that really needs it.

Whatever happens this week, on Wednesday be the person that shows your hope in God's final king and ultimate kingdom has made you more loving, not less, more present, not checked out. Your hope isn't on the ballot this week, because it points to a King and kingdom who aren't going anywhere, would you pray with me?