

# Holy Chaos-an excerpt

## Chapter 4—Trusting in the Wrong Kingdom 27

All work performed by God is approved by his will. God understands what is happening, and his deeds are intentional. He can turn our sin and the sin of others—which both create *unholy chaos*—into redemptive stories so that we can live with him forever.

While it is exciting to be a part of this process, we must learn to take deep breaths, relax, and follow his lead by faith. Unfortunately, in the Bible God’s people at times opted for the opposite approach.

In the last chapter, we talked about how God broke his people. They had taken God for granted. They truly felt God resided in the chest called the Ark of the Covenant. When they perceived God was out of his container, his people were so scared—so frightened of his presence—they packed up the ark and put it away for twenty years.

Through their actions, God’s people created chaos for themselves during those two decades. Their enemies, the Philistines, saw an opportunity and attacked. It was only because of God’s endeavors that his people ultimately won the victory.

### Give Us a King

**“When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel’s leaders. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.**

**“So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, ‘You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.’**

**“But when they said, ‘Give us a king to lead us,’ this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him: ‘Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king’” (I Samuel 8:1-7).**

In studying this passage, I wondered: Did God initially desire to use this time to give Israel a period of Sabbath before he moved again? Were God’s people getting antsy and moving ahead of him? After all, from the people’s perspective, even though Samuel was a judge, he was getting old. Meanwhile, the other nearby nations had a political system built upon a human being—the king—which seemed an attractive option.

We can relate to that. God does not always speak to us; we do not feel his physical touch; we do not see him with our earthly eyes. We have to discern God’s presence in intangible ways.

Israel wrestled with this reality as well, and they, too, were tempted to try to nail down the tangible, the physical.

But God is spirit. God has never audibly spoken to me. I have never felt God's physical touch. God told Moses he was not wired to view God with only earthly eyes—it would blow his circuits.

God was King over Israel, but he was an intangible monarch. Finally they decided they wanted an earthly king. It is interesting to note that God anticipated that someday his people would want a king. He even made allowances for it.

In Deuteronomy chapter 17:14-20, God gave Israel parameters for the character of a man who would be their king. Therefore, the issue was not people's desire for a king but the motive behind that desire. The problem was that God's people felt threatened. They felt anxious. They were looking for a physical manifestation of someone who could make a difference. Someone who could make them feel better. Someone who could take away the stress. Someone who could rescue them.

They began looking toward a guy named Saul.

### **Big Man on Campus**

Saul stood head and shoulders above everyone else. Evidently he was an imposing guy: athletic and physically impressive. This young man would look good on TV today. Even better, he appeared to be very humble. What a great candidate for a king!

As Saul evolved as the clear choice for Israel, he initially did not realize this. He even tried to resist—which made him all the more attractive as a candidate.

So the Israelites gathered together before Samuel and cried out, "We demand a King." What follows is one of the saddest passages in all of Scripture. Samuel was understandably upset. In an attempt to calm him down, the Lord spoke poignantly: **"And the Lord told him: 'Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king'"** (I Sam. 8:7).

What a compelling statement, religiously speaking. God's people decided God was not good enough to be their King. God, as the Sovereign, made them feel anxious. Thus the people chose to hedge their bets. They wanted a physical king—someone in the flesh, whom they could see, hear, and touch. "Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."

So Samuel anointed Saul as King. Please note, the people were about to experience a great deal of chaos as a consequence of their own decisions. Their lack of trust and unwillingness to allow God to be their God created new chaos.

They wanted to be like everybody else—always a dangerous mindset.

Anointing Saul as king became another occasion when the Israelites engaged in idolatry. A more subtle form of it, yet idolatry nonetheless. They could not trust God, so they chose to trust an idol—in this case, Saul. The Israelites created many messes because of this and experienced much heartache.

### **Political Junkie**

For those of you who are political junkies, I understand. I was once a political junkie as well. My dad died when I was twenty-two. I had been planning to go to graduate school. Instead,

I went home to help my dad in what was then essentially hospice care, and to serve as the executor of his estate after his death. A week or so after my dad passed away, an elder from our church came to my dad's old office where I worked on my executor duties. This church leader was also a local politician. He told me, "Your dad served on the school board. The school district needs to find a successor. There are those of us in town who think you would be the logical one to succeed him."

I listened, thanked him, and asked him if I could spend some time thinking about it. I gave the idea serious consideration. Public service in my hometown and school intrigued me. As a single adult, I had plenty of free time. But accepting this position meant further disrupting or even altering my life plans. I had aspired to go to a foreign country and do mission work.

As I pondered the decision, I took a trip to Abilene, Texas. There I met with some of my mentors at Abilene Christian University, where I had graduated four months before. They listened. No one tried to tell me what to do. But one man did say, "You know, Mark, you have spent four years of your life moving in the direction of mission work. Now you're looking to turn on a dime."

His words made a lot of sense to me. I turned down the opportunity for the school board, and whatever that future held. Even so, I saw the potential public service had for me, and I almost entered it. I sympathize with those committed to politics, political movements, and public service. I remember reading years ago a minister's comparison of public servants to physicians seeking to cure society's ills. They do not always succeed, and when they do, their remedies do not last forever. But they can help this fallen world seem a bit more habitable.

So, I do appreciate the role of politics in a free society and respect public service in its purest form. But let us all beware of the danger of politics as well; politics and government can never equal God.

I am grateful for the United States' great system. Whether you like it or not, if you are a citizen of the United States, you are a part of our government. Whether you vote or withhold your vote, you will impact our political system.

Our world is fallen, and we are called to help. I refuse to say it is a sin to get involved in government, political service, or the political system. Yes, some people engage in those areas and lose their faith. However, medical doctors do so as well. We need both. One arena addresses the ills of society while the other addresses the ills of the physical body.

In the field of medical practice, some physicians think they are gods. In the area of politics, some politicians think they are gods. (I once made that statement to a church, and I received some of the loudest "amens" in my preaching career.) Yet who wants to live in a nation where there are no medical doctors? We can all appreciate that physicians help us survive in a fallen world. We would do well to look at public service in a similar way. There is a difference between viewing politicians as public servants and turning to politicians to fill a void created because one views God as absent or not doing his job.

We must also avoid the temptation to believe that politics is greater than the Kingdom of God. We must not focus more on political goals than Kingdom goals. I assure you there are times when God's Kingdom goals must take precedence over our political objectives. In those moments our political aims have to take a backseat.

I remember a sermon I heard in high school. The preacher spoke of a personal friend, a politically motivated young mother. She spent hours, day after day, knocking doors for political candidates. But she would never knock on a door to tell someone about Jesus. She was caught up in a kingdom...but it was a political kingdom.

### **What a Fellowship**

When we are caught up in the Kingdom of God, we will be routinely meeting with people whose political views are not the same as ours. And that means we must be cautious with the words we use, lest we destroy Kingdom fellowship by laying it down on the altar of political opinion.

If you bring enough people into the Kingdom, you will fellowship with people who will vote for political candidates different than yours. What are you going to do then? Are you going to try to work in a way to sabotage their presence and make them feel unwelcome? That is what some Christians do. Or are you going to welcome them into your fellowship?

I have reflected long and hard on these considerations through the years. It is challenging to deal with what I consider moral issues of the Kingdom, and I have at times placed a higher priority on some moral issues than my brothers and sisters. In other cases, my brothers and sisters have emphasized other concerns I have not considered as critical.

For example, I have emphatically fought against abortion. Other Christians I know have made fighting poverty a higher priority. Who is right? We both are. Both are important Kingdom issues. If anything, my friends who fight poverty have many more scriptures directly addressing their issues. I get it, and it makes me fully aware that pursuing solutions for society's predicaments can be subjective.

### **Party Politics**

How about those who say, "If you are a Christian, you will support this political party..."? I have a missionary friend who traveled with his wife to different churches to raise support during the election season. A church leader arose to lead a prayer during a worship assembly. Before he prayed, he offered as a preamble, "We all know this is a big election year, and you know which party God wants you to vote for."

My friend spontaneously, without thinking, exclaimed, "What?"

His wife immediately began elbowing him and whispering sharply, "Shh. Don't embarrass us."

Can any political party genuinely claim a lock on the Kingdom of God? Be careful—churches who marry political parties today become widows tomorrow.

We are God's people. We do not bow down before any political party.

Respect people who hold different political views. Pragmatically speaking, you never know when someone with a different political view will take up your cause for the Kingdom of God.

Lyndon B. Johnson held the values of the "old South," yet during his presidency, he moved earth-shaking civil rights legislation through Congress. Richard Nixon, an ardent anti-communist, made a trip to communist China and opened the door for historic recognition of that

isolated nation. No one should “burn a bridge” with people who think differently politically, least of all with a fellow Christian.

Like Martin Luther King, Jr., I have a dream.

I have a dream that politically liberal Christians and politically conservative Christians can sit down at a church potluck and enjoy meals together.

I have a dream that Christian soldiers and Christian pacifists can sit together side by side in church and cheerfully share in communion.

I know a husband and wife who have supported two different political parties for fifty years. They typically cancel out each other’s votes. But they have a wonderful marriage. How? Because they recognize that some details in life transcend politics. If they can do it, we Christians can do it.

There are no guarantees our nation will be here in a hundred years. Or in ten years. What will we do if our country has served as our god?

*God will always be here.* And it is in him we place our faith. He has more strength and power than any political party or government. Abraham Lincoln—a politician and public servant—captured this thought well. Once an acquaintance reportedly told him he was thankful God was on the side of the Union. Lincoln replied, “Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God’s side, for God is always right.”

By all means, get involved ministering to our society’s ills in the political process to whatever extent you feel called. Just remember, you serve a God who is not only the God of your nation but of the whole world. Hence, be flexible in God’s Kingdom work. Never surrender it for another agenda. If we ever do, we will be just like the people of I Samuel 8 who announced to Samuel, “We want to be like everybody else!”

When asked, “How do you make a difference?” some Christians have answered, “You’ve got to get the right candidates in office and place the right judges on the Supreme Court. Only then can you make a difference.”

No, there is only one who is at work who can make an actual difference, and he is our Lord. Whether it is in our workplace, our school, or our home, you and I can make a difference by serving him every day. Therein lies the ultimate power to change and mold society.

If you are in Christ, you have been elected to the most crucial office in your country. God has selected you to serve in his Kingdom. You are a part of God’s elect.

Serve people.

Love them.

If you want to vote, vote for whom you believe in.

Become involved in public service to the level of your calling. But don’t ever make that service your god.

You are not a tool of politics; politics is your tool.

I Samuel 8 reminds us of what is essential and what is not. We live life day in and day out. Social media, TV media, and radio media bombard us with messages calling for “all hands on deck.” If you listen, these messages will have you chronically frightened, anxious, and convinced, “If it is to be, it is up to me.” Every day you and I have to decide whether to follow God or follow idols. And make no mistake about it, to follow oneself is to follow an idol. To follow oneself is to create all sorts of self-induced chaos.

This is hard. Following a God who does not audibly speak to you, a God whom you cannot see, feel, or touch, is hard. Yet God does not apologize for that. He just calls you and me to trust him. Many of us have tried alternatives, and we can testify that is no solution. As the apostle Peter said in John 6, when Jesus asked the disciples if they wished to abandon him: “To whom shall we go?”

You have been reading an excerpt from *Holy Chaos* by Mark Edge