

What might God say to the President of the Republic of South Africa?

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Introduction

It is great to have you all out tonight, especially to have you, President Zuma with us at GodFirst. I am glad that we were able to accommodate you today, as most weeks we have a Head of State attending our church, so I'm glad we could fit you in!! And also a warm welcome to those with you, especially your bodyguards. A few weeks ago we interviewed Madiba's former bodyguard, Rory Steyn, so we now have a new found respect for bodyguards. I recently read that American actor Clint Eastwood endorses gun control saying, 'If there's a gun around I wanna be in control of it' – a view that no doubt bodyguards share.

We are currently in a Sermon Series entitled 'What would God say to...' We have looked at Oprah, Bono, Madiba, Whackhead, Malema, Madonna, Tiger, and today brings us to what might God say to the President of the Republic of South Africa. And I speak today with the humility that ought always to attend one who addresses the President, but also with the confidence of one that represents the President's President.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, some of us here know you, some don't, but you know all of us. Please speak to each of us today through your word. Amen.

Rms 13v1-7: Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted...For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

1 Tim 2v1-6: I urge, then, of first importance, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone, for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Out of the plethora of things that I think God might say to the President, I have chosen just three. Firstly...

1. I have made you the President of South Africa

We are told 3 times in 3 verses in Romans 13 that God establishes all authorities. Even as I speak, this congregation divideth like the Red Sea into two groups: Group 1 thinking 'That's how I voted. Good job God. Go JZ!' And Group 2 thinking something quite different, not at

all sure that God had anything to do with the last elections! Question: why does Paul state 3 times in 3 verses that ALL authorities are put in place by God? Answer: to help those of you in the 2nd group get the message!

Those in Group 2 may now move to thinking, 'Well, it doesn't apply to us because our government is surely worse than the one Paul was referring to!'

Wrong again. Nero was their president, a bloodthirsty sicko who invented his own stadium sport of feeding Christians to lions in the Coliseum. That was at weekends. Weekdays he simply had Christians drawn and quartered, where you tie the four limbs to four horses and then whip those horses, and four horses go in four directions each with a fourth of your body. At his State Dinners, Nero would dip Christians in pitch and resin, tie them to a pole, light at match, and allow them to illuminate his banqueting hall. And, we've just read in 1 Tim 2 that Paul expects us to pray for that guy. Pray what, hit by a meteor – yeah, I can pray that!

Fellow South Africans, herein lies the consistent biblical theme of God's active sovereignty in raising up and bringing down every government in the world. Here are some support scriptures:

Dan 4v32: God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men & gives them to anyone he wishes.
Ps 75v7: God brings down one ruler and exalts another.
John 19v10: Jesus said to Pilate, 'You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above'.

Do you get it? God is sovereign over the ballot box. These opening verses in Romans 13 are a mountain peak of scripture with dizzying implications for those who follow (citizens of RSA) and for those that lead (the President and his government), and my remaining two points deal with these groups respectively.

So, the second thing that I think God might say to the President is...

2. Anticipate submissive and prayerful followership by Christ-following South Africans

Why submissive followership from Christians?

Because these passages are loaded with compelling reasons to submit to the laws and government of the land. Take a look:

1. Submit out of fear of punishment:

Romans 13v5 says that the Government bears the Sword to punish wrongdoers. That's a good reason to obey the laws of the land!

2. Submit out of national interest:

Romans 13v4 says the 'rulers do us good'. Without a government, albeit an imperfect one, a tidal wave of anarchy would break over the nation. We submit to rulers because 'non-rule' would unleash on us unbridled evil with no recourse whatsoever.

3. Submit out of gospel interest:

Check out the progression in 1 Timothy 2: I urge...that prayers be made for kings and all those in authority, (why?) that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and

holiness which pleases God our Savior, (why? Because he wants) all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Wow! Did you see it? Paul wants prayers for governments ultimately because he wants the gospel to advance, because he knows that Governments, like all aspects of creation, ultimately exist to facilitate the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Men and women responding to the gospel of Jesus Christ is the goal of creation. Jesus used the phrase 'You must be born again' (John 3). The Duchess of Huntingdon once asked D.L. Moody why he always seemed to speak on the John 3 text 'You must be born again'. He replied, 'Because Madame, you must be born again'. Being born again means receiving the forgiveness of God, and the lordship of God into your life. Or, to use a phrase that we find so helpful, to begin to 'put God first' in your life.

There is another reason Paul ultimately places a higher value on the gospel than on government, because he knows that it is ultimately only the gospel, not merely a government that can produce a truly godly nation. Think it through: The government can outlaw racism, but only the gospel can deal with hatred. The government can ban corruption, but only the gospel can deal with greed. The government might subsidize the poor but only the gospel can make the rich compassionate. The government might ban porn, but only the gospel can deal with lust. We thank God for the government and Laws of RSA because they keep a lid on sin, but only the gospel can change the heart of a man or woman.

4. Submit out of submission to God:

The apostle Peter puts it so well: 1 Pet 2v13: Be subject to every human institution for the Lord's sake. We submit to the government ultimately out of submission to God, because God appointed them. Sometimes you might submit through gritted teeth, but if you claim a life of submission to God then submit you must to the government of the day. But because God is your ultimate authority, there might be occasions when it is appropriate to disobey a government if obeying it would result in disobedience to God: there's some biblical precedent for this:

Exodus: Pharaoh instructed midwives to kill babies. They disobeyed and hid them.

Daniel: Nebuchadnezzar forbade prayer. Daniel prayed.

Acts 5: The authorities banned preaching. The apostles kept preaching saying, 'We must obey God more than man'.

In line with this theme of not watering down the way we preach, I came across this true story appropriate for tonight: A nineteenth-century American preacher named Peter Cartwright was preparing to deliver a sermon one Sunday when he was warned that President Andrew Jackson was in attendance, and he was asked to keep his remarks inoffensive. During that message, he included these statements: "I have been told that President Jackson is this congregation. And I have been asked to guard my remarks. What I must say is that Andrew Jackson will go to hell if he doesn't repent of his sin." After the sermon, Jackson strode up to Cartwright. "Sir," the president said, "if I had a regiment of men like you, I could whip the world."

And why prayerful followership from Christians?

Because Paul writes to Timothy that praying for our leaders is of 'first importance' (1 Tim 2v1). Fellow South Africans, may I urge you to pray more for our President and Government. Because as A.C. Dixon: When we depend upon organizations, we get what organizations can do; when we depend upon education, we get what education can do; when we depend upon man, we get what man can do; but when we depend upon prayer,

we get what God can do.

And the third thing that I think God might say to the President is...

3. In view of me appointing you, lead confidently and humbly

Why lead confidently? Because I appointed you. I was sovereign over your campaigning and sovereign over the nation voting. Mr. President, on days when you are tired and frustrated, please remember that it was God that put you in office – a truth surely sufficient to return the spring to the step of any president! King David, similar to you in that he was also elevated to the highest office in the land out of the rank and file of ordinary citizens, understood this truth writing in Ps 139: All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. It was not a strange quirk of fate that made him king, rather the actions of a sovereign God. Winston Churchill aged 20yrs, wrote his mother from the battlefield, 'I rode my pony into the enemy today and dispatch two with my revolver. I turned my pony and rode again dispatching two more. Ne'er a bullet touched my pony, tunic or person...I believe I was preserved for higher things'. Mr. President, the angels said that of you in your early years: preserved by God for the office that you now hold! So lead confidently in the assurance that you are God's appointment, but also lead...

Humbly, because within this epic encouragement lies a sobering truth: You are God's servant (Romans 13v4), and as such the day will come that God will relieve you of your responsibilities and give them to another, and the day will come when you will need to give an account to God for how you have led. A servant of SA certainly, but more than that a servant of God. He gave you the job, to govern his people, according to his template of right and wrong.

And in closing, may I simply say that it seems that biblical rulers were judged by God especially for their treatment of the poor and downtrodden, those at the bottom of the food chain. Indeed King Solomon maybe best remembered for his wise judgment over two prostitutes each claiming to be the mother of a living child. Might God grace you with courage and wisdom to lead us, like Solomon, with heavenly precision and understanding. We have a real-life sized replica of Solomon's Sword to present to you. Our hope is that as you, from time to time, glance at it on your wall, you will be encouraged to keep leading us with confidence and humility for the glory of God.