

# Flourishing IN A LAND FULL OF FEAR

A Christian response to the state of our nation

## Part 1

### Introduction:

As a nation, we have been faced with some troubling news over the past few weeks, which has raised some genuine concerns about the welfare of our future. There have been a range of different reactions from people that have included angry rebellion, defeated disengagement, nostalgia, fearful micro-management and even unbridled optimism. Scripture is not prescriptive about *where* we should live but it does give us plenty of instruction on *how* we should live. This week's message looks at what an appropriate and biblical Christian response should be in difficult circumstances, wherever we live.

### 1. The People Of God Are Called To Flourish For His Fame Regardless Of Where They Are

Before and after the fall, God called his people to flourish (see *Genesis 1:28-31*). Even when the Israelites were exiled into Babylon because of their sin, God still gave them the instruction to flourish while they were there (see *Jeremiah 29:5-7*). When Jesus entered the scene, he brought in the kingdom of God, which the Israelites hoped would mean an end to the cruel Roman government. Instead, Jesus taught them to serve the government, by paying their taxes and being law abiding citizens, regardless of how unfair it seemed. During Paul's ministry in Rome, where he was totally mistreated by the Romans, he instructed the Christians around him to submit to the very same governing authorities (see *Romans 12:1*).

### 2. Governments Are Appointed By God For Human Flourishing, But Are Not Our Ultimate Hope

Paul commanded their submission to the governing authorities based on the fact that their authority was given to them by God himself.

I. Read Romans 13:1-7 to consider what scripture says about governments:

- Governments are appointed by God
- Governments are servants of God
- Governments are fallen
- Even bad governments can be steered and directed by God (see *Proverbs 21:1*)
- Governments are temporary (see *1 Corinthians 15:24*)

II. There are a few implications for us Christians regarding our government:

- We should pray
- We should obey - the only time we should not obey is when our laws expect us to disobey God
- We should pay what we owe - our taxes, fines etc.
- We should do all we can to assist - we should be agents of renewal
- We shouldn't look to them to be something they are not

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### 3. True Flourishing Is About Joy, Hope and Faith Regardless of Circumstances

The question of how we actually flourish in difficult circumstances still remains. The scriptures give us a simple and yet profound definition of human flourishing, which is to be lived out regardless of our circumstances: Love people and love God (see *Luke 10:27*). Our biggest problem is that we as the church view flourishing incorrectly, through the world's lens, which views flourishing as an individual experience.

As Christians we are called to get our hope, peace and joy from Christ, and not from our circumstances. When we actively pursue Christ for our satisfaction, we will find it, and then we will be able to flourish, in the true sense of the word. When our hope is in Christ, we then have an unwavering hope, which is vastly different to the circumstantial optimism that the world holds onto.

### 4. This Nation Needs A Flourishing Church

The church has what our nation desperately needs - a hope found in something other than circumstance. The church, and our church, is supposed to be a group of people who are committed to mercy, justice, peace and flourishing at all times, not just when things are going well.

### *Discussion and reflection questions to consider this week:*

- 1 What does the Bible mean by human flourishing and how is this different to the world's view of flourishing?
- 2 Why is it so hard for us to accept that governments are put in place by God? (Try and not be one-sided in this reflection. Also reflect on this from the viewpoint of the majority during the Apartheid government, pre 1994).
- 3 Which of the implications for Christians, regarding our government, do you struggle most to accept and why? (See point 2.II).
- 4 Why is it actually ungodly to ignore the scriptures' instructions regarding our submission to our authorities in South Africa?
- 5 What needs to change in us (according to scripture), in order to become a flourishing people, in a land of uncertainty?
- 6 Why is our hope in Christ not the same as the world's optimism?
- 7 What sinful attitudes and behaviours is God convicting you of as a result of hearing his word this week, and what changes are you going to make so that you walk in repentance and faith?