Session 1- Our Problem

Scripture: Various
Subject: Problem
Central Theme: Our Problem
Objective Statement: Every believing citizen must respond to our problem as a nation by understanding three solutions to our problem.
Keyword: Solutions
Points:

1. The Past and Declining Solution- 3 Institutions
2. The Present and Partial Solution- Political Engagement
3. The Urgent and Eternal Solution- Spiritual revival through great co-mission engagement.

Introduction:

Connection:

- I love the 4th of July. Everything about it is amazing.
    - It's summer time.
    - It's a time to eat!
    - We get time off. We get to be with our family.
- More importantly, it's about our nation.

- It is about the Declaration of Independence that the founders of our country made against the tyranny that they were experiencing from England.
- We are so blessed as a nation. We have historically had an incredible amount of freedom.
- Our country has been a force for good in so many ways around the world.
- God has blessed our country, and we ought to be thankful to Him for what we have.

Tension:

- But as I think about where we are as a nation today, I wonder if we really are experiencing a growing and thriving freedom today. Is freedom growing or declining?
- Are we a nation that is headed in the "right direction"?
- I have to answer no.
- There is a problem.
- Our country is in a mess relationally, culturally, financially, politically…and spiritually.
- Now as an individual citizen, I can only effect what I can effect. I'm a part of my neighborhood, my city, my church, and my family. I can do things to make a difference in my sphere of influence.
- That being said, I pose this question for all of us.
- What can we as individual citizens, who believe in Jesus Christ, do to pay our part in helping to solve these problems.
- I have good news today.
    - You can play a part in effecting good and lasting change in your country…in your family, in your school…in your neighborhood.
    - We can help be the answer to these problems together.
- Let me say it more strongly, more passionately, and more urgently. We must do our part to answer the cultural, political, relational, financial….yes the spiritual decline that we see.
- Over the next five weeks- the month of July- I want to share with you how we as a church can, and how we will, with God's help and God's plan, make as much impact as we can for the Lord in the coming years.
- How will we respond to our problem? How will you respond to our problem?
- We have no choice as believing citizens of this country but to address this problem.
- If we do not understand the problem, and God's solution to the problem, we will never address the issue.
- This is the focus I want us to have today.

Every believing citizen must respond to our problem as a nation by understanding three solutions to our problem.

1. The Past and Declining Solutions- 3 Institutions

- There are three institutions that serve in our country that were intended by God to contribute to human flourishing.

The first institution that I am referring to is marriage and family.

- In Genesis 1, God made man in His own image. He stewarded man with dominion over the earth.

Genesis 1:26-28

26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

- He made man male and female, and physically created man and woman to procreate.

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27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. 28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

- The means that God's plan for every human being created after Adam is to be connected to someone else.
- God's plan for the planet was that it would be filled with human beings that start out in families connected to a mom and a dad. It was God's plan that parents steward the upbringing of their kids.
- First and foremost this was to be done in the context of marriage- one man and one woman for life.

Genesis 2:18

18 And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

- The word meet means "appropriate" for or "fitting" for him.
- This is exactly what he did.

Genesis 2:21-25

21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

23 And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. 24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

- It was this institution- Marriage- that God designed to be a building block of a civil culture. Mom's and Dads raising kids and stewarding their upbrining.

The second institution ordained by God that I want to speak about is human government.

- Romans 13 is a weighty passage when it comes to speaking about our relationship with this institution and God's intention for us.

Romans 13:1-7

1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. 2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: 4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

6 For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.7 Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

- We find here that human government is a check against anarchy. Lawlessness leads to all kinds of negative outcomes. The government ought to be a check against lawlessness.
- We understand here that human government is ordained of God. This does not mean that God approves of every thing a government or a leader does. It means that God has ordained that there be a power that is a check to the potential human evil that exists in the world.

- We also learn that this human government is subject to God. Our leaders will answer to God for how they handle their duties.
- When human government tells its people to do something that goes against God's will, it is the duty of those people to disobey, knowing that there may be ramifications for that obedience.

The last institution that God has ordained is the local, New Testament Church.

- The Word is "assembly".
- It is the body of Jesus Christ. He is the head.
- We are told that He loved and game Himself for it.
- Ephesians tells me that it is a mystery that was previously unrevealed, which now is being revealed.

Ephesians 5:25-32

25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

- God always had in His plan the redemption of all who would believe in His Son.
- He elected to save those who would put their trust in Him.
- He designed the marriage of man and woman to represent Christ and His assembly.
- And it was His plan that this called out assembly be His body in the World.
- Paul told Timothy about the expectation of what the church was to be:

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1 Timothy 3:14-15

14 These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly:

15 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

- I want to point out that all three institutions, ordained by God, are made up of people.
- In our culture, they are made up of the American people.

So to speak to our problem, how are these institutions fairing in America in 2023?

- All these institutions are in decline.

The Decline of Marriage and Family

  - Divorce rates are not good.
  - The amount of people living together and doing married people things without marriage commitment is on the rise.
  - We are trying to redefine what God has already defined when it comes to marriage, and gender.
  - The family is already not doing well. This was written back in 1996.

Since 1970, out-of-wedlock birth rates have soared. In 1965, 24 percent of black infants and 3.1 percent of white infants were born to single mothers. By 1990 the rates had risen to 64 percent for black infants, 18 percent for whites. Every year about one million more children are born into fatherless families. If we have learned any policy lesson well over the past 25 years, it is that for children living in single-parent homes, the odds of living in poverty are great. The policy implications of the increase in out-of-wedlock births are staggering. (Akerlof and Yellen)

- According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 18.4 million children, 1 in 4, live without a biological, step, or adoptive father in the home.
- This contributes to poverty, incarceration rates, behavioral and psyological problems.
- Birth rates have been cut in half since 1950- from 24 births per 1000 people down to 12 per 1000 people.

The Decline of our Government

- No matter your side of the aisle, an objective look at our government does not lead to an encouraging view.
- Corruption is on the rise no matter the party affiliation.
- Spending is out of control.

- The government is growing in size, and infiltrating our lives in more and more intrusive ways.
- Our freedoms are in decline.

The Decline of our churches

- According to Christian post a Gallup poll in May church attendance is in decline. (Foley)

Overall, Gallup found that 31% of Americans attended religious services at a church, mosque, synagogue or temple in the past week online or in person, an improvement from the 30% who said the same in 2020 and 2022 as well as the 29% measured in 2021.

The 31% weekly attendance rate remains lower than the 34% recorded in 2019, the last full year before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic that led to restrictions on in-person church services and the ascent of virtual church services.

From 2016 through 2019, Gallup's church attendance rates registered at 34%, dropping to 31% between 2020 and 2023.

- Churches are closing.

In 2019, approximately 3,000 Protestant churches were started in the U.S., but 4,500 Protestant churches closed, according to estimates from Nashville-based Lifeway Research. In 2019, approximately 3,000 Protestant churches were started in the U.S., but 4,500 Protestant churches closed. The evangelical research organization analyzed congregational information from 34 denominations and groups representing 60% of U.S. Protestant churches to arrive at the church plant and closure numbers for 2019.The current closure gap indicates a shift from Lifeway Research's previous analysis. For 2014, an estimated 4,000 Protestant churches were planted, while 3,700 closed in a year. (Earls)

- So many churches are not staying faithful to the Lord, to His Word, to His mission, or to His people.

Transition Sentence:

- God has given all three of these institutions, but they are ours to steward. Our stewardship is in decline. This solution- our institutions- are in decline. What is our next solution?

2. The Present and Partial Solution- Political Engagement

- Part of the solution to our nations problems is political engagement.
- God has called us to be salt and light in this world.
- How do we make a difference today? Well, let me give you a case study in Ohio right now.

- Since Roe v Wade was struck down as unconsitituional on June 24, 2022 there has been a flurry of activity on both the pro-life and the pro-abortionist sides of the debate.
- This is because abortion has not been outlawed. The decision has just been put in the hands of state lawmakers, and therefore the people of the states in which they reside.
- On Monday, June 26 in the Courier, a highly biased editorial masquerading as a news article was on the front page. I agree in totality with the first part of title of the article which read "Ohio is Ground Zero. 2 Elections to decide if women have reproductive rights".
- That is one way of framing the argument. Of course, I would say that there are 2 elections to decide if women have the right to end the life of the child in their womb. Of course, this is the crux of the issue. Since it is a baby in the womb, it is wrong to
- On August 8th there will be a special election with only one issue on the ballot. "Should state law require that any proposed amendment to the Constitution of the State of Ohio receive the approval of at least 60 percent of eligible voters voting on the proposed amendment?"
- Ohio's current constitution can be amended by a simple majority. It has been amended 170 times.
- I believe that our forefathers were wise in how they proposed an amendment to be changed to our US Constitution.

An amendment may be proposed by a two-thirds vote of both Houses of Congress, or, if two-thirds of the States request one, by a convention called for that purpose. The amendment must then be ratified by three-fourths of the State legislatures, or three-fourths of conventions called in each State for ratification. *(The White House)*

- Even those on the side of the abortionists in Ohio admit that this proposed amendment is about the abortion issue. If they want to make an amendment that secures a womans right to an abortion they need only get a simple majority.
- In the August special election to be held on August 8, the proposed amendment is that state law should "require that any proposed amendment to the Constitution of the State of Ohio receive the approval of at least 60 percent of eligible voters voting on the proposed amendment?" I am told that if that amendment does not pass, the chances of an amendment being made to the constitution that would outlaw any regulation on abortion much greater.
- The second election to be held in November is called The Reporductive Rights Amendment. "Every individual has a right to make and carry out one's own reproductive decisions, including but not limited to decisions on: 1) contraception; 20 fertility treatment; 3) continuing ones own pregnancy, 4) miscarriage care; and 5) abortion."

- This would make a right to abortion, and no regulation on abortion a part of the constitution of the state of Ohio. It means that the door would be opened to have abortions up to and including all 9 months of pregnancy. The language is written in such an intentionally broad way as to include things like the lack of need for parental consent for abortions or even transitional surgeries and more.
- Now, some may be thinking, Pastor Ben, are you telling me how I should vote.
- What I am telling you is <u>that</u> you should vote.
- I'm telling you that when you vote, you should vote considering what the scripture has to say on every subject, and understanding what the current issues are.
- What scripture says that you should vote?
- James tells us…

James 4:17

17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

- You do know politics matters.
- Let me show you a picture….

Show picture of the Korean Peninsula at night….

Application:

- I believe that we ought to be good citizens of our city, our state, and our country.
- I believe we should be engaged politically.
- I want you to know that to vote in that August special election you have to be registered to vote.
- The last day to vote register to vote is July 10th.
- The last day to request an absentee ballot is also July 10th. Early and absentee voting can start on July 11th.
- If you have not registered to vote or requested an absentee ballot you can do that today in our lobby.
- I believe it is on each and every one of us to get educated on these issues and vote.

Transition Sentence:

- A few weeks ago I was meeting with about 20 or so pastors in the area where we were being presented with this information about the upcoming elections.
- There was a time for discussion and someone asked a prescient question.

- "Let's say the vote goes in a pro-life direction. Won't there just be another attempt and another vote later…
- What is the long term answer to these problems?
- This is an important question…not just for this legislation and these elections…
- But for all the issues that could be brought to mind about our country at this point.
- Of course so many of these issues do have a political component.
- But the answer isn't ultimately just a political answer.
- The answer to our problems is a spiritual one.
- The answer is Jesus Christ.
- The answer is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- I'm happy to report to you that the pastors at that meeting responded almost in one moment in one accord that the solution was evangelism and discipleship long term.
- And that is the last and ultimate solution I want to speak about today…

3. The Urgent and Eternal Solution- Spiritual revival through great co-mission engagement.

- The problem is sin and sinfulness.
- The problem is the sinful hearts of men and women starting with me.
- Repentance and faith in Christ is the answer.
- Paul put it this way:

Romans 12:1-2

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

- Our issue is moral, and spiritual.
- Repentance is merely turning from the way we think about the world and thinking the way God thinks.
- For people to think the way God thinks, they must be made spiritually alive by the mercies of God. They must be transformed by the renewing of their mind.
- How does that happen?

- God gave us a plan.
- It's His plan.
- It's his mission.
- It is called the Great Comission.
- If you walk into our foyer you will find 5 banners that quote all 5 of the Great Commission.

Matthew 28:18-20

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

- The Great Commission is the mission that God the Father handed the Son, and that the Son of God handed to His disciples who then went out and started churches with the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- The would do the work of evangelism, helping people experience conversion. They would then teach them to follow all that Jesus taught them to do.
- People who get saved are born again from the Gospel and from the Spirit. The Word of God changes their hearts and transforms them from the inside out.
- This transcends and transforms politics.
- Jesus didn't come to reform the government. He came to transform people.
- Tranformed people make transformed decisions and make a difference where they are.
- Our families are made up of people. Our churches are made up of people. Our government is made up of people.
- If we want those institutions to function the way God desires, then the people need to be transformed.That transforming work has been handed to believers and churches.

Application:

- If that transforming work is going to affect our families, our neighborhoods, our county, our state, and our nation, then we must make Jesus Christ's last words our first work.
- The Great Commission mandate of evangelism and discipleship cannot be unknown and undone. We must make that work our primary focus. It must be our co-mission vision. We must do it together as a church body.