

How political should Christians be? Preston Sprinkle discusses his new book, “Exiles”

TRANSCRIPT

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DFP S03E11 - Dr. Preston Sprinkle - Exiles

[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Welcome to The Denison Forum Podcast. I'm Dr. Mark Turman, executive director of Denison Forum, and we gather together for these conversations to help equip each other to think biblically, to live beautifully, to live holy lives, and to serve redemptively, to make the world a better place for everybody until Jesus comes back.

That's a lot in just a sentence or two, but that's what we're seeking to do today, especially around the timely topic of Christians and politics. We're having another conversation with our friend, Dr. Preston Sprinkle. Many of you are familiar with him, but in case you're not, he's a best-selling author and has written more than a dozen books.

He is also the president of the Center for Faith, Sexuality, and Gender. Highly recommend that you check out the resources there. And he is also known to many of you probably as the host of the theology in the raw podcast, which has probably the best name for a podcast that I've heard anywhere especially for Christians to listen to and really enjoy following his podcast and his work on multiple levels.

But today we're talking about his newest book called exiles, the church. In the shadow of the empire. And we're going to get into that today. So Preston, welcome back to the podcast.

[00:01:16] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** Thanks for having me on, Mark. I'm glad to be here.

[00:01:19] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, I just, I have to ask you kind of a fundamental question. What's it like to be on the interview side instead of on the host side?

So coach me up on, on what it's like to be on that side of the conversation.

[00:01:31] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** That's a little, it's a little it's different, but I actually like it. I'm so often on the host side that it's kind of fun to be on this side and not know what's going to come, you know?

[00:01:39] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Right. Well, we're not going to try to see if we can trip you up, but we'll, you know, see where we can take the conversation in a way that can help us to be equipped and to deal with politics. Better. Certainly that's very much on a lot of our minds. Primary season is going on. There's just so much consuming the news every single day about politics.

Obviously a timely thing for an election year. Yeah. But who were you thinking of and what were you aiming at when you sat down to write this book?

[00:02:12] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** Good question. My publisher always wants to know who's your, if you could picture one single individual who you're writing to, it's always the hardest thing because I'm writing to many different people. You know, I'm writing to Christians primarily in, in America. It is a very American centric book.

I state that early on that my political situation is as an American living in America. And so that's kind of the lens I'm looking at. You know, part of my I'm deeply concerned over the unity of the church and how fragile that has become over divisions over secular politics. You know, you know, if we divide over fundamentals, like somebody, you know, a church denies the Trinity or the deity of Christ or even other significant doctrinal issues, maybe a definition of marriage or something, you know, that like that, that, that makes sense.

I think there's a place for that. But in 2016 and 2020, the, you know, last few elections, I just saw so many churches ripped to shreds over different perspectives on politics. And I'm like, that just, I just don't think that is pleasing to Christ at all. And I think it goes against Jesus's own prayer in John 17 that, you know, in so many words, he says, you know, when the church is one, then they will, then the world will believe that the father sent me, you know, like the validity of Jesus rest in part on whether the church can be unified or not.

And it's just the churches has not been unified over difference is different views on again, our national politics. And so that, I guess that was kind of my motivate, you know, who am I writing to you? I guess somebody who. And maybe if I can bend the ear of somebody who maybe was part of the problem, you know, and again, we can, and we will get into this and not that we can't have political viewpoints and, you know, lean a certain direction and maybe even vote a certain way or whatever, but to look at another person who votes differently or sees things in a different light as an enemy, not your Christian neighbor.

I mean, I think just, I think that's a fundamental problem.

[00:04:14] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And very well framed. Absolutely. And your comment there makes me think of, I think it was Ronald Reagan who said, you know, in politics, we have no enemies, we just have opponents. Part of the early part of the book, you talk about your own journey through politics, which is reflective of my own and a number of people that I think will be listening to this and also reading the book.

Where do you think it is that we turn this corner from the idea that, hey, we have rivals, we have different opinions, we have different views we want to follow different paths to accomplishing different policies, that type of thing. Where do you think in the last 40 to 60 years that we turned this corner of, Hey, we don't just have different opinions or see each other as political rivals or opponents.

Now it's a good versus evil kind of conversation. You know, I saw a bumper sticker. Less than two weeks ago of, you know, a guy driving his pickup truck here in Texas. Like the last thing in the world is going to let my daughter marry somebody from the other political party. Right. It was obvious what his political party was.

Where do you think we turn that corner?

[00:05:22] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** Well, you'd probably know better than I would. I think in the last 10 years with, I don't want to reduce it all to this, but I do think the manner in which we are getting our news today, there's been a major shift, right? From like mainstream news outlets that I was just talking to somebody the other day who kind of explained it.

And, you know, back in the olden days, when you had a newspaper and, you know, one news channel or whatever, it's like, you know, they want to sell newspapers to everybody. So you kind of kept, you kind of have to appeal to just as many people as you can. You can't just be a left lane, left wing newspaper or right wing.

You're going to lose half your audience. So, and there was definitely leanings and stuff, but it just seemed to be. Journalism back in the day. And, but now our news outlets are so siloed and they are, they make money off of appealing to a certain base. And how do you appeal? How do you appeal to a certain base?

You produce fear and anger. We know psychologically that will keep you clicking and reading and you start stewing in your anger. And that's just the way the system is largely. And you know, I think that has at least a significant thing to do with it, you know, and I, so that's why I think the last 10 years or so, you see this massive polarization.

You put it correctly. I mean, you know, no longer is it, Oh, I really disagree with your viewpoints. It's your evil. You're immoral. Wait, you voted for that guy. That's an immoral vote. I

didn't see that growing up in the nineties, you know, and, you know, I lived through the, you know, Reagan Clinton Bush era.

And you know, I saw, you know, and I was young then. So I'm, you know, I'm going off of my memory here, but it seemed like people would get into good, you know, political disputes or whatever, but I never saw the accusation of you are immoral. You are evil. If you vote for that evil person, you know, I don't know.

I think, yeah, maybe from Obama onward, it started to get a bit more along those lines, but you know, there was, I don't know if you remember this, but a few, I think it was a couple of years ago when George W. Bush, George H. W. Bush and Ellen DeGeneres were at like a football game and they were hanging out.

So, you know, so here you have a pretty liberal person, Ellen and a conservative president, and they were hanging out at a football game and they were like laughing and joking, like they're friends.

[00:07:39] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Exactly. Yeah. I

[00:07:40] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** and I don't,

[00:07:41] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. Vividly. Yeah.

[00:07:42] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** and the social media, and there was outrage on social media that she would be friendly with this You know, this evil, horrible person and vice versa, you know, but that just shows, you know, both of them are from more of an old school kind of framework where they could radically disagree, but still get along.

And that, that was where the, you know, that's the era that came from. But then the reaction in our modern day situation was one of good and evil. You don't be friendly with evil. So I would love, do you, I mean, I know you're interviewing me, but do you, you pay attention to politics more than I do.

And for, I'm going to guess a low, slightly longer time than me is. Do you have any

[00:08:20] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, yeah. So, you know, I, you know, I go back to my first orientation around this just being aware of Watergate as a kid. You know, I was, so I was born six months before JFK was assassinated. So my whole life was framed in that context, especially as a Texan living not far from Dallas. My family, I grew up in a Roman Catholic family, first decade of my life.

And so my family, my parents particularly resonated with, you know, a Catholic becoming president in the early sixties. And then like I said, to be assassinated, you know, a hundred miles

away from where we lived is very. Much a framing thing. And then as I came of age in the Nixon years, I remember sitting wondering why my mom wouldn't let me turn the television to something else.

Well, there wasn't anything else on, but Watergate trials. And it was frustrating to me that this situation was overtaking, you know, this wonderful thing called television in those days. But it, I would agree with you that it seemed to have pivoted sometime after nine 11, it seemed, you know, and maybe in some ways triggered by, you know, that we had this terrorist attack that was driven from a perverted view of faith and the idea that.

You know, the nine 11 attackers had somehow endeared themselves to their God by what they did. And so you had that as a context. And then I love the call out about journalism. Just we're still working in, we'll be working for a long time to come. I think. In the reframing of journalism, but I remember not long ago talking to my church about this and saying, you know You don't want to live in a world where you don't have a healthy active free press we would call that russia or we would call that china or other places in the middle east that type of thing you we need good journalism and we need good balanced journalism, and I think we're we're trying to find our way back to that or I hope we're trying to find our way toward that again in A fresh way to where we can somehow break down some of the echo chambers.

A lot of people are talking about that. And I think, and I think your book helped call that out as well is Hey, we're all trying to wrap our head around big issues. And yeah, and as someone hired, you know, somebody say. It might've been a quote come out of your book. I can't remember, but I heard somebody just recently say, you know, back in the Reagan era, Tip O'Neill, who was a speaker of the house said all politics is local.

Well, we've turned that on its head. All politics are now national. I mean, we have, I've seen school board members and city council members and county commissioners running on a platform that is based on what's going on in national politics rather than what's going on right here in our immediate context which is a.

A very strange and weird kind of way to do politics really. Well, let me ask you this question. So much of your ministry that I have followed probably for a decade or more now has to do with identity. Just understanding our identity in a lot of different categories, particularly, you know, sexuality, gender, you've written some really great work in that.

This is a big question. I don't, we could spend a couple of hours talking about the, what's the difference between answering the question? What are we? And the question, who are we? Okay. Those are really big philosophical theological questions, but your book talks about developing and building a political identity.

So here's my here's where I'm going with this, which is building or even trying to build a political idea or an political identity. Is that giving too much weight to this area or is politics just kind of a. a necessary earthly function that we participate in at whatever level we choose to participate in it.

So I guess it's a long way around saying, do you think we should even bother to have a political identity? Or Is it foisted upon us without our choice?

[00:12:24] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** Huh? That's great question. And I, yeah, large part of my book is In so many words, kind of addressing that I would in a big part of a big large part of my argument is that Christian is a political identity that so many, and I, you know, I show from scripture, both Old New Testament that that a lot of the themes used to describe the people of God, the work of the people of God who we worship you know, the even terms like kingdom of God, you know, these were deeply political terms, even the term church.

This is how I opened the book. The Greek word ecclesia referred to a political gathering. And that was the term that the church that the early Christians used to describe their own community. They didn't call it a koinonia. Well, they did sometimes koinonia, a fellowship, you know, or a pseudagoga you know, Where we get the word synagogue and gathering, they call it an ecclesia, which had deep political implications.

And so, a main, I guess, part of my argument is that the church, the early church saw themselves as a political alternative to the empire that they were living under. They weren't just a group of spiritual people, you know, worshiping their God. And then they went out the door and then they got involved.

Then they did politics like. Worshipping Jesus as Lord was a political statement to say Jesus is Lord. In a sense, sort of whispered Caesar is not now, of course, Caesar is, you know, he was the empire emperor and, you know, ran things, but theologically he, you know, Jesus kind of dethroned him when he got crucified by him, you know, is, you know, what we see throughout the book of Revelation and other books.

So yeah, that I want people to see their Christian. Identity as a political identity. And then, you know, and of course we should be good citizens. I mean, we all know the passages, Jeremiah 29, seek to get to the city. Romans 13, submit to your governor authorities, first Peter two, and pray for your leaders for Timothy two.

And but I think the best way Christians can be good citizens is by having a well V I mean, viewing themselves as yeah, a separate political. Entity from the empire that we're living under. I mean, you go back to like the pre Constantine era, and I know it's a different situation. Christians were a marginalized minority and You know, didn't have access to political power.

But I, I think that was, that might've been a good thing too. Like they were able to care for the poor, like crazy. They were able to live out their Christian values and have a massive impact on the empire so much so that, but when Constantine comes around the fourth century, he's like, I need to get on board with this Christian thing.

It's going to be politically advantageous for me, you know? So, so they had a massive influence on the empire as a. Community that saw itself is radically separate from that, from the empire. So, and again I I don't want to map the early Christian situation onto our situation perfectly, but I do want to really live in that early church experience and say what are some things we can draw some principles we can draw from how they lived in the face of the empire that they were living in.

Oh,

[00:15:34] **Dr. Mark Turman:** tease that out a little bit further from the standpoint of I wonder if somebody was listening to us or they're saying, Oh, so Preston thinks that the rise of the evangelical right over the last 50, 60 years is a great thing because he said, we should see our, we should see Christianity as our, as a political identity.

So I'm wondering if that's really where you're going or if you're trying to say something else.

[00:16:00] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** that is not where I'm trying to go. So let me, definitely let me clarify. No I would see that as. Like the rise of the Christian right, I would see that as going against kind of, seeing their Christian identity as separate from their secular political identity. So, yeah, you know, when I see, so yeah, I, you know, I'm a child of the eighties.

And so I was right in the middle of the of that kind of late seventies, eighties, nineties the rise of the Christian right where you had the Christian right. Yeah. Saw it as advantageous to sort of, Accumulate political power, right? Like if we can just get the right people in office, if we can get the right laws established, if we can kind of make this Return this nation back to its Christian roots is kind of the underlying motivation.

And I just I see that it's very problematic. It's not so different than well going back to the fourth century when The church went from being a persecuted minority without political power, secular political power to now being in positions of power. And when we saw that that was, I think it had a devastating effect on the purity of the church.

First of all where you had, you know, yeah, I just, I don't think that the, when I read the new Testament, I just don't see Christianity as designed to have. political, secular political power. I think that will always go badly for the church. And we in, and I share some stories in the book, you know, I mean, what we've seen that happen in not just America, not just in first century,

fourth century, Rome, but I mean, we saw, we've seen it happen in many countries around the world where you'll have a Christian president gets elected and tries to Christianize the nation.

And it always, historically it's always ended in, in disaster. As far as I can tell. I mean, Rwanda is a classic example. There's several countries in Latin America where that's been the case. So, yeah, all that, I don't know if you want to go towards Christian nationalism, but I mean, yeah, I think that I think something like Christian nationalism or even, you know, Early version of maybe the rise of the more majority of the political.

Right. I just see that as having a devastating effect on the purity and mission of the church.

[00:18:14] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. So it kind of sparks a thought that I keep having over and over again, which is it almost has a sense on multiple levels, politics being one that Christians don't handle success very well.

[00:18:26] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** Yeah.

[00:18:27] **Dr. Mark Turman:** You know, whether I'm thinking about, you know, a Christian gets elected to be president and then.

It doesn't end up going well or even a series of Christians getting, you know, elected to high offices of influence and authority and power it kind of parallels in some ways, just as you were describing it what seems to happen a lot of times with Christians who become quote unquote celebrities whether we're talking about mega church pastors or, you know, Christians that have other platforms, maybe they're in music.

That type of thing in it you know, and maybe because of the way media works now, we're just more aware of everything. But you know, I opened my computer yesterday and there's another story of a very prominent pastor in Australia who has resigned his church in the middle of moral infidelity.

Is it, you think there's just a principle here that we don't handle success or we don't handle. Influence and power on a grand scale very well. And we should try to avoid it.

[00:19:26] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** Yeah, probably. Yeah, I think. Yeah. And it makes me think of that several passages but one in particular, Matthew 20 and Mark 10 where Jesus, you know, talks about the rulers of the nation, you know, and he says, You know, the rulers of the, you know, they rule this way, but not so among you, the one who wants to be first shall be last, you want to be a leader, be significant.

You should be the slave of all, you know, like he just turns the whole power structure upside down. And and we see this, I mean, all throughout the new Testament in particular, but even it

goes back to the, even the the old Testament, you know, I begin the book talking about even the upside down nature of.

The kingdom of Israel, you know, where one of the most stunning passages is Deuteronomy 17, where you have the so called law of the king, where where, you know God describes the kind of king he wants to see in office. And it's almost like he'd take it, took a look at kingship in the ancient world.

And says, okay, I want you to do the exact opposite, you know, like kingship in the ancient world, you would you would amass power and wealth at a big harem. And, you know, you would see yourself as better, you know, you're way higher up, you're in an elite, you're at the top of the social pyramid. And he just says, don't do any of that stuff, you know, be humble, don't amass wealth, don't amass.

A massive military with horses and chariots and don't make alliances. And, you know, he, and I think from the beginning, it has always been that way that this upside down view of power, that the one who is significant should be a servant. The one who actually has real power in God's world is one who serves the one who's humble, the one who doesn't, you know, wield his power to get his way, you know, so, Yeah.

So I think part of it is not handling fame. Well, not handling the spotlight. Well, like that's a human problem, I would say across the board. But it's also, I think that the mission of the church opera operates on a fundamentally different view of power to, to love and to serve is power to be humble is power.

But that's not the way it's done in the world. And that's where, you know, when you see Christians just kind of like wanting to gain political power, wanting to gain cultural Power. I'm just like, I just, I think that just goes against exactly what Jesus told us to do in Matthew 20 and Mark 10 and many other passages.

[00:21:41] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Right. Yeah. And then make, makes me think even kind of step back from that where, you know, when Israel way back is asking God for a King because they want to be like the other nations

[00:21:51] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** Yeah.

[00:21:52] **Dr. Mark Turman:** you know, God, if I remember this correctly from my old Testament studies, you know, God says, you don't need a King, I'm your King.

And they're like, but we want to be like the other nations. Give us a King that we can see and touch. You know, celebrate and cheer. And God's like, okay, I'll accommodate that. But it's not the best idea. And then he. And then he says what you said, you know, he says, well, if I'm going

to let you have a King, it needs to be completely different from the Kings that you're looking at and they sometimes get that right.

A lot of times they get it wrong. And then, you know, and then makes me also think about David. He seemed to come into a place of power and influence with that right, godly spirit, but then after a while, he doesn't handle it well and. Ends up turning his place of power and privilege into a place of entitlement.

And the whole story of Bathsheba unfolds. And I mean, all of that kind of thing. Let me see if I can bring it a little bit into the new Testament context, because I love the way that you're like in this book saying go back to scripture, go back to scripture, learn from the negative examples.

Some of which we just cited, but learn from the positive examples. See, let me see if I could get you to work through two two people. One of them being John the Baptist, the other one being Jesus. So, John the Baptist is this prophetic voice preparing the way for Jesus. And he is speaking truth to power, especially in a local sense to this guy named Herod.

And it is ultimately John speaking truth to power that gets him executed because he won't relent on telling the guy in power that he shouldn't be doing what he's doing with his wife or with his brother's wife in this case. So you have that example, it ends up costing John his life. And then as a friend of mine, a fellow pastor said to me recently, Jesus only.

Said the word Caesar one time, and it was when he was asked about taxes,

[00:23:45] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** Yeah. Yeah.

[00:23:45] **Dr. Mark Turman:** and he didn't say much more. And what do we take away from that? Jesus knows that there is on the planet back in Rome, someone who is claiming direct rivalry with him, and he only mentions him once. So, what might we take away from either or both of these stories?

[00:24:05] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** That's Mark. I love the way you're framing that. And those are interesting perspectives. And I would say, yeah, I love that. We have John the Baptist speaking truth to power. You know, he had, I mean, in the situation is quite different. You know, he's speaking to Jewish leaders. He is a Jewish prophet a recognized prophet too.

In a small country, you know, it's not like he's traveling 5, 000 miles away and, you know, knocking on Caesar's door. I mean, he's, there, kind of in almost relationship with these quasi political figures. I say quasi because these are Jewish leaders that were sort of like under the being empowered by Rome.

So, I mean, yeah, and he had opportunity to call him out. And he did. And I I think that's a great example of what I call at the end of the book, you know, being a prophetic witness where there

are times I think, and as much as we have the ability to Yeah. yeah, to speak truth to power, not to try to make this nation a Christian nation, but to hold it accountable to the mandate that it says it's trying to fulfill.

And this is, you know, Romans 13 talks about some of the ways in which the government should be Should be acting and oftentimes doesn't do that. And I think if we have opportunity, we should speak truth. And I am with Jesus. He does only explicitly mentioned Caesar once. But I, you know, I have a whole chapter where I show that there's a lot of things Jesus does or that are described, you know, the way the gospel writers describe Jesus that are, you know, Almost like a subtle, sometimes not so subtle, but you know, critique of the Roman empire.

I mean, one of the, one of the ones that I think is, it's well known to us, but we often don't see it through a political lens. It's just the way that the gospel writers describe the birth of Christ. I mean, Luke chapter two, you know, the Christmas story we read it every year but you know, sometimes we pass over that the first few verses where it talks about.

Caesar Augustus and a census and this governor Kyrinius and you're like who cares, you know, but the very

[00:26:09] **Dr. Mark Turman:** it wasn't just, yeah,

[00:26:12] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** yeah the very,

[00:26:12] **Dr. Mark Turman:** trying to date what was going on. Right.

[00:26:15] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** no, it's like a subtle, like, okay, here's these political rulers, these political lords. Cause Caesar was called a Lord a curious. And by the way, there is also born a new Lord in, you know, some backward, backwards, you know, slice of the empire, you know, and through humble means.

But even the way Luke tells the birth of Jesus, it is a subtle kind of like, Hey, there's a new Caesar that's, you know, coming on the scene here. That the famous dialogue between Jesus and pilot. I think there's some really interesting things going on there. And you know, when, and when he says my kingdom is not of this world, I don't think he's saying my kingdom is not tangible.

My kingdom is just sort of lives inside your heart or my kingdom has no.

Political implications. I think he's saying no, the manner in which I rule the world is fundamentally different from you all. But make no doubt I am ruling the world and I'm going to be enthroned when you crucify me because in. The way God's designed the world is fundamentally different than the way you guys are trying to rule the world.

So, yeah, so I do think and there's others we can talk about. I do think that there are other more subtle, sometimes not so subtle, but you know, critiques of the Roman empire throughout Jesus's life and ministry.

[00:27:32] **Dr. Mark Turman:** You know, let's chase it a minute from the standpoint of just understanding the how the, how Jesus and the gospel are subversive to the world order that is around us and so much at times dominating us, how it is subversive, but it at the same time, not revolutionary in the sense that the world at times wars with itself As one group trying to take over, dominate or turn back the other group.

And when I think about this, I think about how my pastor, when I was a young Christian used to talk about, Hey the Bible doesn't in any significant way, directly attack slavery. And yet there are all kinds of truths and teachings that are subversive and that, you know, ultimately empowered people like William Wilberforce and later the civil rights movement, MLK, they, those movements actually are moving along the lines of the truths of scripture that, you know, like I said, led Wilberforce to do what he did to the undoing of the slave trade, that type of thing. Tease that out a little bit, because a big part of what this book helped me to do is just, again, raise my thinking beyond what's going on in the immediate context to what's trying to, what God is trying to do in the eternal context. How is it even otherwise manifested as being subversive without being revolutionary?

[00:28:58] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** That's great. Yeah. I think I even use the phrase submissive subversiveness or, you know, where even be even submitting to the state or doing things like turning the other cheek. Like these aren't signs of weakness. This is otherworldly power when we wash people's feet when we love our enemies and so on.

The slavery. That's a great example of that. Because yeah, it is It is true that the New Testament does not seek to end the institution of slavery. And I think there's social factors there. Like that just would not have been possible really from a social standpoint, but it sort of gutted slavery from the inside out and how it talks about masters and slaves, you know, I mean, even the idea of.

The Lord's Supper that you know, people sitting down and eating bread and drinking wine together where all social classes are leveled the thought of a wealthy high class Christian sitting next to a slave and having an eating the same food sitting next to each other. That would have been a I mean, that would have been just, that would have been revolutionary, not in the, you know, overthrow the government kind of sense, but people would have been bewildered at the equality that Christianity was established in there.

Again, not full dethroning the whole institution of slavery but sort of, turning the whole, turning the system on its head from a social standpoint. Even Yeah, there's so many different directions I

can go here. One of the most profound statements along these lines, I think, comes in the book of Revelation chapter five.

That's that just stunning scene of the throne room where John, you know here is about a lion who has conquered. And so he hears that he hears about a lion that's conquered. And the word conquered, nika'o, where we get Nike, is a military term. It's what, And here it says this lion has conquered, and then he turns around and he looks and he sees a lamb that was slain and in the book of revelation, whenever John contrasts hearing and then seeing the thing he hears about is the is defined by what he ends up seeing.

You see this two or three times in, in Revelation. So here he sees this conquered lion. He turns and sees the slaughtered lamb and what he's, you know, put it all together. And it's like, Jesus is the conquering lion. How did he conquer? By sacrificing himself, by submitting to the violence of the cross.

And that's how he defeat defeats. According to the book of Revelation the dragon empowered beast, which is the Roman empire, you know, so that's where, you know, through a worldly lands, you can look at the cross as defeat as weakness as he lost, but through the lens of God's kingdom he won, he defeated the powers to be by submitting to the cross.

So you see that kind of, I mean, Submissive resistance all throughout the new Testament.

[00:31:56] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, well, and yeah, very helpful. And you just gave me a new image for Easter of a. Of a lamb that roars,

[00:32:06] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** Yeah. Yeah.

[00:32:10] **Dr. Mark Turman:** said at times when I was teaching, you know, that Jesus needed a better marketing department. Why did he choose a lamb as a mascot? Right. And we would have preferred something else.

And there's a little bit of discussion about that as well, as terms of symbols and that type of thing. Let me ask you a little bit about metaphors. We think in metaphors, we understand things a lot in the framework of metaphor. You titled the book exile. And let me just ask you to unpack it from that standpoint.

Why the title and why the metaphor of exile?

[00:32:43] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** that's a good question. So biblically speaking, and I do want to be clear that the book, as you know, you've read it is 85 percent just Bible. Like it's not. I call it my politics book, but it really is a biblical theology of a Christian political identity in terms of how the people of God viewed themselves in the face of the empire.

And then I kind of want to tease out some implications, but I I'm not a political scientist. I don't want to pretend like, you know, I have the best way of applying this to today. So it's, I really do want to stir people's thinking to go back to the text of scripture and let's just marinate in scripture for a while.

And then. Yeah. Cultivate our sort of political viewpoint from that. I'm blanking on the question. You just ask your question again. Oh, right. Excel.

[00:33:25] **Dr. Mark Turman:** the metaphor of exile, which, and let me just say where I'm starting from exile, obviously huge metaphor in the old Testament. And you know, the children of Israel I don't know if exile exactly works in terms of the people of Israel going down to Egypt because of a famine and then they become enslaved there.

And the story of the Exodus, I don't know what the word exile exactly applies there. Obviously it applies later in the new Testament when the people, Daniel and others are carried off into Babylon. And that's where the old Testament ends. Talk about that as a metaphor and a framing for how we should how we should think about as Christians, we're kingdom people of an eternal kingdom.

That is still coming in many ways and still yet to be culminated. But how do we, how is it helpful to think about ourselves as exiles? Where are there some limits to that kind of metaphor and maybe some other metaphors we could pick up and bring alongside of it, I guess would be the way I'd frame it.

[00:34:24] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** It's a great question, and it obviously deals with the heart of the books is titled Exiles. You know, it's I feel like viewing ourselves as exiles is one significant lens through which we can view our political identity. I don't think it's the only lens. And this is where I probably should have clarified that in the book.

Some people have said I think you're making too much out of this metaphor. I'm like, well, I think You might not be making enough out of it, but, you know, I'm not, I don't want to collapse the entire kind of political identity and into exiles. But I do think it's pretty pervasive. I mean, obviously, you know, you said it, the exile of the nation of Israel, specifically the southern kingdom to Babylon and in the sixth century, you know, that, that was a cataclysmic event, like the entire old test.

It's like a hinge in the old Testament. You have all throughout the Old Testament, the threat of exile. If Israel disobeys, then they're given the law, then they live in the land and you have all these ups and downs. And the, you know, the story continues and hovering over Israel is this threat of exile if they disobey and finally, and, you know, five.

Well, between 605 to 586, they are, you know, they are exiled. They're taken out of their land and exiled to Babylon. And then they return in 536, temples rebuilt in 516. But even when they return, they are kind of still in exile. They're still in the land. But they're paying taxes to a foreign overlord.

At that time, it was Persia in, in the return. They're back in the land, but there's no Davidic king on the throne. The temple is built, but the presence of God hasn't returned. The lights are on, but nobody's home, you know? So, so they are, and you say, you hear this in the cry of Oh, is it Nehemiah?

Nehemiah or Ezra in Nehemiah nine saying, you know, we are slaves in our land. You know, like we we have, we've returned, but we kind of haven't returned. We are still in exile. And one thing that you see between the testaments this was the topic of my PhD dissertation was. It's looking at, you know, the so called intertestamental period.

And one thing you see that's quite pervasive among Jews writing between the Testament testaments is this idea that we are still in exile. They kind of adopt this exilic language through a lot of their writings. And so when the New Testament comes on the scene. You know, Jesus is a Jew.

He's coming out of these, you know, these, the different Jewish sects, you know, the Pharisees and Sadducees and Jesus comes on the scene doesn't quite fit into any one of those, but he's participating in those conversations. So the whole new Testament is sort of born out of that framework that we are, at least early on, we are a Jewish people living in exile.

We are in the land, but now Rome is ruling over us. We're still awaiting our Davidic King. Is Jesus our Davidic King? Yes, but he's not going to. Take over the throne and the style of, you know, the old testament. So there's one scholar that says the entire new testament is written from the perspective of exile.

I think that's, I think that's true. You don't see the specific language of exile very often. You do see it in first Peter in first Peter one, two, and two. But you do see that concept, I think, sort of underlies so much of how the New Testament talks about the church or, you know, the early Christian movement in, in light of the empire that they're living in you see, I think you see in Hebrews two and it's revelation again, not necessarily the terminology, but the concept, but once you kind of take a wide angle lens, you see this Really pervasive Jewish view of still living in exile.

I think kind of underlies a lot of New Testament thought. So, so again, I don't want to, I don't want to make too much of that lens, but I title it exiles because I think Christians don't make enough out of that lens.

[00:38:06] **Dr. Mark Turman:** So let me take that at least a step further from a standpoint. If that's the mindset coming into the opening of the new Testament. And would you say that was Jesus's mindset or did Jesus want to move them past that thinking of exile into something, something obviously kingdom oriented, because Jesus talks about the kingdom all the time, but does Jesus pick up that, that way of thinking that, Hey, we may be back in the land, but we're still in this exile mindset.

Does he want to reinforce that? Or does he want to push past that? Do

[00:38:44] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** That's good. So I think when we look at exile, I think we need to look at it through a theological lens and a political lens. So, Going back to the actual exile in the Old Testament, you know, theologically it was God's punishment for disobedience and they were longing for restoration from exile. Politically it was, we had a nation state and now we don't have it anymore.

Now we are living among the nations. In the New Testament, I do believe that Jesus is the restoration from exile theologically and even politically. He establishes his own kingdom as an alternative way of living, but there still is a sense that in, in relation to the various political empires of the day, the governments, the authorities, we are not our identity should be separate from that our political identity is as a member of Christ's multi ethnic global kingdom spread across the nations living under the nation.

So in that sense, In that political sense, I think we should see ourselves as still in exile from those political nations while we are enjoying the restoration from exile, theologically, as we are members of Christ's kingdom. Yeah, I don't know. Does that make sense? It's, yeah,

[00:39:55] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, yeah and both. Both on a theological pastoral level, as well as I think you could expand this further into a political reality, but you know, Jesus's first recorded sermon in mark one is repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. So he's calling them away from that sense of judgment that came because that the exile was the expression of judgment because of their disobedience.

So his. You know, the first thing he's announcing, and John does this as well, is to call them to repentance, to call all of us to repentance as a way of answering the judgment of the exile in some ways. But I think it's helpful I, but one of the things that made me made me think as I was working my way through the metaphor, which I do think is really helpful in a lot of ways.

Which comes down to kind of a practical thing. And in the couple of minutes that we have left, just want to run that out a little bit. Are you are you hoping that one of the things that comes out of people reading this book is that they would just kind of adopt more of a, well, you know, we just need to tolerate the government, whatever government we have because, well, we're in a temporary.

period of time. Jesus could culminate his kingdom on any given day, including today. So everything that's going on right now, every Christian should understand is temporary. So should we just kind of adopt this tolerance? Well, we just we won't worry about it too much. We'll just try to avoid it as much as we can.

And be grateful if they ever do anything right, but for the most part, we're just going to try to avoid it is that the position you want me to take, or are you trying to get me to take another road,

[00:41:37] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** No I, my, my quick answer, and then we can kind of open it up a bit is I'm not sure my as I said, offline, you know, I want my goal in this book. So I'm a biblical scholar. I'm not, again, not a political scientist. My goal in this book is I want a more robust biblical conversation to happen among Christians who are talking about modern politics.

I want us to, you know, I want to stir people's thinking in, in, in light of this beautiful narrative of scripture that is, is profoundly political in nature. I mean, there's so many passages in scripture that are talking about what is it to live. Under and in light of the nations. We are interacting with.

So I'm, as I say, at the end of the book, I'm not arguing for an detachment or isolationist position where we sort of hunker down or a little communities and don't care about the world around us. Certainly. I don't think that's the case. I'm also nervous about another position, this kind of transformation that we should sort of try to establish as many Christian laws.

In the governments we're living under like again, I think that's merging church and state in a way that is unhealthy. And I think it I think it doesn't take seriously enough. Some of the pessimism that the New Testament has towards empire. And I do think I would consider America at least empire like I think the book of Revelation would be really nervous about followers of the lamb getting to Overly entangled with the dragon empowered beast to put in his own terms.

That does not, I don't, so here, I don't think that means we have no civic involvement or even some, you know, maybe political involvement as we have opportunity. I think, you know, you think back like the civil rights movement or you mentioned the abolitionists, you know, I think there certainly is a place for Christians to oppose certain forms of injustice that are, you know, Being promoted by the government, but I just I want to do so not from the perspective of one of the empire's political parties, but from the perspective as a member in the global kingdom, who is living separate from the nation's in the style of John the Baptist when he confronted the Well, it was a Herod, you know, was it Herod?

Yeah. Herod Antipas. He didn't do so as a member of the Sadducees or a Pharisee. He did so as a prophet of God's kingdom, you know? So, and this is what I do like about MLK and the civil rights movement is as far as I, and I'm not an expert in this, right. I mean, I read a few books, but it wasn't partisan.

It's not like he was just opposing what he saw as an unjust law. And he did so. at least intended to do so through Christian means through, through nonviolence. It wasn't like he was like trying to, you know, use the power of the empire to, you know, establish justice or whatever. So, I, I want us to, I want us to almost consider or maybe explore, like how would the early Jewish exiles, did they seek the good of the city? It was as exiles, not as Babylonian. So like, if let's just say, you know, Like they, I don't think they ever would have divided over whether Nebuchadnezzar was better than Nabonidus, you know, or they would have lost their minds if Babylon had an immigration policy.

And there was, you know, too many Assyrians or not enough Assyrians flooding into the land of Babylon as exiles, they would have had an opinion and had values and something to the city, but they would have had just this kind of posture of this isn't where our primary identity. Lies or in the new Testament, you don't see the Christians, you know, dividing over whether Caligula was better than Nero or, you know, early Christian gathering, splitting over, you know, gosh, you know, I can't believe Nero's on the throne.

Now people like, no, he's way better than Caligula. Like that, just the idea of that was like, I mean, it's silly, right? You wouldn't have even. They just saw the empire as through a different lens than I think Christians often see their nation today. That does not mean, again, we don't speak truth to power and we have opportunity to pursue justice and live out our Christian values as a political entity.

But I just, I am nervous about getting just too intertwined with with Babylon and I'll

[00:45:50] **Dr. Mark Turman:** yeah I see where you're going and you get. You get a good example and a good model in some ways, I think right off, you know, Daniel chapter one, where Daniel says, look, I don't want to take on a Babylonian name and I don't want to take on a Babylonian diet. And they got in the, you know, the caretaker says, look, if you don't, then it's going to be my head on the block, not yours.

And Daniel is sympathetic to that. And he says, Hey, you know, give us 10 days or whatever. And if we're not as healthy or healthier than everybody else that you're doing this with, then we'll do what you need. But he does not want to become a Babylonian for any reason. And he asked for and in very very respectful ways, navigates a path that God ultimately honors and puts him in enormous places of power.

And influence, but when he becomes second in command, he's not doing it from the position of being a Babylonian, he's still a Jewish exile. So I love that model. And then I love the other part about John the Baptist that we just to round that out. It says about Herod, Herod didn't really know what to do with John.

He kept asking him to come and talk to him.

And he would not have executed him apparently if it had not been for, you know, his brother's wife that he was wrongly engaged with Harrod didn't seem to have any real intent to put John to death. In fact, it says he was sad when he did.

[00:47:15] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** Yeah.

[00:47:16] **Dr. Mark Turman:** So he was intrigued by John wanted to talk to John, even though John was telling him, Hey, you're a lot of what you're doing is wrong, particularly in your.

Marital situation. So anyway but lots of ways to think about how to operate as an exile or a pilgrim. Here's I'm going to put you on the spot as the last question. Okay. So I'm calling this my. My party my party flag pledge and Anthem question. Okay. You get really down practical at the end of the book and you talk a little bit about the pledge of the legions.

And so I'm like, okay you said at the beginning, I'm not trying to tell people what to do. I'm trying to get them to think in more biblical ways about their politics, which is exactly what we need in many ways. And you have an interesting conversation about the pledge of allegiance. So I'm just thinking somebody may be listening like, okay, should I join a political party?

Should I vote? Should I run for office if I feel like, you know, that's something that I'm interested in or my God might get kept gifted me to should I own a flag? Should I not own a flag? Should I sing the Anthem, stand in the Anthem, sit at the Anthem, give me what you want, how you want me to think.

Not necessarily what you want us to think around that idea.

[00:48:32] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** It's a great question with all those practical questions. I'll repeat what you said. You know, I'm trying to tease out implications from the biblical narrative, not saying, therefore this is, you know, so, so it's like me, if I've read scripture correctly for the 85 percent of the book, then here's how I'm bringing that to bear on some of these more practical questions.

With all those practical questions, I want to. address them through the lens as a member in Christ's global kingdom spread among the nations. So when I talk about pledge allegiance, I want to say, I want to not say should American Christians pledge allegiance. I want to say, should members of Christ's global kingdom pledge allegiance to whatever nation they are living under?

Should Sudanese Christians pledge allegiance to Sudan. So Chinese Christians pledge allegiance to China. For some reason, I think we would be pretty sympathetic with the Chinese Christian that says, I'm not going to pledge allegiance to China. Like, we would probably say like, yeah, good for you, you know, but then for some reason, we would probably do the opposite.

We would get, I've had people very angry at me, Christians angry that I don't pledge allegiance to America. I'm nervous. So pledging allegiance that to me is going beyond simply being a good citizen, being obedient, obeying the laws, praying for the leaders that allegiance is kind of religious language.

I mean, it is religious language. It's and even the Pledge of Allegiance is liturgical like it's been so long. It's just in my bone. I can't not recite it. Like if it started in my head, like it's I, we all know it. Now, if I said, let's pledge the apostles creed or the Nicene creed or the 10 commandments, I don't think most Christians could recite the 10 commandments.

I think that's one of these, I think that's problematic. I think that's going. Yeah. Anyway, so I here's what I say. I for theological reasons, I don't pledge allegiance. And I don't think any Christian in the globe should pledge allegiance to whatever state they're living under.

If somebody disagrees, but all I ask is at least have a robust theological reason that why you pledge allegiance. Don't just assume that this is a good Christian thing to do. And that's my whole point of the book. Don't just assume. Your sort of political position, your viewpoint, whether to take it back to scripture and say, can I cultivate a robust biblical argument for me doing this?

You know, I'm respectful when I'm in a public setting, I stand, I put my hands behind my back and I often recite the Lord's prayer while people are pledging allegiance. And if people think I'm being a bad Christian for doing that, I would love to see that argument.

[00:51:16] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. Okay. Well, it's an intriguing, you know, and what I love about it is it gets down to the practical. Okay. And to the, okay, well, we can talk about a lot of things and we should think about a lot of things, but at the end of the day, we should bring the lens of our faith in Christ to be the primary lens through which we look at everything.

And that's what I think your goal is overall in your ministry, but also particularly in this book, how do I bring the lens of faith and of scripture and of Christ? Into everything, rather than letting the world inform my faith.

[00:51:50] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** Yeah. And we might come to different opinions on some of these practical questions, and I'm perfectly fine with that. Yeah.

[00:51:57] **Dr. Mark Turman:** so, Hey, I need, I know you need to go, but I just want to recommend again to everybody. The book is Dr. Preston Sprinkles, exiles, the church in the shadow of the empire is coming out here in early March and we're excited to recommend it to you. I think it will be thought provoking as well as helpful, very much packed with scripture and a lot of things that we've referred to today, but other things as well.

Preston, we just want to thank you for that. We hope that the release of the book goes really well and glad to be a part of that experience and process with you also want to thank our audience for listening today. If this has been helpful to you, please rate, review us on your podcast platform, share this with friends.

And as a couple of donor supported ministries in many ways, we would just say, thank you for the ways that you helped to make this conversation possible and other resources. We're grateful for your support. And check it out and we look forward to seeing you on the Denison forum podcast next time.

Thanks.

[00:52:53] **Dr. Preston Sprinkle:** All right. I.