



## TIRED OF WAR

Pastor Al Detter Various Texts

9:30 & 11:00am Grace Church May 27, 2007

This is the weekend we honor those who have given the supreme sacrifice for our country. Memorial Day is a special time of remembrance to honor those who gave their all.

We can trace the origin of Memorial Day back to the days following the Civil War. General John Logan proclaimed a special day, and on May 30, 1868, flowers were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers in Arlington National Cemetery.

I've been in several war cemeteries from Arlington to the Philippines. The number of graves is staggering. I can't imagine the total number of Americans who have given their lives for our country. God knows the number and name of each one.

We've added over 3000 names to the growing list of war dead since September 11, 2001. When we woke up that morning, who could have conceived that terrorists would strike our homeland? And who could have imagined that we would enter a war in which more lives have been lost since the Twin Towers than in the Twin Towers? We're in a mess!

The climate isn't good. Unrest continues in Iraq and Afghanistan. The war is before us everyday on the news and the death toll is mounting. A majority of Americans oppose the Bush administration's Iraq policies. And even though the world's a different place since 9-11, most of us live like we're not at war.

Yet we can't escape the fact that far too many are dying on both sides. As we hear almost daily that more American troops have died, we know that someone will be getting that dreaded phone call and that life will tragically never be the same. This thing is going on too long. I don't know about you, but I'm tired of war.

I was born after WWII. In my lifetime, I've seen US involvement in Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf War, and now Iraq. I used to tell my kids in the 90's, maybe we'll see a generation of US young people who will not see war. I was wrong.

I don't know how you feel about the war in Iraq or even war in general. My guess is that you can't believe we're still at war 6 years after 9-11 and that you're tired of war too. I think you also feel the pain of the tragic news reports about casualties and failed initiatives.

And if you have family members and friends in the military who have been deployed, you live on the edge of fear and faith at all times. You've prayed and cried more than at any other time in your life. You're tired of war.

But war is a reality in America. We can't ignore it. My purpose today is not to take a position on the war in Iraq or to stir up sides. That would serve no constructive purpose among the people of God. Rather, my purpose is to look at war through the lens of Scripture and to bring the Scriptures to bear on how we view war as Christians.

The Bible speaks to all areas of life. And I believe that we need to drape the Holy Scriptures around the thorny issue of war. We are not to think of war as politicians do. We are not to think of war as citizens only of this world. We are not to think that God chooses sides in the wars of this world and that God favors America above all other kingdoms of this world. Rather, we are to frame our view of war from the pages of the Word of God.

And that's where we turn today.

Some of you know what a concordance is. It lists all the places in the Bible a particular word is found. It's a big book. I looked up 3 words for this sermon—battle, war, and peace. I found scores of verses listed under those 3 words.

For those of us who are tired of war, there's bad news and good news in the Bible. Unfortunately, there's not much good news now. But there will be at the end of the age. I'll get to that later on.

As I looked over the words—battle, war, and peace—in the Bible, 5 realities about war bubbled to the surface. I want to present those realities to you today.

## **Reality #1— God is at war.**

When we look at war, I think this is the place to start. God is at war with warring hosts in the heavenlies. There are actual spirit beings in cosmic war between the forces of God and the forces of Satan. This war began in eternity past when Satan and his followers were cast out of heaven (Isa. 14:12; Rev 12). The war has been constant from that point on.

We moderns have a hard time conceiving of an incredible, invisible war in another dimension. Most worldly observers tend to dismiss cosmic war as something superstitious in the belief system of the unenlightened in centuries past.

But you need to know that the entire Bible holds to the worldview that God is at war. It records and teaches that war exists in the unseen realms and those wars have a direct bearing on the wellbeing of human beings and the environment of this earth.

A good book has been written by Greg Boyd about this called God at War. He maintains that God's good creation has been seized by hostile, evil, cosmic forces that are seeking to destroy God's beneficent plan for the cosmos (p. 19). This world has become a spiritual battle zone. Do I believe he's right? Absolutely! In a very thorough and credible way, Greg makes a powerful argument that the Bible is right. Something has gone wrong in the world. God is at war and the earth feels its effect.

Sometimes the invisible and the visible have collided. There were times in the Old Testament when God led Israel to fight back the forces of evil that had pervaded human society. They were the battles of Yahweh. How ironic that Israel failed in its mission and that God used the warring enemies of Israel and of righteousness to punish Israel.

God sovereignly rules over the armies of the world. But I don't believe there are holy wars today as some claim. God does not use the secular nations of this world to accomplish His righteous victories. There are good and evil causes over which wars are fought, but God no longer wages holy wars through nations.

So here's my 1st point again. God is engaged in a continu-ing cosmic war between His forces and the forces of Satan. The world is often affected by this struggle and we see its ugly effects.

One more comment. There are things about God that I can't understand. This is one of them. It's not that God is at war and that there are realms of war in other dimensions. But for all God's power, why does He allow cosmic war to continue? Why doesn't He just crush the devil and all His hosts? I don't know. It's on my list to ask Him when I get to heaven. But this I know. God knows what He's doing. He's at war and we feel its effects on earth.

## **Reality #2—Wars pervade history.**

Someone has said that the history of mankind is the history of wars. Pretty accurate. Where would Hollywood be without war? People are at war and have been since the early days of the human race. The Bible is our one-and-only sacred book. Maybe you'd expect a sacred book to be sanitized—most things good and right. But no. The Bible is full of war! Much of it is a record or prophecy about war. In Numbers 21:14, mention is made of a mysterious book called, The Book of Wars of the Lord. In a real sense, the Bible is a book of wars.

The 1st recorded war in the Bible is in Genesis 14:2 when an assortment of kings went to war near the Dead Sea in the days of Abraham. And then when Israel came out of Egypt into the Promised Land, they were a virtual war machine. Joshua led Israel against the nations of Canaan and the census was in terms of those who were able to go to war.

The wars continued into the eras of the judges and kings of Israel and Judah against nations like the Philistines, Assyria, and Babylon. Incredibly, there was also war between the houses of Israel (II Chron. 12:15).

The prophets began to speak and they talked about wars that would send God's people into exile. They talked about the wars at the end of the age. So does Jesus in the Gospels and the Apostle John in the Book of the Revelation. The Bible—talk about a book of war!

So whether you pick up a history book at school or a Bible at home, what do you find? War after war. I can't imagine the total numbers of wars and the total numbers of war dead in all the wars of the human race. The toll continues to mount. The United Nations defines "major wars" as military conflicts inflicting 1,000 battlefield deaths per year. As of mid-2005, there were 8 major wars under way (down from 15 at the end of 2003), with as many as two dozen "lesser" wars going on with varying degrees of intensity.

Did you ever hear about the guy who liked to bang his head against the wall? He was asked why he did that. His reply, "It feels so good when I stop." After 1000's of years, we keep banging our heads against war walls and haven't figured out how good it feels to stop! Honestly, this is a mystery to me as well. Look how far we've come in science and philosophy and academia and technology. We haven't figured out how to stop war after becoming so smart.

Reality #2 is war pervades history. That leads me to the 3rd reality.

### **Reality #3—Wars come from within.**

Classically, we think of war as open hostilities between nations or political factions carried out by weapons. But war goes beyond that. War is basically a condition of hostility and opposition by which injury is inflicted against the opposition to gain a victory.

Wars don't just happen between states. They happen in marriages, families, at the work place, in churches, and among people who used to be friends. You don't have to have lethal arms. Weapons could be words or silence. They could be actions to make someone's life miserable or to get what is not rightfully yours.

The Bible is clear where these wars come from. They come from within. James 4:1-2 says, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have so you commit murder. Are you not envious and cannot obtain so you fight and quarrel?"

There's something wrong with the heart of man. By nature, the heart is intensely selfish and Jeremiah the Prophet says that the heart is more deceitful than anything else and desperately sick beyond what we can understand (17:9). The reason there's perpetual war is because the hearts of mankind are not right.

Jesus tells us that the heart is behind war in Matthew 15:19: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immorality, thefts, false witness, slander." There's something wrong with our hearts and the greatest manifestation of the selfish and deceitful heart is war of every sort.

That's why negotiations and peace treaties are only temporary. They deal with the external matters between nations and people. What we need is a change of heart which can be accomplished only through the gospel of Christ. When Jesus comes into the heart of a person, He brings peace because He Himself is the Prince of Peace.

Wars exist because of the evil hearts of people. The only lasting answer is Jesus Christ.

## **Reality #4—Wars will increase.**

If you're tired of war, expect to be fatigued. Wars are part of the human landscape. Things are not going to get better. With all our learning and technological advancements, we haven't learned how to get along in the world. Instead, we've learned how to annihilate much of the globe.

There will be periods of respite from war. But don't be deceived. The trend line is upward. Jesus, speaking of the end times in Matthew 24, says, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened. For nation will rise up against nation and kingdom against kingdom (vss. 6-7)."

Jesus goes on to predict the great tribulation (vs.21). The great tribulation will be a period at the end of this age in which the world will experience unprecedented war and destruction. Similar prophecies are also given in great detail in the Book of the Revelation as well as in Old Testament books like Ezekiel 38-39 and Zechariah 14.

Our world is in political upheaval. The way is being prepared for the Antichrist. At one point, it will look like he'll bring peace to the world. Daniel 9:27 says that he'll make a peace treaty with Israel. The Apostle Paul says that people will be saying, "Peace and safety (I Thes. 5:3)". But it will be a mirage. Sudden destruction will come and it will be in the form of the last great war as Christ returns.

The Bible is clear. As we move towards the end of the age, mankind will not be able to achieve world peace. Wars will increase. And the ultimate conflagration will be Armageddon.

So where's the good news? It won't be in our lifetime but it will happen in Reality #5.

## **Reality #5—Wars will cease in the new heaven and earth.**

History is moving somewhere. It's going towards a predetermined plan that God is overseeing. Unregenerate mankind will continue to slug it out. At the same time, the gospel of peace will go forth to the 4 corners of the earth.

When people of every tribe, tongue, people group, and nation have heard and some have believed, Jesus will return to earth. We are getting incredibly close to that moment. Why? We have the technology to reach the entire world for the 1st time!

Let me tell you what will happen. When the trumpet of God is sounded, Christ will call for His elect, the church, from the 4 corners of the world. Then He will descend as a mighty warrior and defeat the hostile armies of the world (Rev. 19). Jesus will set up His temporary 1000-year kingdom on earth wherein will dwell peace and righteousness (Rev. 20). At the end of those 1000 years, Satan will be allowed to deceive the nations for the last time. They will gather together for war against Christ and His saints.

But fire from heaven will devour them and the devil will be permanently confined to the lake of fire. God will destroy the current heavens and earth and create a new heaven and earth (Rev. 21). All the former things like death and war and sorrow will pass away forever. And the redeemed will live with God in righteousness and peace for eternity.

The day is coming in which there will be no more war—for the 1st time since Satan was kicked out of heaven and the 1st recorded war in Genesis 14. What a day it will be! In the midst of wars now, let's be people of hope!

We've just seen 5 realities of war from a Biblical perspective. We look forward to the day when we'll be with Jesus and study war no more. But what can we do in the meantime? What can we do in a world of war and unrest with no end in sight? I want to give you 2 ways you can apply what we talked about today.

## 1. Prefer peace.

Recently I read a verse that represents how I feel about war. It's Psalm 120:7: "I am for peace. But when I speak, they are for war."

This is the last verse in the beginning of a series of 15 Psalms called "Songs of Ascent". When the Jews made their yearly pilgrimages to Jerusalem, they would use these Psalms on their way to the Temple to celebrate the feasts. In this 1st Psalm, they are far from the Temple and feel like they're among enemies. The singer's plight comes to light in this Psalm. He wants peace. His enemies want war. He's tired of war and those who hate peace.

I think that should be our stance as Christians. We should prefer peace over war. We should be sick of the violence. But we get caught in a bind because we're citizens of 2 kingdoms—heaven and this country. As Christians we value the sanctity of life. But in acts of aggression against our country, are we not called upon to defend it?

It seems that the terrorists prefer war. I am for peace. How do we put that together? Do we give them carte blanche? President Bush wants peace but he won't relent on the war in Iraq. One could perhaps argue for war or for peace politically. We face a nasty dilemma. Sometimes it's hard to be a good citizen of 2 kingdoms.

Honestly, it's a struggle within me that I haven't totally resolved. Maybe you have the same struggle. Jesus calls us to love our enemies. War makes us kill them. I believe we should protect our country. But living by the Sermon on the Mount could lead a person to other conclusions. There are no easy answers even as a Christian.

I felt the struggle when I was in college. I got my draft number. I was willing to serve our country. But my conscience wouldn't let me kill anyone. I couldn't send people into the possibility of a Christless eternity. As a future minister of the gospel, I didn't feel I could kill in the name of Caesar and at the same time try to reach the ends of the earth with the gospel to save their souls.

War makes Christianity messy. I believe we need to defend ourselves. But I think we need to value peace above war. We need to pray for wisdom for our leaders. We need to value the souls of the enemy. We need to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

## 2. Wage peace.

We know what it means to wage war. Why not wage peace? Why not work as hard as we can to pursue peace? Here are 2 key ways we can wage peace:

**1) Share the gospel of peace with others.** Isaiah 52:7 says, "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who bring good news, who announces peace and bring good news of happiness, who announces salvation and says to Zion, "Your God reigns." The Apostle Paul quotes this verse in Romans 10:15 as he talks about getting the word of the gospel to those who haven't heard. In Ephesians 6:15, Paul tells us to cover our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

Acts 10:31 says that the word that God sent to Israel was preaching peace through Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1 says that the result of being justified by faith is peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you see it? The best way to stop war in the world is not through military might. It's through changed hearts. God's plan was to unleash the gospel of peace on the world through the church. God's design is for the church to carry the gospel of peace to the ends of the earth.

When people find Jesus, they find peace with God and with each other. As we saw earlier, the reason for war is that something is wrong with the hearts of humanity. The gospel gets to the root of the problem—the heart. The gospel is the only thing that can truly change the hearts of people.

If the church, people like you and me, around the world would do what Jesus asked us to do, we would see incredible results. But the truth is, the church in America is more concerned about its own comforts in life than

the gospel of peace. Less than 10% share their faith on a regular basis and more than 50% have never shared the gospel with anyone.

Think what would happen if every one of the millions of Christians around the globe would share the gospel with their friends, relatives, neighbors, and associates. The results would be staggering!

**2) Make peace in your own world.** Several years ago, I took a seminar taught by Stephen Covey on the “7 Habits of Highly Effective People”. He made a point I’ll never forget. He said that we must understand 2 circles—the circle of concern and the circle of influence. The circle of concern includes the things in life that burden and bother us but that we are powerless to do anything about. The war in Iraq is in our circle of concern. I doubt that there’s anything we can do to change the situation except at the polls.

But Covey drew attention to the 2nd circle—the circle of influence. That circle deals with problems and issues we can do something about. What we do in that circle will have a definite effect. That’s the circle of our primary energies.

I’m talking about the circles of your marriage and family, church, neighborhood, friends, and even enemies. In these circles, you need to do whatever you can to promote peace, not strife and discord. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God (Matt. 5:9).” Paul said in Romans 12:18, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” That whole section is an explanation on how to wage peace.

In a word, don’t you be the cause of enmity and strife and trouble in your world. Get your heart right with God. Be filled with the Spirit and manifest the fruit of the Spirit in your relationships. Stop treating people in unscriptural ways. Forgive people. Be willing to be wronged and suffer loss. Let God repay vengeance. Let your every action be an action of peace. It will change your world.

## Conclusion

The issue of war and Christianity is a hard subject. Some thought I was crazy for tackling this in a sermon. I don’t have the final answer. I sometimes find my Christianity and my American bent at odds.

This sermon is not an attempt to make policy for the church. It’s an attempt to call our church to honest dialogue about war and faith. It’s a call to do some soul searching. Have we mixed issues of the state with the kingdom of God? Do we believe that the counterintuitive values of Jesus and the New Testament can make a difference in the world?

Are we putting our hope in political parties, guns, and bombs or in the gospel of the kingdom of God? Do we have a passion for love and justice in the world and are we saddened by violence, destruction, and war? Are we more committed to our own comfort and callously dismiss the tragedies of war that are daily present? Are we committed to being peacemakers in the world in which we live?

I’m calling you to think. To pray. To study. To dialogue. I’m calling you to make a Christian difference in your world. If I can motivate you to better integrate your faith with the realities of war, I feel like I’ve done my job. This is not an easy issue. But may Jesus and the New Testament determine our worldview and not the culture and policies of this world.