

Politics According to the Bible

War

Mark 13:1-8

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War

Scripture

We are in the middle of an 8-weeks series of messages titled, “Politics According to the Bible.” We are examining key political issues in light of the Bible.

Today, as we continue in our series on “Politics According to the Bible” I want to examine “War.” What does the Bible have to say about war? How should we vote regarding the issue of war?

War is defined as “a state of usually open and declared armed hostile conflict between states or nations,” or more generally, as “a state of hostility, conflict, or antagonism.”¹

About 20 years ago a group of academics and historians compiled some startling information. Since 3600 BC, the world has known only 292 years of peace! During this period, that is, during the past 5,600 years, there have been 14,351 wars large and small, in which 3.64 billion people have been killed. The value of the property destroyed is equal to a golden belt around the entire world 97.2 miles wide and 33 feet thick.²

About 25 years ago a Dutch professor calculated the cost of an enemy soldier’s death at different epochs in history. He estimated that during the reign of Julius Caesar, to kill an enemy soldier cost less than \$1. At the time of Napoleon, it had considerably inflated—to more than \$2,000. At the end of the First World War, it had multiplied several times to reach the figure of some \$17,000. During the Second World War, it was about \$40,000. And in Vietnam, in 1970, to kill one enemy soldier cost the United States \$200,000. I shudder to think what the cost is today.³

Now, these facts and figures are frankly more sad than interesting. General William T. Sherman, in a speech in 1880, said,

¹ Merriam-Webster, I. (2003). *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*. Includes index. (Eleventh ed.).

² Quoted in *Today in the Word*, June 1992.

³ Quoted in *Plain Truth*, 1988, p. 15.

“There is many a boy here today who looks on war as all glory, but, boys, it is all hell.” This appears to be the basis for the quote commonly ascribed to Sherman, “War is hell.”⁴ All of us, but especially those of us who have served in a war, can testify to the veracity of Sherman’s statement.

However, the important issue before us is not our view about war but, rather, Jesus’ view of war.

Let us read Mark 13:1-8. I will not be doing an exposition of this text, but I will refer to it later in today’s message.

So, let’s read Mark 13:1-8:

¹ And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” ² And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

³ And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?” ⁵ And Jesus began to say to them, “See that no one leads you astray. ⁶ Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. ⁷ And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains. (Mark 13:1-8)

Introduction

I don’t have to inform you that the present wars are hot political issues today. Our military is engaged in wars in several theatres, most notably in Afghanistan. Our brave men and women are constantly in danger, and we routinely hear of casualties.

⁴ Merriam-Webster, I. (1992). *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary of Quotations*. “A Merriam-Webster.”; “Quotables from Notables”--Cover; Includes index. (440). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster.

The United States of America has many enemies today. There are many who seek the destruction of our country. Some just desire our destruction, others are actively engaged in our destruction, and still others are planning aggression against us in order to destroy us. We face dangers on every side.

So, how are we to think about war?

I should say that every right-minded person hates war. War is a great evil. Only wicked and perverse people, including Satan, love war. War has caused untold damage to individuals, families, societies, and nations.

But, again, the issue before us is not our view about war but, rather, Jesus' view of war.

I should also mention that good and godly Christians are deeply divided about the issue of war. There are various views about it. And so, it is important to deal sensitively with this issue.

Lesson

So, as we consider politics according to the Bible, let us examine what the Bible says about war.

Let me use the following outline to guide us:

1. What does the Old Testament say about war?
2. What does the New Testament say about war?
3. What are the different approaches to war?
4. What is the Islamic threat?

I. What Does the Old Testament say about war?

First, then, what does the Old Testament say about war?

Kennedy and Newcombe, in their book titled *How Would Jesus Vote?*, are right to note that “Nowhere does the Bible say that war is justified. However, it never says it is not justified, either.”⁵

Genesis 14:9-20 describes the very first war in the Old Tes-

⁵ D. James Kennedy & Jerry Newcombe, *How Would Jesus Vote?: a Christian Perspective on the Issues* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2008), 71.

tament. The first war in all of recorded history took place 2,000 years before Jesus Christ was born. It was the result of some very interesting events, especially in light of current events.

In Genesis 14 we read that Amraphel, the king of Shinar, together with three allies, invaded Canaan, particularly the land of the plain around the Dead Sea. He attacked a number of cities, including Sodom and Gomorrah.

Now, this is very interesting. Genesis 11:2 records that people built the Tower of Babel in the land of Shinar. Do you know where the land of Shinar is? Shinar is in the region of Mesopotamia, or modern Iraq! So, the kings that attacked Canaan in Genesis 14 came from the region that today is known as Iraq!

One wonders if we have come full circle. The very first war in recorded history involved the invasion of Israel by the king of Shinar and his allies; recently, we were involved in a war in that same region of the world.

But those early kings made a mistake. History has shown that aggressors often make fatal mistakes. The mistake of the four kings is that they took Lot and his family captive. However, one of Lot's servants managed to escape. He ran back to Abram (or Abraham, as he was later called) and told him what had happened.

Abraham took 318 armed men from his household and started after the four kings. Abraham and his men engaged the four kings in battle at Dan, in modern northern-Israel, and won a great victory. Abraham divided his troops into two forces and attacked the four kings at night; a strategy that has merit even today.

Abraham recovered Lot and his family, and then pursued the four kings and their forces beyond Damascus (which is in modern Syria).

Then Abraham started for home with Lot and his family. As they were passing Salem (which became known as Jerusalem), Abraham was met by Melchizedek, whose name means "king of righteousness." Melchizedek was the king of Salem. Salem is the same word for *shalom*, which means "peace." And so Melchizedek was the "king of righteousness and peace." Melchizedek met

Abraham and blessed him for his great and righteous victory in vanquishing the aggressors and restoring justice.

In the book of Hebrews Melchizedek is referred to as a type of Christ. Interestingly, we read this statement in Genesis 14:18, “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High).” Today we know that Jesus is our High Priest, and he used bread and wine as the signs and seals of his broken body and shed blood for us. Abraham’s return from his victorious war is blessed by this priest of God Most High, a type of Christ, who is represented here by the king of righteousness and peace. I think that this is very significant.

We might think that Abraham, who was chosen by God to fulfill God’s redemptive purposes, would not engage in war. But Abraham did engage in war. In fact, knowing that he was called by God to fulfill his redemptive purposes undoubtedly strengthened him for the battle.

Abraham was not commanded by God to wage this war with the four kings. It was left to his own conscientious understanding of justice. It was not his own personal property or household that had been taken. But to correct an injustice against another, to release captives and restore property, Abraham put his own life in jeopardy, acted in faith, and won a decisive victory.

There is no doubt that Melchizedek’s blessing on Abraham was in fact God’s blessing and approval of what he did.

Throughout the entire Old Testament there are many instances of God’s people going to war. In fact, God frequently ordered his people to engage in war. For example, the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Avenge the people of Israel on the Midianites. Afterward you shall be gathered to your people.” So Moses spoke to the people, saying, “Arm men from among you for the war, that they may go against Midian to execute the LORD’s vengeance on Midian. You shall send a thousand from each of the tribes of Israel to the war” (Numbers 31:1-4; cf. Exodus 17:16; Deuteronomy 7:1-2; 1 Samuel 15:1-3).

Author Robert Morey noted, “The use of force to overthrow

tyranny is blessed and sanctioned by God himself. People have the moral obligation to take whatever action is necessary to fight for the freedom and liberty of all the oppressed peoples of the world.”⁶

II. What Does the New Testament say about war?

Second, what does the New Testament say about war?

Didn't Jesus, the Prince of Peace, change the Old Testament attitude toward war? Didn't Jesus tell us to be peacemakers? Didn't Jesus tell us not to resist evil? Didn't Jesus tell us to turn the other cheek?

Yes, he did. But it is very important to understand that Jesus was addressing his words to *individuals* and not to *governing authorities*. Jesus' words are part of his teaching regarding *personal* ethics; they are not instructions to *governing authorities* on how to govern or approach international relationships.

Jesus said, “But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:39). What did Jesus mean?

Several years ago I read the story about a young man who fatally stabbed his father and seriously wounded his mother and sister at their Plantation area home. His other sister woke up to hear screaming in the house. She stepped out of her bedroom and saw her twin sister covered in blood.⁷

Should she have offered herself to be stabbed as well? Is that what Jesus meant?

No. Clearly that is not what Jesus meant. It would be entirely correct to do as she did, and that was to run and lock herself in a bedroom and call the police, before she escaped unharmed out of a bedroom window.

If we are to find out what the governing authorities are to do, we read about it in Romans 13:1-5, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from

⁶ Robert A. Morey, *When Is It Right to Fight?* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1978), 34.

⁷ See <http://www2.tbo.com/content/2008/jul/25/me-friend-aided-in-stabbing-arrest>.

God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience."

The entire basis of how the governing authorities are to conduct themselves is justice. The governing authorities have been established by God, and it is the responsibility of the governing authorities to ensure that justice is maintained.

In our personal lives Jesus made it very clear that we are to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). We are to live, as much as we can, at peace with everyone (Mark 9:50). The Bible teaches this clearly.

On the other hand, Jesus also made it clear that he did not disapprove of war. In Luke 7, when dealing with Roman centurion, for example, Jesus never told him that it was morally wrong to be a soldier or to leave the military. In fact, Jesus commended him for his faith. He said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith" (Luke 7:9).

Further, Jesus never said that Rome should disband its military or that there should be no police. Jesus clearly taught that the governing authorities were to use the sword to punish evil and maintain justice.

Moreover, Jesus also clearly taught that wars would continue until the end of time. One of the signs of the end time, we are told, is that there shall be wars and rumors of wars. Jesus said in Mark 13:7, "And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet."

So, Jesus never denounced war, but always affirmed that it was a reality in this world.

III. What Are the Different Approaches to War?

Third, what are the different approaches to war?

Christians have taken different approaches to war. Generally four approaches have been suggested. I don't have time to examine each view in detail, but I do want to mention them.⁸

The four approaches are nonresistance, pacifism, just war, and crusade or preventative war. Each of the four approaches has strengths and weaknesses.

However, throughout history the Church has generally supported the just war approach. The just war approach recognizes that all war is evil. The point at issue, however, is not whether war is good but, rather, whether war is unavoidable in all cases and, if it is not unavoidable, whether it can be conducted in a just way.

There are a number of criteria for *the right to go to war*.⁹ Criteria for a just war were first proposed by Augustine of Hippo, and others throughout the ages of modified it. The criteria are:

1. There must be a proper or legitimate authority that has responsibility for judging whether the other criteria are met.
2. War must be the last resort. Negotiations and compromise must have been tried and failed.
3. Insofar as possible, a formal declaration of war is required. Since war is the prerogative of a government, not individuals, the declaration must come from the highest governmental authority.
4. There must also be reasonable hope of success. If not, it is generally unreasonable to sacrifice lives in a vain hope. Some think an exception to this criterion is allowable when the evil confronted is so outrageous that an attempt must be made as a protest, even if there is little or no hope of success.

⁸ An excellent book which deals with the four approaches is *War: Four Christian Views* by Robert G. Clouse, ed., (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991).

⁹ Robert G. Clouse, ed., *War: Four Christian Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 120-122.

5. There must be some proportionality between the objective hoped for and the price to achieve it.
6. There must be just cause. A war of aggression is condemned; only defensive wars are just.
7. The war must be fought with the right intention, i.e., to secure a just and lasting peace. Revenge, conquest, economic gain, or ideological superiority must all be renounced.

As difficult as it always is, one must always ensure that these criteria have been met in order to engage in a just war.

IV. What Is the Islamic Threat?

And finally, what is the Islamic threat?

Our country and, indeed, many nations of the western world are engaged in a war against radical Islamic jihadists. The goal of Islam is to see every nation become Islamic. That is their intention for the United States as well. I remember talking to a graduate student at Penn State University, who was a Muslim from overseas, say that the goal of Islam is to see a Muslim in the White House and Sharia law as the law of this country. You may be aware that in 2008 Great Britain allowed Sharia law to be used in certain Islamic communities.

Bill O'Reilly, host of the popular Fox News show *The O'Reilly Factor*, noted, "America will sooner or later have to defeat the Muslims who hate us, or be subjected to continuous terror and violence. If you think I am overstating things, consider this: Our so-called friends, the Saudis, are paying the families of suicide bombers thousands of dollars for their 'sacrifice.'"¹⁰

There are several Islamic doctrines that make it difficult for us to come to terms with Islamic jihadists. First, there is the concept *hudna*. This allows an Islamic leader to make a treaty with non-Muslims with no intention of keeping it! From their perspective, the treaty is temporary, and when it is expedient for the ji-

¹⁰ Bill O'Reilly, "Pray for Peace but Polish the Weapons," *Washington Times*, April 22-28, 2002, 35.

hadists, they will break it. In Islam this is entirely permissible.

Another Islamic doctrine is *waqf*. This means that a territory that was once Islamic is forever Islamic, even if non-Muslims temporarily regain it. That is why the Islamic world will not leave Israel alone in peace. Centuries ago Muslims controlled Israel. But that was changed in 1948, when Israel became a sovereign state. At a Camp David meeting coordinated by President Bill Clinton, even though Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered Yasser Arafat 98 percent of what Arafat wanted, the terrorist leader turned it down. Why? Because of *waqf*. The Islamic world will not rest until Israel is destroyed and they have regained control of it.

And third, the love of death is prevalent in Islamic doctrine. When the United States was engaged in the Cold War with the Soviet Union, the Soviets had a fear of death, and that—at least, in part—kept them from initiating a nuclear war. However, Islamic jihadists have no such fear. They love death because of a distorted understanding of what awaits them in the afterlife. They look forward to dying for Allah so they can receive 72 virgins in paradise.

For these and other reasons Islam is a threat to our country. We would do well not to ignore the Islamic threat.

Conclusion

So, how should a Christian vote regarding the issue of war?

Jesus would certainly understand that war is evil. He would also understand that war is a last resort. And although some Christians might say that Jesus would always oppose all war, I do not believe that he would. Jesus would support a just war, but only as a last resort and as absolutely necessary.

Thus, I believe Christians should vote for a candidate who supports appropriate military engagement in a just war.

Come back next week as we learn about education. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAYER:

O God, thank you for your Word. Thank you for what we learn about politics according to the Bible.

As we think about the upcoming general election and our responsibility (and privilege) as citizens to vote, help us to understand politics according to the Bible.

O God, your Word teaches us about war. We know that war is a great evil, and that it is to be avoided, if at all possible. However, there are times when the governing authorities must wield the sword and engage in war.

Would you raise up political candidates who understand the just war approach to war. We live in a world filled with all kinds of threats. Give wisdom to our leaders to know how to respond to each threat in a way that is consistent with your truth.

And all of this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.