

"War and the Will of God"

Psalm 46:9-11

24 February Anno Domini 1991

updated 31 March Anno Domini 2003

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho

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(Note: There may be portions of this sermon that were by others. I do not know of such portions by other, but I'm just not certain since it was written twelve years ago.)

Dear Baptized,

As the world is in the midst of a horrible war in the Persian gulf area, and, on the verge of a ground war which could result in the deaths of tens of thousands of people, the questions seem to abound. "Why is there war? Can't God stop the war? Does God want to stop the war? Whose side is God on? How is the Christian to respond to war in general, and this war in particular?"

As confessional Lutheran Christians our desire is to know the answer to many of these questions based upon what the Lord declares to us through His Word – the Bible. What does the Almighty say to you and to me about war? Let us be still and know that the LORD is God as we consider

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Psalm 46:9-11 – "He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow, and shatters the spear, He burns the chariots with fire! 'Be still, and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth!' The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our Refuge."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

First of all, we know that war did not have its origin in God. In fact, the Lord created all things good and intended for His good creation to live in peace and harmony with on another and in communion with god Himself. That was what the Lord desired and He did not have to say, "Be still, and know that I am God."

War has its origin with man. It is the result of a violation of God's will and war erupts as a result of our sinful human nature. Warfare between peoples and nations, flows directly from the warfare that mankind has declared on God. Jesus declares that out of the human heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. Physical peace on earth is not the normal human condition. Therefore, war is a man-made fire stoked by human nature and fanned by Satan's forces. Instead of loving the Lord our God with all our body, mind, soul, and strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves, mankind has declared war on both God and neighbor.

What is the response of God to all of this sin and rebellion? What should He do? Many state that God should go in and destroy completely such wicked men like Pharaoh in the days of Moses, Hitler of past decades, and Saddam Hussein of this day. Some state that God should render His Holy, Divine justice against such men. He should break them with His arm of righteousness. Such people

who speak and act contrary to God's should be eliminated. They would have the LORD God Almighty smash out all those who have defied Him. Such people do not deserve to live. However, if the desire is that everyone who has violated the Lord's will be eliminated, who would be left? If people are demanding that God be fair, how many of us would be able to stand before God's Law and not be consumed?

Be still and listen to the Word of the Lord from the hand of Paul: "For no human being will be justified in His sight by works of the Law." For "none is righteous – all have turned aside – no one does good, not even one." We simply must recognize that within each one of us is the capability of being a monstrous madman. So, let's not ask God to be fair and just with us. A request to do so would put us in the position of asking God to condemn us to eternal destruction. And that is not His will.

Based upon the Bible, we maintain that man kind has declared war on God. What is God's response? The Lord has made out a declaration of war and has, in fact, already carried it out. Someone was going to pay the price for sin because God's holiness demands a payment for such a violation of His Law. However, God's mercy has provided the Way for such a payment to be made. God Himself paid the price. The Son of God came into the world for that very purpose – to pay the price that the world could never pay. The Lord declared war and waged it on Calvary as God permitted His Son to be stricken, smitten and afflicted for the sins of the entire world – yours, mine, Pharaoh's, Hussein's. All sins have been paid for. Forgiveness is available to all and God would have all people be saved.

In fact, He declares it with a solemn oath written in the Old Testament: "Why will you die, For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord God; so turn and live." There you have the Good News of God in Christ – the wrath of God that everyone deserved to have carried out to them eternally, has instead, been carried out in the crucifixion of the Son of God. We do well to hear the Word of God that we be still and know that He is God.

Thus, while the LORD God hates war, He also permits war, and allows war to run its course. We need to learn of this basic truth – every war, even the most honorable, justified and necessary struggle of defense, comes as a result of unbelief or, as a trial which would bring the faithful closer to their Father. He is the Lord of love, not a grinning war-god who delights in the slaughter of people. But when unbelief and blasphemy know no bounds; when men set themselves in God's place; when a nation is headed away from the Almighty and toward disaster, He may allow the woes of war to come.

But which nations are heading away from the Almighty? We are quick to point out that the Islamic nations in general and Iraq in particular espouse a religion outside that which proclaims Jesus as the Incarnate LORD God and Savior of the world. However, who can deny that multitudes in the United States have turned from God, and that many churches have forgotten the Lord and have become worldly.

There was a time in our nation when the Government officially recognized the authority of Jesus Christ. On March 3, 1863, the United States Senate passed a resolution which can be found in the record of the 37th Congress,

"Resolved, That devoutly recognizing the supreme authority and just government of Almighty God in all the affairs of men and nations, and sincerely believing that no people, however great in

numbers and resources, or however strong in the justness of their cause, can prosper without His favor, and at the same time deploring the national offenses which have provoked His righteous judgment, yet encouraged in this day of trouble by the assurance of His Word to seek Him for succor according to His appointed way, through Jesus Christ, the Senate of the United States do hereby request the President of the United States, by his proclamation, to designate and set apart a day for national prayer and humiliation.”

That resolution was passed without one, single dissenting vote! We don't wonder too much what would happen if that same resolution were to be put forth for a vote today. The cry which must resound with clear, unmistakable tones throughout this divinely blessed and embattled nation is: "America, 'be still, and know that the LORD is God!'"

Not only does the Lord permit wars to take place, but the Lord can also stop war. The Psalmist cries out in out text: "He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow, shatters the spear, He burns the chariots with fire!" While unbelieving people in every nation have pictured God as a helpless, inactive, drowsy being, Who has no concern with the prosecution or outcome of the present struggle, the Psalmist indicates that this war will end when, where, and how God decrees. In plain denial of atheistic and materialistic teachings which declare that our soldiers, smart bombs, marines, laser-guided artillery, sailors, propoganda, airmen, and strategies will bring us victory apart from God, we need to remember that an end to this war and a true victory for the allied coalition lies in God's hands.

Now we come to what may be a difficult truth to accept at first. While this sermon seeks to proclaim the message of forgiveness through Christ to each one of you personally and to assure you that God is all-powerful in war, it is also quite true that the Lord is all-merciful in war. This truth speaks to the question, "What good can come out of this horrible war?" The scenes on television are awful and they are going to get much worse as this ground war goes into full force. As you look at this scene, it seems that sometimes nothing good can come of it.

To help understand that God is all-merciful in war, visualize the Son of God dying in the cross. It is an awful, horrible scene. Is a victory taking place as Jesus' life is taken from Him? Yes, but it doesn't look like it. It looks as if evil has won. Human reason would say with the thief, "If you are the Son of God get down from the cross and save us." God says, "No, I must stay on the cross until I die and go through hell. In this is victory!" You see, our ways are not God's ways. His ways and thoughts are far beyond ours. He is able to achieve victory and salvation for us in a way that is beyond our human understanding.

So also in war. The Word of God promises that the Lord works for good for those who are called according to His purpose. And that is true whether in peace time or in war – whether in life or in death. What good can come as a result of war? Only in eternity will the answer be demonstrated. While we are not now able to give the answer to that question, we do trust in the Lord to bring about some blessing. Hear what the Psalmist says: "I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth!"

And what of this Persian Gulf War? What good can come of it? Only the Lord knows the full blessing which He is working out. But you consider this. In the midst of a region where the Islamic religion has been solidly anchored, defended, and where Christianity has not been able to get a foothold for a thousand years – in such a place like this and at such a time like now, the Lord has

introduced some 500,000 people many of whom are Christians. God is doing mighty things in the midst of this war. How merciful the Lord is then – even in this war.

This sermon is an update with only minor revisions from one written during Desert Storm in the liberating of Kuwait. In 1991 when this sermon was written it was reported that out in the Saudi Arabian desert on Christmas Eve, 28 American soldiers shed their guns and worldly burdens and dip into the warm Saudi waters. However this was no idle swim under the stars. Rather, these men were baptized into the Christian faith. And up to January 6th some 1000 American military people have been converted to Christianity. To those 1000 people the Lord has been quite merciful in allowing them to be a part of this war. In His plan, the Lord moved the events of history to take these people from their homes here in the United States and place them into a location and a situation where they recognized their need for the Good News of God in Christ – yes, and they believed it! Do you begin to understand that God is all-merciful in war?

Do you hear among the bombs bursting the mission of God in having His Name and the Gospel of Christ being brought to the world? God speaks in the Psalm: “I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth!” Every American church should be dedicated to the preaching of Christ’s saving Gospel. American Christians should be aroused out of their sleep and stirred into action for Christ. Not only are we to support our government, but to place our prayers in the support of all of the allied forces, that is, the coalition forces.

In your bulletins there is an insert describing a new "Armed Forces Devotional Book" by Concordia Publishing House and detailing the way for congregations like this one to make copies of it available to ... not only members of our Lutheran congregations ... not only members of the armed forces who are Christians ... but also any member of our Armed Forces who is willing to receive one. God has gotten their attention as they face, perhaps for the first time in their lives, the reality of temporal and eternal matters. We have the Good News to place in their hands and we have the means to get the Word to them concerning eternal life now and forever. These Christians have and will become witnesses to those they encounter. They become missionaries. A copy of the Armed Forces Devotional Book" is out in the narthex. Please take a look at it and consider what the bulletin insert suggests.

Since the Gospel of Jesus is the only means by which people’s sins can be forgiven, our missionary activities here simply must be multiplied a hundredfold. The one banner under which the peoples of the earth congregate in peace is not the United Nations flag or any other composite, artificial, international flag – but the banner of the old, rugged, blood-stained cross – beneath which, through true faith, US and Iraqi Christians – Russian and Israeli Christians – British and Saudi Christians – Canadian and French Christians - believers of all nationalities make the good confession of Christ crucified and risen. Though now separated by deadly conflict such Christians, them – you – me – are united and one - all forgiven in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit.

“The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our Refuge.” Therefore, we continue to reside in God’s nail-pierced hands. And with respect to this war we pray that the will of God might be done – in bringing people and nations to a point of repentance – His will be done in the execution and resolution of this war as an opportunity for mission work. Then, blessed by His unfailing strength, you can face all opposition raised against your soul during these war-burdened days and break forth in the victory song:

With might of ours can nought be done,
 Soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the Valiant One,
 Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, who is this?
Jesus Christ it is, Of Sabaoth Lord,
 and there's none other God;
 He holds the field forever!"

May God give you the eternal Refuge for Jesus' sake. Amen.