

Part 2 - Peace

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[0 : 00] Greetings from Moorhead City. It really is a privilege to be here. I rarely get to leave my post. I'm sort of like chained to spreadsheets and other things that no one else finds very exciting, as well as some other things on Sundays, but I am thrilled to be here.

I just want to say you guys have done an amazing job at this place. This is my first time being here since you finished, and it's just fantastic. And we love telling the story of your church here in Moorhead.

The fact that there are two churches who are worshiping Jesus together on the same grounds, in very different ways, and yet with love for one another, people cannot believe this is happening. I mean, we love telling this story, and you just have such a wonderful thing. There's so much more I'd like to say about that. I don't have the time for it, but I just want to encourage you in the Lord for everything that's happening here.

So, with all that said, we are going to jump into the sermon. And like Jesse said, we've been in a series called Advent as a Church, and I think we got the slide there, yeah, Advent, living in between.

[1 : 02] And you may have noticed, I don't know how all the teaching has gone here, but at least in Moorhead, to some folks, it didn't feel all that Christmassy at first, and that's actually partly by design.

In a sense, it's on purpose, because in churches that celebrate the more traditional church calendar, Christmas and Advent are distinct. Christmas is about helping Christians to remember the first coming of Christ.

Advent is the season which we anticipate his return. And so, in this series, we're exploring the dimensions of this present age. We're living in between these two Advents of Christ.

And so, while we're waiting, we're supposed to be people of hope and of joy and of peace. And so, today, we're going to be talking about peace. And I would say, of the elements that we are looking at in the Advent series this year, peace is by far the most controversial.

Which you may not feel why that would be so, because peace as a word and as a concept doesn't necessarily feel controversial. In fact, it's the word that we love to put on Christmas ornaments and sing songs about, and surely everybody loves peace.

[2 : 15] But I would say I don't think that we all do, definitely not in the way that God does. And full disclosure, I cannot ever remember in six years preparing a sermon that has challenged me and made me more uncomfortable than this one.

I don't remember praying as much in the preparation of a sermon as I did for this one. Preparing this sermon, I felt like I was being, in some ways, pierced and pruned by the word of God, which that's what the word is actually meant to do.

The Bible says it's its own kind of weapon. And pruning is a good process, but it can be a painful process. And it was for me as I realized how much I don't love peace in the way that God does.

So we're going to start by reading just a few verses from Isaiah chapter 9. And this is a fairly Christmassy kind of text. So hopefully this will help with the festivity in the air, if this feels or sounds familiar to you.

So Isaiah chapter 9, verse 2. And verse 6.

[3 : 31] Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. And that's quite a promise, isn't it? I mean, it's just remarkable. This child is going to be born, and one of the names that he is going to have is going to

be Prince of Peace.

And his government and his rule and the peace that he brings will not stop increasing. And I think that that's the kind of thing that people from all cultures and all time have in a sense longed for. And yet maybe today more than ever before, because we're living in what many historians have believed is the most violent epoch in human history. In our small, quiet, and rural towns, this can be maybe hard to believe because it can feel to many of us like the world is a more civilized place than it once was.

And yet in the last hundred years or so, over 187 million people have been killed in war, and most of them were civilians. In the last hundred years, there have been seven genocides, including the one in Rwanda, where 800,000 people were hacked to death in 90 days.

[5 : 11] And that was in a Christian nation. Speaking of Christians, there were more Christians martyred for their faith in the last century than in the first 19 combined.

So there's a lot of violence, but it isn't just the violence. There's also, seems to be, there seems to be an increase in a prolific desire for violence.

And this has been written about by thinkers and intellectuals, both in the church and outside the church. We have an increasing desire for violence. I remember feeling this, a sense of this, when I watched the movie 300.

I remember having a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach when I realized that, man, we have made killing people look beautiful. We've made violence look beautiful. We've made cutting off someone's head look sexy.

And if that is not bloodlust, man, I don't know what is. There's a lot of people who have become a little uncomfortable with how much of our entertainment, movies, television, video games, and all that are centered on and depend on violence.

[6 : 17] And so at Christmas, you know, we've got these nostalgic traditions where we rehearse songs of peace. But the rest of the year, our hearts thrill for scenes of war. And I want to just appreciate that some of you may not immediately appreciate why that's a big deal and what the problem is.

And, you know, what is the big deal about some violent movies? And I'm, because I'm certainly not saying that we just need to stop watching violent movies. I'm not saying that at all. I am trying to say, and I'm proposing that the way that most of us, myself included, the way that we think about violence, the way that we think about peace, is often at odds with what an overwhelming amount of scripture says about these things.

So I want to, this morning, I want to do a very quick flyover of the Bible. I'm going to do what's called biblical theology. And we're going to look at this, these themes of peace and of violence. And we're going to tug on that thread just a little bit.

And the hope is that we're not just going to leave today better agents of peace in a chaotic and violent world, but that we leave a little more enamored with the Prince of Peace. And so that's what I'm hoping for.

But before we do, just one caveat. I want to set aside a few things that we're not talking about today. We're not talking about the role of Christians in the military or in law enforcement.

[7 : 34] So we're not talking about Christians who may be at times called, be called upon to do violence on behalf of the state. We're not talking about that. And we're not talking about the scenario in which there's an intruder at your door and what's the role of violence when it comes to defending your family.

I just want to acknowledge that I think that those subjects are really not even appropriate for sermons at all. I think those are best discussed in conversations. And it's good to acknowledge that Christians from across the theological spectrum have grappled with what to make sense of those. I don't want to call them tricky, but they're just sensitive issues. And I say that as a former Marine myself. And I'm proud of having served in the Marines. And this is a Marine Corps town.

And we've got, I'm sure, in this church, present and past Marines and sailors. We've probably got law enforcement. So I want you to know we are and I am proud of you. And we are grateful for you. And I'm, yeah. And I'm hoping that the sermon this morning does not confuse you. I'm hoping it helps you be a better Marine or a better sailor or a better policeman or a policewoman.

[8 : 45] And so that said, we're going to go back to the very beginning and we're going to see what the Bible has to say about peace. And what we see in Genesis is that human history starts with shalom, which is the Hebrew word for peace.

And I'm using that because when we talk about peace, in fact, in previous sermons that I have preached on this subject, oftentimes we frame the idea in terms of a lack of something. Peace is a lack of conflict or a lack of anger or a lack of anxiety.

And that is true. But shalom suggests something more substantial than just a lack of something. In a book called *The Meaning of Peace*, one Hebrew scholar defines shalom this way.

It signifies the well-being of a human in all imaginable respects. It stretches from the well-being of satisfaction and contentment about one's welfare to security to being unharmed, including keeping healthy, to getting along with each other in every form of relationship.

So shalom or peace is the harmony of everything in your life, working together for your good in beautiful and nourishing ways.

[9 : 53] And that was the state of things in the Garden of Eden. It was the original plan. There was shalom between Adam and Eve. There was shalom between them and creation. And there was shalom between them and God. And that's how things started.

And what's very interesting is that as soon as sin enters, to notice how quickly violence follows. And it's remarkable because the very first descendant, Cain, murders his brother.

It only took one generation to get a murderer in our midst. And then the human situation deteriorates rapidly. So much so that God decides to send a flood. But look at why he says he sent the flood.

Genesis 6. Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight. And the earth was filled with violence. And it's safe to assume that the world was corrupt in many ways, just like it is today.

There was probably moral corruption. There was probably sexual corruption. And yet the thing that the writer of Genesis points to is the violence. And so there's many implications to the sin of Adam and Eve.

[10 : 57] But a straightforward reading of the Bible will show you that violence is a corruption of shalom. And I don't want to overstate things. God hates all sin.

But the role that violence plays in the history of God's people and the story of the Bible is a unique one. Throughout the Old Testament, God expresses his repulsion at the violent ways of the world.

There are these other nations around the nation of Israel. And they are known for their violent militaries and the carnage that they wreck against the world. And God hates all of that.

He hates the gods that they worship. And because many of the gods that they worship are themselves bloodthirsty and violent. Many of them requiring human sacrifice. And God is at pains to say, I'm not that way.

I'm not that kind of God. And I don't like that kind of thing. The book of Judges is perhaps the most violent book in the Bible. And the ironic thing about that is that many people miss the point when they read the book of Judges.

[11 : 55] They read it and say, wow, this is a very uncomfortable book to read. And look how violent God is. But that's the thing. The stories aren't about how violent God is. They are stories about how violent men are.

God sends Israel into Canaan, the promised land. The people of God go into Canaan. And they're supposed to bring the influence of their God into that place. But the reverse happened. The Israelites were not the influencers.

They were influenced. And so Canaan was not Israelized. Israel was Canaanized. And one of the most obvious ways to see how that worked out is how violent they became. They don't reflect their shalom-loving God.

They reflect the bloodthirsty nations around them. And I will admit, there are parts of the Old Testament that are, well, they're just difficult to grapple with. And they can make it seem like God really does like violence.

There's the law itself, which has punitive measures that can seem to us like excessively violent. There's the invasion of the land of Canaan, which we read about in the book of Joshua.

[12 : 57] That is God-sanctioned, this Israelite invasion of Canaan. And we don't have time to look at those two things this morning. But I will tell you that even there, there's more than meets the eye.

And one thing that's very clear is that God never celebrates the violence of men. There's one element of violence in the Old Testament that I think is worth considering, that we do have time for. And that is the warfare policy that God gave the nation of Israel.

Wars are not ideal, but if they have to be fought, well, how should they be fought? And so God gives rules about this, and hear me, they are absurd. By 21st century standards, they're absurd. By ancient Israeli standards, they were absurd. Israel was not allowed to use taxes to fund a standing army.

So its military had to be pulled from the general population as necessary. No professional soldiers, only weekend warriors, so to speak. The king was restricted from even having the resources to build an army.

[13:57] This is explicit in Deuteronomy 17, where the law prohibits the king from acquiring many horses, and from acquiring excessive silver and gold. Well, in order to have a big army, you need lots of horses to pull your chariots.

But the king can't have those. And in order to have a big army, you need lots of money to pay your army. But the king can't have that. And then we go on to read that another thing the king can't have is he's not allowed to make military or political alliances with other countries, which we all know you have to have to have a stable country.

And so, well, what's the king got? Well, he's got the Lord. And so in Deuteronomy 20, listen to this. And just imagine, like in today's world, anyone in the government saying this.

When you go out to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them because you have superior tactics and you have superior technology.

No, you will not be afraid of them for the Lord your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. When you draw near to the battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the people. And he shall say to them, Hear, O Israel, today you are drawing near for battle against your enemies.

[15:06] Let not your heart faint. Do not fear or panic or be in dread of them. For the Lord your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you the victory. And so God strips the nation of military strength.

And that often goes overlooked. He strips the nation of military strength to make them militarily weak so that they will depend on him because he will fight for them.

And that's not just in a figurative sense. It's in a quite literal sense. Quite literal sense. It comes into sharp focus when you consider how many times in the Old Testament scriptures you read about a victorious battle and all of the credit goes to God.

None of it goes to the nation of Israel. It happens again and again. Guys, these folks, they wrote their own history. And they don't take any of the credit for their success. At the Red Sea, who takes out Pharaoh's army?

Well, God does that. Judges 7, before fighting the Midianites, God tells Gideon to send the entire army home except for 300 guys. And the Midianite army was numbered in the tens of thousands.

[16:06] Now, in modern or ancient days, sending the army home except for 300 guys, that is not a tactic. That's suicide. And yet that's what God does. And then he actually goes before the 300 men.

He brings panic into the camp. And he defeats the enemy. And God tells Gideon, I did it this way, so you wouldn't boast in your own strength. 2 Chronicles 20. Judah's getting invaded.

King Jehoshaphat rides out with the army. But on the way out, they're not training. They're not sharpening their swords. They're singing and praying. And sure enough, the Israelites show up to battle. But the invading armies have turned on each other.

And again, God wins the day. Then there are stories, again, where the Israelites, they do fight. But even there in their own history, they tell us that when they won, they didn't win because of their own proficiency.

It's because God caused them to defeat their enemies. On top of these stories and the narratives themselves, the songs of the nation are also decidedly not militaristic.

[17:05] Which is strange because even today, nationalistic songs will always exalt military supremacy. Psalm 33. And I bet you we've all read this.

And I just want you to imagine any nation on earth having a song like this that the people would sing together. Psalm 33. The king is not saved by his great army. A warrior is not delivered by his great strength.

The war horse is a false hope for salvation. And by its great might, it cannot rescue. I mean, can you imagine any country having a song like this? The nation will not be saved by its military. And our great weapons are false hopes. And Psalm 33 goes on to say, our soul waits for the Lord. He is our help and our shield. For our heart is glad in him because we trust in his holy name. Even King David, by the way, he wrote many of the Psalms. He was himself on the wrong side of the violence issue. He wanted to build a temple for God's presence. And God told him no. [18:05] And the reason that we read in 1 Chronicles, God's reason for saying no is this. God says to David, you've shed much blood and have waged great wars.

You shall not build a house to my name because you have shed so much blood before me on the earth. Now, David is the guy who committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband killed. This is a guy who he did some pretty terrible things.

And yet, the one thing that God points to that disqualifies him for building the temple is that he was such a violent man. The point of all of this is that God wants peace.

He wants shalom. And his people are to be very different than the nations around them. And if there's going to be violence, well, God often insists on doing it on their behalf. Or at very least, making it very explicit how far the violence is to be exacted.

The degree to which God's people are expected to depend on him is practically preposterous. It flies in the face of ancient and modern nationalistic and militaristic assumptions.

[19:05] But the Bible, many theologians have pointed out, reads like music. So if you're a musician, you know more about music than me. But I know that in good music, it often moves around a bit.

It does some different things. And then there's a point in the music where it begins to build to a crescendo moment. And that's the climax of the song. And it's the part that really moves you emotionally. And it's the part you remember.

And the Bible is like music. And Jesus is the crescendo moment in the music of the Bible. And he is the crescendo moment in every respect, including peace. Jesus is the crescendo of shalom.

Before he even shows up on the scene, the music starts building. There is an enormous amount of prophecy about the coming of Jesus and what kind of rescuer and Messiah he's going to be.

And some of the most remarkable things that are said about Jesus by the prophets are in respect to the nonviolent peace that he's going to bring. So in Zechariah chapter 9, it says, On a war horse!

[20:14] No. Humble and mounted on a donkey. On a colt, the foal of a donkey. But he is going to build up our military. No. He says, I'll cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the war horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off.

But he is going to destroy our enemies. No, he's going to speak peace to the nations. And his rule shall be from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth.

In Isaiah chapter 2, it says that this coming Messiah is going to judge between the nations and shall decide disputes for many peoples. And here's what he's going to do with their weapons.

He shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. Instruments of destruction are going to be turned into instruments of cultivation.

The people, not only are they not going to fight, they're not going to even need to train to fight.

Fighting will be a thing of the past. And yet there's another dimension still to this kind of peace that's coming, but one that is far more troubling.

[21:21] And Isaiah 53 goes on to say that this coming rescuer is going to be a suffering servant. And it says that he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds we are healed. And so peace is going to come. Isaiah seems to be saying, peace is going to come through violence, but it's in the opposite way that you would expect.

The coming king would create peace for us by absorbing violence, not by inflicting it. Now despite what might seem clear in these prophecies, most Jews of Jesus' day were expecting something very different.

And it's very easy to criticize them for that. Very easy. But I would say that if we were in their shoes, we would have done the same thing. There's a show that Amazon released.

It just finished its third season. Man in the High Castle. Anyone seen Man in the High Castle? It's a dystopian thriller based on an alternate history in which the Axis powers win World War II.

[22 : 27] And so in the story, America is occupied by foreign invaders. The western states are controlled by Imperial Japan. The eastern states are controlled by Nazi Germany. Now just imagine yourself in that kind of situation. Imagine that you're treated as a slave in this country, as a kind of servant.

You're like a second class citizen in your own country. Imagine the swastika flying over Cherry Point. Or imagine the swastika flying on the Atlantic Beach Bridge. What kind of leader would you be hoping for exactly?

What kind of rescuer would you be anticipating and even praying for? Well, obviously, the one who would overthrow the Nazis.

We don't even have to guess about that. That's what we would want. It's what I would want and it's what you would want. And Israel's history for centuries had been that scenario, if not worse, and I would say it was worse.

200 years before Christ, the Greeks were ruling over the nation of Israel for a time. They violently suppressed any form of insurrection. And then there's this brief spell during which the Maccabees, a Jewish family, violently throw off their oppressors.

[23 : 38] And they massacre thousands to do so. But Israel only enjoys 80 years of self-rule and even that wasn't peaceful because the Maccabees eventually turned on their own. The Jewish king, Alexander Gennas, crucified 800 Pharisees, butchered their wives and children, and watch all that happen while reclining with concubines.

So much for the peace of self-rule. But things got worse even still when the Roman general Pompey showed up with his army and slaughtered 12,000 Jews in his successful invasion of the land, putting the nation of Israel under Gentile occupation again.

Only a few years later, Herod the Great, the puppet king of the Jews, picked up where Alexander Gennas left off, killing his mother-in-law, one of his wives, many of his sons, and most notoriously, the male babies of the little town of Bethlehem.

Jesus Christ was born into a world overwhelmed with violence. Overwhelmed. And if it's you living in that world, what kind of prince would you want?

I mean, I think I can speak for all of us. We'd want a prince of the sword before a prince of peace. But Jesus came to restore shalom. And he seemed to think that violence was of no use to him at all, period.

[25 : 01] Everywhere he went, Jesus was preaching about his kingdom, which is not unusual. Most leaders talk about their kingdoms or their empires, but his was so different than everyone else's, very different than the Maccabees. None of his resources went to fighting anyone.

All of his resources, and they were very powerful resources, went to helping people. And healing people. And taking the people that no one actually ever noticed in global conflicts, like the poor. And restoring their situations.

He built people up. And despite that, everywhere he went, there were people who were out to harm him. Who were trying to take him out, betray him, sabotage him. Now, again, imagine that you are one of those very modest, poor people, and you've been helped by Jesus and blessed by him.

And you can see that everywhere he goes, he's got enemies. And people are trying to catch him in lies and attack his reputation. What would you do if you were in that situation?

Well, you probably would have done what the disciples did, and you would tell Jesus, you have to retaliate, Jesus. You have to defend yourself. You can't just be a doormat. You know, there's this one time where Jesus is rejected from a town, and the disciples wanted to call down fire from heaven on that town.

[26 : 07] Just nuke him, Jesus. Jesus. And not only does he refuse, he turns around and rebukes his disciples. This isn't your kind of kingdom, disciples.

There's another time where Jesus is telling his disciples that actually he has to suffer at the hand of his enemies and be killed. Now, again, imagine the sort of man in the high castle scenario, and the leader that you put all your hope and trust in says, what really needs to happen is I need to be handed over to the Nazis, I need to suffer, and they will need to kill me.

What would you say? Well, you'd probably do what Peter did, and you'd say, no way can this happen. In the Gospel of Mark, which is Peter's account of this, by the way, which is really interesting, it says explicitly that Peter rebukes Jesus for this.

And in Mark 8, verse 33, it says, but turning around and seeing his disciples, he, Jesus, rebuked Peter and said, get behind me, Satan. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

This isn't your kind of kingdom, Peter. During Passover, this was a particularly important festival of the Jews, and lots of people would come into Jerusalem. And so you've got a situation that's ripe for unrest.

[27 : 16] And so Herod would often, at Passover, he would have a kind of like a military parade, a show of force. And so at the beginning of Passover, he would, with all of his, you can just imagine, war horses and chariots and all that, he would have this moment where he'd ride to Jerusalem in power as a way of saying, hey, don't mess with me.

And so it's in direct contrast with Herod, in direct fulfillment of the prophecy that Jesus, at Passover, rides into Jerusalem on a donkey and humble.

This is not your kind of kingdom, Herod. And then when Jesus is arrested and standing before Pilate, the Roman governor asks him what he's done, and I've never noticed this before until when I was preparing these notes.

In John's Gospel, you know, Pilate asks Jesus what he's done to deserve this, and Jesus says, well, my kingdom is not of this world. If I were of this world, my servants would have been fighting that I might not be delivered over to the Jews, but my kingdom is not from the world.

This is not your kind of kingdom, Pilate. It's not your kind of kingdom, Maccabees. It's not your kind of kingdom, Israel. It's not your kind of kingdom, America. You know, it is so interesting to me that when Jesus is standing before Pilate and he tries to make the point that my kingdom is not like yours, the one thing that he points to is this, we don't fight.

[28 : 36] It's the one thing. And the true crescendo moment happens here, not when Jesus is born, not when he raises people from the dead, the crescendo moment happens when he dies a horrific death.

He is a conquering king who conquers by dying, not by killing, by absorbing violence, not by inflicting it. And in doing so, he makes peace because he doesn't stay dead.

So by dying for the Jews, he makes a way for them to be forgiven. By dying for the Romans, he makes a way for them to be reconciled to God. And by dying for you, he becomes your personal prince of peace.

And his first order of business, by the way, is to introduce you to his everlasting father. And that is good news. We sang the song this morning that has the line, he makes the nations prove his righteousness.

righteousness and the wonders of his love. Every time that Jesus stands against the kingdoms of the world, they prove how much better are his ways and his kingdom. But this prince of peace has rules for his kingdom and one of the most important rules is this, you have to live like him.

[29 : 43] We have to live like him. Christians are called to the non-violent shalom of Christ. The overwhelming message of the New Testament is that Christians are supposed to embrace suffering and refuse retaliation of any kind.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, six different times he says this statement, a contrasting statement in which he says, you've heard it said this, but I tell you this.

Six times he does that and three of them are about violence. You've heard it said you shall not murder. I tell you, you can't even be angry at your brother. You can't even have violence in your heart. You've heard it said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

I say, do not resist the evil one. You cannot take vengeance into your own hands. The third one in Matthew 5, verse 43, it says, you've heard it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

You can't just, you know, it's not just, you can't have violence in your heart. You actually have to show love and peace to the ones who would harm you. In today's world, probably the most often quoted scriptures, probably John 3, 16, you know, God so loved the world he sent his only son.

[30 : 49] You know, it's interesting, the early church fathers who left an enormous amount of written materials for us to read. The most often repeated scripture is this one about loving your enemies.

But we just don't want to take Jesus literally on any of this. It is surely an exaggeration. He was just, yeah, I was hyperbole, you know, because there's a lot of evil out there and really, what are you

supposed to do if the evil comes for you?

Well, Jesus said, he said, when he said, don't resist them, he actually gave several practical examples which we also don't want to take literally. He says, if you get slapped, turn the other cheek. Deal with violence by loving the violent.

He says, if you get forced to go one mile, go two. Now listen, the context for that is that in Jesus' day, a Roman centurion could take a Jewish man at any time and say, you have to carry my luggage for a mile.

Now again, just imagine the Nazis are here, they've taken over and they can stop you at any time, whatever you're doing and make you carry their stuff for a mile. How would you feel about that? You'd be ticked and Jesus says, Jesus says, give him an extra mile for free.

[31 : 57] Deal with oppression by being generous to the oppressor. When the world offers you violent oppression, you offer the world loving peace. You inject everything with shalom.

Remember those, in the 90s, the WWJD bracelets, what would Jesus do? Eh, they were kind of hokey. But, you know, the example of Jesus, what would Jesus do? The example of Jesus is important to reflect on.

Here's something interesting. Do you know that when the New Testament writers talk about the example of Jesus, they don't mention hardly anything at all. They don't mention the sexual ethic of Jesus and his commitment to celibacy.

They don't talk about the example of Jesus fasting and praying. When they talk about the example of Jesus almost exclusively, they talk about one thing and it's his love for his enemies and his response to evil.

An example, 1 Peter 2, for to this you've been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps. And so here's the example. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

[32 : 54] When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. That's your example if you're a Christian. The New Testament writers, they took these commands of Jesus quite literally.

1 Thessalonians say, we can never repay evil for evil. We have to do good to everyone. Hebrews 10, there is this crazy verse in Hebrews 10 where the writer of Hebrews acknowledges that the people he's writing to, he says, you know, you were actually joyful when your personal property was plundered.

I cannot imagine that being written about any American. Being joyful when their personal property was plundered. And I'm going to say something that I want to say this sensitively. But if your constitutional rights are more important to you than the example of Jesus, you will have a hard time embracing New Testament Christianity.

Your constitutional rights are important, but like everything else, they bow at the feet of Jesus. They do. And I'm sure at this point, many of you are pitching with questions about, come on, how do you really live like this?

How do you really make this kind of thing practical? And I want to remind you, we're setting aside the military, we're setting aside police, and we're setting aside what do you do if someone's at your door who wants to harm your family?

[34 : 07] We're not talking about that today. Okay, but I do want to say this. I realized, in thinking about these things, I realized something about myself in the preparation of the sermon. I realized that I often form my beliefs by starting with, okay, an intruder at my door who wants to harm my family.

I start with a tricky question, a hard question. And then I come up with an answer, not necessarily based on Scripture, but I come up with an answer that I can stomach and then I reverse engineer those beliefs into the rest of life.

A better route to take is to take the Word of God and apply it to your life, most of which does not fall into the tricky situation of intruder at your door. Most of our life is not that kind of thing. Most of our life, we can just very straightforwardly apply the Word of God to.

We make it more complicated than the Bible does. Again, we're not dealing with all of those questions. We're not talking about how the government of the United States should operate. We're talking about how the church should operate.

We're talking about how you and me, how we should operate. And we are talking about the fact that I am convinced most of us in everyday life have more faith in redemptive violence than redemptive

suffering.

[35 : 09] I'm convinced of that, guys. Those are the movies we like to watch. That's what we dwell on. And I have been so convicted about this personally. I have had to repent so much in the last couple weeks dealing with this in my own heart.

We like the Bible verses, we just don't like making them practical. And one, because it's just really hard. It takes a certain kind of strength to defeat your enemy. It's an entirely different kind of strength to patiently endure violence and to love your oppressor.

And that is not weakness. That takes a kind of strength most of us, we simply don't think we have. But also, if we're being honest, we just don't think this works. And this is where I think most of the objections come in.

Because if you really follow Jesus on this kind of thing, well, you're just going to let people get away with things. And the world is going to be chaos and people need to learn their lessons. People can't just think they can get away with whatever they want.

And I will admit there's a lot of situations that deserve thoughtful and sophisticated responses. I don't want to oversimplify things, but I'm just going to say a couple things to that. First of all, it is not our job as Christians to fix the world.

[36 : 17] We are not talking about the police or the military. We're talking about us. And we are not, hear me on this, Christians are not first and foremost called to effectiveness. We're called to faithfulness. What's most important about our job is our witness to what Jesus has commanded and called us to.

Effectiveness is the work of the Lord. And the Bible is very clear about this. We do all kinds of things. We plant, we water, Paul says, but it is the Lord who causes the growth. He is the one who makes things effective. And so, faithfulness is our job.

That's our primary responsibility, not obeying those commands that we think are going to be particularly good for the mission and those commands that we think are going to be effective. We have to obey them all. But even if you care about effectiveness, which I think you should, nonviolence has the evidence.

Your lavish, undeserved, unexpected grace can do and will do far more good than any act of your righteous judgment. Daryl Davis is a black blues musician in Maryland.

I think we got a picture of him. There he is. He has a strange hobby. He befriends white supremacists. He connects with them over music or shared interests. He just befriends them.

[37 : 27] He just wants to hang out with them. They hate him and yet he keeps at it. And there's been a good deal of investigative journalism about Daryl and the result of that has been the discovery that it appears there's been 200 members of the KKK who've renounced their membership because of Daryl's intervention.

Nonviolent shalom works. Not shouting at the supremacists. Not arguing with them. Taking them out to coffee. Playing music with them. Emily Klotz was out for a run one day when a man abducted her, threw her in a car and drove her to a place where she was brutally raped.

After that was done he put her back in the car and can you believe it asked her to sing him a song. She said I began singing Amazing Grace in the car and I felt God gave me this song to sing because not only did this man who had just done this horrible thing to me need God's grace I hadn't yet received that grace and so I needed it just as much.

That man was later found and put in prison. Emily struggled as you can imagine for a long time with deep wounds of bitterness and of anger of hurt and yet over time she felt compelled compelled that she was supposed to forgive this man.

And so she said there's this moment where she had to say out loud I choose to forgive this man. She said his name. I choose to forgive him. And she said she prayed a prayer right then. She said Father I want you to forgive him because he doesn't know what he's done and I ask you you would bring him to his knees in repentance before you.

[38 : 55] Unbeknownst to her the man was in prison and the words of Amazing Grace as well as some other things that she had said to him had been gnawing at him over and over and over again until he couldn't take it anymore and eventually he did pray to God to be forgiven and to be made a new man and he went on for quite some time to have a ministry to other prisoners on behalf of Jesus.

Someone called Emily to tell her the news and on the phone in her kitchen when she found out that he had been saved she said she was jumping up and down that her prayers had been answered. Her rapist had been rescued by Jesus and he was now her brother. Nate Schrader is a friend of our church Army Special Forces.

Deployed multiple times to Iraq got out of the army and God put on him a burden for the people so he returned to do something very different. He returned to plant a church armed with different weapons weapons of peace to bless.

There are so many stories like these and I could tell so many. Men and women who conquer not by killing but by sacrificing by giving and even by dying which is the ultimate expression of love to die for your enemies which is precisely what Jesus did and what many other Christians have chosen to do throughout the ages.

[40 : 18] In fact, the book of Revelation makes this painfully clear. Over and over again we're told about the conquering of Christians and that word conquer in Revelation is almost always translated from the Greek word *nikal* from which Nike gets its name and in the Greek the way that it's almost always used is in reference to military victory and yet in Revelation the word is used in a backwards way because in Revelation the ones who have said to have conquered are always those who have been killed.

Jesus and after him a long line of men and women who refused to inflict violence they insisted on absorbing it. In some cases dying for others in every case dying for Jesus.

Revelation 12 and they've conquered him by the blood of the Lamb him being Satan and by the word of their testimony for they love not their lives even unto death. There are times where people like Daryl Davis and Emily Klotz they get to see the fruit of their shalom of their commitment to non-violence of their pursuit of peace but sometimes you don't know what's going to happen and you have to make a choice anyway.

Wang Yi is a Chinese human rights advocate and has been the pastor of one of China's most well-known underground house churches called New Rain Covenant Church. Despite a lockdown on unregistered churches by the Chinese communist government Wang Yi has continued to proclaim the name of Jesus to his community.

On December 9th this was two weeks ago folks December 9th over 100 members of his church including Wang Yi were arrested. Anticipating his arrest Wang Yi wrote a letter which was published after he disappeared into the Chinese prison system.

[41 : 54] The entire letter is remarkable. It will put some backbone in you to read it and I don't have time to read the whole thing. I'd like to read you just an excerpt. He said if I'm in prison for a long or short period of time if I can help reduce the authorities fear of my faith and of my savior I am very joyfully willing to help them in this way.

But I know that only when I renounce all the wickedness of this persecution against the church and use peaceful means to disobey will I truly be able to help the souls of the authorities in law enforcement. I hope God uses me by means of first losing my personal freedom to tell those who've deprived me of my personal freedom that there is an authority higher than their authority and that there is a freedom that they cannot restrain a freedom that fills the church of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.

The mystery of the gospel lies in actively suffering even being willing to endure unrighteous punishment as a substitute for physical resistance. Peaceful disobedience is the result of love and forgiveness.

The cross means being willing to suffer when one does not have to suffer for Christ had limitless ability to fight back yet he endured all the humility and hurt. The way that Christ resisted the world that resisted him was by extending an olive branch of peace on the cross to the world that crucified him.

We don't know yet what's going to happen with Wang Yi but the word of his testimony is traveling the globe. So friends, when Jesus returns and weapons of war are smashed into instruments of cultivation, what kind of day is that going to be for you?

[43 : 26] I think some of us, we are far more skilled at fighting than we are making peace. We're good at winning fights, bad at ending them. We've gotten, in some cases, very good at using our instruments of destruction.

We're not as sophisticated in being an instrument of cultivation. And if the eternal kingdom that's coming, if it's going to be a kingdom of peace, then we are supposed to be peacemakers now.

And so, look, friends, we can beat down, we can beat down words of spite into words of blessing. We can beat down our snarky comments into words of encouragement.

We can take the anger that we feel towards people who disagree with us, maybe people who disagree with us politically, maybe people who disagree with us religiously. We can take those feelings of anger and beat them down into empathy and love.

We can take our bitterness towards those who've hurt us and beat it down into forgiveness. The record of wrong that you're keeping against someone, the grudge that you're holding, you can beat it down into a reminder of who you were when Jesus loved for you and died for you anyway.

[44 : 38] In our marriages, when we are taken for granted, perhaps even mistreated, we can beat down our resentment into an unconditional love that reflects the love of Jesus.

A love that isn't based on how we're treated, but is fundamentally based on who we are, image bearers of the living God. As we get ready to close and the band comes up, I'm going to show you one more picture.

The United Nations was officially founded in 1945 as a response to two world wars and there's a beautiful statue with the inscription of one of the verses we've been talking about outside their building. They shall beat down their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. And I find this monument to be ironic because while we may long for this, we all know it's impossible and it is not ever going to happen in this age because the shoulders of our earthly leaders are too small for this kind of government.

But a day is coming, one of judgment and of peace, and if we did not believe, friends, if we did not believe that Jesus is ultimately going to come and make peace and judge the wicked, then we would have a zeal to right every wrong ourselves, wouldn't we?

[45 : 53] And we would have a zeal to get back at everyone who has ever hurt us. But we don't have to do that because we can trust in the day that's coming, that Jesus is going to do what we could not do, that the government will actually be upon his shoulders which are broad enough for this kind of thing.

And of his peace there will be no end. And the zeal of the Lord of hosts is going to be the thing that does this. Let's pray. Lord, we want to thank you for the example that you've set for us.

That when we were your enemies, when we deserved righteous judgment, you extended us peace. That from the cross, as our sin pierced you and hung you there, you cried out to your Father on our behalf that we would be forgiven.

Lord, I want to confess on behalf of my friends in the room, the culture has done us no favors. We so often have put more faith into redemptive violence than redemptive suffering. We've assumed the ways of the world and we've called it righteous and yet your kingdom is not like our kingdom. Would you change us and transform us? Lord, would the reputation that this church has in the community, that it does not matter what happens to us, we are committed to loving and showing peace to everyone, even the ones who would do us the most harm.

[47 : 14] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. As we come to communion and come to the table, I want to remind you that the book of Ephesians says that Jesus himself as a person is our peace.

That he made peace and that he reconciled us to God by breaking down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. And that's what we're remembering at communion, the breaking down of his flesh in which the dividing wall of hostility that separated us from God.

That's how that happened. That's how it came tumbling down. In fact, Ephesians says that he killed the hostility and he killed it by being killed. And so, there's going to be a moment now for you to consider your own heart and where has there been violence in your heart.

Where do you need to confess and ask for the shalom of Christ to take over every corner of your soul? I would encourage you to do that. Maybe you've been harboring racism or violence.

Maybe you have put your hope in the shoulders of men that are too small. Maybe you've been oppressed and you haven't found the freedom that comes from loving your oppressor. And some of you, you maybe don't have Jesus as your personal Prince of Peace.

[48 : 27] And I want to tell you there is a day of violence coming. A day of judgment. Man, the whole point of the gospel is that Jesus drank that cup for you. And the invitation for you is to come and be at peace with him.

Let him be your Prince. So this is a time to pray and I would invite you to do that and when you're ready come to the table and enjoy Jesus.
to be with you.