

The Parish of Wellow

Searching Issues

Can a war ever be holy?

Passage, Sermon Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these sermon notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during next week to consider the questions below.

1. Sermon Passage

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

- 1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:
- 2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,
- 3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,
- 4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,
- 5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
- 6 a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,
- 7 a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,
- 8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

2. Sermon Notes

2.1 Introduction

- Christians have struggled with this question about war for centuries.
- The Bible is not silent on this difficult subject.
- The Bible makes clear again and again that our priority is peace.

2 Key verses - One in the Old Testament the other in the New

- i. Ecclesiastes 3:8: 'There is a time a time for war and a time for peace.'
- ii. Romans 12:8: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

- Paul the author of Romans and Solomon the author of Ecclesiastes are also very realistic about peace.
- Notice Paul's two qualifiers: "as much as it depends on you... as far as it's possible."
- Notice Solomon's qualifier that there is a time for peace but also evidently a time for war.
- As followers of Christ we must pursue peace; in our relationships, between nations, among families.
- We must do all we can to promote and establish peace.
- God says peace is a two way street. There's a part of peace that we're responsible for and there's a part we don't control and that may mean peace gets broken.

Where does our responsibility for peace begin and end? To find out let us ask four questions:

- i. What is the real cause of war?
- ii. Is it ever right to go to war?
- iii. Can a war ever be 'just'?
- iv. What about the current war on terror. Is this a 'just' war?

2.2 What is the real cause of war?

- The Bible says that most wars are caused by two things: selfishness and pride.
- James put it brilliantly in his letter "Where do these wars and battles between yourselves first start? Isn't it precisely in the desires fighting inside your own selves? You want something and you haven't got it; so you're prepared to kill. You have an ambition you can't satisfy, so you fight to get your way by force." (James 4:1-2)
- Back in 1991 Saddam Hussein selfishly wanted something that wasn't his. He wanted the oil fields in Kuwait so he just took them. This selfish act eventually precipitated war.
- Whenever there is a battle between two nations, a battle between two businesses, a battle between workers and management, husband and wife, parent and child, whenever there's conflict, one party or maybe both will be exhibiting selfishness or pride. One or both parties are effectively saying 'I want my way'. Peace is broken the instant that selfishness causes us to sin against someone.

2.3 Is it ever right to go to war?

"There is a time for war and a time for peace." Ecclesiastes 3:8

- The Bible is very realistic about war.
- Sometimes it says war is the right thing. Sometimes war is the wrong thing.

- There is a time for war, if the reason for it is not selfish, but rather if the reason is in order to defend 'justice'.

2.4 Can a war ever be 'just'?

- Christians should never speak of a 'holy' war.
- Even a just war is never a holy war.
- It was the great theologian Augustine who put forward the idea of a 'just' war theory.

Augustine's seven point judgement criteria for a 'just' war:

1. Public authority: War must be declared by a legitimate government. It is not for private individuals and groups to decide when lethal violence must be used in support of justice and peace
2. Just Cause: War must not be waged except to protect innocent life, to ensure that people can live decently, and to secure their natural rights.
3. Right Intention: Not only must there be just cause to take up arms; this just cause must be the reason for taking up arms. Our goal must be to achieve a just peace — not to pump up the economy or keep petrol prices low.
4. Comparative Justice: War should not be waged unless the evils that are fought are grave enough to justify killing. Notice the word: 'Killing,' not 'murder.' Murder is deliberately taking innocent human life. This is categorically forbidden, even in wartime.
5. Proportionality: There must be reason to expect that going to war will end more evil than it causes.
6. Probability of Success: There must be a reasonable likelihood that the war will achieve its aims.
7. Last Resort: War should not be waged unless a reasonable person would recognize that the peaceful alternatives have been exhausted. There comes a point, though, when even a reasonable person recognizes that the opponent is not interested in peace.

2.5 What about the current war on terror. Is this a 'just' war?

- For many years, the church has taken Augustine's rules of a 'just' war as their guide.
- The problem is that our enemies do not always play by these rules.
- Terrorists and tyrants care little for rules.
- They deliberately target innocent civilians and public buildings rather than military sites.
- So is the new global war on terror a just war? I think it probably is.
- It has a loving aim that people across the world can do what the Bible says: live life in peace and quietness, in godliness and dignity.
- However, because it is such a expansive, complicated war, each new front, each new operation, needs to be looked at separately to say:
 - i. Does this have a loving intent?
 - ii. Will this do more good than harm?
 - iii. Are we being proportional and discriminating in our actions?
 - iv. Can we find a way without force to bring in peace and justice?

2.6 Conclusion

Each of us must also look forward to that day prophesied in Micah when wars will cease and nations "will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore" Micah 4:3

3. Questions to consider back at home

- 3.1 What does Paul mean when he says in Romans 12 verse 8 "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."?
- 3.2 Do you agree with Solomon when he says that 'There is a time a time for war and a time for peace.'?
- 3.3 Does the sixth commandment which says, 'You shall not kill', prohibit war of any kind?
- 3.4 Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9). Does this means that as followers of Jesus we should be pacifists?
- 3.5 A friend says to you one day that when it comes to the topic of war the Bible is schizophrenic. Some people claim the Bible gives them permission to wage war whereas others claim the Bible gives them permission to be pacifists. What do you think?
- 3.6 What is your opinion of Augustine's 'just' war theory? Is this theory helpful?
- 3.7 A Christian friend of yours in the Army is about to go and serve in Iraq. She is concerned as a Christian what she might be called upon to do. As a close Christian friend what advice would you give her?
- 3.8 What do you feel about the current war on terror? Do you think this is a 'just' war?
- 3.9 How should the Church nationally be responding to the war on terror? How should we as a church family be responding? How should we personally be responding?

If you would like to discuss these questions further please feel free to call me on 01761 432293