

Living in God's Peace 8/15/2010

Greg Boyd

I'm Greg Boyd, the senior pastor here at Woodland Hills Church. It's really good to see all of you here this morning and to come together to worship God and to hear from His word. I really appreciated Bruxy last week. Wasn't he a blast? [Audience applause] Wild man! The whole relationship we have with The Meeting House in Toronto, it's a church in Toronto that's just so in sync with the vision of the kingdom, the heart for the kingdom that we have here. It's actually the second largest, I'm told, second largest church in all of Canada. It's just a happening place. But we have just really been, you know, kind of building a relationship with one another because of the common vision that we have. It's one that's not shared by all churches. And so last week actually their leadership team came down here and spent a couple days with us. And there are some things that they do really, really well that we don't do well. And there's some things that we do really, really well that they don't do well so we're just looking at how can we partner and cross-pollinate one another to be more effective at building the kingdom. And so I suspect you're going to be seeing more Bruxy here and they're going to be seeing more of me up there and we'll see how this goes. And if God puts in on your heart to pray about that relationship, by all means intercede on our behalf.

We're going now back to the book of Luke; we're in the section where Jesus is being arrested. We take breaks to do topics and then we come back to the book of Luke. So we're up to chapter 22, starting with verse 47. I want to entitle this message, "Living in Peace"... "Living in *God's* Peace" because it's really all about learning how (and it's a learning process) learning how to trust God to the point where you relinquish control of your life and of the world over to Him and then find that peace that passes all understanding. It's not something we do naturally in our fallen world but it's so absolutely central. Before I start I would like to pray. Pray with me here.

Father, for every person in this auditorium and every person listening through podcast, I just thank you for every one of them, who's going to hear it through television or whatever means. I pray Lord God that you'd use this message as a blessing to them, as a challenge to them and to me. Confront what needs to be confronted, tear down what needs to be torn down, liberate what needs to be liberated, transform what needs to be transformed, encourage what needs to be encouraged. But build your kingdom. Use this message, we pray, to build your kingdom in us and through us. And God in particular I want to pray that Lord by the power of your spirit would confront our addiction to common sense, our

cultural common sense, and free us to truly live in the radical, counter cultural, transformative beauty of your kingdom that looks like Calvary, the cross. In Jesus name we pray and all of God's people said [Audience, "Amen"] Amen. Amen.

Before I even read the Luke passage I want to read a previous passage from I Corinthians. It's about the cross. And just kind of lodge this in your brain and we'll kind of weave this throughout this message. Paul in talking about the cross, the message of the cross, which is just basically that God's way of transforming the world and getting his will done on earth as it is in heaven is by dying for the world. That's the message of the cross. And so Paul says that the message of the cross is foolishness, idiocy, to those who are perishing. But to those who are being saved, who are coming under the reign of God and being transformed by the life of God, all that's involved in the concept of salvation. It's a past, present, and future tense thing, we're *being* saved. And to all who are being saved, well you know the cross to be the power of God. What looks like foolishness to the natural mind you know, or should at least know, is the power of God.

I Corinthians 1: 18, 27

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God..."

"But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong."

And then in verse 27 Paul says, "God chose", this was intentional here folks, he chose the foolish things of the world, things like getting killed and crucified, he chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and he chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God is a God who does surprising stuff. He doesn't flex his omnipotent muscle to get his will done, he uses foolish things and weak things to accomplish his will. And all who are his people, all who are under his kingdom are to live that way. So it's going to look foolish and it's going to look weak but in fact God uses it to bring about his will on earth as it is in heaven.

OK, so now let's go the passage in Luke that we're up to. Here Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane; he was talking to his disciples and while he was still speaking a crowd, or a mob, came up.

Luke 22: 47-53

"While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him,

‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’ [Jesus is really just going, ‘Really? Really!? Just knock it off. Don’t pretend like this is some kind of a sweet thing you’re doing here.’] When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they said, ‘Lord, should we strike with our swords?’ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, ‘No more of this!’”

It’s interesting that the disciples had the decency to first ask Jesus, “Jesus, do you want us to use these swords?” Unfortunately, one of them at least didn’t have the decency to wait for an answer! And we learn from a different gospel that that was Peter. Peter just—it was so *obvious!* We do this all the time, “Lord, you know, should I do this?” But we really know that *of course* he wants us to do this so we don’t really wait for an answer, we operate out of our common sense. If ever there was a justified use of violence it was here. So Peter, of course, “God wants me to do this” so he doesn’t wait for an answer. Before Jesus can say anything Peter lops out the sword, starts swinging it, cuts off a guy’s ear. And then Jesus says, “*No more of this*”. What’s the “this”? What Peter just did. It’s really a statement that is just pregnant with meaning. Here’s how this usually goes down, “Peter you’re going to cut off his ear, then his son’s going to cut off your ear, and then your son’s going to kill him and then their grandson’s going to kill your grandson, and then your great-great grandson will kill them and this vengeance will be going on and on and on” and that’s how it’s been going from the beginning. Round and round and round we go, where the blood stops nobody knows. Jesus says, “Enough is enough! It stops here. No more of this.” In the Matthew version he adds, “When you live by the sword, you die by the sword.” We should have gotten that by now. It stops here. OK, then the passage goes on.

“Jesus picked up the guy’s ear...”

The passage goes on...which reads... [Greg waits for the PowerPoint to display]

“Speaking to the crowd...”

But then after that it says, the passage moves on... [Greg hints to the media team to go to the next slide on the PowerPoint]. He picks up the ear and he heals the guy’s ear...next slide. [A slide shows up displaying the PowerPoint program, having difficulty trying to reach the correct slide. In a text box on the screen reads the words “Sebastian O4v Micaela 097]

Sebastian O4v, yes, Micah 97...where are we? [Audience laughs] So, the way the passage goes, I’ll just quote it from memory. [The screen still displays the media team trying to come to the right slide on the presentation] Jesus picks up the guard’s ear and he puts it on there and he heals this guard’s ear, showing thereby that the way you do warfare in the kingdom of God is not by cutting off people’s ears but by healing their ears. And that applies to everything. We go forward by loving our enemies, waging war against the principalities and powers that are

always trying to play us off against one another. After that he said to the chief priest and the officers, temple guard, and the elders who had come for him:

“And he touched the man’s ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, ‘Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? [There was a mob with all the clubs and swords] Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns.’”

And Jesus is really kind of just pointing out the hypocrisy of this crowd, “Really? You guys are going to come with clubs and swords in the middle of the night? Do I look like a big, bad, mean Jesus like I’m a major threat; you’ve got to use all those weapons? If that was the case then why didn’t you arrest me in the temple courts, I’ve been talking there for a week about non-violence and you guys know that. So this is a big show, coming as though I’m some kind of a threat and you know that I’m not and why are you coming in the middle of the night when darkness reigns? This is your hour.” But he’s using kind of a double-entendre there, “when you come at night”, but this is the time when darkness, when evil, is reigning and therefore it is your hour.

Now, this passage here, profound passage—has always been used, and rightfully so, as sort of a classic verse illustrating the non-violent teaching of Jesus; the non-violent ethics of the entire New Testament. Jesus could have called legions of angels; he could have flexed his omnipotent muscle as the son of God. He could have had his followers fight on his behalf but instead, though he has all that power available to him, he chooses to die a terrible death. And the reason is because that’s what love requires and that’s what his father willed. On behalf of his enemies, and by the way we all are, apart from God’s grace, regarded as God’ enemies—for our sake he chose to die when he could have just as easily, more easily, won! It’s the non-violent ethic of Jesus; the lifestyle of Jesus. And then amazingly the New Testament says that’s not only something that Jesus does for us but it’s something he does in us and through us, which is why the New Testament calls us to live like *that*, to love like *that*. It is the most original, beautiful, distinctive, counter-cultural aspect of the kingdom; to love your enemies rather than retaliate against your enemies. And remember when Jesus and Paul and others in the New Testament talk about enemies, the first thing that anyone would think of is the Romans; any Jew would think of the Romans, nationalistic enemies, terrorist enemies, life threatening enemies, those kind of enemies. And Jesus says love them, serve them, pray for them, and bless them. Do good to them. It’s incredible and that’s how we are to live. We’re called to live that way. It is, I believe, the quintessential, the supreme sign of the kingdom, the surest evidence that we are coming under the reign of God, which is the point of everything, and that his life is beginning to pour into our life and transform us. The surest sign of that is

we're learning how to let go of that self-preservationist instinct and love even our enemies to the point of death. That's why when Jesus was before Pilate, Pilate said, "Are you king of the Jews?" and Jesus said, "Well, I'm a king but not of any particular nation. My kingdom is not of this world. If it was of this world my servants would be fighting on my behalf to prevent my arrest. But as you can see, they're not doing that which proves my kingdom is not of this world."

John 18:36

"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

The proof that you belong to a kingdom that's not of this world is that you lay down the sword and you have this love; this universal, unqualified love. All the kingdoms of the world fight out of their own self interest. All the people in a fallen world—we preserve our self interest at any cost, we protect our self interest, and we advance our self interest through violence. But the kingdom of God is not like that. The distinguishing sign is that we put down the sword and rather love our enemies. And that is before Pilate that Jesus says this. It's sprinkled throughout the New Testament if we have eyes to see it. We try to censor it a lot of times because it doesn't fit our common sense but it's there and it's clear and it's central. So Jesus says things like this in Matthew chapter 5, "You've heard it said an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, well here's the kingdom teaching, love your enemies."

Matthew 5:44

"I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

You love your enemies, bless them and do good to them, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. The distinguishing mark of a person that has come under the reign of God—the distinguishing mark of someone who considers themselves a child of God is that you're learning how to love the way God loves. His character is beginning to be reflected in you. His character, his love, is reflected in the way the sun shines and the way the rain falls, that's what Jesus is saying here. The sun doesn't choose who it's going to shine on, it just shines. It does what it does. Now people can put themselves in caves and barricade themselves from the sun if they want but the sun is going to keep on shining. And the rain just falls on whoever is out there. It doesn't choose who it's going to fall on. That's how God loves. God just—God *is* love, I John 4:8. He just loves. He doesn't discriminate, pick and choose, rank and file—no, he just loves unconditionally and indiscriminately. That is how we are to love. We don't get to pick

and choose who we love, who we serve, who we even are willing to die for. No, it's just the character is in us and so this is what we do.

So this passage that we're looking at today is a classic illustration of that, it is the paradigm of Christian living, of kingdom living. And it's not peripheral, it's not marginal, it's not ambiguous. It is as clear as can be and it's as central as can be. We talk about this quite a bit around here largely because it's not talked about in most other places and it needs to be. So we hit on this thing quite a bit. Bruxy just last week made this part of his message. What I want to do right now is not reiterate or repeat all of that, but I want to take it a step deeper; raise the ante a little more even and ask this question—Holy Spirit help us to be honest with this—why is it if this is so clear and so central (and it is) why is it so rarely preached in the churches in America? Why is this so rarely talked about? Why is this so rarely lived? In fact, why is it that to talk this way from a pulpit in America or to write this way in a book, it evokes animosity on the part of a lot of Christians, as I'll show a little bit later on? Why is that, when it's so central? This takes us, I think, to the heart of what is off, wrong, and missing in the world, the heart of our rebellion, the heart of our fallen nature and the heart, therefore, of how the kingdom is to redeem us.

I'll start by sharing a little episode from my childhood, I've shared it before. But it illustrates, I think, the nature of the fall. When I was about six years old, I lived in a family that was full of conflict, full of warfare, just a lot of animosity in this family. It was a blended family and it didn't blend very well. On top of that I had a step-mother, as I've shared before, who when she would get angry something would snap and she would get sometimes horrifically abusive. So I'm a little kid in Lansing, Michigan, six years old in this situation and I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm scared and I'm wounded and I'm hurt and I'm in pain. I can't do much as a six year old to influence my environment so I'm asking the question, now that I look back on it, what can I control, what can I do about this situation? And in my back yard, and I remember it as though it was yesterday, in Lansing, Michigan I had a creek going through my backyard. I'm out in the backyard with a box of matches, lighting matches, throwing them in the pond, just sort of an act of rebellion because I was never supposed to play with matches, "Well, I'll show you!" And so I'm lighting these matches. And I said to myself, and I remember it so clear, "Mom doesn't like me so I'm not going to like her, and she'll never hurt me again." I said that, "she'll never hurt me again" and she didn't. I mean, she beat the crap out of me plenty but it never hurt. I don't remember ever crying, regardless of what happened, I would not give her the dignity of crying. There was times when I would even defy her and do more, "Is that all you got?" There was this resistance there.

Now, here's the thing. I don't think I was guilty for the decision that I made there, I was trying to survive, and who wouldn't try to survive? I had to work with what I had. But see, in

making that decision I was cutting my emotional nervous system. I was in a sense committing emotional suicide. And what was actually going on there, it reflects sin in this world, because I was acting as though there was no God. You know, in a more ideal world my parents would have illustrated God's character, that's what parents are supposed to do! "Here's what God is like" and I would have known something at the age of six about trusting in God and believing God's going to bring good out of evil and trusting my heart to him. I wouldn't have done what I did if I would have known something about God, but I didn't know that. I felt like I was entirely alone in this world. It's up to me, I'm lord of my own life, and no one's going to look out for me but *me*, and so with that sort of self sufficiency I severed my emotional nervous system, stopped feeling pain. I'm sure some of us can relate to that. You survive. Now what I didn't know is that when you cut the pain nerve you cut *all* the nerves. You can't compartmentalize the self. And so I to a large degree anesthetized myself at the age of six and now looking back on it, for the next twelve years or so I was rather numb. *Nothing* fazed me. And I didn't know there was something defective with me because that was my *normal*. Only as I began to—as Christ began to heal me and I began to regain my full humanity, looking back on it was like, "Wow, I was really numb back there." I didn't know it at the time. But see every action we do brings about unintended consequences and one of them was that I numbed myself. I had to, I think. It helped me survive, but the fact that I did that, it really illustrates I think some foundational principles about our fallen nature. I don't feel I was personally responsible because I was only six, but I was already part of the polluted world environment. It illustrates foundational things. First of all it illustrates the way in which we have trouble trusting God. In this fallen world, in our fallen natures, we have trouble trusting God. You see if we get these fundamental principles we'll understand why we find it hard to take seriously Jesus' teaching about loving enemies and not resorting to violence to protect ourselves and our possessions. We have trouble trusting God. You find this illustrated in Genesis 3 which tells the story of the primordial rebellion. God created this world so that we would know him, we would trust his character, he would love on us, he would fill us with life, and then we would imitate that character to one another and to the animal kingdoms and to the earth. That's what the whole plan was all about. God's a good God, we trust in the good God, he fills our life with fullness and out of the fullness of that we love one another, we take care of the animals and we take care of the earth. That is the kingdom of God. What happens, however, is that the enemy comes in, the serpent in the garden, and it plants a lie in our head (he's still doing it today); a lie about who God is, a lie about his character so that we *don't* trust God. We have trouble trusting God as our source of life and the minute we don't trust God, well now we take matters into our own hands and you see that in Genesis 3 as well, "If I can't trust God for fullness of life well then I'm on my own." And so Eve now has to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to get life and so the story goes, and so the story goes. So we have trouble trusting

God, and everything hangs on trusting God, this is the lynchpin of everything. The kingdom is all about at the center putting all of our trust in God. We don't do that.

When we don't do that here's the second point it illustrates. We take matters into our own hands just as I did when I was six years old.

1. We don't trust God.
2. We take matters into our own hands.

It is now up to us. We're on our own to the extent that God is not Lord of our life; we're lord of our own life. To the extent that we're not surrendering control over to God, we are trying to *be in* control. That's just the way it works. Now when we take matters into our own hands we assume that we're competent to take matters into our own hands. We assume that we have enough wisdom to be lords of our own life, enough wisdom to rule the world, to make the world a better place. That's what that presupposes. The trouble is that we *aren't* competent, we don't have that kind of wisdom, and we were never supposed to have that kind of wisdom. That's why the original tree was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When we rebelled against God, what happens is we've taken our "omniscience mechanism" (omniscience means "all knowing"), so what I mean by omniscience mechanism is simply that we have this impulse to think that we know way more than we know! It's why we judge people as though we knew their hearts and know anything about them. Only God can judge because only God is omniscient! Our brains are very, very small and our perspectives on reality are very, very narrow. But we forget that! We act like we know stuff that we don't know, eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It's the original idolatry. All of it is because we're not trusting God and so we're taking matters into our own hands, we kick in this omniscient mechanism and we try to rule the world on this basis. The thing is that we're *not* competent on this. We know so little, our brains are so small and we're fallen so we always operate out of our self interest and our judgments are not wise.

Among other things, every action we do causes effects, which in turn cause effects, which in turn cause effects. Every action is like a little pebble dropped in the pond that causes ripples throughout time. But because we're finite in our understanding we can't anticipate all those ripples effects. We're not wise, only God is. What happens is that when we act on things thinking that we know there's always unintended consequences like when I severed my emotional nervous system. You look at history and you see how even the best of intentions often bring about fateful, negative results because people couldn't anticipate the downside of their decisions. A classic illustration of this, one of my best—I think one of the best examples of that is this: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of my favorite theologians—just love this guy, insightful, godly. He was a pastor/theologian in the '30s in Germany when Nazism was coming into power

and he was a pacifist, which means that he took seriously the teaching of Jesus against violence. But as the Nazi movement was coming into power he felt led to join a resistance movement that was plotting Hitler's assassination. What could possibly be more godly than that? What could be more common sense than that? And Dietrich Bonhoeffer joined this movement. He didn't feel like he was doing it because it was "just war" and Hitler deserved it. He couldn't justify it on the basis of the New Testament and I so admire his honesty. He didn't try to. In fact he said, "This is sin. But, I feel I'm called to embark on this sin like Abraham was called to offer up Isaac." He felt it was what he had to do. And who can't sympathize with that. So they plot Hitler's assassination. They have a bomb that's in a briefcase that's supposed to go off. It would kill Hitler and a lot of his high ranking Nazi socialist officers and infiltrated to get this—the bomb in this briefcase planted in his office. Now his secretary tells this story in the documentary, his personal secretary throughout the war gave this testimony in the '50s, that what had happened was that briefcase was under the table and when someone sat down next to Hitler he bumped that and so he just moved it a few feet over to the right from where it was planted. And because of where it was moved, when the bomb went off it exploded and the table was then used as a shield to Hitler. It actually blocked the bomb and Hitler was completely unscathed. A lot of other people died and were wounded but Hitler was "supernaturally" protected, or so he thought. And this secretary testifies how up to that point Hitler had begun to waver in his commitment to the final solution, which was to exterminate all the Jews. He was beginning to waver because Germany was starting to lose the war and maybe they should give more resources to the war and take it off the concentration camps. When that bomb went off it convinced him that God was protecting him. God was on his side and so he, with renewed, divine affirmation vigor—he renewed his commitment to the final solution, which is why to the very end, even as Berlin was being bombed, they were pouring massive resources into the extermination program. Thousands, if not millions, of Jews were killed that would otherwise not have been killed if it wasn't for that bomb. And it shows that the best of intentions in this world where we can't possibly look at all the effects that things have, and in this world where God's not the only spiritual influence in this world, there's also a devil and demons and demonic forces. And often even the best, most common sense intentions backfire. And all that is simply to say that we are not competent at running our own lives let alone running the world, which is why it's so important that we put our trust in living life the way God tells us to live life.

Nowhere is it more clear than just with the whole use of violence throughout history. Violence has looked like a solution. "If we just bomb these people, exterminate them well then that will solve the problem because they are the problem." The trouble is whenever you bomb a house, yeah you took care of your enemy, but you just recruited their kid to be your enemy in the next generation. So they do the same to *you*, so you do the same to *them* and it goes round and round and round and round and that in a nutshell is world history and we keep on thinking

that if we just do it a little harder, a little worse, a little more with bigger bombs, well then we'll rid the world of evildoers and everything will be wonderful. And that mantra has been going on throughout history but we keep on doing it. Its delusion is deception. And that's why Jesus says, "No more of this, it stops here." So the reason why we have trouble taking Jesus' teaching and Paul's teaching and New Testament teaching about loving our enemies seriously is because we have trouble trusting God which makes us take matters into our own hands, which leads to number three, fear.

1. We don't trust God.
2. We take matters into our own hands.
3. We fear.

I did what I did when I was six years old because I was scared, "I'm alone in this world. I'm scared." The reality is that in our fallen condition we're all scared because the world does seem out of control and on some level we know, on some level we know—we pretend like it's not so but on some level we know that we're not competent. We were never meant to run our own lives and to run the world. We're not good lords of the earth. We're not good masters of destiny. But we're just little people who were created to love God, trust God, and imitate God and when we try to become world rulers, well inside there's a fear that arises because we know that we're just not competent on this. But, see, here's what happens. Knowing that we're not competent, having that kind of fear, it just intensifies our omniscience mechanism! It makes us want to believe all the more that we know what we're doing, "I do! I know! I'm competent! This will work!" Or if we know that we're not competent we want to find somebody who *is*. And so someone sure enough comes along and says, "I have the answer! I will solve our problems. I will protect you against your enemies." And we go, "Oh yes! Please do it, please do it, please do it!" And the leaders have always known that the best way to control a mass of people is to install fear in them. It's why the leaders are always pushing the fear button, "Hey if you don't vote for me the world will come to an end! Or, America as you know it will come to an end!" Or, "The bad people are going to win if you don't vote for me! Oh, they don't really care about America, but *I* do so vote for me!" And people are scared, "OK, I'll trust you [said with fear]. I'll trust you." Hitler could never do what he did in Nazi Germany if people weren't afraid. Man, they had propaganda, "The Jews are taking over the world! The Jews are going to take away our freedom! The Jews are Communists! The Jews are trying to run the banks!" and everybody's all afraid but Hitler comes, he's confident and, "OK, we'll trust *you* even though we're not really comfortable with all the stuff you're doing but we do want that security..." People surrender over everything when they're afraid enough.

The other thing is that when we have trouble trusting God, oh this is so important, what happens is God tells us, “You guys, life here, this little life you have and all world history, it’s just a nanosecond, a fraction of a second of eternity. It’s just a little blip.” And see, if we believe that there’s going to be a peace that we have because we realize that this is just a little warm-up stage that we’re in now. But because we have trouble trusting God we have this impulse to think that this is *everything!* This is *it!* This is the only life we’ve got! Grab all the gusto you can! And so we take our life and we take our goods and we want to just cling to them because we think this is all there really is, here and now. And now we will do anything we need to do to protect it and we’ll trust anyone we need to trust to protect it. Way too much is leveraged on this world, on our life, on our sacred stuff, right here and right now because we have trouble trusting that in fact this thing goes on forever and ever and ever. And so we put our trust in leaders who look like they’re competent because they’ll make us feel secure. Now here’s the thing, governments, some are good, some are not good. There’s a wide variety in terms of how just they are and how righteous they are, got that. But all governments from a Biblical perspective—Lord help us to see this—are premised on fear. Follow me on this. In fact, they’re premised on a lack of trust in God. When God originally created this world, it wasn’t supposed to have human government. He was supposed to be our King, *period!* He said, “Have dominion over the animals and the earth” but he never said have dominion over one another. And even the Adam and Eve relationship was to be a helpmate, equal relationship. It wasn’t supposed to be a lording over one another thing. That happens because of the *fall*. Israel, whom God raised up to sort of be a microcosm of the world and God wanted to illustrate as much as possible some kingdom principles in Israel. They didn’t have a king early on. They weren’t supposed to have a king because God wanted to be their king and to show the other nations, “You trust in earthly kings but my people just trust in me.” And so for a long period of time, even though there’s a lot of sin involved and they didn’t do it perfectly, but for a long period of time Israel didn’t have a king and they stood out as a unique nation for that reason. But there came a time when the Israelites grew scared. They were surrounded by all these hostile nations, Syria, Babylon, or whatever. Samuel, who was the high priest who was kind of this mediator between them and God, he was getting very old and was going to die and his sons who were supposed to take over the priesthood, they were rebellious. So the people were saying, “What are we going to do?! What are we going to do? What are we going to do?” They were afraid. So they came to Samuel in I Samuel 8—look at this passage very carefully and this is what happens.

I Samuel 8:5-8, 19-20

“[The Israelites] said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.”

“We want to be like other nations! They’re secure! They can trust in kings and militaries, why can’t we?” Whenever the people of God—they’re aspiration is to live like the world, we’re in trouble.

“But when they said, ‘Give us a king to lead us,’ this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him, ‘Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected [don’t take this personally], but they have rejected me as their king.’”

How do they reject God? They didn’t go out there and say, “God we reject you!” No, but in saying, “We want a king and a military” they’re rejecting God. You trust in earthly kings and earthly militaries when you don’t have a trust in God. That’s why they are there. When a people group, the people of God have their trust in God and lean on God then there’s no need to look for humans in operating out of their own finite, fallen wisdom to lead the world. You’re trusting in God. That’s how it was always supposed to be.

Oh, but how this is so alien to us in this culture and in our fallen condition. I got an e-mail this last week, in fact several e-mails this last week—in fact I get several e-mails like this almost every week—whenever I teach this kind of message this is the kind of response I get and here’s a paraphrase. This person read my book, “The Myth of a Christian Religion”. It came out a couple years ago and I have a chapter in there on the non-violence of the kingdom and this person said this, “You are so irresponsible. Telling people they’re supposed to *love* their enemies?! Pray for them and do good to their enemies?” And by the way, I don’t say that! *Jesus* does, Paul does. I’m just quoting them. Get mad at them. This isn’t the gospel of Greg Boyd! I’m plagiarizing here, all right? But he says, “When you go out and teach that you’re irresponsible because if somebody doesn’t take responsibility, if somebody doesn’t get practical, if somebody isn’t willing to do the dirty work then the enemies *win*! The terrorists are going to take over! Do you want to lose your freedom? Do you want to lose your ability to preach in public? Do you want to be thrown into prison? Is that what you want?” It’s like, “Yeah [sarcastically] that’s what I really want. That’s my motive here.” But see, you sit up there in your “ivory tower” theology, “Oh, it’s easy for you to say, ‘Live in peace and love your enemies’, whatever. But the reality is that there are threatening forces all around and they’re going to win unless somebody does something!!”

Now, just look at the assumption here and this is—I’m not picking on any particular e-mail, but this is the response I *always* get whenever this message is preached. It’s never a biblical response because it’s really hard to argue *against* it biblically. Dispute me about what Jesus teaches or Paul teaches if you want but you’re not going to win that one. So it comes down to practicality, “We gotta be practical!” And that mindset assumes, look at this, it assumes that we can’t trust God. It assumes that trusting God is not practical. It assumes that

it's all up to us. It assumes that if we don't rise up in violence then evil is going to win this world. It assumes that Jesus and Paul are just stupid when they tell us to love our enemies; they're at least not practical. Maybe it applies to grouchy neighbors but it certainly doesn't apply to the mean, real and nasty threatening kind of an enemy. When in point of fact that's exactly what Paul and Jesus *are* referring to. And I will grant this, if God doesn't exist this is *idiocy*. If Jesus is not Lord, this is *lunacy*. Loving your enemies and turning the other cheek and all that stuff, it is *insane*. And if it seems that way to you well then you're getting this, that's good. Because Paul himself says it's foolishness to the natural mind. You take God out of the equation, Jesus out of the equation and going to the cross when you could have called legions of angels to fight in your defense is *nutso*. Nutso! *If* God doesn't exist and if Jesus Christ is in fact not Lord. But if he *is* Lord, and he is, and if there *is* a God, and there is, then I submit to you that the only thing that in fact makes sense is putting your trust in him, putting your confidence in him, living the way God calls us to live. It's the only thing that *is* practical! Because nobody else knows what they're doing! The reality is that we *can* trust God, we must trust God. It's not all up to us and we don't need to be living in fear. Because the reality is this, things can look really stupid and insane on Good Friday but on Easter they look a whole lot brighter. All right? And we live in a "Good Friday" world and we wear Good Friday lenses, we see just the first little fraction of a second of reality but God sees the big picture and he's the only one who really does; which is why we have to trust that our short term solutions, as common sense as they look, are *not* long term solutions. If you want to work your way into the kingdom of God and bring about God's will on earth as it is in heaven you do it a *Jesus* way, the non-common sense way; they way of the cross, the way of Calvary. Because the reality is that your life and all of world history is just a fraction of a second to a very, very long story. When this whole thing wraps up, I assure you on the Easter morning of the cosmos we will see perfectly how wise God was when he told us to turn the other cheek and to serve our enemies because that is what will win in the end. Right now we just kind of have to trust him but that's what the kingdom is all about, putting all of our eggs in this basket even if it means that we die. Because even if we die that's not bad news. That's just the first fraction of a second of a world that goes on forever and ever and ever and ever.

You know, I say this a lot and I mean it, I don't care if you vote. If you do vote I don't care who you vote for, I really don't. But, if you're a kingdom person here's what I care about, don't trust—don't put your trust and confidence into whoever it was you voted for. If your trust is in the Democratic Party, or in the Republican Party, or the Tea Party, or the Socialist Party, or the Communist Party, or the Green Party, or any Party I feel sorry for you because you're going to be living in fear and you *should* be living in fear because those people don't know what they're doing. They don't! And God bless them, God bless you if that's where you're at. You mean well, you're doing the best you can, bravo. But you're a finite human being and you're fallen, why would I ever trust *you*? You're as dumb as I am and I'm really

dumb! You see everyone's guessing! If you're trust is in the White House, or America, or some other country, or the Congress, or the Senate, or the Governor, or some other plan or program, or some other military bombs or bullets, you're going to be afraid and you *should* be afraid because no one knows what they're doing. They're guessing. Of course they present themselves like they know what they're doing because otherwise you're not going to get elected. You get up there and you say, "Hey guys, I'm a human being and therefore I don't know what I'm doing" no one's going to vote for you! No, you gotta say, "That other candidate doesn't like America, the other candidate is evil, will bring about Socialism. If you vote for them well then all your values are going to be undermined." You gotta do *that*. Because people need to be afraid, and you are their security or something like that. And you mean well, I'm not trying to bash all of that, but all of our eggs, all of our eggs—all of our chips have got to be in one basket and that's Jesus Christ, the only one who knows what he's doing! And that means that we have to commit to following, living a Jesus way of life no matter what. He could have called legions of angels, could have flexed his muscles, could have done all sorts of Jesus Kung Fu on everybody and chopped them all up [imitates Kung Fu chop]. Instead, he chose to go the way of the cross. He trusted his Father, the omniscient Father, to know what is best. He says, "Nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done." It doesn't mean, *does not* mean that we just sort of sit around and wait for the kingdom to come and don't do anything. Do the opposite! No, "au contraire", to follow Jesus is to be a radical activist because Jesus was an activist. It means that we bring about God's will by the way we serve the poor, the way we feed the hungry, the way we clothe the naked, the way we intervene in hostile situations, the way we love the unlovable, the way we sacrifice of our time and resources to benefit others. It's what he did rather than having the right opinion about what government should do. What's unique about the kingdom is that we don't trust—put our eggs in what *government* is supposed to do about the poor, poverty, and other things. We just *do it* because we're followers of Jesus and that's what we're called to do. No, it's a radical activism. But we also have to have the humility to know that this isn't going to fix the world. The world ain't fixable, not by human wisdom. No, God will in the end redeem it all but our job is just to be faithful and to trust that God is Lord, sovereign God of all. The world's not going to end before he says it's supposed to end! You just trust him on that. And so we don't live out of fear. We relinquish control—we relinquish control and then live in peace.

And this applies not just to global issues—I'll close with this—it applies to our everyday life, everyday life. Because all of us walk around with stressors, whether it's a job stressor, financial stressor, neighbor stressor, marriage stressor, relationship with kids stressor, relationship with in-laws stressor. You know whatever it is, there's stressors on us all the time, every one of us; things that we can get anxious about and if we're not careful, if our trust isn't in God moment by moment then we begin to take matters into our own hands. "We've got to do something!" And our omniscience mechanism gets activated and we start to try to control,

we start to try to fix, and invariably we do more harm than good. In fact, we can engage in violence because we're trying to fix the world or fix our spouse or fix our kids. And it may not be physical violence but there are a lot of other kinds of violence like saying, "What are you, stupid?!" That's violence! That's verbal violence! We get big, we get rage, "Someone's got to take control here!" And so we try to fix people by just imposing our will on them. Or some Christians just get mad at the culture, "We're going to impose our righteousness on people; pass these laws!" There's this anger that drives it. If we will just trust God, he's running the world, he alone is competent, and listen. So often we ask the question like the disciples did but we don't wait for the answer. Why? Because we're afraid! Peter was afraid and when you're afraid you don't wait for an answer! You walk right out of your own false sense of competency. Now, if we can just peacefully surrender to God and listen, he'll give us wisdom about a Jesus way of handling the marriage issue, the kid issue, the job issue, whatever the issue may be. Now it's going to be a gentle way, a Jesus way, a soft way, but we'll never get there unless we can trust God to quiet our hearts and hear his voice. Fear is the all time nullifier of hearing God and walking with God and that fear is there because we're trying to be Lord of our own life, control our own destiny, refusing to surrender it all to God.

Paul sums it up this way, and then we're going to move into a time of worship and communion here:

Phillippians 4:5-7

"Let your gentleness [the kingdom is always gentle] be evident to all. The Lord is near [He's here, be at peace]. Do not be anxious about anything [you don't need to have any fear! Not if you remember that this is a fraction of a second of eternity] but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God [and then *listen!*]. And the peace of God, which transcends *all* understanding [I love that verse] will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." [Emphasis added]

That is the kingdom. So as we go into this time of worship, and I want to call the ushers to come forward to take up this offering and then I'll lead us in the communion, ask the Holy Spirit to maybe bring to your mind right now vividly one thing you are stressed out about, marriage, finances, global warming, North Korea, whatever. And will you just hear—admit that you're not competent to handle, because you're not. And realize that your stress and anger is because you're trying to be lord over a situation that you're not supposed to be. You're supposed to be a servant *in* a situation, not lord *over* the situation. And so get that in your mind and as we enter this time of worship will you just hear, as an act of obedience, surrender it over to him. And part of you may think that it's foolish, that's your *natural* mind, "If you don't do it, no one's going to do it and then you're going to die!" No, no, no, just quiet that part and say, "I will trust in God like Jesus did." I will trust. Surrender it over to him and then just breathe in. Open up

your palms, surrender it, and breathe in the peace that comes with trusting God. Let the Lord still your heart so you can hear him. Have your way Lord; we now worship you in the spirit of truth and the spirit of peace. In Jesus name, Amen.