

“Hear Ye Hear Ye: Wars and Rumors of War”

Scripture: Matthew 24:6-13, Matthew 10:26-31

Graphics: newspaper, war

Big Truth: We live in a day when news, as it’s happening, is at our fingertips at all times. We are inundated with news of war, political struggles, economic problems like inflation, moral dilemmas like abortion and human sexuality, science, nature, history, and more. As followers of Jesus, we are regularly reminded to not be afraid and not worry. Yet with all that’s happening, can we just live and love like Jesus? This series will help the people of Panama UMC to focus their thinking and praying to the God who is sovereign and loving, and to then go into the world to love and serve in Jesus’ name.

Focus Phrase: We can stay strong in the face of war and rumors of war.

1. Introduction

A. **PRAY!!! (Jesus, you are Lord...)**

- B. Today, I’m going to do something SUPER dangerous. Today and next week, I’m going to talk about **the news**. And by ‘news’ I mean the latest headlines that are dominating our news cycles. As followers of Jesus, even though we’re citizens of the Kingdom of God - an unshakeable kingdom of saints and angels - we’re also in this world now. We hold dual citizenship. We’re both citizens of the Kingdom of God, and citizens of this country. Given that dual citizenship, we’re impacted by the hope and kingdom vision of a life to come, while living now in the world on earth, which impacts our day-to-day life.
- C. And part of our world here on earth is the news...current events...diseases, money, politics, morality, science, religion, terrorism and war...NEWS! It’s at our fingertips 24/7. We can access news feeds on Apple News, watch 24-hour cable news that meets our political leaning, and even read something called a newspaper. As followers of Jesus, what’s our response to the NEWS - good, bad or somewhere in the middle?
- D. We’ve called this sermon series *Hear Ye, Hear Ye*. In 17th Century Britain, that phrase was used to make official pronouncements...usually to tell the community about an important event or decision made by Parliament. It was used on street corners to announce important news stories, and sell newspapers.
- E. *Hear Ye Hear Ye* is what the relentless news feeds say to us constantly. And we can check out and go golfing or scroll our social media feeds (which are also filled with news) or watch Netflix until the next news cycle hits, if we don’t like the current one.
- F. OR, we can **read the news through the lens of our faith**...and seek after the wisdom and truth of scripture, which has much to say about the human condition. It may not address specific news stories, but the pages of scripture are, as 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “...God-breathed and is useful for teaching,

rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” And that even includes being able to reflect on and interpret what’s happening TODAY in light of Jesus and his kingdom coming.

- G. So...where should we begin? Well, for this week, “Hear Ye, Hear Ye! There are Wars and Rumors of Wars!”
- H. One headline that’s dominated our news feeds for many years (maybe as long as there has been ‘news’) is WAR. We’ll focus in on the war between Ukraine and Russia. But the bigger question is: what do Christian do when we are threatened, faced with war or conflict, and how should we respond in our own communities?
- I. Now, you may not immediately think that Jesus or scripture has anything to say about war. Yet, in Matthew 24:6-13, we read these words...

2. Scripture

A. READ Matthew 24:3-13

- i. Wow! Jesus was answering the disciples’ question about the end of the Age...or, the end of the PRESENT age, when Jesus returns. They asked, how will we know? And Jesus told them about wars and rumors of war.
- ii. Now, every age for all of history has been rife with war...before Jesus said these words, and certainly after.
 - a. The biblical history tells of battles between the people of God and the pagans cultures around them.
 - b. [science.com](https://www.science.org/content/article/slaughter-bridge-uncovering-colossal-bronze-age-battle) reports that, “3200 years ago [during the Bronze Age], two armies clashed at a river crossing near the Baltic Sea. The confrontation can't be found in any history books—the written word didn't become common in these parts for another 2000 years—but this was no skirmish between local clans. Thousands of warriors came together in a brutal struggle, perhaps fought on a single day, using weapons crafted from wood, flint, and bronze, a metal that was then the height of military technology.” The battle site was excavated starting in 1996, and it’s told archeologists a lot about the weapons that were fashions, how people died, and what happened to them after they died. (<https://www.science.org/content/article/slaughter-bridge-uncovering-colossal-bronze-age-battle>)
 - c. The world wars and the Gulf War and now the war in Ukraine, all point to the fact that we, as humans, haven’t figured out how to be in conflict without sometimes going to armed combat.
- iii. This sermon isn’t a political statement about war and whether or not war is just in given circumstances. This is an acknowledgment that war has been, is, and probably will be part of our world until Jesus comes back.

- iv. The bigger question for us as followers of Jesus is: what are we supposed to DO about war and rumors of war? What are we to do when people are threatened or we, ourselves are threatened?
- v. The headlines from the war in Ukraine are all about Russia threatening and then attacking Ukraine, Ukraine fighting back, and the loss of life on both sides. And we, thousands of miles away, may think, “Well, that’s their problem and it’s way over there. War in Ukraine doesn’t affect us, right?”
- vi. Yet, it doesn’t take long to pump gas, buy groceries, or watch the news to be convinced that our global economy and political network is interconnected in ways that it wasn’t 100 or 200 years ago.
- vii. To make that point even clearer, in April of this year, Russia announced that it had successfully test-launched its Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile. This missile, which can reportedly carry 10-15 nuclear warheads, could reach Berlin, Germany in 106 seconds and the British Isles in 202 seconds. And, with a range of 11,000 miles, the Sarmat ICBM can reach the US and the West in a matter of minutes. Wars and rumors of wars... threats, real and perceived.
- viii. According to the wiredword.com, Most U.S. analysts depicted the test as "nuclear saber-rattling" by Russian President Vladimir Putin to distract his domestic audience from his country's recent military failures in Ukraine. These analysts said the threat to the United States or its allies is “extremely low.” On the other hand, the Russian declarations are in line with the declaration of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov that the threat of nuclear war “should not be underestimated.”
- ix. Wars and rumors of wars... threats, real and perceived.
- x. So, how do we, as people of God, go about our normal lives with the threat of war and the actual wars going on in certain places around the world? Especially, when we know from Jesus’ words in Matthew 24, that things will get worse before they get better...?
- xi. If we get down to the base emotion that drives our anxiety about the threats that come from others, we see that we are tempted to fear. In fact, Jesus’ response to the disciples in Matthew 24, was to try to confront their fears about the future and how they will be persecuted.
- xii. And the disciples were able to work through (or at least control) their fear of what was to come after Jesus left them...about the threats they would face. They would be hated because of Jesus...simply because they were associated with Him in this life.
- xiii. And, truthfully, that holds for us too. Sometimes, it’s because we’re citizens of a particular country, but also because we’re citizens of God’s Kingdom.

xiv. Remember though, that we're looking at war through the lens of scripture... with Jesus glasses. Psalm 23:4-5 is where we'll start.

B. READ Psalm 23:4-5

- i. **“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”**
- ii. In Christ, who is the manifestation of the Father, our fears are placed in the hands of God. Does that mean we aren't ever afraid when we read the news or feel threatened? No, but it means that when we feel threatened, we should turn to Him.
- iii. Then there's this phrase about preparing a table in the presence of my enemies. What's that about?
- iv. Well, Psalm 23 is from the Middle Eastern world, where in biblical times, there were some strong traditions about hospitality. For example, a man being pursued by enemies could run to someone's tent and, even if that were the tent of a foe, he could ask for refuge. Custom dictated that the tent owner not only take that person in, but also prepare a meal for him. His enemies could stand and glare outside the tent, but could do no more as long as the pursued person remained inside. “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”
- v. Our enemies are all around us...yet, when we go into the tent with God in worship, in prayer, in times of scripture reading, our enemies must wait outside the tent!
- vi. And when we worship and pray and commune with God, we're assured that the Kingdom of God is far greater than the rulers of this world.

C. Hebrews 12:28 reminds us, “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe...”

- i. There are no guarantees that the earth or the things in it will remain steady or survive forever...in fact, we're told they won't. Life is constantly being shaken up. But the author of Hebrews reminds us that God's Kingdom cannot be shaken.
- ii. The place where WE have our citizenship WILL NOT BE SHAKEN, and cannot be destroyed. So, when we feel threats or fear war, we have a haven for ultimate security...in HIM!

D. Then, we get to Matthew 10:28, when Jesus told his disciples - and us - “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

- i. Jesus was preparing the Twelve to go out on a teaching and healing mission throughout the region, here. As part of their preparation, Jesus warned them about persecution they may encounter.
 - ii. Jesus assured them that those who, despite persecution, remain faithful to the end “will be saved” (v. 22). But even though they may not be rescued from the persecution, their spiritual survival was guaranteed. That eventually led to the comment in verse 28, that the disciples should not focus on temporal fears, but instead have an eye on eternity.
 - iii. Jesus’ remarks were aimed at helping these disciples fulfill their mission of proclaiming the gospel. He didn’t want them to hesitate to speak out due to fear of their witness being rejected. When the things of this world and the things of heaven seem to be in conflict, Jesus’ told them to prefer eternal security over temporal security.
 - iv. When we are concerned about wars and rumors of wars...threats to others and to us, Jesus said, be more concerned about what can keep you from full spiritual relationship with God...and less concerned about the things that can destroy your physical body.
 - v. And when you do...then you’ll lift your head, even in the midst of threats and conflict, to say, “Thanks be to God for all he has done and will do!”
- E. Romans 8:38-39 is our final verse to help us through this news of war and conflict.
- i. **“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**
 - ii. The ultimate promise from God is that no matter what - and I mean, no matter WHAT - NOTHING can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. No war can make God love you less. No threat can diminish God’s love for you. Not even death or sword or famine can reduce the love of God in your life one iota.
 - iii. That being said, love flows into your life in even the most difficult times... times of persecution, times of depression, times of failure, times of war, times when people say mean things or do mean things.
 - iv. When you watch the news or read the feeds, NOTHING can separate you from God’s love in Christ Jesus...God’s grace, God’s mercy, God’s forgiveness, God’s directions, God’s love.

3. Application

- A. Frank Ramirez said this, regarding the Russian threat of nuclear war: “Regarding existential threat - it's not always clear how serious the threat is, but we can

feel the threat deeply. 9/11 was a terrible day in American history when around 3,000 Americans were lost. Only a few years before, around a million Rwandans, with the full support of some pastors, were murdered one by one, close at hand, often close up and personal with machetes. You can't compare the level of pain people feel, but the existential threat of a lone successful terrorist attack, with nothing on that scale repeated on our shores, [perhaps gives us some sense of how] the Mutually Assured Destruction would be experienced if a nuclear war were to begin in Europe. It's hard to know if the 'banter' quoted [by the Russians] was meant as a serious threat, or the equivalent of saying 'Boo!' to get a rise out of someone. I think [we] ought to respond to this threat by emphasizing, more than ever, ways in which we can contribute to the kingdom of God. Churches can explore how to help refugees with relocation, support feeding the hungry, support their denomination's work in Ukraine, and in other war-torn areas of the world, and of course pray without ceasing.”

- B. Jesus told his followers to pray for those who persecute you...intercede for those who threaten your well-being, your world, your life...love your enemies.
- C. In order to confront our fears and keep building the Kingdom amidst the threat of war and rumors of wars, we must keep using our spiritual gifts to pray for those who are attacked and also the attackers.
- D. If there are ways to help, give or go or provide. Our church gave \$10,000 recently to the relief efforts in the Ukraine earlier this year, through the United Methodist Committee on Relief. We praise God for that and pray for more ways to help.
- E. You and I CAN stay strong and make a difference in the face of war and rumors of war.

4. Conclusion

- A. War is a horrific reality of our broken world...and God weeps whenever one person dies as a result of war.
- B. We, as Jesus people, are called to see war through God's eyes. It's not the end of things, but will be a reality until Jesus comes again. As we heard last week, Jesus promised to come back to get us.
- C. Until then, our church is called to pray, worship, serve, and love those around us. When you are tempted to fear, give that to God...allow the Holy Spirit to calm your fears and lift your face.
- D. We will have wars and rumors of war, for a season, but we will live in eternal security forever. Make a difference where you can and in the ways God's calls.
- E. Then, go, and speak hope to a threatened world that desperately wants to find peace and justice in Christ. Use us, O Lord!
- F. **Let's pray.**