

# ***“Wars and Rumors of War Must End”***

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## **Scripture**

*Matthew 24:4 And in response Jesus told them, “Stay alert, otherwise someone might just lead you down the wrong path. 5 For many will come using my name, and claim, ‘I am the Anointed!’ and they will lead many astray. 6 Now you are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars. See to it that you are not afraid. For these kind of things will certainly happen. 7 For nation will rise up against nation, and empires will take on other empires, there will be famines and earthquakes everywhere...*

*9 “And then they will turn you over to be tortured and kill you, and you will be hated by every nation on earth because of me. 10 Many will lose their faith, and they will betray one another and hate one another... 12 And as lawlessness spreads, mutual love will grow cold. 13 But those who hold out to the end will be saved. 14 And this good news of Heaven’s imperial rule will have been proclaimed throughout the world...*

## **Sermon**

The nearly two-decades-old war in Afghanistan is now officially over.  
This “endless war,” according to our President,  
has finally come to an end!  
And it ended badly!  
The most powerful military force that the world has ever seen  
was defeated - again!

But chaos erupted in the final days as the U.S. military  
tried to get out not only its citizens but the many Afghans  
who had assisted in the 20 year long occupation.

The promises of a liberal, multi-ethnic, and religiously tolerant government,  
the protection of human rights (especially for women)  
and the education of young girls now lies not only in tatters,  
but will likely result in so very deadly consequences.

But I have to ask, “How did we really expect this war to end?”  
What gave us any reason to believe it would work out any better  
than Vietnam did only some 45 years ago!

Brutal occupations, with puppet rulers and military power,  
over people who do not want us “Lording it over them”  
according to history usually do end badly!

The scenes of chaos have certainly tarnished our image around the world  
but the war and occupation was even worse for the millions  
of Afghans who had to suffer through it!

As the Civil War General Sherman is alleged to say, "War is hell!"  
And the war in Afghanistan was hell not only in the way it ended  
but it was hell, each and every day for so many for 20 years.

Now as one who marched, protested and even got arrested  
before and during the start of this war and the subsequent one  
in Iraq I could simply say, "I told you so!"

But this feels hollow and hardly satisfying when considering  
that 3544 U.S. and allied troops were killed  
and more than 20,000 U.S soldiers who were wounded.  
It is estimated that more than 114,000 Afghans also died.  
The US alone spent an estimated \$2.3 trillion on the war —  
or \$300 million a day, according to President Biden.

As one who ardently believes that "War is never the answer,"  
I had hoped that another way could have been chosen.  
But saying that, "It wasn't my fault!" is again equally shallow.

Now is not the time to gloat or feel self-righteous over the expected  
catastrophic outcomes that war ravaged upon us and Afghanistan.  
But it should however reignite in us, those who attempt to follow Jesus,  
"the Prince of Peace," to boldly reaffirm not only the futility of war,  
but to work even harder on those things that bring true peace!

And this is not some mere abstract moral belief, it is also  
a very practical endeavor for the continued survival  
of humanity and our entire planet as well!

We have been endowed by our loving Creator not only with morals,  
but intellect, imagination, and courage as well to do better!  
War and violence are always a failure on our part  
to use these God given gifts.

We were of course told that we had "no choice," but to invade Afghanistan  
(and then later Iraq) in order to destroy those who planned 9-11.  
But we were also motivated to avenge those in our nation  
who had been killed with unspeakable horror on 9-11.

However, acting out of fear and/or revenge seldom, if ever, truly addresses  
those root causes of why others might seek to harm us.  
The war to stop only those who attacked us and to avenge our martyrs  
soon morphed into a war "the Global War on Terrorism."

But it also became, in reality, World War III – a real, endless war  
that will continue with high tech surveillance, summary executions,  
drone strikes, high altitude bombings and special forces operations.  
In the past three years alone, the U.S. has been involved in  
counterterrorism operations in at least 85 countries.

Wherever “militant extremists” can be found, from Nigeria to Somalia in Africa and from the Caucuses to Indonesia in Asia, we will hunt down and destroy those we deem terrorist and those, usually innocent civilians, who “harbor” them!

Large numbers of “boots on the ground” in places like Iraq and Afghanistan are actually counter-productive in the real game of cat and mouse. Many military experts agree that the invasion of Iraq not only distracted our focus on eliminating the real threats, but actually increased those real threats.

A conservative estimated cost of this 20 year old global war on terror currently stands at \$8 trillion with over 900,000 deaths, according to the Costs of War project at Brown University.

The “Global War on Terrorism” is necessary, we are told, in order to make Americans safer. However, the opposite is, of course, the new reality as more places in the world are now more dangerous for Americans to travel to.

Perhaps the voice of God proclaiming that, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay saith the Lord!” takes on a more relevant meaning as a profound warning to us humans — that vengeance is simply too dangerous and destructive of a thing for us to engage in. Mere humans, I fear, simply do not have the sufficient spiritual intelligence to play around with being vengeful and so must simply leave it alone. But humanity has, as we know, seldom, if ever, seriously heeded Yahweh’s instructions.

It is truly hard to imagine what might have happened if we had only sent a fraction of those nearly 800,000 soldiers sent to Afghanistan to be humanitarian workers instead, or took even a fraction of the 8 trillion dollars spent on the Global War on Terrorism, and used it to address the root causes of war.

But that is, of course, the problem with war; it is always the least imaginative of all possible responses.

Maybe the lesson we must learn here is, now more than ever, we really do need those folks who do want to see an end to War!

As MLK succinctly put it,

*“I want to say one other challenge that we face is simply that we must find an alternative to war and bloodshed... President Kennedy said on one occasion, “Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind.” The world must hear this. I pray to God that America will hear this before it is too late...*

The stakes, of course, are far higher than just the elimination of our own species but the very existence of our entire planet. Those of us who believe in and speak up for peaceful forms of transition will be maligned, attacked, called unpatriotic and hopelessly naive.

And like many peacemakers throughout history, we too may be hunted down, arrested, tortured and killed as a threat to the nation.

But the things that lead to war are not all that nuanced, secret, or difficult to comprehend.

Wars are the result of human actions such as greed, vengeance, sloth (which I define as lack of effort and imagination), fear, ethnocentricity, religious zealotry, ignorance and hubris.

These are also considered to be the precursors of “madness!” And who among us would not try to intervene to stop a friend from descending into such homicidal madness?

Now it would appear as if Jesus’ words in our gospel this morning incline us to just accept the inevitability of war.

Wars and rumors of war are things we must simply resign ourselves to as we hope and wait on the promise of God’s heavenly reward. Given what we know about our history one can certainly arrive at that conclusion since indeed this seems to always have been the case.

But we also know that Jesus’ life and teachings were anything but a resignation to the way things have always been.

Instead, the words and actions of our Lord and Savior were particularly, I believe, all about actually making war obsolete. His first instruction to us is to “not be afraid!” For he is with us through all the pain and sorrow to save us now. Just like there is pain with the joyous birth of a child there will be pain as the joyous new age of God’s Imperial rule is being born.

Jesus taught to pray, “On earth, just as it is in heaven!” What is being born is happening here and it will be realized by those who “hold on,” who persevere in spite of the hatred, torture or the threats of death.

It is a promise given to us by the same Jesus who spent his life addressing those root causes of war such as hunger, injustice, poverty, ethnocentricity, fear, sloth and greed.

The promise of a new world is not found in resignation nor is it the product of our efforts of national or personal self-preservation but it happens when our efforts join with God’s plan to construct shalom!

In this spirit allow me to end this morning with one more quote from MLK Jr that beautifully and powerfully sums it all up!

*“I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.”*