

Holy War?

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[0 : 0 0] The Starbucks near where I live, which is where I usually go on Saturday mornings to try to work on my sermon a bit more. A Christian friend of mine that I hadn't seen in about three or four years, he bumped in.

He happened to be in that Starbucks. He doesn't live there, but he happened to be there for whatever reason. And he asked me how it's going, and he saw that I had my Bible out. I was working on my sermon. So he asked me what I was preaching on on Sunday.

And I said to him, I'm preaching on something that if I was to make a list of the things I don't want to ever preach on, if I can somehow manage to avoid it, this would be really high up on the list.

Because I'm going to talk about holy war. You know those parts in the Old Testament where God tells people to go and fight people and kill them? That's not an easy text.

And I've wrestled with it all week. But that's what we're going to look at. And if some of you are here and you're wondering, well, why, George, why don't you just sort of change it? Why don't you talk about something different? One of the things that we do here, it's a very, very ancient custom, is that when we do our sermons, we preach through books of the Bible.

[1 : 1 7] That's the way the Bible is written. The Bible is written as a collection of 66 different books, 39 of them before Jesus. That's what we call the Old Testament. And 27 of the books were written about Jesus and about his early disciples.

And that's what we call the New Testament. And we preach through books of the Bible. And one of the good things about preaching through the books of the Bible is it forces us to look at things that we wouldn't normally talk about.

And in fact, actually, this is maybe a very helpful thing for us to look at, holy war. You might not think so by the time I'm finished. I don't know. But if you think about it, one of the great fears in our culture today, I think, is that religion causes violence.

It's a very, very common belief. And people might not say to you, if they find out that you're a devout Christian, those of us here who are devout Christians, people might not say to you, oh, you're a devout Christian.

You probably are in favor of violence or what you believe causes violence. But they'd always wonder that a little bit about you. It's something which has changed in our culture. Many of you are too young to know when it was anything different than the way it is now.

[2 : 2 4] But it is a common view that Christianity, like all other religions, causes violence, maybe except certain types of Buddhism, the Zen type in particular, and certain types of Hinduism.

But all others cause violence. And so we're going to look at that today. So it's Esther chapter 7 and chapter 8. We're looking at two chapters today.

If you don't have a Bible with you, the text will be up on the screen. As you can see, the sermon series has been the story of Esther, the hidden God in a broken world. We live in a broken world, and God is hidden most of the time.

He works through providence. And the book of Esther is a very, very powerful book that helps us to understand this whole doctrine and teaching of providence. And just before we start reading of chapter 7, verse 1, what's just happened, what the big thing that's been going on in the book just up until now that has to be dealt with is that a man by the name of Haman, who's the second most important person in the Persian Empire, because that's where the book is set, he has managed to orchestrate events in such a way that genocide is planned against the Jewish people, that on a certain day that's coming up, the machinery of the state, the organs of the different instruments of the culture are all going to be set for a particular day.

The result of that day, when it's over, is that every single Jewish person, young and old, male and female, every single Jewish person will die. And it's just in a sense, like obviously it's a bit different because it's a different time period, but it's just like what happened in Nazi Germany, like the bureaucracy, the military, the police, the judiciary, the governors, the politicians, everything is organized towards the annihilation of a people group.

[4 : 19] And through a series of, through providence, from the king's point of view, through a series of circumstances, but from our viewpoint, through providence, a Jewish woman who didn't practice her faith at all, but lived as a Persian becomes one of the king of Persia's queens, and her name is Esther.

And just shortly before this, she has a conversion experience, and her conversion experience is connected to the planned genocide of her people. And she decides that she, even though it's, I mean, it's just one of those really, it's one of those, do you know that the Christian church often grows during violent persecutions?

That all Christian missionaries were expelled out of communist China, I think it was in 1950, maybe it was 1949, but it was around then.

And I believe that they estimated that when the Christians, all the missionaries were kicked out of China, all of them, this is pre-internet, all of them were kicked out of China.

All of them were kicked out of China. I think they estimated there was a million Chinese Christians. The estimates today are that there's well over 100 million Chinese Christians, that inexplicably, despite an atheist state that worked a crackdown on Christianity, Christianity grew, even though it was persecuted.

[5 : 48] And in the threat of the impending destruction of the Jewish people, Esther becomes Jewish. Jewish. And she's challenged by her uncle Mordecai to use her role to plead for her people.

And then we talk about that in a couple of, that's what happens is prior to this in the story. And she finally gets an opportunity to talk to the king and to Haman, and confront Haman and plead for herself and her people.

But when the opportunity comes, she gets cold feet and she can't go through with it. But just before all is lost, she asks if the king will come the next day for a new feast.

And in between, there's another big adventure where Haman wants to kill Mordecai, Esther's adopted father. But now the second day, and that gets foiled by providence, and now we come to the second day.

And I guess the question is, will Esther have cold feet? Or will she go through with crying for her people to be delivered in herself? And here's where we catch up. Chapter 7, verse 1.

[6 : 56] So the king and Haman went into the feast with Queen Esther. And on the second day, as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king again said to Esther, What is your wish, Queen Esther?

It shall be granted to you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled. Then Queen Esther answered, If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request.

For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king.

Just sort of pause. Esther here is very brilliant. You know, she has to keep her eye on the ball, and the eye on the ball is that in about ten months, nine and a half months, every Jew will be killed.

Now, she needs to get the king to do something to stop this. And what she can't do is say, King, you ordered us to all be killed, because that's going to lose the argument right there, won't it?

[8 : 18] She has to get him on board, and she does it in a very brilliant way. In fact, saying that she doesn't want to hurt the king at all. But this is what's happened. Now, here's one of the things which is in the story.

It's a very small detail, but it's very, very telling. Most of us notice it in other people and rarely see it in ourselves, but we are like other people. We do it as well.

We can do something which is quite, quite bad, quite, quite wrong, but we don't even maybe think about it as being very wrong. And afterwards, even if we've been involved in doing something that's wrong or making a decision, we've been part of a room that's made a very bad decision.

Afterwards, it's as if somebody else made the decision, and we forget about it altogether. Because what we're going to see right now is that the king hasn't the vaguest idea in the world, what Esther's talking about. He has no clue.

Like, he's just sitting there. If it was being filmed, it would be like, uh? Like, what's going... Like, what are you talking about? Like, I'm the king. Like, what are you talking about?

[9 : 20] How's this going on in my kingdom? And I don't know about it. So we see that in verse 5. Then King Xerxes... That's not how you pronounce it.

That's who the king is. The King Xerxes. He has multiple names, and the Xerxes is easier to pronounce than that, so I'm going to say Xerxes. Then the king said to Queen Esther, Who is he? And where is he? Who has dared to do this? And probably even Haman doesn't understand, because, you see, Haman has been boasting to his friends that the queen treats him as a friend and is inviting only the king and him to his meal.

So he probably has absolutely no idea what her next words are going to be, because remember, she's been living like a Persian. Her conversion is very, very recent. It's only weeks...

It's only like a week old. Not even a week old. So the king says, What? Who would dare to kill you? And Esther said, Verse 6, A foe and enemy, This wicked Haman.

[10 : 30] And Haman was terrified before the king and the queen. He wouldn't have said, My God. I don't know what God he would worship. But he would have said, Probably bleepity, bleepity, bleep.

Esther's Jewish. I didn't know. And now he's stuck. And he can tell by the king's angry outburst. He's offered her half his kingdom, which is politeness. But what he really means is, You can make a big ask of me, Esther. Make a big ask. And whatever your big ask is, I'll do whatever I can. He's in a great mood. He's affectionate towards her. Haman doesn't see this coming. He's completely and utterly blindsided. Esther tells him that all she wants is to be able to not be killed. The king is outraged. Anybody would want a king kill his wife, Esther. And then she says, It's all because of Haman. He is completely and utterly terrified.

[11 : 38] Probably a man who had to rise to be the second in the empire, only under the king. He had to be one of the world's smoothest talkers. But as you could well imagine, words will fail in a situation like that, especially with no preparation.

So what happens? Well, verse 7, And the king arose in his wrath. We just, you know, we get angry. We just want to move. Like you jump up. You're just furious.

Furious. And he, he, he, king arose in his wrath from the wine drinking and went into the palace garden just beside. But Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther.

For he saw that harm was determined against him by the king. And the king returned from the palace garden, probably just there for a moment, to the place where they were drinking wine as Haman was falling on the couch, probably by accident, where Esther was.

And the king said, Will he even assault the queen in my presence in my own house? As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face. Now just pause.

[12 : 47] That's an idiom. Remember, like, what, what, an idiom is something like if I said, you know, you do this, do this, and Bob's your uncle. Okay? In other words, it's an idiom for saying you do this, you do this, it's guaranteed that it's going to work.

Okay? And so, and the words cover your faith is literal, it's an idiom. But what it means is, you know how often in countries that practice capital punishment and in Canada when capital punishment was practiced, the condemned man or woman before they're hanged or shot or whatever it is that they're going to do, it was often very customary that a hood, like either a blindfold if it was, you know, you're going to be shot, but if it's some other type, often a hood was put over them, the sentence in the past, you're about to die and the hood goes over you just before they fire the guns, press the button, like whatever it is.

And that's what the idiom is. It's, the idiom is that as the words leave the king, it's as if the onlookers can just see that the hood that you put on just before you die has now been covering his face.

That's what it means. And things can now can get worse. You know, because what can often happen for powerful people is that for those of us who've had any type of power, but I've had virtually no power in my life.

But for powerful people, powerful people can live under the myth, the illusion, that lots of other people like the fact that they have power. But no, that's not actually how it works.

[14 : 31] Those under them often gripe and complain and are looking forward to their downfall. So now, this idiom about it's obvious that Haman's about to die, then Harbona, verse 9, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king said, moreover, moreover, the gallows that Haman, this guy, had prepared for Mordecai, you know, the hero that you just rewarded earlier today, that guy?

Well, Haman, you know, Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman, I'll say that again, moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, that's Mordecai, yet that gallows is standing at Haman's house, 75 feet high.

And the king said, in a sense, oh, perfect, hang him on that. So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai, then the wrath of the king abated.

Now, as I've said before, if you're a guest here, they hanged is a good word, but it's not really, I don't know why they don't use the right perfect word, they impale him, that's how they kill him.

I don't know how they would have done it, but the stake would have had a big point at the end and they drop him on and I guess they push him down enough to make sure he won't fall and that's how he would either slowly or quickly die.

[15 : 55] But notice here, then the wrath of the king abated. Now, this is a big problem and this is one of the other things in this story which is so psychologically real because isn't it often the case, you bring to politicians or you bring to somebody important or somebody who's powerful this big problem and they get the problem and they do something and they do something which is good.

It's not that they do something, they do something that's good and then they go, oh, okay, well that's finished and they go to walk away. But one moment, Haman's dead, but what about the genocide? The king's wrath has quenched and as we see in a moment, it's as if he goes on, okay, well that's dealt with, let's talk about some other things now and you can well imagine, it's hard to sort of frustrate but that's why, you know, reading stories like this often, you need to read them slowly and notice the words because the words are very carefully chosen and you can well imagine that Esther is, what?

like, don't stop now, like, what about the genocide? And it's as if it's gone from the king's mind. So, later on that day, verse, chapter 8, verse 1, king, the king, gave to queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews and Mordecai came before the king for Esther, had told the king what he was to her and the king took off his signet ring which he had taken from Haman and gave it to Mordecai and Esther sent Mordecai over the house of Haman.

Very briefly, as you well know, most of the world doesn't have property rights and most of the world throughout history hasn't had property rights and they definitely didn't have property rights here.

[17 : 55] So, Haman's widow can't just say, well, you know, I'm secure with all my property. In that day, if you were considered a traitor to the king, all of your properties forfeit.

All of it. So, the king just says, all of Haman's property is now mine and I'm going to give it to the queen, my queen Esther. and Esther gets Mordecai to be her manager.

It's still Esther's property, not Mordecai's. And at the same time, Mordecai gets a promotion, whether it's actually to the same level of Haman or just, but he goes from being whatever level, mid-level bureaucrat he was to like, at least one of the seven advisors of the king and he gets this huge promotion.

but once again, at the end of chapter, verse two, what about the genocide? I mean, that's still going to go ahead. You haven't stopped it, king.

So, Esther, the text is a little bit messy. What we do know is that Esther now does something that once again she risks her life by violating protocol in a way that, well, literally, could have the king could kill her.

[19 : 10] And maybe what it is is that it's a formal function, function, but she comes up and even though she's the queen, she can be the queen with the king in an intimate way when they're in an intimate situation, but right now it's a formal situation, it's like a legal situation and there's advisors and there's others all around and what she does is something that if anybody does it, they're worthy of death.

She leaves wherever it is she's standing, probably off to the side, and she falls down in front of the king and she grabs him and she starts crying out and by doing this she risks her life.

Look what happens in verse 3 and 4. Then Esther spoke again to the king. She fell at his feet and wept and pleaded with him to avert the evil plan of Haman the Agagite and the plot that he had devised against the Jews.

When the king held out the royal scepter to Esther, Esther rose and just pause there as those of you who were here earlier or you know something about it, when somebody does something that's just a huge, this is a cruel culture.

The sentence to do something that's inappropriate like this is death and if the king who has his scepter, so it's a very royal, this isn't just them talking about in the chambers, this is a very, very formal thing.

[20 : 34] I don't know, it'd be like as if somebody burst, left the side, one of the, you know, in parliament and dashes and clings to Trudeau during a formal presentation or something like that, only you, you know, you can't, you can't get killed for that.

I don't know, maybe you died at Twitter by a hundred and thousand angry Twitter tweets or something, but that's just not real death, that's just honor death, shame or something. But anyway, nobody still answered me why anybody would care that 75,000 people say nasty things on Twitter about you, people you don't know, don't care about and probably have thought about it for exactly one millisecond and can tweet the opposite thing a week later or even a day later.

Nobody, anyway, never mind, that's a side. We'll get back to the text. So anyway, she does something and the only way that, the only way that the, the person's life will be spared, if the king does nothing, you die.

So the only thing that will spare your life is if the king takes his scepter up and sort of holds it out to touch you and that's what saves your life and that's what the king does. So Esther risks her life again.

[21 : 40] She's passionate about this, very courageous. Her faith in God's provision to deliver makes her bold. That's what's going on.

Her faith that the Lord will deliver his people makes her bold. She knows she might die but she knows the Lord will deliver his people and maybe he's going to use her and even if, even if he's not going to use her, even if she dies, she knows he's going to deliver and maybe he will use her. It makes her bold. So she does this and the king lifts up his scepter and touches her and in verse 5, Esther rose and stood before the king and she said, if it please the king and if I have found favor in his sight and if the thing seems right before the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let an order be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman the Agagite the son of Hamadatha which he wrote to destroy the Jews who were in all the provinces of the king for how can I bear to see the calamity that is coming to my people or how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?

In other words, king, you gotta deal with the genocide. You gotta deal with the genocide. Then king Xerxes said to queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman and they have hanged him on the gallows because he intended to lay hands on the Jews. But, this is so classic, right? But you may write as you please with regard to the Jews in the name of the king and seal it with the king's ring for an edict written in the name of the king and seal it with the king's ring cannot be revoked.

[23 : 25] So, this is part of the problem that he can't revoke the order and he hasn't been able to figure out or he had not thought about it but he says, okay, I'm gonna give you permission under my authority to come up with a solution to the problem and this is gonna get us to the nub of the text which is very difficult.

So, what's the solution going to be? I don't know, bring in some mediators, have people stand in front and link arms to protect the Jews.

Like, before we get to the nub of the problem, the problem is we're gonna see in a moment is they're gonna ask, they're gonna give the Jewish people permission to arm themselves and attack those who are gonna attack them and kill them.

Bump. help. But just as we're starting to think that which is a very horrible thing, you have to ask yourself for a second, this is actually a real historical event, like what are the options?

To shame them on Twitter? I don't know. To have like a peace ceremony? Like, I don't know. Like, is that gonna work? People have been given the official power and the military, the police, the judiciary, the nobles, the powerful people, the local people, have all been given permission to attack and kill every Jew, man, woman, and child, old and young, on the same day.

[24 : 58] So, here's the solution. Verse 9. The king's scribes were summoned at that time in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the 23rd day.

And an edict was written according to all that Mordecai commanded concerning the Jews, to the satraps and the governors and the officials of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, 127 provinces, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language, and also to the Jews in their own script and language.

Just pause. All of this language, if you go back in chapter 3 and you check it, you'll see that it's almost word for word what happens when the edict is being made to cause genocide.

But an interesting thing is you realize now that the original edict to kill all the Jews wasn't written in Hebrew. It's another one of the, you see, one of the things which is so powerful about this whole story is it helps you to understand genocide, which is a profound evil.

But even at the level of the edict to kill all the Jews, in the very edict itself, there's a disempowering, there's a turning the Jewish people into nothings, people who don't exist because they don't even send the edict in their own language because it's as if they already do not exist as human beings.

[26 : 31] And now this edict which is going to go out that's going to try to solve this in its very language reinstates them as human beings.

Their language is recognized and they're named as a people. And in verse 10, and he wrote the name of King Xerxes and sealed it, sorry, he wrote in the name of King Xerxes and sealed it with the king's signet ring.

Then he sent the letters by mounted couriers riding on swift horses that were used in the king's service, bred from the royal stud, saying that the king allowed the Jews, here's the awkward passage which we need to spend a few minutes thinking about.

The king allowed the Jews, verse 11, who were in every city to gather and defend their lives to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, children and women included, and to plunder their goods.

On one day throughout all the provinces of King Xerxes on the 13th day of the 12th month which is the month of Adar, a copy of what was written was to be issued as a decree in every province being publicly displayed to all people and the Jews were to be ready in that day to take vengeance on their enemies.

[28 : 03] So the couriers mounted on their swift horses that were used in the king's service, rode out hurriedly, urged by the king's command, and the decree was issued in Susa, the cat's citadel.

And we'll just stop reading there. So, most of us have probably, you know, what we learn about Esther is sanitized versions that lead out, leave this out.

So, you know, here's the thing. We can't say, well, you know, there's lots of things that are bad in the Old Testament that go on and one of the ways that we deal with it is we just say, well, it's just recording what's happened.

It's not saying that it was good. It's just recording what happened. We can't say that here because, in fact, the whole book of Esther is to, at the end of it, is to become a holiday which is to be kept by Jewish people forever where they remember God's delivering them from the hands of their enemies who wanted to kill them.

So it actually has a very special status, this holy war which comes at the end. It's to be remembered. So we can't just say, well, you know, that's not that the Lord was wanting this to happen.

[29 : 25] And this is where Canadians expect me to say, well, we know better now. We know better now.

Now, by the way, those of you who weren't watching, I did that on purpose because that's what happens when Christians do that. When they say, well, we know better now, what we're doing is this. Well, we know better now. In fact, I want to talk about me.

You know, I understand why under pressure we do things like that. I won't tell about it now, but I shared with my wife yesterday.

I had a bit of a witnessing opportunity yesterday. Caught me completely and utterly flat-footed. I probably said nothing right and I wish I could get a do-over.

So I understand when under pressure we say things like that and it's a hard topic, but it's not really an out that Christians can take. So I can imagine my friends my non-Christian friends would now probably want to look at me and wonder and maybe say, George, do you believe in holy war?

[30 : 49] You're a Christian and you believe the Bible. So do you believe that holy war is good and just and Christians should do it?

And I, you can just imagine that if somebody actually was to ask me that question after this, I know a couple of people that if they were here after the service, if I hadn't outed it, they would ask me that question now that I've brought them to the point that they see the problem.

And, and my answer will be, which I'm going to try to explain over the next few minutes, is, no, I don't believe that holy war is practiced anymore and is just, would never be just today and it's not something that Christians should ever do.

but I understand what holy war is pointing to in the Old Testament and that it's actually pointing to something really important. Something, and by the way, we're going to talk about this a bit more next week because this is just the plan next week we see what happens and how it's to be remembered.

And I, I'd say it's an important part of salvation history but now, with Jesus, everything changes. It's not just that I'm going to say we know better now, it's that really, literally, everything in the Bible, all these 39 books in the Bible written before the time of Jesus, we read them now to understand how they help us to understand who Jesus is and why he's important and what he does for us and how everything has changed.

[32 : 30] And so, I understand why God had this as part of the Old Testament and because of Jesus it's not something that Christians should ever do now and that's not, well, in fact, that probably would surprise people, might have surprised you that that's what I'm going to say.

But that's, I think, what the message of the text is. And so, the question might be, George, that, you know what, George, you think that Holy War was all right, I sort of like it, obviously I like it that you don't think it's right now, but you think, George, that just sounds so arrogant, it just sounds so wrong, it just sounds so bad, it just sounds so inconsistent to think that there can be any excuse for killing that's going to involve women and children and all these people, George, that just seems wrong.

Let me tell you a story, true story, a couple of weeks ago, one of the baristas that I've talked to quite a few times about the Christian faith, and they can get very down on themselves, and I, there happened to be a bit of a, just by coincidence, a bit of a break, nobody else up, I went up to get a refill, and I said, oh, how you doing?

And they said, well, how are you doing? And I said, well, I'm doing fine. They said, well, that must be nice. I don't know, I'm like, my life just, sucks, and nothing's working well for me, and I don't know, just things seem like there's no much, not much value.

And I said to the fellow, I said, you know, you are a person of vast worth and are precious, but you possess vast worth and significance.

[34 : 37] And he looked at me, and he said, well, that's your opinion. And I was about to do the Canadian thing and said, well, that is my opinion. But somebody must have been praying for me at that instant because just as I was about to say, well, that is my opinion, I changed what I said and I said, no, it's not my opinion.

I believe it's true. I believe what I just said to you about is like objectively true. I said, it's central to what I believe is true.

Like, I believe that you're made in the image of God and therefore have this vast significance and worth and Jesus loved you so much that he came to die for you.

And they just looked at me and another customer came up to get a coffee and they nodded at me in a way that I knew that the conversation was over.

I didn't want to push Bob on it. He just nodded and I moved on. I put my sucra or whatever it is, artificial sweetener in my herbal tea.

[35 : 52] It was a refill. So, but here's the point about this story. You see, for most Canadians, when they hear that you're a Christian or they hear you're Muslim, they hear you're a Buddhist, what they think is this, that religion is just a matter of opinion.

It's not talking about anything true. It's personal. It's private. It's spiritual. And you know what? If Buddhism gets you through the day, good for you.

If Islam gets you through the day, good for you. If reading the Bible helps you get through the day, good for you. Like if having a shot of Johnny Walkers as soon as you get home gets you through the day, good for you.

Like it's just a matter of taste. It's just a matter of preference. It's just a matter of what helps you, gives you some, helps you get through the day. So, if religion is just something about helping you get through the day, but it's going to lead you to kill people, then that's terrible.

Like that's horrendous. But you see, and in a sense that's why Bob, when I said to him that he was of value and of this vast significance and worth because he was made in the image of God and he said my opinion, he's just saying, well that's just a religious way of speaking.

[37 : 13] And I was going to respond like a Canadian, but I said no, I'm saying what I think is true. And you see, that's the big difference. And to begin to get your handle on, and we as Canadians, Christians, those of us here, probably almost all of us are Christians, when we hear this text, part of this Canadian mindset seeps in that religion is just something personal.

It's just something private. It's just something about helping you get through the day. But you see, to me, this is not the, this, God is just as real as an iceberg. For me to say that the Lord exists is the same as for me to say that Ottawa exists.

I believe I am saying something which is completely and utterly true. And I am very simple-minded. When I stand here in front of you and I close my eyes or I open my eyes and I pray, I believe I am talking literally to a God who exists who can hear me.

And you can act in response to my prayers. When I pray that ask the Father and ask the Son to pour the Holy Spirit out upon us, I literally believe there is a God who exists who hears me.

And I believe that any time I ask for the Holy Spirit, for the Father to send the Holy Spirit, that he always answers that prayer with yes. And I believe the Holy Spirit does fall in some way upon us.

[38 : 44] Like, really does. When I pray that prayer, I am very simple-minded. But if you believe that the Lord really exists, like, really exists, then that's going to have to start to change the way you read the Bible.

It's going to have to be read in a different way and we have to think about holy war in a different way because religion isn't just about, Christianity isn't just one other religion about how to get some comfort to get through our day and the nice thing about reading the Bible is it's cheaper than buying expensive scotch every day.

And, you know, which might be how some people look at it. I wish I could get into religion because scotch is so expensive. But I just, I really believe there is a God who does exist.

So, how does that, how does that help us to understand this particular text? Well, one more story.

Oh, I'm running out of time.

I'm going to keep going. In the book of Acts, there's a very interesting story that helps us to understand this and all the holy war things. I'm not going to try to deal with this. I'm going to cut some things out, but I'm going to, I want to stay to it because it's, I think the Lord needs us to gather around this text to help us to, to lose our fear of reading the Old Testament, to trust God's word and to trust Jesus and recognize how precious and important he is.

[40 : 19] In the book of Acts, Saul is a guy, he's not converted, he persecutes Christians and there's this spectacular story in Acts 9 about how the Lord appears to, to, to, to Saul, like, appears to Saul and all everybody sees is this bright light and Saul hears a voice that speaks to him and he hears the voice of Jesus speak to him and the first words that Jesus says to Saul isn't, why are you persecuting Christians?

He says, why are you persecuting me? Why are you persecuting me? If you could put the first point up, this is, helps us to understand a lot about what goes on with holy war in the Old Testament.

Is that when you seek to destroy, I'm borrowing the language that Mordecai had, you see, amongst other things, whatever, sort of, whatever Mordecai says for the Jewish people to do, all he does is duplicate the language of those who are going to commit genocide.

And so, when you seek to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate the Lord's covenant people, you are really seeking to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate the Lord himself.

See, Acts 9 helps us to understand the Old Testament. Jesus' words, why are you persecuting me? Haman thought the gods had given him, by casting the Purim, the lots, had given him the permission and the blessing to kill.

[42 : 00] but the gods that he was consulting were idols, they don't exist, they're ashes in your mouth, and the god who really does exist, it is his covenant people.

And when Haman set out to attack, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate the Lord's covenant people, he was actually seeking to annihilate, to destroy, and to kill the Lord.

And there's another thing about the New Testament that helps us to understand this as well. The Old Testament is all about grace, believe it or not. If you go back, I tell Christians and non-Christians this all the time.

I said, you go back and look at Exodus, you look at Deuteronomy, you look at the Ten Commandments, and how does it begin? It begins, I am the Lord, your God, who redeemed you out of slavery into Egypt.

I redeemed you. I redeemed you. And given that I have redeemed you, that I am now your God and you are my people, how shall you then live in light of redemption, which is all by grace and God's power.

[43 : 17] And in the New Testament, we understand that when we put our faith and trust in Jesus, that he saves us, he saves me. And we understand that even though we use this one word, Jesus has saved me.

When I put my faith and trust in him, he saves me. There's in fact, implicit in that, three different tenses of the word saves. On one hand, I can say that when I put my faith and trust in Jesus, he saved me.

I am made right with his. I am adopted. I am given new life from above. I am his by adoption and grace. He will never let me go. I am saved. I am justified. I am made right with God.

But at the same time, I am, I can say that he is saving me right now. That I am becoming, as redemption grips me, that I am to become, as the gospel grips me, as it shapes me, as it nudges me into new ways of living, as it draws me into new ways of living, as it shapes me into new ways of living, as I become more like Jesus, as I become more fit for heaven, I am being saved right now. Because it's not that he just saved me a long time ago and then he leaves me alone. No, I am being saved right now. The Holy Spirit indwells me. I am being saved right now. And at the same time, I know there are so many times my salvation is, I screw up.

[44 : 29] I have to confess my sins. I have to come to, I need to call out for more grace and mercy. Not that I need more. It's all been given to me in Jesus when I've been redeemed. I'm being saved. But I also know that in the future, I will be saved.

I will be glorified. I will live in a new heaven and a new earth with a resurrection body. I have been saved. I am being saved. I will be saved. And that helps us to see in a picture way what's going on in the Old Testament where before Jesus, part of the preparation for Jesus coming is that the Lord redeems one people, not the smartest people, not the brightest people, not the holiest people, He saves out of love.

And if you could put up the next point, then we see that in the Old Testament, it's true that the Lord has delivered, is delivering, and will deliver His covenant people.

The Lord has delivered, is delivering, and will deliver His covenant people. And that means that not only did He redeem the Jewish people out of slavery and bondage in Egypt, in Egypt, but He will continue to deliver His people because He is their God and He will deliver them.

And so in the face of a new Amalekite who desires to annihilate the covenant people without them realizing that they are actually trying to annihilate the true God that does exist, He says, I will deliver My people.

[45 : 51] I will deliver My people. And it's only in those cases in the Old Testament that holy war is to be understood.

It's a consequence of the fact that the Lord will deliver His people. If you could put up the next point, how is it that Jesus changes everything?

We've already seen it in some very small ways. But the thing which is so remarkable, we're going to talk about this more next week, that's so remarkable, is that when Jesus comes amongst us as a fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy, He is called, in the book of Isaiah, they say that there will be one born one day whose name is Emmanuel, which means the Lord with us.

It means He's with us. It means He's among us. It means He's for us. It means He comes amongst us as one of us. And so when we are to understand as Christians, is that when Jesus comes, well, He comes not just to be with us, but to save us.

And He saves us by standing in our place. What do Christians recognize that in my place condemned, Emmanuel, the Lord with us, stood?

[47 : 12] that you see, in a sense, every holy war story in the Old Testament, on one hand, we can look at it and say, that's a picture of the fact that the Lord will continue to deliver me and that one day He will deliver me into His eternal kingdom.

But Christians can't only look at the Old Testament and look at the Jewish people. They also have to look at those who aren't Jewish. and they have to understand that on one hand, that enemy of

the Lord who wants to kill the Lord is me.

In a sense, every Christian is to say, I am Haman. And what we understand in this profound text is the Lord seeing our deep need comes amongst us and bears the death, the penalty, the justice that we could not withstand.

And He does it to save us. If you put up the final point, please. And this doesn't mean to, this isn't sounding arrogant or anything like that.

It's not that there's nothing special about me. And there's nothing special about Canadians. I just made a, if you could, see, here, no one can enter the Lord's new covenant by their birth, by their accomplishments, by their say-so, or by their connections.

[48 : 51] Nobody can. But if you receive the gospel, and that you is any you, there is no person in the world so rich and successful and holy that they do not need the gospel.

And there is nobody that we will ever meet who is so broken, so forgotten, so worthless, so passed over, so defeated that this offer is not made to them.

But if you receive the gospel with repentance and faith, the Lord will give you new life from heaven and bring you into His new covenant. You know, our church, this is a quick list.

Our church has people in it from Uganda, from Rwanda, from Belgium, from the United Kingdom, from the United States, from Italy, from Russia, from China, from Taiwan, from Canada, from India, from Barbados, from Netherlands, and from Australia.

It's for anybody. And it's for everybody. But it has to be received by faith. And when you receive it by faith, you will be saved.

[49 : 59] And He will save you right now, forever, and He will continue to work in you to make you more like Jesus, and He will one day bring you to glory. Please stand.

Thank you. There is no better time than now to call upon the Lord.

There is no better time now than to call upon the Lord, and He's not waiting for you to pass the theology test for all the perfect things to say. All you have to say, Lord, is, Lord, be my Savior.

I want you to be my Savior and my Lord. Please, Jesus. Your own words. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for Jesus. Thank you that He is Emmanuel. Thank you that you keep your words.

You kept your word of prophecies sent hundreds and hundreds of years before Jesus.

[51 : 01] You kept them all. He came. He fulfilled those prophecies of His first coming. He is Emmanuel. He did live amongst us as one of us. He is for us. He is for us even to the point of dying on the cross for us, that He died for His enemies.

Not that He saw us as enemies, but we were His enemies, and He died for us while we were His enemies. And we thank you for that, Father, that you would die for me when I was your enemy, that, Lord, you would die for me.

You would take my call that you would be my Savior when I was your enemy, that you would do that for me. Father, thank you so much for Jesus. Thank you for salvation.

Thank you, Father, for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Father, make us disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel, learning to live for your glory. And all God's people said, Amen.

Amen.