

Take Heart (Part 2) – God the Protector and Defender

Matt Chandler – June 12, 2016

Hey. Good morning. How are you? Doing well? Awesome. It sounds like you're doing great. If you have your Bibles, grab those. We're going to be in Exodus, chapter 15. If you don't have a Bible, around you there should be a hardback black one. If you don't own one, that's our gift to you.

While you're turning there, I want to spend some time as a community of faith praying. While most of us slept (I know not all of us, but while *most* of us slept), last night in Orlando, Florida, occurred the worst mass shooting in US history. A man went into a gay bar called Pulse and there shot and killed 49 people before the police shot and killed him. This man is of Muslim decent, so there's all this conversation going on right now about whether this was an act of terror or this was a hate crime or what exactly this was.

I want to talk about this event on two levels. First, I want us to pray, because it's horrific and awful. Secondly, I want to lay before you two things that are occurring right now. First, if you have a friend or family member in the LGBT community, this would be a good time just to make a call. Check in. See if they're all right. Most of us will not live in the kind of environment where you're nervous about you being murdered as a hate crime in any moment or anything like that. If you want to call and touch base, "How are you in light of this news? How can I pray for you?" that's a good thing.

The second thing to consider is that every Muslim neighbor and coworker you have right now is going, "Oh great," because once again they're going to feel like we think they're all terrorists. Maybe you're ignorant enough to actually believe that. In reality, as Afshin Ziafat taught us back in January as a man who moved here with his family from Iran and faced really the cultural distrust and hatred at the hands of Americans, it was literally someone who counseled him in English who gave him a Bible that led to him becoming a Christian.

If you have friends or family members in the LGBT community, this is an opportunity for you to call and check in, see how you can pray, encourage them. If you have neighbors who are Muslim, family

members who are Muslim, coworkers who are Muslim, this is also an opportunity for you to love and be the presence of Christ for them.

What I want to do is give us a few moments here to just pray, to put humanity on this. There are 49 moms and dads who just lost their child. There are 49 brothers and sisters who lost sisters and brothers. There are all sorts of loss that just occurred in Orlando, and we should grieve the brokenness of this world.

I want to give us an opportunity to mourn with those who mourn and lament the brokenness of the world we live in, because in no level can you look at what happened in Orlando and think anything about it is good. I want us to be mindful of the brokenness of the world we're in today. It will be a heavier day even by topic, but I want us to start just by praying for these family members, praying God would be at work in the mess.

That's what we believe as Christians: the world is messy, but God is at work in the mess. We want to pray and ask for comfort for these families, ask for mercy for those involved, and really just ask the Spirit of God to be at work. How we do that here at the Village is if you've come with some people who are Christians, you can kind of group up with them and pray. We'll just full-on embrace awkwardness here, so you don't even have to know them. Just lean in, go, "I'm praying with you guys; I'm here by myself," and we'll love that.

If you're not a Christian and you're here just because some whacko religious nut job family member dragged you, then we're glad you're here also, and you can awkwardly stare at me, or you can pray or happy thoughts to the higher power. Whatever you want to do, I want you to feel welcomed and comfortable. We love that you are here with us today.

Let me give you just a couple of moments here to pray for these families, for this terrible situation. The saints in the first century would often cry out, "Maranatha!" which means, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus. Make sense of this madness." Let me give you a couple of moments to pray here, and then I'll close us out.

Father, we thank you for your sovereign reign and rule, but we confess this morning, much like the apostle Paul confesses in the Scriptures, that we are perplexed but not crushed. We pray for these families. We pray for those who have suffered great loss today. We pray we might be marked as a people of compassion and grace, that whatever we read about on Facebook or whatever foolishness

gets echoed out in other social media platforms, that we not join in with stupidity and foolishness but rather we'd be marked as your people, those who mourn with those who mourn.

I ask, Father, that where this touches those near and dear or around us as you've uniquely wired and placed us in the world, we might be agents of salt and light, compassionate, helpful, encouraging. Father, we ask this madness might come to an end and, Father, you might work according to your good pleasure for justice, for freedom, and ultimately so men and women might see you as beautiful and delightful. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

A.W. Tozer said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." Let me try to explain Tozer's argument. Tozer is saying when you think about God, what you think about God will shape everything about you. It will shape how you interact with others in your relationships. It will shape how you interact with your finance. It will literally shape everything about your life.

I'll expand on Tozer's argument, not knowing whether or not he would agree with my interpretation of what he said, because he is dead. That creates some license for me because he is not here to argue, but reading this book, here's the conclusion I think Tozer is making. If in your mind when you think about God, you think he is gracious and kind and loving and forgiving, then when you think about God, that thought about God then shapes your ability to be gracious and generous to others.

If I believe God is generous and gracious, then I am more likely to be gracious and generous to others. To be a recipient of grace, to be a recipient of generosity, usually shapes and forms us to be the same kind of people who we have been shaped and molded by the God we believe in.

On the flipside of things, if you believe God is perpetually disappointed in you, that every time God sees you, he just kind of has a kind of retching kind of reaction, like he is just so weary of you and your nonsense, then more than likely (far more likely than if you believe God is a God of grace and mercy), you're going to have kind of this low-grade agitation because you're never quite able to measure up, and you don't even know what the standard is and, "How dare he?" Then that bleeds into your relationship with others and how you handle your finances.

So to see God properly, correctly, in his context in the Scriptures is to have really the whole of our lives ordered in a way that I would argue is beautiful and right and good. To see God wrongly means

we will make a mess of things even with our best intentions. When we tend to think about God... That's a complex idea. What pops in your head when you think about God is pretty big.

Last weekend if you were here, I spent 27 minutes on the Enlightenment in my intro. Right? Who does 27 minutes of intro on the Enlightenment? Well, what I was trying to get to the bottom of (because I knew where I was going this week) is to show you that at its core, the Enlightenment seeks to boil men and women down to brains on a stick, that we are purely our intellect. We know from history and we know from our own experience this is simply not true.

There are all sorts of things we feel and ways we behave that are contrary to what we know is true in our minds. We're not brains on a stick. We're far more complex than that as human beings. One of the things, one of the ideas of who God is, a character attribute of God that has completely vanished in 2016 for all sorts of various reasons but I think is an important one, is the idea of the Lord being a warrior.

When we think about God, we tend to think about Nickelodeon, not HBO. Right? We tend to think about *Bambi*, not *Braveheart*. We tend to like the God who is a lot more like Tinker Bell than anything else. What we want is feathered-hair Jesus, a lot of product to hold that thing in place. He has a bag of pixie dust, and all he does is he sprinkles. He never gets upset about anything. You can't do anything wrong. We're all awesome, and his sprinkle dust is there to help you understand that, by golly, you're amazing.

That tends to be the only palatable version of Jesus that culture at large will buy into. Although you cannot out-preach the grace, mercy, long-suffering, patience, and kindness of God, make no mistake. The Bible paints God also as a warrior. We're going to talk about that today. Hang in there because it might not mean what you think it means.

Let's look at this text (Exodus 15:3). It's simple. It's a sentence. It's just one sentence. **"The LORD [or Yahweh] is a man of war; the LORD is his name."** Okay. So if we're going to understand the Lord as a warrior in any kind of real, biblical way, we have to kind of back up and see the whole narrative, the whole story of what God is up to in the world we live in. The Bible tells us when God created everything that existed, he created it perfectly. He created it with not balance but honest perfection. There was joy.

He describes the relationship between the man and woman like this: "**And they were both naked...and were not ashamed.**" That had nothing to do with nudity and everything to do with the state of their hearts. They were naked and unashamed. There was no guilt, and there was no shame. Can you imagine never feeling guilt or shame? That's creation as God created it. The man and woman were naked and unashamed, which means they had nothing to hide. They projected no false image of themselves. They were what they were. There was innocence, beauty.

The Hebrews called this idea *shalom*. Think of a symphony with all the instruments playing their part. It was beautiful, rhythmic. It stirred the senses and the affection. It's called *shalom*, and this is how God created the world to function. No shame. No guilt. Guilt is the breaking of a law. Shame is just brokenness of human spirit.

You can feel shame over all sorts of things. Some things are shameful, but sometimes you can just feel shame because your heart is broken. You can be ashamed of what you drive or you can be ashamed of how you look or you can be ashamed of your friend or you can be ashamed of where you live. Right? But that's not rooted in the breaking of a commandment. That's just the brokenness of our hearts or giving ourselves over to what is shameful.

In this, the Bible says this is *shalom*. This is the world as God created it to be. On top of that, we see before things break, before we get to the world we live in now, even the creative order is wired in such a way that it's perfect. What we see now as beautiful is just a shadow or a shell of what it once was and what it eventually will be again.

We know this because the Bible is going to tell us in Romans 8 that creation groans to be free from the bondage of decay, which means at the beginning, creation somehow did not need to die for more life to spring up in its place. If you're asking me biologically how that happens, I have a great answer for you: no clue. I'm 42. God is infinite. We're not going to see the same way all that much, but I can look to the cross, and I can trust that he is faithful and good.

If we're going to understand now the world we live in... Can we just agree really quickly that doesn't sound a lot like our week? Unison. Purity. Beauty. No relational strife. Even the creative order humming the praises of God. Most of us are going, "Not my week. My wife and I fought thousands of times. The dog chewed up my favorite book. My kid apparently can block out my voice. I've struggled with some anxiety. I've had some fears. I don't know what this is."

That's the world we live in. We live in a world where a guy walks into a nightclub and kills 49 people. That's the world you and I live in. How did we get from Genesis 1 and 2 to where we are now? Well, I'm glad you asked. That was actually the next part of my notes. We have to actually get before Genesis 1 and 2.

I'm going to start talking, and you're going to think, "This sounds a lot like late-night TV, specifically on the Syfy channel," but I would say once again that shows how marked we are by the Enlightenment, how marked we are by modernity that would consider everything a matter of empiricism. "Can I touch it? Can I taste it? Can I feel it? Can I hear it? Can I smell it? If I can't, it doesn't exist." We know that's not true, but any talk of supernatural realities and cosmic powers makes us think more of late-night Syfy than it does cosmic realities.

The Bible tells us there is war in heaven, and an angel named Lucifer and a group of demons jealous of the glory of God leads a battle against God in heaven. They lose, and they're cast out. Now back to our perfect garden. You have Adam and Eve walking in the cool of the garden, naked and unashamed.

Here comes the Serpent, and the Serpent says to Eve, "Did God really say you should not eat of this fruit? Really what God is up to is God doesn't want you to become like him. He doesn't want you to be your own god. So he is telling you not to eat of this because he doesn't want you to be God." Eve takes the bait. Her moron husband is just standing there birdwatching or something. Who knows what he is doing, but he is definitely not paying attention right now because Eve is being lied to. There he is like, "What? I named that. Blue jay."

Then she eats of the fruit, hands it to him. He eats of it. The fruit is not magical. This is about obedience and the joy that comes in obedience. At that, the shalom fractures, and the symphony and beauty and rhythm of God's created order spins off into chaos. In fact, relational harmony fractures in a moment. The second they eat the fruit, the Bible says they realize they were naked, and they ran and hid. What a heartbreaking passage of Scripture. For the first time, shame takes hold of the human heart. What did they do? They ran and hid, and man has been running and hiding ever since.

They hear the Lord walking in the garden, and they're anxious about that. They hide, the most futile game of hide-and-go-seek in the history of mankind. You're just not going to hide from an all-knowing God. It's like little kids when they lie on the floor and think, "I can't see them because my

eyes are closed, so they can't see me." You're like, "You're in the middle of the floor, bud. I'm standing over you right now."

Adam and Eve go and hide, and God finds them, because God finds us. Then in that moment, there's this weird act of compassion despite the fact that Adam and Eve had sided with the Enemy and had foregone their allegiance to the creator God who created this beautiful symphony of enjoyment and praise and worship. They instead joined the rebellion.

God made them clothes. Isn't that a strange moment? You're betrayed by the apex of your creative order. Man and woman alone, made in the image of God, viceroys, stewards of your creation, sided with your enemy. They feel naked, they feel ashamed, and God made them clothes. Now God's response to his creation siding with the Enemy wasn't...

Now hear this. Redeem and reconcile all things to himself. That's God's big play. The most infinitely powerful thing in the universe does not set out to now destroy and annihilate his creation that joined his enemy but rather to seek and save and redeem them. Any talk of God being a warrior must be plugged into that narrative, because that is the story of the Bible.

When we talk about God being a warrior, I'm going to talk... This grid I'm using is... A man by the name of Tremper Longman is a historical, biblical researcher, PhD. Just hear "smarter than me." He is much, much, much smarter than I am. He is going to divide God's warring into five cosmic stages. I mean, doesn't even that sentence sound like the Syfy network? "Five cosmic stages." It sounds like somebody should be doing the intro of a trailer. "God's five cosmic stages." Right?

Here's what they are. We'll just outline them, and I'll try to explain why this is such good news and not bad news. Stage one is God fights for Israel. Then what Longman is going to do is he is going to look at Exodus, the conquest of Canaan, and then the Davidic kingdom as this stage of God warring. Let's think about it.

The people of God are enslaved in Egypt. They're enslaved. They are oppressed, and God begins to war to free his people. In fact, we'll get into this a lot in the fall when we're walking through the book of Exodus, but every plague God pours out on Egypt corresponds with an Egyptian god. God is actively warring, destroying, killing false gods and idolatrous worship that enslave, chain, and break mankind's potential to be all he designed them to be in worship, joy, and gladness.

The Egyptians worshiped the Nile, so he turned the Nile to blood. They worshiped cattle, so God killed the livestock. They worshiped the god of the crops, so God sent locusts to devour the crops. They worshiped the sun god Ra. If you even watch movies, you would know that one. Yet God then blacks out the sky and makes it pitch black.

This is what makes the people of God so insufferable when they get into the wilderness and immediately form a golden calf to worship. Had God not already flexed his might over that false, non-existent god? Well, he absolutely had. This is God making war.

Now if we're looking at them being delivered out of slavery, really if you are familiar with any of kind of the new atheism or kind of the arguments of those who refuse to kind of enter into dialogue about Christianity, really kind of the ace of spades that will get played over and over again is the conquest of Canaan.

They'll be like, "Oh, your God is a maniac. He is a genocidal maniac. He kills women and children and slaughters whole people groups. I can't believe you would worship that God." In fact, I'll let Richard Dawkins say it. He says it better than I can. This is from his book *The God Delusion*. "The Bible is a blueprint of in-group morality, complete with instructions for genocide, enslavement of out-groups, and world domination."

Now a couple of things. I think Richard Dawkins was a brilliant intellect. I would also probably like to argue that I'm not sure he ever read the Bible. Now I am fully convinced he has pulled some texts out of the Bible, but I'm not quite sure he actually read the Bible. Here's why. In all of his writings, he tends to favor pulling these two verses out of Joshua, this one verse out of Exodus, and ignoring the narrative in which those verses find themselves.

What he does is he goes to June 6, 1944, and he finds a twenty-something-year-old storming the beach at Normandy, killing everything that's in front of him, and going, "See? He is a monster. This kid is a monster," when that's not what's happening at all. That's not what's happening at all! In fact, the long-suffering patience of God is stunning when it comes to the Canaanites.

This July (next month), the United States will turn 240 years old. It should be a pretty epic party (240), right? I mean, that's a big year. That's not like your fortieth or fiftieth. That's your 240th. We have that coming next month. Celebrate well.

The Bible tells us God gave the Canaanites 400 years to repent. Repent of what? The type of idolatrous worship where babies were sacrificed to gods, where elderly were killed because they lacked no good purpose in society, where anyone with any deformity was put to death. The idea of being a mountain baby... They would look and see if there was any defect and then fling you off of a cliff down into your death.

For 400 years, overtures are made toward the people of the Canaanite lands to repent of this idolatry, to disavow their allegiance to what's called the dominion of darkness and line up with the good graces of God, and they refused. This is stage one of God's warfare.

Stage two. This is interesting to note. God then begins to fight *against* Israel in judgment. Stage one, he fights *for* Israel. Stage two, he fights *against* Israel. What happens is as Israel kind of gets into the Promised Land, they actually begin to worship these pagan gods. They take on the rituals of those who God had sought to destroy beforehand. They began to do the same things these people judged by God were going to do. His own people betray him.

I mean, think of how foolish the people of God are. God destroys livestock in Egypt to show his power over the non-existent idol of the livestock god. What happens as soon as they get into the Promised Land? "We don't know what to do. Make a golden calf so we can worship it." Not the sharpest knives in the drawer. We are among them, brothers and sisters.

Then God sends prophets and pleads with the people to return to the good design of God's "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" for human flourishing, for joy, for justice to return. The Bible is clear that the people of God were stiff-necked people. They refused, so God warred against them. That takes us to stage three.

Again, if you know your Bible, this is the exile and the latter prophets who then, like Jeremiah, declare, "Listen, if we do not repent, God is going to scatter us across the world. We will no longer have a place of our own. We will be scattered." Sure enough, if you know your Bible, the people of God are scattered throughout the ancient world.

In fact, what we see when Jesus comes and walks the earth is the people of Israel are spread across the Roman Empire. There are little communities of faith that are in almost every major city and in almost every major town in the ancient world. This is why when the apostle Paul, who hated Jesus, actually tried to stomp out and kill Christians and then became a Christian himself actually went to

those synagogues first to share the gospel. This is all a part of God warring against Israel and dispersing them out of the Promised Land across all of the known world.

That brings us to stage four. We're going to spend a lot of time in stage four. Stage four of God's warfare, Jesus comes as the divine deliverer, and he defeats the power of evil, Satan, and death. Let me kind of talk about how this works here. All right? First John, chapter 5, verse 4. It says, **"For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith."**

This is an interesting statement coming from John. John is saying, "Anyone born of God has overcome the world." What does that mean, "overcome the world"? Well, certainly not overcome the world in some sort of military way. Certainly it isn't overcome the world in some sort of violent way. This certainly does not look like stage one, stage two, or stage three. This is altogether different.

Christ has entered the scene. He has lived. He has died. He has resurrected, and now as men and women come to know and put their faith in Christ, they are set free, not from the brokenness of this world but through the bondage of sin, death, and decay. What it means to be the people of God is not that we do not sin but that we are freed from it. Are you tracking with me? The people of God are not perfect people. Do you know any of them? Are you one? Do you know yourself?

Well, you're not perfect. I'm not. There are none. There's a perfect Savior, not any perfect church folk. We'll talk more about that in a second. At the coming of Christ now, warfare looks different. We have overcome the world because the power of Satan, sin, and death no longer holds anchor in our hearts, and that's how the victory is won.

You get a greater sense of this when the Bible starts talking about cosmic realities. Again, we're children of the Enlightenment. Cosmic realities are hard for us. It's not hard for us for watching *The Matrix*. We love that nonsense on *The Matrix*, but if we actually think about the world working that way, then all of a sudden we're filled with skepticism.

Colossians, chapter 2, starting in verse 13. He is very much going to talk about personal salvation at the beginning of this. I think you'll be able to relate to that if you're a Christian. If you're not a Christian, this is what we mean by personal salvation. Colossians 2, starting in verse 13. You can plug your name in here if you would like. I'll plug mine in as I read.

"And [Matt Chandler], who [was] dead in [his] trespasses and the uncircumcision of [his] flesh [of my heart], God made [me] alive together with him, having forgiven [Matt Chandler] all [his] trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against [Matt] with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."

So all I am guilty of is nailed to the cross of Christ with Jesus Christ. That's great news. That's personal salvation. In that text we read about how God saved me and redeemed me. We read about in this text what David was talking about in Psalm 40 and then Bono would sing about later on the U2 album with the song "40" that, "God heard my cry. He lifted me out of the muck and the mire, and he set my feet on a rock. He put a hymn of praise in my mouth, a hymn of praise to my God."

That's personal salvation, but yet there's something that happens here also. Look at verse 15. In this, **"He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."** Now what rulers and authorities are put to open shame when we become Christians? It's not a governmental authority. It's not a parental authority. What authority is it that's put to open shame when we become Christians? Well, I mean, he is talking about cosmic realities here. He is talking about Satan and demons and spiritual powers.

Think about it. Here's what being laid open to shame means. We are born broken, born with bents that are moving us far from God, not moving us toward God. Nobody is born going, "Oh, I'm going to be fully submissive to the God of the Bible." Nobody is born that way. We're all born with bents toward rebellion, every one of us. David said, **"...I was brought forth in iniquity..."**

If you've been around kids, you know it's not always environment. I can tell you this. I have never bit my wife or another human being to get what I want. Ever! My children did not learn that by watching Lauren and I get in arguments. "Give me the remote, boo. Give me the remote." I mean, that did not happen. They did not watch Lauren and I and go, "That's how you do it." No, no, no. It's just their little hearts are evil. Their little hearts are broken. They need to be redeemed.

If you're going, "That's not the way my child acts. My child is, 'Yes, Father. Sure, Mother,'" then I'd keep your eye on that kid even more. Maybe lock your door at night. That stuff that's in like *Paranormal Activity* right there. Here we are talking about demons. Anyway, in the end, what's been disarmed and what's been laid to open shame is that in our flesh, drawn by demonic powers and forces, we give ourselves over to all sorts of wicked and depraved things.

Then when we are saved and baptized, we testify to Christ's power over those things, and in that, God then triumphs over Satan in a very public way. One of the things I love about The Village Church is historically we've just been a really grimy place, right? I use these illustrations all the time. We've had a guy in the bathroom with a needle stuck in his arm and had to dial 9-1-1.

Our baptism services are always almost NC-17. You know, sometimes I want to get up before and go, "Okay, you probably want to take your kids out for these services unless you want to try to explain why swinging is a bad thing and really kind of what happens when drugs and other types of wicked things rule and reign over the hearts of men."

Well, what happens when somebody gets in the water and says, "I cheated on my spouse"? What happens when they get in the water and say, "I gave myself over to drunkenness and licentiousness"? When they say those things to 1,500 strangers, what they're saying to all is that the love of Christ triumphs over the sin.

Then what Satan meant for evil and destruction, what our flesh meant to destroy us is now a treasure and a trophy of the grace of God. It's why Celebration Service is such a big thing here, because in it, we're reminded that God's triumph over sin and death in Christ is complete. There is no sin with more power than the cross of Christ. There is no one who has gone too far. You can't outsin the grace of God.

That's what this is all about: Satan and demons thinking they're getting the best of a situation, only to have it flipped on its head to show Christ triumph over it all. Then I want to show you chapter 3, verses 8 through 10, because I think it speaks to the truth of the church in a way that's helpful. Ephesians 3, starting in verse 8.

"To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles [that's us] the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things..." Look at verse 10. **"...so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known..."**

Now I want to stop there. If you've ever really just kind of looked up at the church, I'm going to be honest. This looks like a really bad plan. All right? If I'm looking at the evil and brokenness of the world, if I'm looking at all the heinous, horrific, dark... If I'm looking at poverty, if I'm looking at sex

trafficking, if I'm looking at a billion just evil, wicked, grotesque, dark things and then I look up at us...?

I mean, seriously. Look around the room for a second. Go ahead! Don't stare at one person in particular, but just look around the room. *This* is God's big plan to push back that? *This*? I just think we need to probably go back to the whiteboard on this. Just looking around, I'm just concerned this probably isn't the wisest plan, and yet the wisdom of God is not being revealed to human eyes but rather to something else.

Let's look back at verse 10. "**...so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.**" What God is doing in the church, what God is doing in Christians and Christians in covenant community with one another, is revealing his wisdom not just to mankind, because we might look really foolish to mankind, but to spiritual powers and authorities and rulers.

One of my favorite authors, C.S. Lewis, was actually a professor at Oxford and Cambridge. Medieval literature was kind of his specialty. He wrote a book called *The Screwtape Letters*. In *The Screwtape Letters*, what he is doing is he is just brilliant with storytelling. The whole book is about an older demon discipling a younger demon named Wormwood on how to deceive this man who is his client.

Wormwood allows his client to become a Christian, so the older demon in counseling Wormwood says something like, "Here's what you need to do. When he is at church (not the church as we see it arrayed in splendor, mighty as an army with a banner across time and space), draw his attention to the woman who sings off-key. Draw his attention to the frumpy man with squeaky shoes. Draw his attention to..." He starts to list out these things that are in every church always everywhere.

He says in seeing these absurdities, he will surely consider that all of this is foolishness. Lewis was diving into this reality that the church as it's seen in the heavenlies reveals the bankruptcy and futility of Satan's plans to muddy and destroy, and the victory already belongs to Christ. The gain then is make people blind to cosmic realities, right? The Enlightenment certainly helps with that. "Brains on a stick. None of this really exists. This sounds absurd. There's no cosmic reality. There's no red pill/blue pill. This is nonsense! It would make a great action movie, but it's nonsense."

This is how we've been trained. This is the air we breathe, and yet the Bible is telling us the manifold wisdom of God is made visible in the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. Since what we see in these texts is, in Christ, Satan vanquished and conquered and the triumph of Christ made sure in his people, how then are we to live?

Here we are still in stage four, and here's what this means. Stage four doesn't look anything like stages one through three. In fact, now the weapons of warfare are compassion, mercy, faithful presence. We have been illuminated by the Holy Spirit to understand Christ is king. Now we live intentional lives on purpose, pushing back the darkness where we are.

Now that's not overwhelmingly complex. We're going to talk about this at length next week. You've been uniquely wired and uniquely placed by God for these purposes. You have a bent. You had natural gifting when you were born. You didn't work at it. It was just there, raw material there. I was born allergic to math but can remember almost everything I read. I didn't learn to do that. I could just do it.

Some of you were drawn toward the arts. Others of you, business. You just see it. Others of you are just natural athletes. You can talk about how hard you work. You came out of the womb just better than us. All right? Get over yourself. The same thing is true if you made straight A's. You're like that. You're that kid who was like, "Oh man, that test crushed me," and you got 106% on it. We know who you are. You don't have to read anything. You just touch the book, and you become instantly smarter than everyone.

God wired you those ways, and then he has placed you where he has placed you for this reason, because we're caught up in this. This is the only story there is! In our neighborhoods, in our workplaces, wherever we find ourselves, we find ourselves in this great cosmic battle, pushing back what's dark with truth and life and love and hospitality and good food and good wine and loving conversation and rich compassion, mourning with those who mourn, celebrating with those who celebrate, and being the people of God where we are.

This should be the eradication of boredom to all who claim the name of Jesus Christ, because there's eternal significance attached to everything we're doing. But that's not how most of us think about Christianity. We think about Christianity as kind of navel-gazing. "I wish I could stop doing these things." I'm just telling you the least sexy version of Christianity in the universe is the one that says, "Just be a better person."

There's no mission behind that, no passion behind that, no shaping force behind that. If anything, it makes you self-absorbed. There's nothing uglier than self-absorption and narcissism. I think because we're not dialed in to these realities... C.S. Lewis said something else about that. If you're thinking maybe I have a thing for Lewis, you might be on to something. Lewis also said this: "It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses..."

Now what does he mean by that? We're not Mormons. We don't believe (nor did Lewis believe) we become gods but rather that we were adopted as sons and daughters of God. There is one God. We will not be gods, but we will reign, rule, alongside of God, redeemed by the blood of Christ forever. What does Lewis mean? Well, then he defines it.

"...to remember that the dullest, most uninteresting person you can talk to..." Anybody know a guy like that? Listen to what he says. "...may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or the other of these destinations."

Here's Lewis' argument. You and I have been trained by the air we breathe to not see people...legitimate, eternal people...sitting in front of us. The next line of this quote says, "You have never talked to a mere mortal." Everyone you know is eternal. You've never met a mere mortal. Countries are mortal, businesses are mortal, but you have never met a mere mortal.

Everyone you know is eternal, and Lewis' argument is in eternity they will be something so beautiful and lovely that if you saw it right now, you'd be tempted to worship it. I think he is referencing 1 Corinthians 15 there and the resurrected body. Or they'll be so grotesque, perverted, and distorted that it would be the stuff of nightmares. I think one of the reasons we haven't embraced kind of being a people with compassion and grace that push back the darkness is because we have lost sight of the bigger picture here.

We've lost sight of the bigger picture, and that is the barista who gets you coffee, the waiter who brings your meal and takes your order, the neighbor who lives beside you, the friend you work with...all are not mere mortals. God has placed you there to be a herald of the good news. If you're not a Christian and you're here and you're like, "Oh, this whole God as a warrior thing, man, you're making me feel condemned." No, no, no. Stage four is not about condemnation.

In fact, the Bible is really clear. John 3:17 says Christ has come into the world not to condemn the world but to save the world from condemnation. Christ coming into the world as a warrior was not about condemning you but destroying the Enemy so you might be saved. You can't go, "Oh, he is so mean. Jesus is so mean." No, no, no. Christ has come to save, to rescue from condemnation, not to condemn.

That's what we're celebrating as the people of God. We have been rescued and ransomed. That's the story of the Bible. He kicked open the door and dragged us out. He placed our feet on the rock. This is what we're celebrating. This is the good news of the gospel. No, I'm not saying you're like, "Hey, can I get a large, black coffee? By the way, I brought you a Bible. Why don't you open that up to Romans 1? Let's talk really quickly." That's not what I'm talking about.

I think there are times where just your relationship with someone built over time lends itself to that, or if you be so bold, you can start spiritual conversations cold just like that. But I think it means more that our dinner tables are open, and we do life genuinely and deeply with people who don't believe what we believe. We love well, and we have compassionate conversations. We seek to understand, and we seek to lay before people what is good, right, and beautiful about the God of the Bible.

It means we never do drive-by guiltings or say really foolish things online that could isolate or spark up anger for controversy sake. This was not the way of Jesus Christ. "Well, he rebuked the Pharisees." Bro, the Pharisee is us. How did he treat the woman caught in adultery? Compassion. How did he treat the woman at the well? Compassion. Zacchaeus, the wee little man. Did he not go to dinner at his house that day? Yeah, it's with compassion, empathy, grace, patience, genuine friendship that darkness is pushed back.

If you're not a believer, we are in this stage four of warfare where Christ is pushing back with his people darkness. If someone is in your ear talking to you about Jesus Christ, that is an act of cosmic violence but earthly love. Stage four will only last so long, so we live intentional lives until stage five. In stage five, Jesus returns to fight the final battle against his enemies, both spiritual and physical. Let me read Revelation 19:11 through 16.

"Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire,

and on his head are many diadems [that's many crowns], and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.

And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."

This is a far cry from 6-pound, 3-ounce baby Jesus. This is Jesus in a robe dipped in blood with a tattoo on his thigh that says, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." The day of stage four warfare which has lasted for millennia of God's patience and mercy seeking to save and ransom, finding many who go forget your salvation, forget your offer to remove all condemnation, we pick, we choose, our idols. We choose the other side.

He will then, the day of mercy, dry it up, and the Bible says the sky cracks open, and the return of Christ commences. It's not a long battle. Hollywood would like us to believe it's a long battle. You know, like the priest shows up. "The power of Christ compels you!" Everybody knows that guy is going to die. That poor priest (the first one who shows up). You can just check it. I don't know how much that guy gets paid for his acting job, but he is there for 10 minutes, and then he is dead.

In the final scene of this great war, Jesus shows up and says, "I am," and the Bible says it's over forever. Then we return to what we read in Genesis 1 and 2. In fact, the prophet Isaiah says the deserts bloom with roses, the mountaintops produce sweet wine, and the lamb and the wolf lay down together. They dine together. It's creation remade.

For the earth to be Death Starred, like many Christians, think means Christ would concede to Satan and give Satan victory. That is not what happens here. Rather all things are remade to the fullness of their glory. Now Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "Being a Christian is less about cautiously avoiding sin than about courageously and actively doing God's will." What I want you caught up in is this is what your life is caught up in. Everything about your life is inside this story. This is the story.

It doesn't matter what you do. If you're a welder or a businesswoman or a doctor or a teacher or a garbage man, it just doesn't matter. This is the story you and I are fitting into, and every man and

woman on earth will bring glory to this God. You don't get to choose whether or not you're going to bring glory to this God. You will bring glory to this God by being an object of his grace, a trophy of his grace, putting to open shame the Enemy, or you'll be an object of his just, right wrath.

Even one who would shake his fist at heaven and go, "I hate you" is still going to bring glory to God. That's what makes this God so terrifying. This is what makes him not Tinker Bell but something altogether ferocious. Loving? Yes. Gracious? Yes. Merciful? Yes. Long-suffering? Absolutely. Tinker Bell? Not at all. Not at all.

Now again, if you're not a Christian, here's what I desire for you to hear me say. My hope even in preaching this (because I know how it strikes modern sensibilities) is not to give you ammo to doubt or hate the God of the Bible but for you to hear that the Lord has made war on your behalf to ransom and rescue you from sin and death and idolatry. God's patience is stunning if you think about the belittlement of his name, the mocking and disordering of his creation, the questioning of his character.

I point out to those who are here all the time, a million planes will take off and land (more than that) today. Millions of planes will take off and land today, and nobody is going to go, "Praise Jesus, this plane landed" unless you freak out flying, and then you'll be the one who is like, "Okay, praise Jesus. The plane landed." But that's not like a legitimate, "Isn't God good?" But let one fall out of the sky, and "How cruel!" and, "Where was God?"

If we use early this morning as an illustration, people club all the time, and no one shows up and shoots it up, but God gets no credit for sustained peace. But let one incident break out and watch them come out mocking, belittling, questioning. God's response is long-suffering, patience, sending his people to be salt and light, to herald the good news to all who will hear. This is what you're caught up in. This is really what's behind your life. To embrace it and live in it I think is the greatest joy we can know.

As a Christian, to reject it turns us into navel-gazing moralists. It's just a terrible way to live life. Embracing it means we're marked by compassion, empathy, and love, and we're salt and light whatever domain we're in, placed there by the good pleasure of God for the glory of God to be seen. It's a good use of our lives. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for these men and women, an opportunity just to stand... I know so much of what we've talked about today is difficult. It makes other questions kind of pop up in our heads, but I pray that just for a moment, Father, we might consider whether these things are true. If there is someone even in here now that they can just feel in their soul just a blocking, just, "I'm *not* going to consider this; I'm *not* going to hear this," I just pray even now Holy Spirit of God, you would make them aware they're doing that right now.

It wouldn't be below the surface, but they would become aware that they refuse to consider, they refuse to think. I pray for my friends who aren't Christians that they would hear this is good news. I pray for my brothers and sisters who are Christians that they would grow bold in their faith knowing the war is won and they would fight their battles with grace, compassion, hospitality, genuine friendship, and long-suffering love and patience. Help us. We need you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.