

To the Saints of God at Topeka, Kansas

February 8, 2015

“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” (2 John 1:10-11).

I recently saw a YouTube video taken by someone who purports to believe as we believe and clearly wants to be seen as like us if not one of us. I saw something across many of his videos that was quite surprising and rather shocking, frankly. In many of his discussions with people on the street, outside American whore houses masquerading as churches, he concludes his session with them by saying “God bless you”.

Mind you, he says a lot of other good things. Maybe not the way I’d say them, or maybe some of you would say them, but good things nonetheless. He takes on Catholic idolatry and Mormon idolatry and others fairly well. But he frequently ends his discourse with these souls with the equivalent to bidding them God speed. He will pronounce God’s blessing upon them as they depart.

Now this might be seen by some as just politeness, not wishing to rail against anyone or seem contentious, making sure people know he’s not out looking for a fight or presenting any kind of threat to them. I get that desire, and certainly that thinking has a place with us as we stand on these streets and wish to peacefully preach. The blessings of God ought not to be misused and thrown to the wind like some kind of cheap perfume to be lavishly laced upon any and all passers-by.

Now to be clear from the outset, this isn’t about this particular individual specifically. I don’t really know what’s ultimately up with this guy, and his disposition isn’t the point of this sermon. The outrage I feel over the cavalier way so many of these so-called Christians use the phrase “God bless you” isn’t just directed at this one soul. I only give you that context to understand what prompted this sermon and what I want you to feel coming out of this.

There are a number of things that vex me about this issuing of God's blessings on unrepentant sinners, but today I will focus on one.

The fundamental reason I cringe at this and feel like despite all his other good words this soul is not one of God's people is simple.

We are at war.

There are a lot of elements of war, a lot of characteristics, a lot of attributes, a lot of "do's and don't's". One of the most basic and fundamental of those elements is that when you're at war, you don't fraternize or wish well on the enemy or his agents. God's blessings are reserved for His people, and while in the process of blessing His people, the rest of mankind may and frequently does benefit, they are not to be taken so lightly that you would wish them upon your enemy. Moreover, John tells us plainly that to wish a person God *speed* is to partake in their sins. What would possess you then to wish on the enemy God's full *blessings*?

I'm not here today to convince you, *per se*, that we are at war. If you don't think that Christ's people, His elect chosen remnant are at war, then you're sitting in the wrong place and would do well to evaluate why you are even sitting in the pew or listening to this sermon, because as God's word attests, the war's going to get worse before it gets better. There will be casualties, there will be those who abandon their posts, there will be those who will betray us, and they will be of our own houses. In the days of Noah and Lot the war was grievous and the enemy surrounded their homes and sought their deaths. We have Christ's warning that we can expect the same. You know the verses! We have lived the reality of this war in one way or another. Many of us bear the literal physical scars of this war, and we certainly all bear the emotional ones, the loved ones we've left behind, the sacrifices we've made in order to wear this uniform and be counted as present at reveille if you will. If you don't think there is a war raging this very second, you've never read the Revelation of Jesus Christ and you should be ashamed of yourself for claiming to be a Christian.

I say again, ***we are at war***, and our war, though fought on a different front, with different tactics, different strategies, and different weapons, is no less real than the war Moses began and Joshua led into Canaan. This isn't our

war, but it is the Lord's, and we are His servants and soldiers in it. Paul instructs Timothy as such

“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

Fighting in this war isn't easy. There are a lot of hardships in it, from the spoiling of our goods, to the losing of jobs, to the physical violence committed against us to the departure of our loved ones from the field, and on and on I could go. But as Paul says, we don't entangle ourselves in the nuances and details of this life, we focus on the war we are engaged in.

This war has been ongoing between the servants of God and Satan and his minions since the beginning, and will continue until the final vanquishing of death and hell with Christ overcoming Satan

“And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Rev. 20:10).

This is not our war, but the Lord's. What's that mean? Essentially, it means we didn't start it, we don't dictate strategy in it, we don't draw the battle lines, and we don't determine what the victory conditions are. This is the war of the Lord, the quarrel of His covenant. Battles in this war happen every day, and those battles are written down in a book

Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the LORD, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon, And at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwelling of Ar, and lieth upon the border of Moab” (Numbers 21:14-15).

This is the only place that this phrase “wars of the LORD” is used in Scripture. It is a unique thing, and these verses are tucked into an interesting little context.

“And when king Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south, heard tell that Israel came by the way of the spies; then he fought against Israel, and took some of them prisoners. And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into

my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities. And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah. And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived. And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in Oboth. And they journeyed from Oboth, and pitched at Ijeabarim, in the wilderness which is before Moab, toward the sunrising. From thence they removed, and pitched in the valley of Zared. From thence they removed, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, which is in the wilderness that cometh out of the coasts of the Amorites: for Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites. Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the LORD, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon, And at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwelling of Ar, and lieth upon the border of Moab. And from thence they went to Beer: that is the well whereof the LORD spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water” (Num 21:1-16)

Look at how that's just kind of tucked in there about the wars of the LORD. They were at Hormah dealing with Arad the Canaanite, they travel south to go around Edom (instead of going straight into Canaan at Hormah, which would have been easy), and start complaining because the way is too hard, which gets them smitten by the fiery serpents sent from the LORD, then they travel on to Oboth and toward Moab and the brooks of Arnon.

Our expositor friends, including Gill, Henry, Barnes, Poole, and others I believe largely miss the boat on this book. They chock it up to some historical context that Moses wrote a book of military tactics for Joshua and instructed him in how to deal with military matters thereby. And then they try to explain the kind of strange insertion of this as a poetic quote from that book, and it being about what the Amorites did in taking land from the Moabites, and Moses is using that to show that the children of Israel didn't disturb the Moabites as God commanded them not to do. I don't think that makes a lick of sense.

There's no mention of battle at the brooks of Arnon here for Moses to have made a reference to. The battle was up at Hormah with Arad. Now certainly there is war with Sihon, but that battle is at Jahaz, not Aroer or on the brooks of the River Arnon; Jahaz is a city south of the river Arnon, but that battle happens later, after the "wherefore". There is battle against Og, King of Bashan, but that is at Edrei, not at Aroer. And what of this "wherefore"? I say this. That the reference is to the battle fought against the rebellion of the children of Israel. It is a notation and a marker of the battle that Moses fought against the sinful impatience and disobedience against God.

Think of it like this – they fought Arad and were handed a great victory after they called on the LORD, they had a session of rebellion and disobedience which Moses fought off with prayer and supplication, and they moved on, wherefore, it is written down in the book of the wars of the LORD how that all went down.

Now I recognize I'm bucking the trend of a lot of guys that are a lot smarter than me, know a ton more Bible than me, and had at their disposal greater historical resources than me, and if any of you object to my explanation here, I'm happy to hear it and discuss it. But to me, with what we have experienced in this life, that contextual insertion doesn't make sense any other way. Moses doesn't wax poetic and just insert stuff at random for reasons of making obscure references or making himself look like a great writer. There's something to see and learn there, and this book must have relevance and meaning to us and God's people in every day and age, otherwise it wouldn't be preserved in Holy Writ for our learning. I don't question that Moses wrote things down, because we have in Exodus 17:14 where he was specifically told to write some things down:

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven”.

So I submit to you that there is a book of remembrance. Mind you, not a literal book that God needs to use to remember the details of things, but as we've said many times before, the metaphor of a book is used to aid in our understanding. This war that we are engaged in throughout our daily lives is recorded for a remembrance and the details are kept such that nothing is missed. And there are a lot of details. Every hard look and hard speech we encounter when we are engaged in these battles, every person who calls us loser, bigot, hypocrite, attributes our motives and words to Satan, and generally issues forth a salvo against this warning we issue at great cost to ourselves is being noted. And when I say battle, it isn't just, and perhaps isn't even primarily about our street ministry. Our war is fought on many fronts – on the streets, in the courts where we get dragged, on the Internet, in the media, from this pulpit, with each other, within ourselves. This war is made up of many daily small battles and sometimes very large battles. And it is all being noted to be brought into account at the Judgment.

“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Rev. 20:12).

This war and our role in it has many characteristics. I'm sure there are others I am not speaking to here that could be written upon exhaustively, but hopefully these few give some view into our role here on earth.

I. We are infused with courage by God to fight in His battles

“Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest” (Joshua 1:7).

Look at what the Lord tells Joshua here specifically. He doesn't tell him to have courage when he's out charging an army of Canaanites and fighting.

He tells him to have courage that he can observe to do according to all the law! It takes courage to obey! Think about that for a second! The Lord God Almighty is telling His servants that He will give them courage to do what is right, and not to follow cunningly devised fables, or to divert to the right hand or to the left from the path they've been shown.

This courage is important because it shows that we aren't just crazed lunatics who don't care about anything, but that we are given this spirit of courage to operate and use every element of this war to show our obedience to God.

II. Our warfare is spiritual (not carnal)

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

This may be one of the most important attributes of our battle and is one of the most difficult for us as humans to maintain. We don't fight with weapons like swords and guns, or try to use the courts to bankrupt our enemies or to silence them. We fight on a spiritual battlefield set in array by our God. We go where the battle must be fought and we fight it on His terms with His words. Refer to my comments recently on the churches being where the front lines of this battle are. That is the place where sin has been brought into a state of acceptance.

III. We bear a standard

“And the children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard, throughout their hosts” (Numbers 1:52).

“Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders” (Isaiah 49:22).

A standard in military terms delivers a message. It is an identifier to the enemy army who they are dealing with as well as a rallying point for allied troops. The legendary golden eagle of the 9th Roman Legion (which, by the way, probably didn't use the eagle) is one of the best known standards in books and movies. The children of Israel used standards to designate where each tribe was to make camp and to keep order in the march.

We bear a standard. We hold forth that ensign of the people in the words of warning we speak to this generation. We hold up these signs as literal standards, but we also hold the standards of God in front of the entire world to see, as a rallying point for the elect of God wherever they may be in the world.

IV. We are an occupation force

“And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come” (Luke 19:13).

“For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come” (Heb 13:14).

This isn't our home, it is a temporary place we are occupying until we take possession of those mansions which have been prepared for us. This is just as much a part of our war as any other piece. We must occupy here and use the resources we are given wisely. Our use of those resources is a testimony and a requirement of our service. We are in this world, but we are not of this world, and our being here, day after day, enduring the grind of being in our workplaces, in our schools, the hatred doled out on us from every corner 24x7 and our refusal to back down away from it is a key part of our daily battle.

V. We keep rank

“All these men of war, that could keep rank, came with a perfect heart to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel: and all the rest also of Israel were of one heart to make David king” (1Ch 12:38).

The idea of keeping rank is very special and unique to the army of God. It is our ability to submit to one another and concede to each other such things as are necessary to be of one accord about things. It isn't always easy to do. If you look at the unique personalities, tendencies and traits of the people in this group, it is a curious and exciting element of our

occupation that we accomplish the things we do. Look around you at any group of people, especially one with as many eyes looking at them as we have. You can't get a band with five people in it to agree on the type of pizza to have for dinner without making a public spectacle out of their disagreement. Here we manage to turn the whole world upside down with a few little words, and we present a unified front to the whole world, not only in name but indeed, too.

VI. There are no gaps in our line

“And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none” (Ezekiel 22:30).

The gaps in the hedge are caused by the sinfulness of man, and the preachers and prophets are supposed to fill in those gaps, warning to repent of those sins and turn to God. We step in and fill in the gaps, and when we are no longer in those gaps, this is what the world can expect

“Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD” (Ezekiel 22:31).

Without us, the wrath of God will be poured out without mixture. This is not a statement of pride or arrogance. This is our job. To stand in the gaps and warn, so that all of the people of God, His sheep will be called forth. Without the gaps being filled, the Captain of the Host will ride through and destroy, and utterly. Maintaining the gaps is one of our battles.

Additionally, in our own battle line, we have no gaps. As we are arrayed in battle, the various skills, personalities, abilities, and gifts that we have been given from our God insure that there are no gaps in the line. Everything we need for battle is there in each of us precisely as we need it.

We are an army, friends, and we must maintain our discipline, our focus on our orders and not lose our energy for the fight. We must not succumb to the tendency and pressure of this world to soften up the message or divert from the path we have been set on.

To bring this back around to what got me thinking on these things, our warfare necessitates that we aren't out to make friends. We aren't out to actively make enemies, but we are certainly not out to win friends. The danger of saying things like "God bless you" to these people we do war with is that we become partakers in their sins. These are not innocent words. "God bless you" and "God speed" have value and weight. There's a big difference between being polite to people and betraying our cause, and we must take care not to cross that line.

My intention over the next sermon or two is to narrow this down further and speak to the armor that has been provided us by our Captain, and expound Ephesians 6, Lord willing. I hope this has been a good start and helpful to you.

We will now take the Lord's Supper.