

The Supremacy of Christ in an Age of Terror

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- [0 : 00] Let's pray together. Father, some have lived in 98 and then entered into your presence after decades of engagement in worship and service at this church.
- And some are sitting in this room having served here and loved you here for six, seven decades. And others are off the street, curious perhaps, this morning.
- And so wherever on the continuum of spiritual awareness and wakefulness, I pray that you would come and apply your word.
- There is no way that any human being can penetrate the imponderable mysteries of the human heart. But you can.
- It is no difficulty for you to go to the bottom of the soul and minister. And you can do it through Balaam's ass.
- [1 : 23] And you can do it from any text in Scripture. And I pray, O God, that you would be merciful now to do it through this text and this preacher.
- Glorify your Son. Save sinners. Strengthen saints. Embolden your people. Bring comfort. Bring encouragement. Bring guidance. Prince. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. A little over a week ago on June 2nd in Toronto, they arrested 17 suspects of terror.
- The New York Times reported day before yesterday a link of one of those men with a cell in London. On that very same day, one man was shot in London and another arrested in suspicions of terrorism.
- And then, of course, on Wednesday, the whole world was aware of Zargawi's demise.
- [2 : 46] And yesterday, another one of those horrific web portrayals went up of the live beheading, this time of three Shiite death squad members by their own countrymen.
- And I only mention these things to underline the obvious, namely that we are not long in our minds without thinking about these things.
- America has had her 9-11 and Britain has had her 7-7. And you'd have to really have your head in the sand not to wonder whether St. George's Tron is well positioned to make a statement in Glasgow if it went up in smoke or some such thought as that.
- So, as I have reflected over these years and a few weeks ago, months ago now I guess, in the United States, what I might preach on and talk about in these days here and then in the last days pondering, I thought, I want to talk about the supremacy of Christ in an age of terror.
- And if you have your Bibles handy, I hope that you will take them again and go to that text that William read and you'll see, probably without any great effort, why I chose it.
- [4 : 26] But let me direct you to the verses I have in mind and then explain to you what I'm going to do with them. This is a prayer. It's an amazing prayer.
- Would that more prayers ascended like this in our churches. Verse 25, those praying find themselves lifting their voice in the recitation of Psalm 2.

Why did the Gentiles, the nations, rage? The peoples plot a vain thing. They plot it in vain. It's a very important observation.

Well, they plotted. The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His anointed.

Let me put in a parenthesis here. Britain and the United States are not the Lord's anointed. That's not the application.

[5 : 29] Okay? Let's get that real clear at the outset. Then, in verse 27, comes a supporting phrase.

You see that little word for there. And what it's supporting is the statement that all the rage of the Gentiles and all the plottings against the Lord and against His anointed are vain.

Why? For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, there's the anointed, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles, the peoples of Israel, to do, this is why it's in vain, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

It is in vain for the nations to rage against the Lord's anointed and to plot against Him, because in the end they find themselves only doing God's will.

That's the argument of this prayer. For truly it did happen in this city. Herod came against Him. Pilate came against Him.

[7 : 04] Gentiles came against Him. Israel came against Him. And what did they do? What God planned. So I'm going to talk about the supremacy of Christ in an age of terror.

The rule of God in an age of terror. Remember, Christ is supreme over all the plottings of the world, whether they are against a nation, against the church.

So, this message is an extended reflection upon that implication.

Namely, whenever the nations rage, whenever people plot something anywhere in the world, against anybody in the world, all they do is fulfill what God had predestined to take place.

And my prayer is that this is going to have a double effect. praying in two directions, at two levels of your life.

[8 : 25] One is at the mental, doctrinal, theological level that you would find yourself in a fresh way embracing intellectually and mentally this truth so that there would be fiber in the oak tree of your faith when the terror strikes your house.

Which it will. Sooner or later, there will be a funeral. There will be a diagnosis. There will be a child. Astray.

Sooner or later, it will come and I long that there be fiber in the tree so that when the wind blows on it, the mind knows what truth to lay hold on.

Oh, I wish for every young mother, for example, like those I have in my mind's eye in Bethlehem with their deeply retarded children and their lame babies in the funerals where they lay them down in the grave in little white boxes about that long.

I long for every father and every mother to stand where I have seen so many stand with ears running down their faces saying, the Lord raise and He is good to me.

[9 : 54] That's what I long for. And there's another level. You thought that might have been both, but it really isn't. At another level, I long for there to be the experience of everybody in this room of what Paul says in a little phrase in 2 Corinthians 6, verse 10, one of my most cherished phrases in the Bible.

He was itemizing his sufferings, his afflictions, the terrors brought against him, and he said, we are sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.

I love that phrase. Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. So, my double goal, my two-pronged aim in reflecting on the supremacy of Christ in an age of terror is that the theological, doctrinal, massive, rock-solid truth would make you strong, your mind, so you're not blown around by alternative explanations of what's going on in your pain.

And I pray that at the deep, emotional level, you would always say, I am sorrowful, but always rejoicing.

And of course, they go hand in hand. It is because there is terror and he is supreme that there can be sorrow and always rejoicing.

[11 : 39] Those are layered truths, one at the deep heart level and one at the theological, doctrinal level. So, that's where we are going.

Now, here's the way I would like to try to do it. I want to step back from the New Testament and the Old Testament and take all of the Bible in my arms and from the Bible give four answers to the question, why is there such a troubled and terrorized world as this?

Why does it exist? Why is it there? Why is there a world like this? And I want to begin by giving two answers that are wrong and say, that's not the reason.

And then four answers that I believe are biblical and true. Number one wrong answer. The reason this terrorized and troubled world exists is not because God has lost control.

There are few things clearer in the Bible than this. I'll just mention a few pointers. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?

[13 : 11] And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. Now that was Jesus' way of talking about molecules.

Today, if He wanted to grope for the smallest little most insignificant thing, He might say, there are no maverick molecules. Those folks didn't know anything about molecules, so He chose somewhere in a deep, dark jungle, somewhere in the world, there's a little bird who just fell off a limb and died.

That did not happen apart from your Father. Even the winds and sea obey Him. Matthew 8, 27. The first text was Matthew 10, 29.

Tsunami. Hurricane. Hurricane. Even the winds and the seas obey Him. Proverbs 16, 33.

The lot is cast in the lap. The dice are rolled on the table. And every decision is from the Lord in Las Vegas. Proverbs 21, 1.

[14 : 31] The king's heart is like a stream of water. Any king, he directs it wherever he wills. The king's heart is like water in the hands of the Lord.

Lamentations 3, 37. Does disaster befall a city unless the Lord has done it? That's Jerusalem raped by Babylon.

Women eating their children. Amos 3, 6. That was Amos 3, 6.

Lamentations 3, 37. Who has spoken? And it came to pass unless the Lord has commanded it. Mark 1, 27. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey Him.

You know, God's greatest competitor in the universe is Satan. And the whole story of Jesus is to show us they obey when He speaks.

[15 : 46] Go out. Go into those pigs. Leave her. They never have any choice when Jesus speaks. Satan is not ultimate.

God is ultimate. He's on a leash. God may let it be very long, but any time He pleases, Satan stops.

That's the point of the book of Job. Isaiah 46, 9. Isaiah 46, 9. I am God and there is no other. I am God and there is none like Me.

Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, My counsel will stand and I will accomplish all My purpose, says the Lord.

God has lost control. That's the first wrong answer.

[16 : 49] Second wrong answer. This world exists terrorized and troubled like it is because God is evil. 1 John 1, 5.

This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaimed to you, that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.

Psalms 25, 8. God is good and upright. Isaiah 6, 3. The angels never cease to cry, with their wings closing their face and their feet.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord. Thrice holy, pure, unstained.

The Bible has given us an explanation. It's given us words of how to say God ordains that there be evil without being evil.

[18 : 05] The Bible has given us words how to say that. Those are my words. That God ordains that there be evil without Himself being evil.

And the words are Genesis 50, verse 20. And you all have heard of them, haven't you? Joseph said to his brothers who had so grievously sinned against him, lying about him, throwing him in a pit, selling him into slavery, he says to them, you meant it for evil, but God meant it for God.

your sin against me was included in God's purpose for you to be saved, indeed for a Redeemer to come through you.

I love that verse. It is God's way of giving us an understanding of a world like this. You meant it for evil, God meant it for good.

The second wrong answer to why there's a world like this is God is not good. Now here are the four, and they're not the only ones, that have become important to me in recent years.

[19 : 34] Why then is there a world like this? Number one, the reason there's a terrorized and troubled world like this is because God planned a history of redemption and then permitted sin to enter the world through our first parents, Adam and Eve.

Now that's a very astonishing statement. God planned a history of redemption before there was anything that needed to be redeemed from and then permitted sin from which he planned to redeem us to enter the world.

So the first answer is God planned a redemption from sin. Now here's the key verse.

This is 2 Timothy 1 9. Amazing. God saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.

And breath sake. He saved you not because of works, but this saving work was in accord with a plan and a grace given in and through the saving work of Jesus before the ages began.

[21 : 29] Grace is God's rescue of us from our sin not by works, but by faith alone on the basis of a redeemer alone to his glory alone planned before the ages.

Indeed, he says, in Christ you received the grace before the ages began. And therefore, he permitted sin to enter the world.

God number two, this terrorized and troubled world exists because God then subjected the world to futility.

That's Romans 8. That is, God put the natural world under a curse so that the physical horrors that we see around us, disease, calamity, would become a vivid picture of how horrible sin is.

In other words, God ordained by subjecting the world to futility, He ordained that these futile events become a loud shout, a trumpet blast, and a sign post about the outrage of moral evil called sin.

[23 : 04] Let me read you the text so you can see this. This is Romans 8, verses 18-21. The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope.

The only person that can subject the world to futility in hope, in hope, is God. He subjected the world to futility not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope, what hope?

That the creation itself would be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. In other words, the futility, the bondage, the decay, the misery, the disease, the death, the calamity is owing to God's disordering of the natural world.

Sin came into the world through Adam and Eve, rebelling against God, refusing to submit to His goodness and authority, finding fruit more satisfying than fellowship with God.

[24 : 35] That is the most horrific outrage in the universe conceivable. But, humans aren't bothered by it.

therefore, God ordains that it would have a display that they are bothered by, namely, pain.

And He subjected the world to futility. And the whole creation collapsed into disorder of all kinds.

It's really interesting that William would talk about the way the arm can heal itself. That would be another sermon to talk about the precious common grace of God in a world where bones are broken, where there can be surgery for cancer, radiation, all manner of well-funded medical care in Britain.

But the bones break and sometimes the children don't just fall down the steps, they fall out of hotel windows. And there's no putting them back together again.

[26 : 00] Why? That moves us. That makes us angry. That makes us weep our eyes out. Not sin. Sin doesn't.

sin. The ultimate outrage of the universe does not emotionally do to us what it should. Nobody experiences sin the way they should.

it is so outrageous what has happened against the God of this universe and happens every moment of every day in this city and for us every hour of our lives.

It is so outrageous that we all deserve to be in hell, suffering eternally, and we are not very bothered by our black balling of the Almighty.

Sin is a vertical reality. People get hurt by it, for sure, but the ultimate outrage of the universe is that God is dishonored by it, God is assaulted by it.

[27 : 05] And that, that vertical dimension, the ultimate outrage of the universe, humanity is not losing sleep over it. And therefore, if you ask, why would he subject this garden that sin has now entered to such futility so that it can have a tsunami break over it, or a hurricane, or bury New Orleans, or have cancer come into the world, or terrible, terrible atrocities.

The answer is, he will blow a trumpet. Perhaps they will hear this, perhaps they will hear this as a testimony to what is really wrong in the world, and it isn't the natural evil.

It's the moral rebellion against the living God. God will show the repugnancy and offensiveness and abominable nature of our ignoring God, distrusting God, demeaning God, giving him less attention than he deserves, blackballing our maker.

He will show us. Third answer. The reason this terrorized and troubled world exists is so that followers of Christ can experience and display that no other pleasure and no other treasure besides God can satisfy their souls.

That the loss of every good thing in this world is meant to reveal Christ himself as more valuable by the way we respond to that loss by being sorrowful yet always rejoicing in him.

[29 : 19] Let me see if I can say that again another way. One of the reasons that the world is so full of loss loss. Loss of health.

Loss of the relationship you hoped you would have. Loss of life. Loss of a loved one. Loss, loss, loss.

One of the reasons that a world like that exists is because it is a golden opportunity to display the infinite value of Jesus.

who is more precious than everything we can lose. And I'll bet if we did a little survey around this room right now as to what texts have ministered that to you most clearly we would all come up with similar texts.

Here's the one I come up with first. I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

[30 : 31] For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and I count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. That's Philippians 3.8.

I count everything my health my relationships my family my job my hope for retirement count them all as loss in order that I might gain Christ who is of supreme all satisfying value to me so that I will be found sorrowful yet always rejoicing.

Last Tuesday was an anniversary for Noel and me. It wasn't a wedding anniversary. It was the 40th anniversary of the day we met a very controversial and memorable day 6666 and so it was 6606 and I could not fail to remember those numbers and so there were flowers and there was a restaurant and it was better than a real anniversary.

I enjoyed it. Two and a half years later we married December 21st 1968 and it was a little tiny church just outside a town you've never heard of Barnesville Georgia and my dad led the service I don't think there were any flowers I can't even remember it was so simple we hung a cross that I made with nails in a velvet pattern on the wall and we opened the Bible and put it on the stand and we said that's our life this word and this cross and then he read the text we chose which goes like this though the fig tree does not blossom nor there be any fruit on the vine the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food though there be no flocks in the stall nor any cattle in the barn yet

I will rejoice in my God and take joy in the God of my salvation it's a good way to start marriage it's a good foundation pestilence starvation calamity and I will rejoice in God my God that's my prayer I want you to have that experience you to know that when there's no food on the table and no sheep in the fold and no herds in the stall and the olive tree has failed it is possible because he is of such supreme worth and supreme value and supreme beauty designed for every crevice of our souls that you can rejoice in him

[34 : 40] I think God has ordained that this kind of world exists because when there's loss he shines more brightly the apostle Paul said in the first chapter of Philippians my eager expectation and hope is that now as always Christ might be magnified in my body whether by life or by death that was his one passion in life I want Jesus to look really good I want him to look supremely valuable in my dying and then he explained how that would be for to me to die is gain because I get Christ Christ is shown to be valuable so that when everything is stripped away and all we have is him we are sorrowful yet always rejoicing finally number four and I'll sum them up for you in a moment we'll finish this is the most important one

I think this terrorized and troubled world exists so that we would so that it would be a place where Jesus Christ could be terrorized a world of terror exists so that there would be a place for Jesus to be terrorized a world of trouble exists so that there would be a place for Jesus to be troubled in his soul a world of pain exists so that the Son of God could feel pain crosses came into existence and torture existed so that the Son of God could be tortured because the Bible says so clearly this was the supreme display of God's love and if it was the supreme display of God's love all the conditions had to be there to show it it wasn't as though there's a better way to show the love of God and God couldn't pull that one off and he had to settle to display his love in a B plus demonstration this is the best way

Romans 5 8 God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us it's the most spectacular sentence in the Bible God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners outrageously rebelling against him God pursues us so hard that he stretches his son on the cross and it was the will of the Lord to bruise him Isaiah 53 is an awesome passage he's borne our iniquities carried our sorrows we esteemed him smitten stricken by God and afflicted which brings us back to Acts 4 27 where this is stated about as clearly as I can imagine it being stated truly in this city in Jerusalem there were gathered together against your holy servant

Jesus whom you anointed both Herod and Pontius Pilate along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel to do what?

To do what your hand and your plan had predestined to take place all the scheming all the flogging all the spitting all the beating with rods all the mockers all the abandonment by his friends all the thorns in his head the nails in his hands and the sword in his side and the weight of our sins on his shoulders according to God's plan so that you could see it graphically let me sum them up the reason this world of terror and trouble exists is because God planned a redemption and then permitted sin to enter the world second the reason this world exists is because looking down on the outrage of that sin the greatest outrage in the universe knowing that

[40 : 14] Adam and Eve scarcely felt anything corresponding to the outrage that it is subjected the world to futility and all of the world became a trumpet blast in natural terms that we feel about moral realities that we don't and should third this world exists so that followers like you and me in experiencing cancer struggles with our children or marriages or churches or work or health or anything might have a beautiful occasion to do what Paul did and say I counted all as loss because I have the supreme value and he is a treasure to me above all treasures let goods and kindred go as mortal life also the body they may kill

God's truth abideth still his kingdom is forever and he's included me and then finally most importantly most deeply terrorism and calamity suffering death exist so that the son could be tortured for you and display a kind of love that the world has never known will never know better than what God has shown us in Jesus God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us so I close with this plea I don't know whether you've been here six or seven decades or whether like me you're just here you just walked in and this is really not what you were expecting at all my plea is that on behalf of Jesus you would hear his invitation come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I'm meek and lowly in heart

I gave myself up I laid my stretched myself out on a cross for you you'll find my yoke easy and my burden light let's pray father in heaven I pray at every level at which you might be pleased to work that you would show yourself and your son to be supreme in an age of terror and that you would shape our hearts in response to this truth so that we are sorrowful yet always rejoicing and I pray that the apex of your creation and your subjection of the creation to futility the apex of it in the suffering of your son on our behalf would simply stagger us awake to the glory of your love so that we live in it rest in it walk in it cherish it treasure it more than we treasure anything on the earth

I ask this in Jesus name amen amen