



Reconciling Current Events with the Bible
By Bill Lawson

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“[People] loved darkness rather than light.”¹ This phrase from John 3:19 has been on my mind this week in relation to current events. There are other Bible passages about the choices people make when presented with clear and distinctly different options. The crowds in Jerusalem intentionally and knowingly chose Barabbas for release and Jesus for crucifixion. They *chose* darkness, intentionally and deliberately. How do we reconcile current events with the Bible, and more importantly, with God and with each other when our beliefs and choices are so vastly different and in diametric opposition?

The lectionary gospel reading for the Sunday after the attacks of 9/11 in 2001 included the question Jesus asked about the Tower of Siloam falling and killing 18 people, “Think ye that they were sinners above all [people] that dwelt in Jerusalem?”² I found comfort in such a clear association with that Bible reading preselected for that week within the long-standing lectionary cycle. But most current events do not fit so neatly with the lectionary. I can’t help but feel somewhat suspicious of myself when my mind makes these kinds of associations between the Bible and current events. Yet, that’s the kind of mind-space where I live. Both Karl Barth and Billy Graham suggested we have “the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.”³ That makes me think about Paul’s instruction to Timothy, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”⁴

Current events also bring lots of other things to mind besides Bible passages, like the 1939 British message, “Keep calm and carry on.”⁵ In the face of looming autocratic dominance, severe persecution of minorities, spiraling increase of white supremacy and white nationalism, and widespread propensity for violence, the slogan encouraged people to think deliberately and act intentionally. Jesus and the first generation of disciples lived in harsh, cruel times yet they kept their focus on implementing the teachings of Christ in their own lives, sharing God’s love with each other in their communities, and extending the invitation to discipleship wherever they could. Perhaps the core reconciliation between current events and the Bible has to do with how we apply the teachings of Jesus to the daily circumstances current events create in our lives and relationships. That’s what we already have been doing, and what we can continue to do even in this impending likelihood of greater challenges and obstacles.

We also have our baptismal covenant as a guide. We “renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of our sin. We accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. We confess Jesus Christ as our Savior, put our whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as our Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races.”⁶

Whether it’s a lot or a little, we all have something we can do.

For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living. (*Mark 12:44 KJV*)

Usually, this passage is thought of as being about Christian stewardship and how we decide what to give to the church. But what if we look at it through the lens of current events? Without taking anything away from its application to financial stewardship, we can use this story as an

allegory for all we offer of ourselves to God through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness. That isn't such an unfamiliar thing to do, since we do have an idiom about putting in our two cents worth. The widow's mite in the King James Version is translated as "two little copper coins worth about a penny" in the Good News Translation.⁷ In the Feeding of the 5,000 a boy offered 5 loaves and 2 fishes which Jesus multiplied to feed all the people with plenty left over. The widow's meager offering was perceived by Jesus as being worth more than all the other offerings being made because it was "all she had to live on." Likewise, however meager may be what we have to offer to the causes we believe in, every little bit counts, and God will multiply our gifts to be more than enough. Even if our side doesn't win an election – and perhaps even more especially when that is the case – whatever we have to give to is regarded by Jesus in the same way as the widow's mite. Our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness are far more effective when they are given than when they are withheld and can be multiplied to become much more "than all they which have cast into the treasury."

God can multiply anything.

For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth. (*1 Kings 17:14 KJV*)

God sent Elijah to another widow in the Old Testament, who trusted God's promise delivered to her by Elijah. Throughout the entire famine, she never ran out of the ingredients she needed to make bread to sustain herself and her child even though she started out with only enough for the final meal she expected to prepare. She "gave all she had to live on," but every time she went back to get more, more was provided.

In God We Trust.

Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. (*Psalms 146:3 KJV*)

Don't put your trust in human leaders; no human being can save you. (*Psalms 146:3 GNT*)

The word translated as *princes* in the King James Version and more inclusively as *human leaders* in the Good News Translation is literally defined in the Lexicon as "inclined, willing, noble, generous."⁸ Charles Spurgeon wrote that people "are always far too apt to depend upon the great ones of earth, and forget the Great One above; and this habit is the fruitful source of disappointment."⁹ George Duffield included this verse in the hymn,

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
stand in his strength alone;
the arm of flesh will fail you,
ye dare not trust your own.
Put on the gospel armor,
each piece put on with prayer;
where duty calls or danger,
be never [lacking] there.¹⁰

Christ has opened Heaven for us.

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: (*Hebrews 9:24 KJV*)

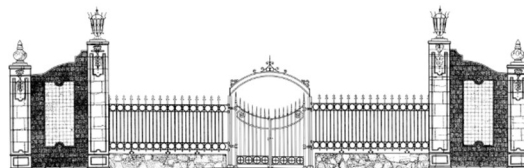
The Epistle to the Hebrews describes the sacred spaces and practices of the earth as symbolic of the spiritual spaces and relationships of Heaven. For example, our sanctuary here is furnished with an altar railing that is always open for prayer and communion. This altar is a symbolic representation of the proverbial altar in our hearts, the invisible spiritual space where we can meet with God 24/7/365 – any time, any place, and however we believe best fits our relationship with God at that moment. Today’s reading from Hebrews concludes with an affirmation, as translated in the New Revised Standard Version, that “Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”¹¹ Jesus already dealt with sin by forgiving sin and sending us to forgive others as we have been forgiven. His return will mark the completion of God’s salvation and healing of humanity and all of creation.

Conclusion

We reconcile current events with the Bible insofar as we implement the teachings of Jesus in our personal lives and apply them to how we respond to the events going on around us. Current events are what they are, and we have little if any direct control over what other people do or the decisions they make, even about things that may directly impact on our lives. We do have control over at least most of what we think, say, and do. We control how we respond to circumstances we find ourselves in, whether of our own making or because of what other people have done.

We have our gifts and graces to offer. We have our kindness and love to share. We have the power to resist evil and injustice and to embrace goodness and fairness. Christ will multiply and scale up whatever mercies we are able to extend in even the smallest of ways. So, let’s put in our two-cents worth, shall we?

In the Name of Jesus, Amen.



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Manuscript of the sermon preached by Rev. Bill Lawson
 Preached November 10, 2024, at Briensburg UMC
 Bible Readings for Proper 27, Revised Common Lectionary Year B,
 Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17 and Psalm 127, 1 Kings 17:8-16 and Psalm 146,
 Hebrews 9:24-28, Mark 12:38-44

USING

1 Kings 17:8-16, Psalm 146:1-7, Hebrews 9:24-28, Mark 12:38-44

Acknowledgments

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Notes

¹ John 3:19 (KJV).

² Luke 13:4 (KJV).

³ "Bible in One Hand and Newspaper in the Other." Google Search. Google. www.google.com/search?q=Bible+in+One+Hand+and+Newspaper+in+the+Other Accessed 10 November 2024.

⁴ 2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV).

⁵ University of London. "The story behind 'Keep Calm and Carry On,' 2024. University of London. www.london.ac.uk/about/history/history-senate-house/story-behind-keep-calm-carry Accessed 10 November 2024.

⁶ The United Methodist Church. "The Baptismal Covenant I." *The United Methodist Book of*

Worship, p. 88. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992. Print.

⁷ Mark 12:42 (GNT).

⁸ Brown, Driver, Briggs, and Gesenius. "Hebrew Lexicon entry for nādīḇ." The KJV Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon. www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/kjv/nadiyb.html Accessed 10 November 2024.

⁹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon. "Commentary on Psalm 146." *The Treasury of David*. archive.spurgeon.org/treasury/ps146.php. Accessed 10 November 2024.

¹⁰ George Duffield. "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus," 1803. *Hymnary*. hymnary.org/text/stand_up_stand_up_for_jesus_duffield Accessed 10 November 2024.

¹¹ Hebrews 9:28 (NRSV).

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