

FIGHT THE RIGHT FIGHT

By Mike Fortune

1. Don't be afraid to question the crowd (Luke 22:47-48; John 18:3,12; Deuteronomy 31:8; Joshua 1:9; 1 Peter 5:7)
2. Of faith not force (Luke 22:49-51; John 18:10; Romans 12:17,21; 1 Timothy 6:11b-12; Acts 2:37)
3. This is your moment (Luke 22:52-53; Psalm 27:1; Hebrews 12:12)

Some of you may remember Keturah Reed. She used to be a member of this church before she moved to southern California years ago. She recently sent me this video she produced for her YouTube channel about Pastor Eliezer [BEN A VEED EZ] Benavides - an active 91-year-old pastor in Redlands, California who is clearly fighting the right fight and showing no signs of slowing down! He and his wife Hope are modern day examples of individuals who live by faith not force. As Jesus did in Luke 22 so let's take a closer look.

Luke 22:47-48

47 But even as Jesus said this, a crowd approached, led by Judas, one of the twelve disciples. Judas walked over to Jesus to greet him with a kiss. 48 But Jesus said, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"

In order to fight the right fight, you have to question the crowd. Point number one. And the crowd that Thursday evening prior, at the beginning of Passover, included Roman soldiers. John's account makes this clear.

John 18:3,12

3 The leading priests and Pharisees had given Judas a contingent of Roman soldiers and Temple guards to accompany him. Now with blazing torches, lanterns, and weapons, they arrived at the olive grove. 12 So the soldiers, their commanding officer, and the Temple guards arrested Jesus and tied him up.

And included in this crowd of soldiers with weapons was a former disciple and close friend of Jesus named Judas. Who Jesus had previously identified as the one who would betray him. Although most of the disciples did not realize that. Is it easy to question the crowds? Filled with intimidating people? Especially when your friends are going along with them? No, I think we all know how hard it is to follow Jesus. Especially when we're intimidated by the numerous kinds of people opposing us. No wonder Jesus had said in verse 40, "Pray that you will not enter into temptation."

And then he walked away, about a stone's throw according to the eye witness Luke records, and practices what He preaches. Jesus Himself prays. Fervently. Do you? But when he returns to the disciples, exhausted from grief, he finds them asleep (verse 45) not praying.

You see, following Jesus is simple, but not easy. It's all about praying, reading, and sharing. But the disciples, not unlike many of us today, have trouble doing these very simple things. And what are the consequences?

When we neglect prayer, we can be confused by the crowds. When we neglect Bible reading, can misunderstand prophetic fulfillments. And fail to interpret it through the life and teachings of Jesus instead of the other way around. We talked about that last week. And how initially the disciples then and now misunderstand Jesus' instructions to "buy two swords" from verses 36-38. So if you missed that message, tech team has placed the outline and all the sermon notes on our website so you can read that later.

And then, when we fail to share what we pray and read about with others, we can also lose any interest in sharing it. Morris Vendon used to say it this way. Praying is like breathing. Reading is like eating. And sharing is like exercising. We do all three of those things every day. To survive spiritually, shouldn't we be doing the same things? So to fight the right fight, we must pray, we must read, and we must share. So for the next six weeks, let's turn off our TV's for one night a week and re-schedule our otherwise good things and make Acts 2:42 a reality.

It says, "42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer." That's where praying, reading, and sharing comes from. So get in group small enough for everyone to share. I'm doing mine online via Google Hangouts on Tuesdays @ 7:30pm. And you could too if you want. With technology today, you don't even have to be in the same room anymore!

But wherever you meet, whenever you meet, make sure you get in a group small enough to allow everyone to pray and read and share. It says "All the believers devoted themselves..." Not just the ones wanting to be baptized. Let's not fall asleep on Jesus when He needs us the most. Let's not fall asleep on Jesus when we need Him the most. Because if you don't use it, you what? You lose it.

So we don't have to be afraid to question the crowd. And do something different. Because God will be with you. Moses encouraged the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 31:8

Deuteronomy 31:8

8 Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you.

I like how John 18:4 adds, "Jesus stepped forward to meet the mob. "Who are you looking for?" he asked. 5 "Jesus the Nazarene," they replied. The crowds don't care about Jesus being the Son of God. They think He is just some guy. Maybe a prophet. But not God. Worthy of our time. And full attention. Verses 5-6 add, "5 I AM he, Jesus said. 6 And they all drew back and fell to the ground!"

Whoa. Something else had to have happened there. Because sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never harm me. But John 18:6 says these Romans soldiers and Temple guards all drew back and fell to the ground! In *The Desire of Ages* p.694, Ellen White suggests the angel from Luke 22:43 who had lately ministered to Jesus moved between Jesus and the mob. A divine light illuminated the Saviour's face, and a dovelike form overshadowed Him. In the presence of this divine glory, the murderous throng could not stand for a moment. They staggered back. Priests, elders, soldiers, and even Judas, fell as dead men to the ground" (*The Desire of Ages* p.694).

Isn't that awesome? We always have help from on high when fighting the right fight and questioning the crowds. Rightly understood, there is no such thing a solo Christianity. The books of the Bible were written to churches. To groups of people not buildings. To be read out loud in small groups and discussed. Jesus had his own small group from among the twelve consisting of James and John and Peter. But they fell asleep on the job. But even then, Jesus did not abandon them. The Lord will still personally go ahead of you. Joshua told the children of Israel in Joshua 1:9

Joshua 1:9

9 This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

Fighting the right fight is not optional. It is a command. It is a commission. Given to all the children of Israel and disciples of God. Not just pastors. Everyone. Pray. Read. Share. And when we do, God will go with you. It is simple, but not easy. Because there will always be so many other things to occupy our time.

But if we draw near to God, James 4:8 says God will draw near to you. So give all your worries and cares to Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God because 1 Peter 5:7 confidently declares

1 Peter 5:7

7 Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

Moving on, verses 49-51 continue

Luke 22:49-51

49 When the other disciples saw what was about to happen, they exclaimed, "Lord, should we fight? We brought the swords!" 50 And one of them struck at the high priest's slave, slashing off his right ear. 51 But Jesus said, "No more of this." And he touched the man's ear and healed him.

Point number two: We must fight the right fight of faith not force. As we learned last week, love can be enough to pray not slay. Non-lethal violence does not mean non-action. Regardless of what the laws of the state of Ohio allow, we can choose non-lethal responses to violence. It's not easy to do, but even in the military it can be done. Pastor Eliezer [BEN A VEED EZ] Benavides chose non-combatancy and conscientious objector status was bestowed upon him. Just like it was for Dr. Burgess Bills and Allan Wolfson in our own congregation. But I don't hear a lot about that these days. Which is probably the pastor's fault. Do our teens know conscientious objection is even an option?

I watched Hacksaw Ridge in 2016 after it came out to rent. It tells the true story of Pfc. Desmond T. Doss who won the Congressional Medal of Honor despite refusing to bear arms during WWII on religious grounds. It's a war movie. Appropriately rated R for extreme violence. But war is violent. Whether it is "just" or not. And it is not easy to secure conscientious objector status if you voluntarily choose to join the military. Especially if you don't declare that choice from the very beginning. So any Christian considering service in the military needs to carefully consider before they enlist whether they wish to be responsible for taking life and fulfilling as Romans 13 rightfully allows the state to employ the sword.

But Luke 22 is not about "just" war theory. "The disciples thought Jesus would not be taken. For the same power that had caused the mob to fall as dead men could keep them helpless until Jesus and His companions should escape. So they were

disappointed and indignant as they saw the cords brought forward to bind the hands of Him whom they loved” (The Desire of Ages, p.696). John 18:10 says,

John 18:10

10 Then Simon Peter drew a sword and slashed off the right ear of Malchus, the high priest’s slave.

Peter tries to defend his Master. But instead, he only manages to cut off an ear of the high priest’s servant. And here’s where two more miracles took place. All the soldiers already fell over like dead men because of Jesus words alone. That’s the first miracle of divine intervention. The second is Jesus touches Malchus’ ear and heals him (Luke 22:51).

Now, that’s an impressive piece of cosmetic surgery done in a sterile room with a team of people and a skilled surgeon. But to do so in the dark surrounded by a mob of angry armed soldiers? Whoa. That’s even more miraculous! You think that changed Malchus’ life? I bet it did. Not everyone in the crowd betrays Jesus. Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s business manager - Luke 8:3, Malchus - John 18:10, Pilate’s wife - Matthew 27:19, the Centurion - Matthew 27:54, and the Thief on the Cross - Luke 23:26-43 all questioned the crowd. I think they all decided to fight the right fight. Will you?

But what’s the third miracle? That’s the one I missed. It can be found in John 18:12. “12 So the soldiers, their commanding officer, and the Temple guards arrested Jesus and tied him up.” Mark 14:46 adds, “46 Then the others grabbed Jesus and arrested him...”

Did you notice that Jesus was grabbed and tied up and bound before he healed Malchus ear? Ellen White did. In her commentary of this passage in The Desire of Ages p.696, she adds, “When Jesus saw what was done, He released His hands, though held firmly by the Roman soldiers, and...touched the wounded ear, and it was instantly made whole.” Isn’t that awesome? Three moments. Three miracles. Jesus never wastes an opportunity to teach us how to fight the right fight. Of faith not force.

Raj Attiken is so good on this. In his book Refreshed: A New Paradigm for Church Leadership, he points out the numerous places in Ellen White’s writings that God runs the entire universe on love, trust, and freedom. So why can’t churches run the same way? Why can’t families? Here’s a sampling: “The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God’s government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened” (The Desire of Ages, p.22).

“In the light from Calvary it will be seen that the law of self-renouncing love is the law of life for earth and heaven; that the love which ‘seeketh not her own’ has its source in the heart of God” (The Desire of Ages p.20).

“The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all created beings depended upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love—homage that springs from an intelligent appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced allegiance, and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service” (The Great Controversy, p.493).

“God does not force the will or judgment of any. He takes no pleasure in a slavish obedience. He desires that the creatures of His hands shall love Him because He is worthy of love. He would have them obey Him because they have an intelligent appreciation of His wisdom, justice, and benevolence. And all who have a just conception of these qualities will love Him because they are drawn toward Him in admiration of His attributes” The Great Controversy, p.541).

Aren't those great? And when Jesus' followers follow Jesus' life and teachings, it's just as miraculous.

Romans 12:17,21

17 Never pay back evil with more evil. 21 Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

1 Timothy 6:11-12 adds

1 Timothy 6:11b-12

11b Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. Fight the good fight for the true faith. Hold tightly to the eternal life to which God has called you, which you have declared so well before many witnesses.

But Peter hadn't learned love trust freedom yet. Why? Because he wasn't praying. He wasn't reading. He was reacting. Not responding. From anger not faith and love. And subsequently missed the Isaiah 53:12 fulfilment of the two swords in Luke 22:36-38. And many Christians today are doing the same things. But Jesus still loves us like crazy flaws and all. And every moment of our life is a teachable moment. Where we can

unlearn the things that are inconsistent with Jesus' life and teachings and fight the right fight of faith that God has declared for all of us.

The good news is it's apparent that Peter and the other disciples did learn this lesson of love, trust, and freedom. Because after Jesus reprimanded him for defending himself with lethal force, there is no record from this point forward in the Gospels or book of Acts of the Apostles or any other New Testament book where any apostle is described as using or carrying a weapon from this point forward. Instead, all the faithful apostles (except John who died of old age) die as martyrs. Peter learned that as a citizen in Jesus' kingdom, God's word (cf. Hebrews 4:12) is the only sword He needs to carry. "12 For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword [Gr: μάχαιρα], cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires." Peter learned to "17 Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword [Gr: μάχαιρα] of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

We know this is true because Acts 2:37 says it was Peter's words which

Acts 2:37

37 Peter's words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" And the rest of that sermon he gave says in verse 38, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

So don't be afraid to fight the right fight of faith not force. Love trust and freedom are much more powerful long term motivating factors than fear and coercion anyway. Don't be afraid to question the crowd. Nothing miraculous will ever occur until you do. Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins. Our next baptism is APR 20 so let me know if you want to participate and we will make it happen.

Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Which has always been around since it was hovering over the surface of the waters in Genesis 1:2. But when you fight the right fight of faith, you're opening your life to whatever else God and His word has for you. Which means even more of the previously hovering Holy Spirit is now being downloaded to your mind and life. It's like an additional gift God gives you. Available to you. Only after you get baptized and ignore the crowds.

Jesus wants everyone to choose Him. Even the soldiers and religious leader arresting him!

Luke 22:52-53

52 Then Jesus spoke to the leading priests, the captains of the Temple guard, and the elders who had come for him. “Am I some dangerous revolutionary,” he asked, “that you come with swords and clubs to arrest me? 53 Why didn’t you arrest me in the Temple? I was there every day. But this is your moment, the time when the power of darkness reigns.”

But they had ignored all his invitations. Day by day. It is possible to harden your heart and reject Jesus. Week after week. Month after month Judas refused to choose Jesus. And eventually, he betrayed the Son of God with a kiss. With fake friendship. And today, the world is full of crowds of people who profess to follow Jesus who are really in fake friendship with Jesus. This is their moment when the power of darkness reigns. But we need not stay in the dark. Because Psalm 27:1 proclaims

Psalm 27:1

1 The Lord is my light and my salvation—so why should I be afraid?

And Hebrews 12:12 adds

Hebrews 12:12

12 So take a new grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees.

Who here would like to fight the right fight? Who here is ready to pray and read and share? I don’t want to lose my love for Jesus and those He died to save do you? So

1. Don’t be afraid to question the crowd (Luke 22:47-48; John 18:3,12; Deuteronomy 31:8; Joshua 1:9; 1 Peter 5:7)
2. Fight the right fight of faith not force (Luke 22:49-51; John 18:10; Romans 12:17,21; 1 Timothy 6:11b-12; Acts 2:37)
3. This is your moment to get a new grip. And strengthen your weak knees (Luke 22:52-53; Psalm 27:1; Hebrews 12:12)

Whatever you decide, you are not alone. And never will be. Jesus will go before you. And miraculously help you every step of the way. So let’s ask him to do so.