

What if Jesus Meant Every Word He Said

by Dean Taylor

The sermon challenges listeners to ask themselves if Jesus really meant every word he said and to dare to put his ideas into practice.

Duration: 57:05

Scripture: Matthew 5:38

Topics: "Non Resistance", "Following Jesus"

Description

This sermon is about the journey of a couple who embraced Jesus' teachings on war and peace, leading them to become conscientious objectors in the military. It highlights their struggles, the transformation in their lives, and the importance of following the words of Jesus literally. The sermon delves into the concept of non-resistance, the early Christians' practices, and the challenges faced in living out these teachings in a modern context.

Transcript

Okay, so the title of this conference is A Change of Allegiance, Choosing the Way of Peace. And the first part of that title came from my book entitled A Change of Allegiance. And this book tells the story of my wife, Tanya, and I had in our journey about embracing Jesus' teaching on war and peace.

And that title suggests something changed in my life, and that's right, it did. See, about 27 years ago, my wife, Tanya, and I were soldiers in the United States Army stationed in Germany. We were in the army band and we had other assignments there in the army.

And I'd say in most respects, we were your average American Christian. But one night, we asked a question that would forever change our life. We asked the question, what if Jesus really meant every word he said? And since we asked that question, our life has never been the same.

And I, if there's nothing else you get during this conference, if you get just that, to allow the teachings of Jesus, his words, his ways, his teachings, his very person become alive and real in you today, I promise you too will be changed forever. The other part of the title of this conference is called Choosing the Way of Peace. And in particular, we're going to be talking about Jesus' words, his teaching concerning peace and non-resistance.

You see, Jesus commanded us to love our enemies, not just our neighbors, but our enemies. He told us to do good to them, to pray for them, to feed them, to help them. And he said in doing so, we would become children of his father.

And you know, in the first 300 years of the church, the early Christians simply believed the teachings of Jesus for what he said. Because of that, thousands were martyred. But they were equipped with the knowledge that Jesus told them that in reality, they would never die.

Furthermore, in their place, the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church. And with such boldness, Christianity spread rapidly. And Rome, the entire Roman Empire was nearly converted.

And that's amazing, because Jesus' words actually worked. And I think they still work today. And that's why I'm here, not to talk about my ideas or the nomination or anything like that.

I want to talk about Jesus, because I think he has some great ideas. And I think his great ideas are also good for us today if we will dare to put his ideas into practice. So dream with me today.

You know, I'm finding that more and more people every day are starting to dream of a Christianity that would be based around the teachings of Jesus and what that would look like. What a great idea. And that's what we want to lift up today.

But here's the problem. This is the problem that I face and the problem that the American church or the world church today is facing also. For far too long, the teachings of Jesus have taken a back seat literally to empire building, to denominationalism and vain traditions of men.

And perhaps some of you here were like I was, used to be. You believe in Christians, but you have theological reasons why you don't take the words of Jesus realistically and practically in your life today. And I hope to change that.

I hope to show you the reasons that support that what people call the just war theory or any type of idea of Christians killing their enemies is based upon human traditions. Unbiblical philosophies are just a natural desire to save our skin, but it's not based upon the word of God. So I'm excited about this topic and I'm excited about Jesus and I hope that by the end of this seminar, the Holy Spirit will inspire you to put the words of Jesus into practice personally speaking.

Now when I first went to start writing my book, *A Change of Allegiance*, and I think Tony said a little bit about this earlier, I started off writing primarily just a straight, you know, theology about the doctrine of non-resistance. But I started to realize that that people relate to a subject more when they see the background behind it, you know, the story behind the theology. Because the word of God is living and active and alive today and there's nothing, there's nothing better than a living testimony.

And so as I began to put the book together, I started to put not only just the the doctrines and the theology of non-resistance, but I began to put together the story of how Tony and I embraced this in our journey. Well, Brother Tony here from Wellspring Mennonite Church really liked that idea and that method I use in the book, I guess. And as he began to talk to me, he asked that in this seminar that we first introduce the teachings of Jesus, but along that to give that sort of journey, that of how we discovered that.

And in my book, we talk about not just myself, but how Tony and I both embraced the teachings of Jesus in this area. We're both soldiers in the army. And so he went so far as to dare to ask, would you

mind if your wife would come up and share with us also? And so y'all pray for Tonya, this is new for her, and so it's going to be a blessing.

And so I would like to thank also, I know you already did, but all the good people that made this possible. It's really, it's really an incredible event. So I'll come over here with my wife and we're going to talk about, we're going to tell our story about what Jesus did in our life.

So, all right, I have just a few pictures here I hope you like, right at the very beginning. Tonya and I, here's a picture of us, Tonya, this is actually in front of our unit in the army, oh, pushing 25 years ago, maybe a little more, sitting there. And I had a chance, I went on a little Anabaptist tour a few years ago, we got to go right back to the same steps, and there we are.

And so not too much worse for the it's, I don't know, but it's been a blessing. And we have been married 28 years and have six beautiful children, wonderful children, and now we live, here's a picture of them, of my family, and they're a blessing. They've been an encouragement and they've stuck up with their dad through all these years also.

And now we live with our six children in a revived Hutterite community called Altona Christian Community. It's my house about right in there. And some incredible believers, and I'm really blessed to be there.

But so here we are, and Tonya, so yeah, you've been married to me all these years, but it did come with a bit of a warning, didn't it? He's right. I have to confess, we both vividly remember this one particular phone call. Somehow he felt compelled.

We had already been engaged to be married, but he felt compelled to call me and inform me. He said, Tonya, I just need you to know, if you marry me, I have this feeling we are not going to live a normal life. Well, I can definitely look back and say, boy, was that an understatement? He was, was he ever right? But I can definitely say, though, we've had our share of trials like anybody else.

It's also been a journey of joy. And I really am so blessed to have pursued seeking the kingdom of heaven with my husband. It's been an honor.

You've been a blessing, too. Well, we started out the time in the Army with me in the Army, and her coming over first as a civilian. We were in the Army Band.

We had been in high school band together, and that's where we met, and then we were in the Army Band there in Germany. But shortly after we were there, the Army Band actually had a little shortage for clarinet players, and so she happened to be there. She was good at playing the clarinet, so she filled in, and many times in playing the clarinet in our music assignments there in the band as a civilian.

And I started to travel a lot, and so we started to think, you know, this is a nice job. So we decided to make the Army career. So not long after that, Tonya ends up joining the Army and with a promise to come back and be in the unit with us and travel with me in the Army.

Now, even before Tonya had left for basic training, you know, we had different kind of music assignments that you were part of, and one of the assignments that I was a part of was an Army rock band, and this had an effect on us that wasn't all that good. It eventually led me down a bad path, and I was a professing Christian. I was a superficial kind of, I don't know, a sinner's prayer kind of a Christianity, and our concept of Christianity was very weak.

I had an understanding and lived some aspects of the Christian life, but actually thinking of following the teachings of Jesus literally had never crossed my mind. And what little I did have, slowly we began losing, I think, through the consequences of being in that rock band and the lifestyle that was very ungodly. Yeah, like Dean said, we'd both been raised in Christian homes, but in our churches, actually really literally following the teachings of Jesus was just really not talked about, and Dean had always been very patriotic, though.

I remember he once won the Room of the Month Award, and I really think it was because he had this over-the-top expression of patriotism. I remember he'd sent me a snapshot of his little desk there in his room, and it had the Statue of Liberty on one side, and he had like the Army flag and the U.S. flag, and then a big picture of Ronald Reagan, and so that was good at ensuring that he won the Room of the Month, but he was very patriotic, and to tell you, he truly really embraced being a soldier at that time. That was what he was all about.

It was. It's true, I was raised very patriotic, and my earliest childhood memories, I think, about it include trips to Confederate battle sites, going to the Alamo, or watching war movies, and that kind of patriotism really was part of me, and I loved it. When I joined the Army, I did it very, I did it with all I had.

I felt what I was doing was pleasing God and pleasing my country. I felt like I was doing the right thing. And while I might not have initially had quite the patriotic fervor that Dean had, his zeal was contagious, and eventually I was getting caught up and swept away by that spirit of patriotism.

I definitely felt a sense of pride in belonging among our newfound U.S. military family in Germany. You've become pretty close because all you have are your U.S. military family there. To tell you a little bit about my family, my father had come to the States in 1956 as a Hungarian refugee, and he was raised in the tumult of war, and he always had told me, Tonya, you just need to make sure you don't ever take our freedoms for granted, you know.

He just really wanted to instill in me just to appreciate what we had. Now my mom, to tell you about her, she has been and still is to this day a very spiritually minded lady. I am very thankful for the influence of my mother almost all of my growing up years, and to this day my memories of getting up in the morning, I've always found my mom praying and reading her Bible with tears, and I'm very thankful for that testimony.

We also had, even though maybe it wasn't always the best, we had Christian programming on all the time in our home, and I look back on that as it actually did increase my faith. I heard, especially from Pat Robertson and the 700 Club, it was very big influence on me as a child and heard lots of personal testimonies. Just to me, God was real, and that he actually longs for a relationship with us and takes pleasure when we reach out to him, and so that proved to be a seedbed of faith in my life.

But along with that faith, the idea that America was God's chosen country, you know, to help deliver the world from evil was kind of a preconceived idea I came into married life with at that time. Right, yeah. When Tonya left for basic and advanced training, we had been only married a year.

We knew each other through high school very well, but we'd only been married a year, and it meant a nine-month separation that we had right at the beginning of our marriage. But what it meant after that was that we were going to be able to spend the career together and traveling and things like that together. But one thing happened about when she joined the Army, the Army gave us a double housing allowance, and

what that meant for us is that we got to move into a really nice little place, and we ended up living in this town called Hochschweier, and it was a lovely village, and it was tucked away in the trees in a little valley there.

It was a lot closer to work and everything, but it had one interesting defect. You couldn't get television of any kind in the little valley that we were living in. That's right.

So without television, things were quiet for the first time in our married life, although we hadn't been married all that long, but it was very quiet, and then something happened that I never thought I'd see. My husband actually began to read. We both started reading our Bibles.

He had never in his adult life been a reader. I remember he would see me reading, and he would always say, you make that look so fun. I wish I liked to read like you do, but I don't care for it.

I don't want to. But I do believe God was doing something. He was preparing my husband for a future, and at some point, I remember going to the local military bookstore, and there was a little Christian section off to the side, and it was there I vividly remember Dean finding the book written by Melody Green about the Christian singer-songwriter Keith Green.

It was a very big book. It was about this thick, and it had this funny watercolor of Keith with a great big afro, and I thought, poor Dean. He's never going to read this book, but I thought, if you want to get it, get it.

It'll make you feel good even if you're not going to read it, but he took it home, and he read it, and he was being changed by that book. Then I read it, and I was being changed. I'm just so thankful for Keith Green's testimony.

He challenged us to a life of no compromise, and it was working in our hearts, slowly but surely, for a thirst for more. It was. I think what initially inspired me about that book, what was it in that book that inspired me, was originally was he was a musician, and so I think as a musician I related to it, but more than that was it was awakening in me, just reading his life story, this thirst for righteousness, and just following Jesus with everything he had, and that comes out in his testimony, in his life, and his desire for missions, and those sorts of things, and I wanted that.

I wanted to have something. I knew we had a very empty Christianity, and I remember just wanting more and more of this sort of radical Christianity, and I think that that challenge got a hold of me, and at this time, to be honest, our spiritual lives were looking pretty shallow, pretty bad, and I had wanted to travel with Dean even more than I already did, so I also joined that army rock band with him, and that had an inevitable bad influence on us, so in addition to playing our normal army jobs, we began playing in bars and clubs on the side, and it would eventually nearly destroy our spiritual lives in the end. Yeah, at about a rock bottom around that time when we started playing in these different band assignments, and they were all very worldly environments, at about rock bottom, the Germany, the army had sent us to this city in northern Germany, the name of it was Mützengladbach, up in northern Germany, to play for this rock concert for this thing called Fasching.

The Germans have this thing called Fasching, it's like an American Mardi Gras, where you have all this drunkenness and carousing before the time of the Eastern Lenten season, and our rock band was sent up there many times to play during this season, and it proved to be very, very ungodly environment, but nevertheless, I think we found ourselves just being influenced by the spirit of that place every time we

went there. So finally, on one of those trips, in despair, we came together in our hotel room, like you said, we were in Mützengladbach, Germany, way up north. After reading Keith's life story, we just felt so challenged, and we just knew we needed to do something.

We either needed to give up on our fake profession of Christianity or devote our lives with everything we had to Jesus. We actually said that. That's right, we literally did.

We were like, Lord, we're just sick of ourselves, and so we got on our knees and we confessed our sins to the Lord, and we cried out to Him to help us be committed to Him, and we committed our lives to follow the Lord and do whatever we saw in His word, and when we got up, it was like we had this banner over our heads, no compromise. It was a blessing. God visited us there in that hotel room and woke us up and gave us a chance of coming out of this mediocre, superficial way of Christianity, and I think the first thing that God convicted us in our lifestyle was the rock music itself, and so early on, the first thing that we did was when we got back to our base unit, we asked to be released from this assignment, and that was pretty easy.

I mean, there was always people waiting in line to try to be in this kind of assignment, so that was easy. Not long after that, we started digging into our Bible and getting more and more into the Bible, and it was then that something really big happened to us. That's right.

I'll never forget the night. I don't think he will either. Dean was reading from Jesus' words in Matthew 5 through 7, commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, and he suddenly got to this passage that just seemed to really blow him away.

Amen. We were there. We would be doing this sometimes with the books that we were reading or the scriptures, and we'd be laying in bed at night there and say, okay, read this, or she'd find something and say, okay, look at this, and it came to this one, and I said, okay, and I remember leaning over on this lopsided pillow, and I said, okay, just listen to this, and this is what I started to read, and I can remember reading this.

This is what I read, and so I said, and I was reading from Matthew 5, 38. Okay, so listen to this one. You have heard it has been said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I tell you, do not resist an evil person.

If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other also, and if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

You have heard that it has been said, love your neighbor but hate your enemy, but I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be that the children of your Father in heaven, who causes his son to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those that who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the pagans do that? So I finished reading that, and I looked over her and I said, so what are we supposed to do with that? And I remember saying, well it sounds pretty clear to me. Yeah, I said, yeah, but we're in the army.

And he had a really good point there. So then it was something like almost supernatural took place. It was like a light bulb of grace came on, and the words of Jesus, his way, his life, just started to be real.

And it was like Jesus was saying over his words, simply this this phrase, I mean that. And so then we dared to ask each other the question, what if Jesus really meant all these words that he said? And after asking that question, after asking that question, our whole world and our whole lives was forever changed. That's exactly right.

So then it dawned on us that if you actually were going to go through all of Jesus's commands in the Sermon on the Mount, and devise a church that would actually go out of its way to purposely do everything opposite of what Jesus said. So if he said, don't go to court and sue your brother, let's go to court and sue our brother. If he says, do not divorce and remarry, well we'll not only do it, but we'll promote it.

Do not store up riches for yourselves. Love your enemies. You know, we're just going to go ahead and do the opposite of every single thing.

Well, it kind of scared us because when we stopped to think about it, what you came up with, that was something that looked frighteningly similar to the modern American church. And that really scared us. That scared us.

So we were going through the scriptures and we said, wait a minute. I mean, the church that we understand is the American church. I mean, every one of the words of Jesus were almost like going out of the way to do the opposite.

And that's a problem. Making matters worse, at all the challenges, we were trying to be honest with the words of Jesus for the first time. And we saw that Jesus himself was not just throwing out these words as some sort of, you know, meditation or some sort of niceties or something.

And even in his own word, he talks about it very strongly. For instance, right in the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus put it this way. He said, whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

But whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. In the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, he put it this way. He said, when people were seeing Jesus in the testimony of his teachings was, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes.

And I think that's the kind of the way we use, we go back to using that way with Jesus. We talk about it as like a theological point or some sort of meditation. But he spoke with authority and not just some theological point.

John put it even stronger and brought it into our judgment and says in John chapter 12, verse 48. And Jesus said, he who rejects me and does not receive my words has that which judges him. The word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.

Now in my background, we kind of put the words of Jesus in some sort of different dispensation or some different millennium or maybe wanted to be in heaven or something. But as I've read, another writer once said, all right, come on, how hard is it to love your enemies in heaven? These teachings are meant for us today to live out today in this world. And that's exactly what we wanted to embrace.

So we began to ponder what Christianity would look like if it were actually purposely based around the teachings of Jesus and his commands. What would the church look like if it actually took Jesus literally? But it made us think of the verse where Jesus says, well, why do you call me Lord, Lord, and you do not the things which I say? Yeah, amen. And that's the thing.

I mean, Jesus giving us his way, his teaching, telling us that when the Holy Spirit come, he would testify of him and a Christianity that really was based upon him was something that was challenging us more and more. Well, as I began to ponder these thoughts and pray, I evaded the question for a little while thinking, okay, the theologians are going to have a good reason for this one. I mean, there's the teachings of Jesus have got to mean something different than what they are actually literally saying.

And so I thought, well, the Christians have always believed in a just world. At least that's what I thought. And so I began to try to find some books.

I went to the chaplain. I found a book written by some high up chaplain guy about the just war theory. And I began to look at that.

But when I began to read the actual arguments, when I when I began to look at their reasons for just war, I got scared. I got scared because I wanted to believe these guys. But when I was looking at their arguments, I was realizing they're really not there.

They're bringing scriptures up out of context. They're not applying the word of God properly. And as much as I wanted to, I just couldn't shake these easy words of Jesus.

And now when I actually was reading the arguments, it began to worry me a lot. But there's one other element that came from reading the arguments against nonresistance is they introduced to me this concept of an early Christianity. Because in each of these books, and you still when you find books today, it's the same thing.

When they talk about the just war theory and everything, they always have a chapter in there that they try to explain away the early Christians. And and so they talked about the early Christians like, well, they were naive, the faith wasn't fully developed, or the thoughts haven't come up to them, or something like that. And as I began to read that, I was thinking, wow, I long to be one of those naive childlike early Christians just like one of them.

And so after all that reading, in spite of the rationale, as much as I tried, I just could not let go of the simple, albeit impractical words of Jesus, like, love your enemies, do good to them that hate you. And all of this happened to hit us at a high point in our army career. We're both really loving our jobs.

We had really good relationships with our co-workers, and life just seemed good. Dean had just recently been promoted to sergeant, and I was now being put on the fast track for promotion as well. So in addition to being a musician, then Dean was also recently, he had been sent to armor school.

And that gave him a special position in our unit of taking care of all the weapons, and everything pertaining to that. And so he was really advancing his career in that way. And our future looked bright.

It seemed we were really prospering in the army. But things were also really stirring in the world, and that was putting the pressure on us. We were bombarded daily by news in the media about war.

And it made our searching, I guess, feel all the more critical. We're like, okay, we really need to come to a decision. We've been pretty open with all our co-workers.

We just wanted to get answers. A lot of our co-workers actually were a little older than us, and they were good people, professing, sincere Christians. We talked about it with them.

Yes, we would share our concerns with them. And some of them would say, Dean, you're asking questions that Christians shouldn't be asking. He actually said that.

Yeah. He actually said that. And, but Dean would say, well, what do you do with the teachings of Jesus? And he'd say, well, I'm comfortable.

He said, I'm comfortable. That's one thing Dean just couldn't say at that time. He was definitely not comfortable, and neither was I. And so out of all of our friends' growing concern for us, they actually removed Dean from being the armorer.

They didn't want to put him in a position of having to--I guess they were waiting to see if he'd just grow out of it. But then people started getting genuinely worried about the two of us and our two friends, who seemed to be agreeing with everything we were seeing. And the day finally came for our deadly force briefing.

They called us all into a room. The war was really heating up. We were being inactivated as a band.

We laid aside our instruments, and we were being called to ship missiles. So at that time, our acting first sergeant called us into a room, and I just vividly remember him singling Dean out. And he said, and if someone comes into this unit, you will be required to use deadly force to stop him if necessary.

I knew then that, okay, things were, you know, getting pretty serious. And the whole thing had become more than just a theological argument, but I was still dealing with it. I remember just a little bit before this, you know, I was in the armor, before they took me out of the armor, and I remember at the time we were starting to read some of these books, you know, and I remember one was a book by Tony Campolo.

I think it was called 20 Hot Potatoes Christians Are Afraid to Touch. And one of the topics was non-resistance. I remember he had some story in there about a bomber pilot dropping a bomb and asking what would Jesus do.

And so I remember, I remember they sent us this shipment, and I was the armor, and they sent us this shipment of M203 grenade launchers. It's the name of this grenade launcher. My job was to install four of these onto some of our M16 machine guns.

And I remember there, I can remember, I could take you back to that place. And I remember there, and I was taking these grenade launchers, and I was installing them to the machine guns, and I was twisting on these little wires, and I remember stopping and asking, what would Jesus do? That word of that book just kind of put that in my mind. And then I just remember saying, oh, it's confusing.

Who knows what Jesus really meant by that, the context and out of that, and I'm ashamed to say I finished and just dismissed it and finished the project. But the war did something good for us. And what it did was, it brought this out of just some theological abstract theology in our mind.

It brought it to something that we had to make a decision about. And I think that that's good for us. I think, well, I was going to say American Christians, but I think all Christians need to face these words of Jesus Christ.

I mean, if you kill somebody, it's either, and you kill someone in some sort of a, you know, righteous, supposedly righteous way, it's either of God or it's not of God. It's either some sort of a brave thing to do, or it's something outside of the will of God, according to how you're reading the words of Jesus. So I don't think it should be left as something as some sort of arbitrary theology.

I frequently ask the question here recently, when people ask about how important this is to Christianity, and I ask the question, can a person be a follower of Christ without following Christ? And that's why I think that looking at topics like this and looking at the teachings of Jesus are very important, and Christianity needs to be talking about the words of Jesus a lot more, and not just leave these off as some sort of arbitrary theology or something. Well, after that deadly force briefing, we knew we needed to do something. So we had found a lot of really good books on non-resistance, and so we just picked one.

It happened to have been published by Herald Press. So we wrote a desperate letter, please help, we don't know what to do. We've discovered the teachings of Jesus.

We sent the letter off to Herald Press. They received the letter and then forwarded it to Mennonite Central Committee, who had enough foresight to have sent a couple of army counselors over to Germany to help people just like us. So they forwarded that letter to them.

They happened to be, their names were Andre and Kathy Stoner, and we're very, very grateful for the help they gave us. They knew all the regulations. They had us in their home.

They came out to our home. We had regular meetings. They were a godsend, and we're just really thankful for their input and all they did for us.

Yeah, it was a blessing. Without them, we could have been in a lot of trouble, and as I look back now on how it all happened, real quick, I couldn't, I can't fail to mention another event that happened a little bit before this that I think made an impression in our life, and it was our trip, our trips to East Berlin. I visited Berlin twice, and the first time that I was there is when Tanya was in basic training, and I went there with my mother, and as I was there, it's your typical Cold War scene.

You're there, and there's these, these, you know, long cement walls. You have your concertina wire around the wall. You have these East German and Russian guards patrolling with their machine guns, and as you look at that in this Cold War scene, it's very obvious they are the enemy.

But the next time Dean went to East Berlin, I got to go with him. It was 1989, and wow, what a scene. The wall was coming down.

Yeah, the Berlin Wall was actually coming down, and as we made our way to Checkpoint Charlie, we just, we're just amazed. So different from Dean's last experience with the Cold War scene. The air was literally charged with excitement.

We were all sort of rejoicing. There was a sense of excitement. All kind of stuff going on.

People were taking turns trying to knock holes in the wall with hammers, and our friend Rick Shirley even literally drove his car into the wall. I don't recommend it. It didn't do much for the wall.

No, it didn't, but it wasn't really good for his car, and standing there in the middle of all the action, we noticed a big hole in the wall off to the side that someone had actually successfully made a hole, and standing there on the other side, we noticed Russian, East German guards. They were literally reaching their arms through the wall, shouting Bruder, which means brother, and Frieden, which means peace, and wow, it was really, really special. It was there that Dean shook hands with the East German guard on the other side, and I took that shot that would eventually become on the cover of our book, *A Change of Allegiance*.

It was an incredible moment, and as we began our long trip home, it was a kind of an eventful trip home, but as we took our long trip home, I couldn't shake that scene out of my mind, and the thing that came through my mind as I considered the two times that we went to Berlin was this. What changed? A year ago, I could have been, I could have been easily called on to shoot this guy that I was now shaking hands with through the wall, but just because a few politicians or something got in a room somewhere or maybe just talked on the phone somewhere and made a decision, now my enemy is my friend, and that bothered me, and I remember a scripture that just spoke to me at the time, and it was a scripture from Ephesians chapter 2, verse 1. The scripture says this, for he himself is our peace who made both one and has broken down the middle wall of separation, and I know the scripture had originally to do with the Jews and the Gentiles, but I couldn't help missing the context of Jesus Christ himself being our peace, and when that happens, breaking down all the barriers, it really ministered to me. And while it was really exciting that God was starting to solidify our conviction, we were starting to get a little lonely.

We found a natural distance growing and maybe a little bit tension between all of our Christian friends in the unit, and our Baptist church actually started having special meetings lifting up the place of Christians in warfare. After that, we called our pastor and requested a special meeting. We just, sometimes you actually wondered if you were off course.

We wanted him to talk us out of it. We wanted him to talk us out of it. We loved our jobs, and we literally were hoping maybe he'll shed some light on this.

You know, we want to give God every chance to make sure we're not making a mistake, but unfortunately, that meeting ended with him saying perhaps he'd be more comfortable worshiping elsewhere. He didn't know what to do with us. And that kind of hurt, but so we did feel really alone.

However, through the loneliness in that time, we found a unexpected friend again through the early Christians. And one of the things the Lord really used to help us during that time was a Christian bookstore in town. It was, for your most part, a typical Christian bookstore, but there had been a local nearby really radical bookstore in a basement that went out of business, and that fellow sold all of his inventory to this local Christian bookstore.

And we could hardly believe what we found in this store. We found wonderful, encouraging, I feel like it was the Lord. We found books about the early church.

We found books about the Anabaptists and other radical movements of God, but even more encouraging were the books we found by modern-day writers who actually took Jesus literally, like David Verseau and Skrull Publishing. We got those books over there. Yeah, and it was just a real shot in the arm that I think

we really needed at that time to know, okay, we're not really that weird.

There are other people who take Jesus literally. That was incredible. Imagine going to basically a military bookstore, and there we saw the writings of Menno Simons.

We got the Martyr's Mirror there. We got all these different Anabaptist writings there. We kept reading these.

Hey, this is great. I remember we even went to the guy and said, we thought, well, maybe he's a Mennonite or something. I mean, he has this, and he didn't even know what he had.

No, he didn't, but Dean had this huge gym bag, and he filled it with books, and he was a walking library. Yeah, it was there actually. I never even heard, to my shame, I never even heard the word Mennonite before, and I'm not kidding.

When I first heard the word, I thought it was like a tribe of Israel, like the Medianites and the Mennonites. I never heard that word before, but through that, God was working in our life and opening up a world that made us realize, wow, we're not alone in all this journey that we're having. So even though we were tempted to lose heart through our lack of fellowship, like he said, we actually found amazing fellowship with dead people, the early church.

It was as though they were alive and with us, and we took so much comfort because they actually really well articulated aspects of following Jesus, and it really helped us learn how to give a defense for our faith, and it was really building up our faith. But it was also very amazing to see that even though the early church was divided geographically, culturally, their languages were all different, many of them, they still universally taught against the Christians in the military and advocated loving their enemies and even concerning both personal disputes and national disputes. National disputes, amen.

We have a few quotes here that were actually some of the quotes that we read when we were soldiers in the army, and they're powerful. We have a few here. First, I'm going to show you this one by Tertullian.

Tertullian was a very outspoken brother in the early church from South Africa, excuse me, from North Africa, and riding around the year 195, he said this, and remember, I was reading from the Just War people that were saying, well, it was undeveloped in the early church. They never thought of the topics. When I read the early Christian, I said, they thought about this, and they lived out the words of Jesus powerfully, and here's what he said.

He said, the practice of the old law was to avenge itself by the vengeance of the sword. It was to pluck out eye for eye and to inflict retaliatory revenge for injury. However, the practice of the new law points to mercy.

Men of old were used to requiring an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and to repay evil for evil with usury, with interest, but after Christ has supervened and has united the grace of faith with patience, now it is no longer lawful to attack others even with words, nor to merely say fool without danger of the judgment. Christ says, love your enemies and bless your cursers and pray for your persecutors, and then Justin, a former philosopher who was eventually martyred for his faith, said this, we used to be filled with war, mutual slaughter, and every kind of wickedness. However, now all of us throughout the whole earth changed our warlike weapons.

We have changed our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks. Later he wrote a letter to the emperor trying to explain Christianity to him, and he said, we who formerly murdered one another now refrain from making war even upon our enemies. Another one, Irenaeus, who was a bishop in northern France, writing a book against heretics, explaining what real Christianity looked like, put it this way, and particularly brought in this two kingdom concept.

I love this quote. Quoting from Isaiah, he says, the new covenant that brings back peace and the law that gives life has gone forth over the whole earth, as the prophet said, for out of Zion will go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, and he will rebuke many people and they will break down their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and they will no longer learn to fight. These people, the Christians, form their swords and war lances into plowshares, that is into instruments used for peaceful purposes, so now they are unaccustomed to fighting.

When they are struck, they offer also the other cheek. And then Hippolytus, a bishop in Rome, he was writing a church standard for baptism, and he stated, the church guidelines state, if an applicant or a believer seeks to become a soldier, he must be rejected, for he has despised God. And this is the way it went for all over the place.

We're just getting some nice quotes here, but you found all over again, like Tonya said, different cultures, different language, separated by all different things, a common voice. And you know what that common thing was? The words of Jesus. One of the quotes that Justin Martyr gave when he was giving a defense of Christianity, and he said, this is what Christianity is, and he just began to explain the Sermon on the Mount.

What an incredible concept of a Christianity that looks like following Jesus. And this was universal in the early church, until coming up into the year 300, 325, when the Emperor Constantine conquered Rome, and when he did that, he told the Roman people, I'm doing this in the name of Christ. He said he saw a vision in heaven in this name conquer, and so he came in, and for the first time he brought the church and the state together.

After him, just tons of people started coming into the church, and the Christianity began to be watered down. You began to see things mixed between pagan, like here's a coin where you have a pagan god on one side, Christianity on the other, and this mixture was something that was very disheartening compared to early Christianity. But still it wasn't for a hundred years after this that you get the people that historians have called Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine, who wrote the very beginning parts of what's called today the Just War Theory.

And I'm going to show you some of the quotes that even right after this first council of Nicaea with Constantine, still the church established rules, the Christians against the military. So this idea, and all these things of early Christianity, we felt a confidence that, okay, the teachings of Jesus are being practiced by radical Christians today, have been practiced by radical Christians throughout the early church, and a pilgrim church that has always embraced these things. And it seems that if you look at radical Christianity through any age that really caught the world on fire, it's always just a group of people who take the word of God and look at the words of Jesus, and just get together and say, hey, let's do it.

And when they do that, the world changes. Amen. So once the doctrine of non-resistance was finally becoming more clear for us, both from a historical and a biblical perspective, we began to ask deeper questions about the words of Jesus.

We saw that the doctrine of non-resistance is not something you take in isolation, but it's part of a bigger package of Jesus's teachings. And that package gets to the heart of how we ought to live our lives on this earth. We began to consider Jesus's teachings on economics, and sharing, divorce and remarriage, lawsuits, his call to missions to the whole earth.

Yeah, amen. And if there's one thing that we notice when we read through the words of Jesus, if there's one thing for sure, if you're trying to read Jesus and let it make sense, but yet still trying to hold on to your life, particularly your American way of life, just your life, all the words of Jesus are nonsense. When he said, if you lose your life, you'll win it.

In that context, it makes sense. You know, the scriptures tells us that the cross, that talking about the cross and the power of the cross, that it's foolishness to those that are perishing. But for us who are saved, it is the power of God.

And when we embrace that mindset of being dead to ourself, but alive to Christ Jesus, believing in the eternal life that he gives, it changes everything. And some people will look at that as sort of, I've heard people accuse me, even on our trial, the judge brought up, he said, isn't that a martyrdom complex? He said, no, it's not a martyrdom complex, but it is a theology of martyrdom. That if you live a life crucified, willing to do what Jesus told us to do, it'll change your life.

And the only way to make Jesus make sense is to receive it face value as a child. Then it all makes perfect sense. So the time finally came that it became clear that we needed to act on our convictions and seek release from the military as conscientious objectors.

So equipped with our army regulations from our counselors, we and another couple, Rick and Dawn Shirley, met in a room to pray one morning. After the prayer, Dean led us up the stairs and we grabbed a witness on the way and we knocked on the commander's door. It was a scary moment.

Very, very scary. I can't explain to you how scared we were. It's one of those slow motion, you only have times in your memory where everything goes in kind of slow motion.

This is one of those moments. It was like that. But we entered the room, came to attention, saluted our officer, and then when given permission to speak, Dean laid the army regulation 600-43 on his desk and said, sir, we're here to present our application for discharge from the army as conscientious objectors.

It was just quite a moment to say the least. He kind of sat there for a little bit. It was quiet and then he kind of flipped through the army regulation.

It said something like, we'll just make sure we expedite this process for you. So we went right downstairs and realized, okay, our whole life just changed. And from that, the army, not just for us, but for everybody becoming a conscious objector, you go through some certain series of different obstacles you have to go through, certain officers you have to speak to.

For instance, everybody has to go to a chaplain. Everybody has to go to a psychologist. Everybody has to present this big document, thesis on explaining your convictions and your sincerity.

And then all of that, finally, you have to go to this court trial, which is a hearing where they are challenging with different things, challenging your sincerity, and even bringing in witnesses to ask, well, how were they in this situation and that one? And then finally, they bring all those things together, each of those persons,

different thoughts of you and your court hearing, the testimonies, your packet and all that. And it's sent somewhere over to Pentagon, to a little office somewhere in the Pentagon where somebody there makes a decision on whether or not you can become a conscientious objector. And until they make that decision, they legally are required to remove you from any sort of work that would demand supportive warfare or training to kill.

So we were given all kinds of odd jobs, from reporting for the local newspaper, which didn't last very long, to painting latrines and rusty guardrails that were literally falling apart on the paintbrush. You could just see it was pointless. But they were just trying to keep us busy.

But it was a long time. It took the Pentagon eight months to reach their decision. And during that time, the Lord used that patient, bearing, waiting to stretch us spiritually.

He did. And each of those little interviews were intimidating. Some of them that I thought were not going to be intimidating were intimidating, and vice versa.

Like, for instance, the psychologist story. I'll tell you that one tomorrow. But one of the ones that I thought was going to be intimidating was a chaplain.

I mean, here's a guy that's been through Bible school and all that. So I remember going in there and having the scriptures, and I opened up the Word of God, and I said, okay, reading the scriptures, looking at these words, can you really look me in the eye and tell me that I'm wrong in these things? And to my surprise, he had an honest moment. He said, no, I really can't.

And so that was, it was very challenging. But it was, again, each of those obstacles was something God was showing us. But it just seems like God used every single one of those obstacles just to keep growing us, and that's just kind of been a pattern in our lives.

It really has. It really has. Like, again, I'll tell some of those ones later on.

Absolutely. But the most intimidating obstacle was definitely that court hearing. It's basically a little court hearing where they bring in a special designated legal officer.

Excuse me. He's assigned to your case, and he drills you with all kinds of questions and tries to determine your sincerity. And we each had to do this alone.

Interestingly, right before this, Mennonite Central Committee had sent us this little booklet that's supposed to help CO people know how to prepare for the questions typically asked in those CO hearings. So when we got it, we immediately met, the four of us, in a little room. Just kind of give you the answers to the most common asked questions, you know.

So we were like reading through it, and all of a sudden, Dean stopped, and he said, wait a minute. We're supposed to be following the teachings of Jesus, right? And we were like, well, yes. And he said, but Jesus said that, you know, you will be brought before governors and kings for my sake as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.

But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak. For it is not you who speak, but the spirit of your father who speaks in you.

Amen. We claimed that promise. That's right.

So just like that, we put the book up, and we forgot about it. We said, Lord, we just pray that you will glorify these words in our testimony somehow. We tried to, when we went to the court hearing, we tried to just give a living testimony.

Each time he asked us a question, we just wanted to answer back, you know, this is what Christ is doing in our life. And he asked me all kind of questions. He asked me a question about hunting.

I remember he asked me questions about economics. He asked us questions about how I felt about different wars, different military conflicts. And each time, we just wanted to share Christ, take him back to the word of God, and show him those things.

And it was, I felt there was an anointing on those meetings. And I even felt that the officer that was interrogating us, some of the questions were even longing type of thing, asking deeper questions. But all that waiting in between, there were times you started to wonder, are we doing the right thing? You still, the enemy always sends doubts, you know.

He was good at that. But God did still use that waiting period to build our faith, in spite of the accuser of the brethren, the attacks we felt on our faith. And it seems like it's been the pattern all our lives.

You're always in a battle. We just fight a different kind of warfare now. Yeah, it was, it was a, it was a difficult and impressive time in our life.

But probably the most amazing thing happened when, when it all came to it. Now, if you remember the first Persian Gulf War, I mean, some of you don't remember this. I mean, this is the 1900s back then, you know.

It's a long time ago. But it was the Persian Gulf War. The first one was kind of, it was over pretty quick.

And as we were in there, the, the, the finally, it was eight months, it was finally over. And the officer called us back into this little tiny room with a, and told us that, okay, called us, all the four of us back in this little room. And there laying on the desk, very conspicuously, were these four manila envelopes.

So we came in, saluted, he said at ease. And then he began to spoke, began to speak. And he said to us, okay, on my desk, and he's pointing to the, the four manila envelopes, he said, I have the results for your conscientious objector application.

But wait, he said, I want to, I want to say something. He said, he said, look, the war is over. You have nice jobs.

You can, I have the authority just to say this didn't happen, and eventually you can go back and have your career, and you get past this. Just, you can do that. So I kind of looked over to the other three, and I, I knew they were with me.

And I said, no, the Lord has been, put this thing in our heart. We want to go forward. And of course, this made us nervous.

I mean, I was thinking, why is he asking this? I mean, is he trying to help us save face or something? Or maybe is he, he knows we're going to go to jail, and he's giving us a last chance to, you know, save

ourselves. There's definitely a heaviness in the air. We were nervous.

Yeah, and so what did he say to us? Well, then he said, well, that's what I thought you would say. And I want to tell you, you've all been approved for honorable discharges, conscientious objectors. And so that was like, wow.

So all this time, all the things that we've been through, it was just a, this total relief of, it was kind of, kind of celebrating this, you know, kind of military way. And then, and then, but in that little moment of happiness and everything, something else happened that was, we just, again, would never, never forget. He said, but wait.

He said, there's now, there's, there's something else I need to tell you. And he looked at us very soberly, and he said, I too now am getting out of the army for the very same reason. We absolutely couldn't believe it.

We couldn't believe it. God had used our testimonies and the power of his word to change the very officer who had us on trial. It was like a hug from God.

And it was confirming for us that the Lord had been with us. It seemed, and talking about it now, it's easy to forget how scary it was, how overwhelming it felt, how frightening it seemed. It felt like we were fighting the world, but the Lord is real, and his power is mighty, and he is able to do things which he will never even believe.

And we never thought we had. We never thought we would see that. And he saw us through that whole time.

It was an incredible time of growth. So, amen. So, during this conference, we're going to be talking about these different aspects of Christian, of biblical non-resistance, and look at these words of Jesus.

And so, tomorrow morning, I'm going to talk about the two kingdoms, and I'm going to give a whole session to, to, to the concept of two kingdoms, because I think it's very important. If we don't get the concept of two kingdoms, really the, the teachings of non-resistance begin to get, they don't really make a lot of sense. After that, we're going to talk about the Old Testament.

And I hope to clear away the smokescreen that people talk about the Old Testament, and the name of that is Yahweh is a Warrior. And we're going to look at the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament and, and see, but they're quite obviously, they're the same God, and how God wants us to respond here in, in the New, in the New Testament. And then finally, we're going to look at what if, and we're going to look at some of those common things.

It seems like, regardless of what the Bible says, you can show people all kind of scriptures. It comes down to, yeah, but what if somebody breaks into your house and, and tries to hurt your grandma or something? So, we're going to talk about that, but at the end of that session, and there's a great skit that they did for me for that, and at the end of that session, I want to say not only about those what ifs, but also how we are supposed to respond as an army, living as soldiers for Jesus Christ on this earth, and what God wants us to do. So, so thank you very much, and Tonya, thank you very much.

Well, thank you. I feel honored to have the opportunity. Thank you all so much.

You are encouraging. You're such a blessing and encouragement in my life. So, I'm going to turn it back over to Brother Tony, and, and he'll conclude it here.

So, thank you all very much.

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