

Building a Community of Refuge in a World of Despair

Rich Nathan

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John: Building a Community of Hope in a World of Despair Series

John 17:11-15

In Jerusalem there is a memorial to the 6 million Jews murdered by the Nazis during World War II. The memorial is called Yad Vashem. Yad Vashem was founded in order to provide an appropriate “place and name” (that’s the translation of the Hebrew term Yad Vashem) for the victims of the Holocaust. What the State of Israel did not want to do was to allow the millions of Jews who were murdered to go to their deaths without any kind of remembrance of their names, their humanity.

Now, remarkably, given the extent of Jewish victimization at the hands of non-Jews, the law establishing Yad Vashem mandated remembrance of that tiny minority of righteous Gentiles who risked their lives to save Jews. Probably the most attractive feature of Yad Vashem is the collection of several thousand evergreen carob trees that line the short stretch of road one walks to reach the main Holocaust Memorial Hall in the Jerusalem Hills. The area is known as The Garden of the Righteous. And each tree in the garden is planted in recognition of a Gentile who helped Jews survive the Holocaust. Whenever possible the planting was done by the rescuer himself or herself. There is a plaque with the name of the honored rescuer placed at the base of each tree.

One of the trees bears the name of perhaps the most famous rescuer of Jews in the Second World War, a Swedish man named Raoul Wallenberg. There are lots of different versions as to the number of Jews in Budapest, Hungary, that Raoul Wallenberg saved. Some sources credit him with having saved 30,000 people. According to other estimates, it may have been as many as 100,000 people. But Raoul Wallenberg, someone many of you have probably never heard of, is undoubtedly one of the foremost heroes of the Second World War.

When Raoul Wallenberg was in his 20's he went to Palestine and came into contact for the first time with Jews who had fled Hitler's Germany. The stories about Nazi persecution stirred him and he spent the next eight years trying to strategize about ways to get Jews out of Nazi-occupied Europe.

Finally, his opportunity came at age 32. He was appointed First Secretary of the Swedish Diplomatic Mission in Budapest. The year was 1944. Hitler's Final Solution was in full swing. And the Germans were beginning to deport Jews from Hungary to the Auschwitz and Birkenau Concentration Camps in Southern Poland. By the time Raoul Wallenberg arrived in Budapest 400,000 Jews had already been deported to concentration camps for extermination.

Wallenberg began printing up his own Swedish passports and hired hundreds of Jews to work in the Swedish Embassy. Through their contacts, they gave these fake Swedish passports to their Jewish relatives and friends. Then he started to take over houses in the area around the Swedish Embassy. They become houses of refuge for

Jews. About 15,000 Jews found refuge in one of Raoul Wallenberg's houses. Thousands of Jews who had been issued the phony passports were able to escape to Sweden.

On one occasion, as Jews were heading out of a train station in cramped cattle cars on their way to Auschwitz, Raoul Wallenberg literally jumped on top of the train and began throwing Swedish passports in through the slats. Nazi guards were ordered to shoot him off the top of the train, but they were so impressed by his courage that they shot over his head. The Jews who had been given these protective passports were let off the train and returned to the city with Wallenberg.

In the closing days of the Second World War, the total massacre of Jews in Budapest was ordered by Adolph Eichmann. The only person who could prevent the massacre was General August Schmidhuber, the commander of the German troops in Hungary. Raoul Wallenberg sent a note to this German commander and said to him that he would make sure that the commander would be held personally responsible for the massacre of the Jews in Budapest, if the order was carried out. He guaranteed that the commander would be hanged as a war criminal after the war.

The massacre was cancelled at the last second because of Wallenberg's intervention. Two days later the Russians arrived and found 97,000 Jews alive in two Budapest ghettos.

Of all the deeds that could be done on behalf of our fellow man, there are very few things that compare with offering refuge to people escaping war, famine, or persecution. Of all the gifts the US has offered to this world, perhaps their greatest gift has been the offer of refuge to tens of millions of people over the last 300 years. America, at her very best, has embraced the words of Emma Lazarus, which were inscribed on a plaque at the base of the Statue of Liberty. The words read in part:

Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

Do you know that the concept of refuge is a deeply biblical concept? It reaches back into the Old Testament.

Moses was instructed in Numbers 35:11 to:

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Select some towns to be your cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone accidentally may flee.

Moses gave this law to the Jews.

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Deuteronomy 23:15 - If a slave has taken refuge with you, do not hand him over to his master.

David composed this psalm:

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2 Samuel 22:3 - My God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my Savior. From violent men you saved me.

David also wrote:

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Psalms 9 - The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

And perhaps in the most famous Psalm of refuge we read these words:

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Psalm 46:1-3, 7 - God is our refuge and our strength, an ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging, the Lord Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress.

It was this psalm that Martin Luther adapted in the writing of his famous hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

I’ve been doing a series from John 17, a series that captures Jesus’ vision for his church. As we continue in this series, I’ve called today’s talk, “Building a Community of Refuge in a World of Despair.” Let’s pray.

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John 17:11-15 - I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world anymore than I am of the

world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

In this text Jesus prays that the Father would protect his church from the evil one.

SLIDES

Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name.

Verse 12 – While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me.

Verse 15 – My prayer is that you not take them out of this world but that you protect them from the evil one.

Father, protect them. Father, protect them. Father, protect them.

Now, a lot of people, and indeed many followers of Christ, wonder why we need to be so negative and speak about our need for protection and refuge. What's so terrible out there that Jesus prays repeatedly for our protection?

It is very important that we are clear and realistic about the world we find ourselves in. One of the worst things that can happen to an individual is to be overly confident and to underestimate the opposition facing us.

When I was a teenager I went to a summer camp and played on this camp basketball team. The boys on our team thought we were really cool. We all had long hair and we tied dyed our basketball jerseys purple. We came out on the court with these big boom boxes that played 8-track tapes. If you don't know what an 8-track tape is, ask your grandfather! We came out on the court playing 8-track tapes of Jimi Hendrix's Purple Haze. Our tallest player was about 5'10".

We were cool. We went through our drills. We knew we were going to win, until the opposing team got off their bus. They wore professional looking sweats, jerseys with numbers on them. Four of their five starters dunked the ball during warm-ups. We just stood around and watched them. Suffice it to say, it wasn't pretty. We were slaughtered.

Pretending that you have no opposition is not being optimistic and positive. It's just being naïve. Does anyone think in 21st century America that you don't need a lock on your door, or a lock on your car here in Central Ohio? Do you leave your wallet out on top of your car as you go shopping at one of the malls?

Avoiding the subject of our need for refuge and protection is like a parent who does not talk with his or her child about sex or drugs in preparation for adolescence. It's

like a gardener who loves to plant flowers and vegetables, but refuses to deal with the weeds.

The world is a dangerous place. We need a refuge from the self-oriented, sensual, materialistic, consumer mindset and the no-fault easy divorce culture.

Other people, of course, are so obsessed with the need for protection that they entirely withdraw from the world rejecting Jesus' prayer in v. 15 where he says:

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My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.

In Christian history, during the declining days of the Roman Empire, many Christians sought refuge out in the desert away from the corrupting influences of the world. These early monks had motives that were admirable. They desired holiness. They wanted to pursue God. The problem was they sought holiness by running from the world. Many of these monks entirely lost their capacity to influence the world toward Christ.

The desire to pull up the drawbridges and flee the world has been a feature of American fundamentalism since the 1920's. Some of you may know the rather sorry

story of fundamentalism in America. The Scopes Trial back in 1925 was a watershed event for many Christians.

The State of Tennessee had passed a law forbidding the teaching of evolution in the public schools. John Scopes, a 24-year old biology teacher, decided to challenge the law. He assigned a text that contained the teaching of evolution. Scopes was indicted and convicted by a jury after nine minutes of deliberation. He was given a \$100 fine. Many people believed that John Scopes won his case. He actually lost it.

But the real event was the attorneys brought in for the case. William Jennings Bryan was brought in for the prosecution to prosecute John Scopes. And for the defense, the famous criminal attorney, Clarence Darrow, was brought in. The trial was theatrical and lasted 12 days. The most memorable moment of the trial was when Darrow called Bryan, the prosecutor, as a witness for biblical creation. Bryan allowed himself to be put on the stand. Darrow cross-examined him and made him look foolish and anti-scientific.

The Scopes Trial was widely reported on the front page of newspapers for weeks. Newspaper editors had a field day portraying this case as a conflict between urban, educated, scientific, progressive Americans and rural, backward, Christian yokels. Christians in America reacted to the Scopes Trial by pulling their kids out of public schools, forming their own fundamentalist private schools and colleges. Fundamentalists withdrew from academic life seeing it as anti-Christian. They

withdrew from fields of journalism and media, believing these to be thoroughly tainted with worldliness.

The results? Even to this very day, Christians are profoundly under-represented in education, media, and journalism. Obsession with the power of the devil and the world led to complete withdrawal.

A third and the healthiest response to the context that followers of Christ find themselves in is to simply see warfare and conflict as an ordinary part of our lives. Jesus prays protection from the power of the evil one.

Some people don't like to think about the existence of real spiritual evil, powerful, malevolent, wicked spiritual forces. They want to minimize the influence of Satan and demons in the world. Their understanding of any problem a Christian might have would look something like this:

SLIDE: The 3 Circles with the circle involving the demonic very small.

Christians in this camp see any problem they have as either arising from their own flesh, that is their own psychological makeup, sin, traumatic pasts, or their problems arise entirely from the world, the world of people who are hostile to God. They have no room in their thinking for an idea of spiritual warfare. Do you minimize Satan's influence in your life? Are you in touch with your desperate need for protection in the war with the devil?

Other Christians are entirely obsessed with the power of the devil.

SLIDE: The Second Circle Slide

When they consider problems in their lives, they believe that virtually everything is demonically inspired. There's no room in their thinking for psychological problems, mental illness, trauma, the natural results of bad choices, bad parenting, or sin.

Biblically, however, the picture that we ought to have that explains our problems is more like the third slide.

SLIDE: Balanced equally sized circles of our flesh, the world, and Satan.

It is a fight in America to be financially generous and give to the kingdom of God. Everything God wants requires a fight. It is a fight to stay sexually pure. It is a fight to forgive people who have hurt you. Your kids are in a war. They have to fight to stay away from drugs.

We need refuge. We need protection because we are in a war. You can close your eyes to the war. You can try to flee the war. You can try to pull up the drawbridges and move out to the country. You can build a 1000' wall around your family. But it is impossible to escape from the war.

From the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, Jesus spoke about and demonstrated spiritual warfare with a kingdom that was in opposition to God. Jesus was drawn into a fight as soon as he began proclaiming his message of the reign of God, the kingdom of God, in the synagogue at Capernaum.

As soon as Jesus began preaching demons opposed him. The ministry of Jesus was, in large part, a ministry of deliverance from the power of demons. And so we read in Mark 1:39,

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And so he traveled throughout Galilee preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

In fact, the most common miracle in the ministry of Jesus was the miracle of deliverance. There is nothing that Jesus did more commonly than deliverance. Those Christians who make fun of deliverance, who say that anyone involved in attempting to deliver someone from a demon, must be part of the lunatic fringe, must look back at the gospel accounts of Jesus and humbly say that our Lord put a lot of stock in deliverance.

And this conflict between the kingdom of God and the present evil age can be described by this diagram:

SLIDE: Diagram: Kingdom of God

In his first coming, Jesus brought the kingdom of God into this world. Until that time, the world was dominated by Satan, who Paul called “the god of this age.” But Jesus brought a piece of heaven in his own person into this world, into our time. Every time someone is healed, forgiven, or set free from an addiction; every time a marriage is reconciled, a refugee is cared for and protected; every time a person chooses to obey God, the kingdom of God and the life of the age to come is manifested and brought to bear in this age.

Now, friends, there is no escape from the war between the reign of God and the reign of Satan. We live in the midst of this cosmic conflict. There is no atom of the universe that is not being fought over right now. The center of the conflict is not the natural world, or the animal world, but world of human beings, and specifically the human will. The individual choices we make are either for God or against God. See, the conflict is all about what power is going to rule at this moment over your choices – the power of God, or the power of Satan.

Now listen, the church has always lived with this understanding that while we live in this world, we are in the midst of a war. The church’s understanding throughout history has been that we are locked in hand-to-hand combat with the evil one all of the time.

I heard Don Williams, who has taught here on many occasions and who has his Ph.D. from Columbia University, quote a Yale scholar who said that an enormous part of the reason why Christianity spread through the Roman Empire was that Christians were more successful at casting out demons than non-Christians. The history of the church has been a history of warfare.

You've heard of the Salvation Army, of course, which started in Great Britain a century ago. Men and women went out into the streets and decided they were going to do something for the poorest of the poor. They wanted to offer a refuge particularly for those trapped by the powerful addiction to alcohol. They wanted to rescue women who were trapped in the bondage of prostitution. Instead of avoiding alcoholics and prostitutes, these noble men and women in the Salvation Army said, "We're not going to walk on the other side of the street. We're actually going to try to rescue these people we find huddled in the doorways of our cities. We're going to offer a refuge to them." What could be closer to the heart of God than that?

Guess what happened. Let me read to you from a contemporary account in the 1880's. A historian writes in Whitechapel:

Salvation Army teenage girls were roped together like cattle and then pelted with live coals. On dark nights hooligans used sprinklers to shower the marching Salvation Army troops with tar and burning sulfur. In one year alone, 1882, 669 Salvation Army soldiers were knocked down or brutally assaulted. 60 Salvation Army buildings were wrecked

by mobs. The British police refused to intervene. In one city, Oldham, 100 young men decided to form what they called a “skeleton army,” sort of a mocking of the Salvation Army. They wore skulls and crossbones. They knocked Salvation Army girls to the ground and kicked them mercilessly. They opened up subscription lists all over the country and brewers and tavern keepers contributed money so that Salvation Army workers would be beaten.

You say: What would energize this kind of hatred against people who are so noble, offering refuge to the poorest of the poor, and the weakest of the weak? Why would anyone go out and knock a Salvation Army worker down and kick them, spit on them, and burn their buildings?

There must be a force propelling people to do this. Without a clear understanding of spiritual warfare, you can’t make sense of the history of the church, its martyrdoms, the persecutions of Christians around the world today. You can’t make sense of the commonness of divorce among professing Christians, the frequent moral failures by prominent pastors, the abuse of children by priests and ministers, the doctrinal divisions, the gossip, the complete watering down of the gospel and the faithlessness of the church. Unless you get clear about this one fact, you can’t make sense of things – we are in a war!

Spiritual warfare should not just be of interest or concern to a very small set of people involved in the deliverance ministry. It touches every area of our lives, our

schools, our families, our relationships, our churches, our political system, marketing, media, our neighborhoods, and our workplaces. There is a constant struggle going on in your life, friend, concerning which power you will surrender to. Satan wants to extend his influence in this world. Are you aware of the war going on?

Do you understand that if Satan does not keep you from getting saved by blinding your mind to the gospel message, (which is what Satan does, by the way, with the whole world - he blinds people's minds so they cannot see Christ) if Satan does not succeed in keeping you from being saved, his next goal is to render you utterly ineffective as a Christian. To get you so wrapped up in an addiction, to get you so distracted by busyness or some diversion, to get you so preoccupied in an innocent pursuit like stripping the woodwork in your house for a year, redoing all of your furniture, or to discourage you and intimidate you, to keep your mouth shut from sharing the gospel. How many times have you been kept from sharing your faith and pushing back the kingdom of darkness because you got intimidated? The thought intruded they'll think you're weird, or you'll seem fanatical? Don't push our religion on others. It's not politically correct. If Satan cannot keep you from being saved, his goal is to keep you from being effective as a Christian and spreading the influence of the kingdom of God.

We need a refuge. We need protection from the evil one. Where is the Raoul Wallenberg, the protector, the one we can run to for safety in the midst of this war?

Now listen, the issue is not where you can run and hide for protection. The issue is who will be with you?

Our great Refuge and Rescuer is Christ. There is one way that Satan gains power in our lives and that is through sin. If Adam in the beginning had never sinned, Satan would have no leverage point in this world. But Adam sinned and every single person, except one –Jesus Christ – yields influence and ground in their lives to the enemy. In the secret places of our hearts, we choose to cooperate with the power that is opposed to God over and over again. We make choices with our words and with our deeds, with our eyes, and our bodies to yield control of our lives to the enemy.

So what is our refuge and our remedy when we've yielded control to the devil? We run to Christ. There is power of the blood of Christ. You know the old hymn:

There is power, power, wonder-working power in the blood of the lamb.

There is power, power, wonder-working power in the precious blood of the lamb.

Revelation 12:11 says:

SLIDE

They overcame him, [the devil] by the blood of the Lamb.

Here's how it works. You find in some area of your life that you've sinned. You are up in the middle of the night and you hear the scream of accusations: Look at what you've done. You've blown it again. You're a failure. You are worthless. You will never be an effective Christian. You never should have said that. You never should have done that. Here's another area where you aren't doing enough. You are not fulfilling your obligations. You are not a very good grandmother. Your children wouldn't have turned out the way they did if you were a better mother or a better father. Why can't you provide better for yourself? Look at you; you succumbed to that addiction again. Why can't you overcome your emotional problems. Why can't you overcome your financial problems? You are worthless. You are a failure. You don't measure up compared to so and so.

Have you ever heard that voice? Worthless, failure, loser. How do you overcome it? Most of the time we just give ground. We agree with the accusations. We allow ourselves to be beaten into submission without offering a fight. Sometimes we try to fight back through denial. No, we really aren't that bad. We do good things. We try to balance out the accusations and guilt with some protestation that we've done well in that area or some other area.

Perhaps you try to defend yourself by saying, "I'm really sorry about my past. Look, I really feel guilty. I am remorseful." Or you try to make an inner vow: I'm going to try to change. I'm turning over a fresh leaf. We lean upon our repentance.

Friends, these are all paper-thin defenses. These are not refuges. There is only one way to deal with accusations. Any time you become aware of a failure at work or in your family, or as a student, you fail to do something that you should have done, or you've done something that you should not have done, the only way to deal with sin or failure is to admit that, indeed, you have failed. "Yes, I agree. I have failed. I don't deny it. My good does not make up for what I've done wrong. I will not rationalize away my sin. I will not try to redefine sin and call evil in my life good. My only hope is that the Son of God loves me and gave himself for me at the cross. By the death of the Son of God, God my Father has been completely satisfied."

The justice of God, the righteousness of God, the judgment of God has been completely satisfied by the death of his Son. God is so utterly satisfied that when I hold forth the blood of Christ and say, "God, my Judge, says to me, 'You are innocent in my sight, absolutely free. Whatever charges are against you have been dropped. I will not listen to an accusation any longer against this one.'"

That is why so many of the truly great hymns center on the blood of Christ.

My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus blood and righteousness.

I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

Or this one:

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins.

*And sinners plunge beneath the flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.*

When you are being accused of a failure, don't present the paper-thin defense of your own good deeds, your own sorrow, your own resolutions. Answer every accusation with the power of the blood of Christ. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb. That's our refuge.

We find refuge in the intercession of Christ. Again, when we feel attacked, we must run to Christ. Here's what we read in Hebrews 7:25:

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Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them.

My refuge against the enemy is not that we are able, that we have lots of faith, that we are great men of holiness and power. My refuge is not in finding a place in this world that is a safe zone. My confidence is in the simple fact that he is able. Jesus is able.

What is Jesus able to do? The writer of Hebrews says that he able to save completely. That literally means the uttermost, absolutely, there's no circumstance the enemy could bring your way, no problem, no storm, no attack, no horrible future

event that Jesus cannot save you from. In all of your wildest fears, whatever you dread right now, if all of your nightmares became true, if you did lose your job, if the diagnosis was, in fact, malignant cancer, if terrorism did hit our country again – if all of it came true, Jesus is still able to save you and me to the uttermost. Whatever happens Christ will be with you in it and through it. You will not be alone. Christ will be there in the hospital. Christ will be there in the funeral home. Christ will be with you when you travel, in your hotel room, in your marriage praying for you.

What is your refuge, friend? It is simply this: Jesus, at this very moment, is praying for you. While I preach to you and you sit there listening, Jesus is praying for you. When you go to sleep at night, Jesus is praying for you. When you are driving in the car with the radio on, when you are yelling at your kids, when you are struggling with temptation as a single person, Christ is praying for you. He is praying for me. He's praying for our whole church. He's praying for every church in this city and for every church in this country, and every church in the world.

Think about it. It's awesome. Jesus our High Priest, is praying for us right now – when you are assaulted with the “what if's” – what if this happened or that happened, run into this thought: Christ is with me and is praying for me. He prayed for you back in John 17 for you to be protected from the evil one. He's praying for you today.

We have refuge in the power of Christ. How am I going to make it through this day? Given your weak point and my weak point, how will you do today? You cannot make

it by will power, friend. You won't succeed by your own resolutions. I've given you a number of scriptures on your outline, but I just want to cite one:

SLIDE

Eph. 1:18-21 – I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glory, the inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given not only in this present age, but also in the one to come.

We rely on the blood of Christ. We rely on the prayers of Christ. We rely on the power of Christ. When I am weak, I pray, "Lord, fill me with your power. Help me to rely at this moment on your power at work in me. The power that is stronger than every spirit, and every demon." Here's our refuge in this world.

How can we deal with the warfare that we face in our schools, our families? God has also given us a church, friends, a refuge in the war. We don't run away and try to find some safe haven in Montana, on a Caribbean Island, or in your little suburb. The church is our refuge.

How can we be a refuge in this world of despair? We can pray for each other. Christ is praying for us. We can pray for each other. Part of our problem in prayer is that we almost always pray for each other only when there is a problem. Sally is sick, we need to pray for her. John is out of work, we need to pray for him. Someone's son is using drugs, we need to pray for them. It is appropriate to pray for the sick and broken, but I believe that we need to pray for one another even when we are doing well. Our attitude ought to be "I'm doing great, please pray for me."

What if we prayed for pastors who are not giving into temptation that they would not give into temptation? What if we prayed for leaders who are not having affairs, that they would not be tempted to have affairs. What if we prayed for each other when we aren't sick that we would continue to be healthy and well. Pray for people with bad marriages, but pray also for people with strong marriages. Pray for the broken, but pray also for the healthy. Do you pray for the healthy? Do you ask for prayer when you are healthy?

We find refuge in the church's teaching and counseling. The apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 10:3-5 talks about the full-scale warfare we are in. Paul writes:

SLIDE

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the

contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

What are the strongholds Paul is speaking of? People talk a lot about strongholds around the city. There are strongholds around Muslim areas. And that may be an appropriate extension of this text. But this text is not about strongholds around a city, or strongholds around a country. Strongholds are a set of arguments and lies in a person's mind. And not just any argument or any lie, specifically, the Corinthians have been duped into misunderstanding who Jesus is. And it is the teaching ministry of the church that tears down false ideas regarding who Christ is. That's one of the major ways we do warfare. We teach people to have an accurate view of God and Jesus. We tear down the lies in people's minds by teaching and counseling.

Let me make this really plain. If you were to dig under a persistent problem in your life, your deepest fear, your deepest issue, I will bet you that almost always the root of the problem is a lie embedded in your mind about who Jesus Christ is. Some of you believe in an unforgiving Jesus. Well, he'll forgive everyone, but he will not forgive this particular sin in your life. Or you believe in the non-judgmental Jesus. Well, Jesus really doesn't care if you go ahead and sin in this area. He's pretty tolerant. He's easy going.

Or you believe in the insufficient Jesus. Jesus is not enough to deal with the problem you are facing. He's not enough to help you face life alone, or cancer, or a lawsuit. You believe in the unconcerned Jesus. He only cares about your spiritual life. He won't help you with your child because you are a single parent. He doesn't care enough. He doesn't care enough to heal you. Or you believe in the heartless Jesus. He doesn't care about the broken people around you.

Friend, do you understand that one of the major ways that you engage in warfare is through the church's teaching and counseling that clears up misunderstandings and falsehoods about Christ.

Of course, the church's ministry of evangelism rescues people from the dominion of darkness. Every time someone stands up here in church and gives their life to Christ, the kingdom ruled over by Satan is being reduced by one. One less person is living under the dominion of darkness. Every time one of you gives your life to Christ, the kingdom of Satan is reduced by one.

There is a ministry the church provides, which is a ministry of refuge. We don't often think about it as offering us protection, but it is the ministry of rebuke. The apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:14-15 says this:

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Therefore we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the

waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ.

On many occasions I have had the opportunity to receive a gracious rebuke by a brother or sister who loves me. They help me to see a major blind spot in my life. You know, the old Calvinists used to say that sin was the sign on your back that everyone else could read, but you. And it is the kindness of brothers and sisters in the church to look us in the eye and speak the truth to us in love and say, “There is a sign on your back. Here’s something you’ve done. Here’s something you’ve said. Here’s an area you are neglecting.”

Finally friends, in order to rescue us and the church from the power of the evil one, we find a refuge in personal commitment to God. James 4:7,

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Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.

Let me share one final picture. Robert Munger, in a wonderful little booklet that he wrote for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship many years ago, describes growth as a disciple in terms of the human heart. He said, “My heart is Christ’s home.”

SLIDE – Diagram of House.

Conclusion.

Building a Community of Refuge in a World of Despair

Rich Nathan

October 4-5, 2003

John: Building a Community of Hope in a World of Despair Series

John 17:11-15

- I. Refuge in War
- II. Refuge Needed
 - A. Responses to Warfare
 - 1. Avoidance
 - 2. Obsession
 - 3. Ordinariness
 - B. Reality of War
 - 1. In Jesus' Ministry (Mark 1:21-28, 39)
 - 2. In the Church's History
 - 3. In Our Lives
- III. Refuge Available
 - A. Refuge in Christ
 - 1. The Blood of Christ (Rev. 12:11)
 - 2. The Intercession of Christ (Heb. 7:23-25)
 - 3. The Power of Christ (Eph. 1:18-19, 3:16, 20-21)
 - B. Refuge in the Church
 - 1. The Church's Prayers
 - 2. The Church's Teaching and Counseling (2 Cor. 10:3-5)
 - 3. The Church's Evangelism and Welcome
 - 4. The Church's Rebuke (Eph. 4:15)
 - C. Refuge in Personal Commitments and Resistance