

This Means War

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 April 2023

Preacher: Dylan Marais

[0 : 00] All right, so you've got a couple of situations. I'm going to ask you a few questions. Who would you listen to in the following situations? There's a fire. Who do you need to listen to when there's a fire?

Not sure. Okay, there's a braai. The fire is a braai. Who do you need to listen to? To God. The one with the tongs.

Maybe you need to listen to your dad. If there's a fire in your house and you don't know what to do, who do you need to listen to at that point? Fireman.

Flowers. You've got a lovely garden. Think of Latimer House next door. Who would you ask to help you with your garden if you're not sure how to do your garden well?

John. John. John Hickson. John Hall. We've got a number of people in our... If Sandy was here, we'd listen to her. Flowers.

[1 : 08] You've got a stall at the Chelsea Flower Show in England. Who would you listen to then? Like a high-level, botanist-level person, wouldn't you?

John, we would still listen to you, but we would get some other advice. You're going for a hike? I don't know. Up the silver mine.

The Green Belt in Constantia. Do you need to listen to anyone about how to hike? Yeah, you're right.

You're going up a mountain. You're stuck on a mountainside. Who are you going to listen to then? Search and rescue. You're fine.

You're breathing. You're normal. Do you need to call a paramedic and ask him how to help you breathe? No, you're okay. You're at home. Your partner collapses. Let's assume we've got 911 in our country.

[2 : 15] Who are you going to listen to at that point? The paramedic. You're at the shooting range. Things can happen at a shooting range.

Do you just do your own thing at a shooting range, or do you pay careful attention to the shooting instructor? So, friends, depending on the situation we find ourselves in, we listen to people, but we listen more carefully to people if the consequences are more severe.

Does that make sense? If you're at the shooting range, you listen to an instructor, a few people could die if you're not careful. If you're in a war situation, and bombs are falling around you, left, right, and center, and people come on the PA and tell you how to take shelter, how to hide, what to do with your, how to protect yourself, would you be listening?

If they tell you, tune into this radio station, you'd tune into that radio station to listen. You don't want to be caught unprepared when the stakes are high.

When the stakes are high, when it's life and death, we tend to listen very carefully to the people telling us what to do. Welcome to this week's talk, and it's all about war.

[3 : 34] Israel are going to find themselves in a war situation, and the point that God wants them to get, they need to listen to the person that he's going to send them to help them, because otherwise they're going to die.

The stakes are high, they need to listen. But the first thing we want to look at is that Israel needs to prepare for war. So, we're in Exodus 23, open up there if you're not there already.

Israel's in Egypt, God saves them from Egypt, God puts them at Sinai. They've got the Ten Commandments, we've had the Book of the Covenant, this is how I want you to live.

They're just about ready to go into the Promised Land. Okay, you guys have got just about everything you need. Oh, one last thing. There's very bad people in the land.

There's evil lurking there. You need to listen to me. God knows that there's evil lurking in the land. It's full of these really bad people.

[4 : 38] You know, the ones that we can't pronounce. So, have a look at verse 23. My angel is going to go before you and he's going to bring you to the land of the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites.

And God isn't just saying, oh, you're going to meet a bunch of nice new people. They're there. They're not going to give up without a fight. And so God is preparing. This is a pep talk for God's people to prepare them for war.

But this is not any ordinary war. This is part of God's great cosmic battle plan against evil, which started not just with us falling into sin, but with the supernatural beings that oppose God and his purposes.

So, yeah, we fell into sin in Genesis 3, but there was, well, Genesis 2, really. Genesis 3. But there's a force behind the sin. There's Satan that comes down and tells us how to disobey God.

So there's these supernatural forces opposed to God. There's Asin, and then there's these strange supernatural forces that are working against God and his purposes. We've actually met some of these people in this chapter back in Genesis 15, where God actually is going to explain his plan of attack to Abraham.

[5 : 59] You don't need to turn there. But this is Genesis 15. This is 400, 500 years before this time. And God is telling Abraham what's going to happen with his people. And he says, in the fourth generation, your descendants will come back here.

He says, I'm going to send them away to a land where they'll be slaves for 400 years. But they're going to come back here to Canaan. For the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.

So God has got this battle plan that includes his people Israel, but it's to go and get rid of evil in another part of the world. The part of the world that he wants his kingdom to be established.

The sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure. What sin is the Lord talking about here? We know from other Bible texts that the Canaanites, this is a conglomerate group really. Canaanites, Perizzites, Jebusites, etc., etc. They all come from Ham and from Canaan, who we know was cursed in the story of Genesis.

[7 : 06] So what sins are they talking about here? Well, corrupt sexual practices, corrupt sexual worship practices. They were idolaters, but in their worship services, it would culminate in sexual acts with a bunch of temple prostitutes, male or female.

Sometimes very young males and females. They also practiced ritual child sacrifice. They burnt their children in the fires to their gods.

When something bad happened, they would sacrifice their children in the fire and kill them so they would get the pleasure of the gods on their side. Not only that, the Amorites and the other tribes mentioned here intermingled with the descendants of the fallen angels in Genesis 6.

Now that's not something we often look at. We don't have time to go into it now. But this is a race of giants in the land of Canaan who are wholly given over to their appetite for domination, abuse, and violence.

Remember when Moses first sends them in? I think it's in Numbers 13. They go and spy out the land. They come back and they give a report. They said, ooh. Notwithstanding what God says in Exodus 23 here, God is saying, listen, just go get it.

[8 : 25] I'm with you. They go and look and see and they come back and say, whoa, no, no. You didn't tell us they were big. Do you remember they were big? Giants? We can't go in there. We look like little grasshoppers to them.

All that's to tell us is that Canaan is ground zero for this force of spiritual evil that's opposed to God and his purposes in the world. And so it's no accident that this is the land that God is sending his people to start the process of ridding the world of this kind of evil.

God's people need to prepare for war. And here's what we need to take on board. We too are in a war against the evil forces of this world.

The war that started in the Old Testament hasn't ended. It continues and we're part of it. What's true of the Old Testament is true of us in the New Testament but with some very important differences. But just to make a note that we as a church sometimes forget that we're in a wartime situation. But you know the Bible tells us that we're surrounded by evil.

[9 : 39] This world is a broken, corrupt place. It's not a good place. It's ruled by these forces that dominated and make people do crazy things. And we as a church are the vanguard, the first driving force in God's army to rid against this evil.

But you know too often we sleep walking our way through life to take notice. Just imagine that we're in a war situation. Think about Ukraine. You're going about your daily life and our war starts.

Do you go about your daily life in the middle of a war? If there is a war and there's bombs dropping and bullets flying and planes overhead. And you see your next door neighbor toddle off down to the coffee shop ordering their flat white moccacino with skim milk latte.

And not worrying about anything happening around them. You'd think, no but hang on, what's wrong with this person? Don't they realize they're in danger? Don't they realize we've got to put up a fight? Don't they realize an enemy is coming?

We've got to fight back. Otherwise they're going to take over this land. They're not aware of the situation. And sometimes we're a little bit like that in our own minds.

[10 : 57] We're not aware that we're actually in a spiritual battle. We're going to go around our daily life. Yeah. Pray. Yeah.

Yeah. When I really need it. Read God's word. There's a pamphlet. Maybe. Church. But it's such a nice day. I wonder if you would change our minds about these things.

About sticking closely to God. If we thought, oh hang on. There's a war out there. And if I'm not careful. I'm going to get taken down. And in fact. I need to be rescued.

Because I'm part of the problem. But the New Testament is full of language about spiritual warfare and conflict. You don't have to turn there. It should be up on the screen.

First, Ephesians chapter 6. Paul writes this. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood. But against the rulers. Against the authorities. Against the cosmic powers of this present darkness.

[11 : 54] Against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. There's a war out there. There's real evil out there.

And we're in a real fight. But this war that we fight. Unlike the Old Testament. It's not aimed at people. And here's the key difference.

It's aimed at the things that cause people to be evil. We aim at the cause. Not at the casualties. And just a word about evil and spiritual warfare.

As we go through our talk today. By evil I mean a combination of three things. That we identify in our church traditions. Especially in our baptism liturgies.

Where we are called to. In baptism. We're prepared to fight manfully. Against the world. The flesh. And the devil. The world is this corrupt, broken system of thoughts.

[12 : 55] And culture and practices. The flesh is us. Our own sin. And the devil is the one that stokes both those fires. So as Christians fighting this war.

We're not called to hate or to fight with anything other than the gospel. And with truth. And with love. We don't use violence. We don't force our views on anyone.

We don't dominate or use our power to coerce. Christians aren't here to hurt or to kill. But to free. And to rescue. And to help.

So the first thing Israel had to realize. As they prepared to go into the promised land. Is that there's going to be a battle. And this question is all. What are they supposed to do in this battle?

How are they going to win? What were the things they were going to have to do in order to survive? What does God want from them? What does God expect them to do to win? We see that there's two things that stand out in our text.

[13 : 54] We'll cover them shortly. First they had to listen to God. They had to listen to his angel that he sent them. They had to pay careful attention to what he said. And secondly no compromise. No fraternizing with the enemy.

They had to make sure they didn't compromise in any way. With the idol worship of the Canaanites. The first weapon. In God's. The people of.

The arsenal of God's people. Is a very strange weapon. These two things. Are going to be the biggest help.

In wartime. Now. I don't know if you've ever seen someone fight. You know we fight you with one hand tied behind my back. Well God's people fight with two hands tied behind their back. With their ears.

Why am I saying that? We'll have a look at verse 21. And verse 22. Well. I have to read from verse 20. Sorry. Okay.

[14:54] Listen. Look boys. God is saying to his people. I'm going to send an angel before you. And he's going to guard you. He's going to protect you. Because you're going to need protection. And he's going to bring you.

To this place that I've prepared. So this angel is going to help you. So. Okay. Great. Now what must I do with this angel. Pay careful attention to him.

And obey his voice. In other words. Listen carefully. In case you didn't get that the first time. Verse 22.

But if you carefully obey his voice. And do all that I say. Then. I'll be an enemy to your enemies. An adversary to your adversaries.

So this is listening language. Listening and obedience language. Is such an important part of spiritual warfare. Or any warfare for that matter. It's interesting that the.

[15:51] Greek and Hebrew word for listen and obey. Is the same word. It's the same word. To listen. Is to obey. You can't listen and not obey in the Bible.

It doesn't work that way. Not like us. Where we listen. But we don't obey. You know. But your mom's always. You hear me. But are you listening? So God is saying the same thing. By listening to this angel.

They're actually listening to God. And that's how they side with God. By listening to the messenger that he sends. And this angel is no ordinary angel. It doesn't say that he is the angel of the Lord.

But God puts his name into him. I'll put my name into him. God doesn't just give his name to anything or anyone. In fact. It really means that this. This is a manifestation of God himself.

That's coming here. And helping you guys out. And he's speaking through this person in a unique way. And so they need to listen. Why all this listening?

[16:56] Well. In a wartime situation. If you're just a trooper. If you're the civilians. Or you're the civilians. You don't know how to fight. You'd like to think we know how to fight. We watch all the adventure movies.

Don't we? And you think you can just pick up a gun and fight. And one man against the armies. It is just not like that. The reason they need to listen is their enemy is stronger.

And cleverer. And bigger. And more trained for war than they are. These people have been living in this part of the world for centuries. And not even the Egyptians can get rid of them.

Everyone is scared of these people. The people that God is telling them to go. That he's going to go and wipe out. And so they need to listen to God. If they're going to survive. And have a hope of winning. Friends.

We're told to do exactly the same thing in the New Testament. With our relationship with Jesus. In a sense. He's the angel par excellence. Of God speaking to us. Angel.

[17:54] Meaning messenger. I'm not saying that Jesus is an angel. That he's not the person of the Trinity. He's not the son of God. He is the son of God. But an angel really is just a messenger. And Jesus is in that sense.

The total messenger. Sent by God to speak to us. And so on. And because there's this war out there. You really want to listen to him. Because God has spoken to him more clearly.

He's spoken through Christ. More clearly. Than through any other person. In history. And so we want to listen more carefully to him. Than to any other voice in our lives.

I'm just going to look at a few verses from Hebrews. It'll come up on the screen in just a second. But I'll just start in the first verse. It's a famous verse in the Bible.

You don't have to turn there. I'm just going to read the one verse. Hebrews 1. If you want to know how to do well in business.

[19:13] And you've got an amazing opportunity to speak. To speak to a business leader. A world business leader. Who knows what he's doing. Who owns billions of shares.

Or you're going to speak to the guy who doesn't know what to do with his life. Hasn't really started any businesses. Which one are you going to listen to? The one who's got everything. Because he's done it. Jesus is the heir of all things.

And not only that. He made the whole universe. He's worth listening to. Because he knows stuff. Does that make sense? Now Hebrews chapter 1 goes on to say.

Well let me just tell you about the angels. You think angels are amazing? They're nothing compared to this person. But it ends here in Hebrews chapter 2.

Therefore we must pay the most careful attention to what we have heard. So that we do not drift away.

[20 : 13] For since the message spoken through angels was binding. And every violation and disobedience received its just punishment. How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?

We must listen more carefully to Jesus. Because even when an angel walks in here. You'll stop listening to me. And you'll listen to the angel. It will just be like that. Angels stop what they're doing. And listen to this guy. This king. This Lord Jesus Christ. He's worth listening to. So that we don't drift away.

And just decide to do our own things. We're like sheep. We pray it every Sunday. We're like sheep. Without a shepherd. There we go. And Jesus says listen to me. Don't just do your own thing. Don't listen to yourself. Listen to me Jesus says. You know in a war time. You listen very carefully to the commander in chief when he gives you briefings. Because your life depends on it.

[21 : 16] You're in the trenches. The call comes. Come to HQ. We're going to give you the battle plan. And guy. You know. You don't go there and just go. Hey. What's going on? Nothing. I don't listen to the guy.

You go there with your notebook. All right. Where's the enemy? What's he going to do? How many people has he got? What resources have we got? Okay. You want me to go there? At what time? When? Okay.

And then this is going to happen. And I mustn't go there at that point. You take it down. And you do it. Because your life and the life of your friends depends on it. Do we listen to Jesus like our lives depend on it?

And he's speaking to us and it's so easy to access. We've all got it within our reach. No. I'm not in that much danger. This is why you don't listen to people. When you don't think you're in danger, you don't listen.

You don't have to listen. It's okay. You can do it yourself. Yes. Well, good luck. In a war situation, good luck. I'm going to the briefing. I'm listening to the guy who knows what to do.

[22 : 25] And I'm going to do my best to do what he says. Ah, I'll get around to it when I need to. Be careful if you're living like that.

Okay. Be careful if you just come to church every now and then. We're going to see a bunch of people at Easter. Which we never normally see. Maybe you just came to church today. Just every now and then. You're not really listening to Jesus.

What you're really doing is listening to yourself. Or to some other voice in your head. Or to the ideas of the world. Yeah, that looks amazing. If we could just have that and do that. They can't give you life.

In fact, they want to give you death. There's only one person in the universe that can give you life. And that's Christ. So you want to listen to him. Christ's words are life and truth.

And everyone who lives by them gains life and freedom and all good things. Well, that tells us, who we listen to tells us which side we're on.

[23 : 25] You can't listen to two sides in the war. You can't obey both sides. You can only really obey one. In wartime, you're forced to pick a side. There's no neutrality in war.

You can't compromise or fraternize with the enemy. It's punishable by death. So in the First World War, in those trench warfares, the enemy was not that far away.

But they had strict orders. You're not allowed to go and speak to them or talk to them in any way. Because we don't know. How do we know if you're a friend or foe then? So the other thing that Israel had to learn was not to compromise or fraternize with the enemy.

They were commanded not to enter into covenant with evil nations or to serve their gods in any way. Let's have a look at verse, back in Exodus 23. Verse 24.

You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do as they do, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces.

[24 : 28] You shall serve the Lord your God. And then later on in verse 32, he repeats it again. You notice how God often says things to us? Because he has to.

You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me.

For if you serve their gods, it will be a snare. It will surely be a snare to you. So the Israelites had to make sure that none of their laws, none of their practices, none of their worship, none of their ways of living or ways of thinking corresponded with the pagan nations that they were going to go and will hopefully kick out.

But certainly we're going to be in their midst for a while. They are to be totally separate. Christians, likewise, are to stay away from worldly acts, the worldly ways of doing things.

Worldly influences are not to compromise with evil in any way, shape, or form. You know, in wartime there's always propaganda. This side wants to tell you that they're the truth, you're going to fight for freedom if you're fighting for them.

[25 : 46] The other side has got the same thing. In the Second World War, they set up these whole radio stations to try and bombard the other side with propaganda. In our modern world, wow, is the world out there not the best propaganda machine we've ever come across?

You're all carrying it in your pocket constantly. Like at least in the past, the Google box, what do they call the doof box, the TV was at least in your dining room. Yes, see, now you carry it with you. You know, we all... And it's like, you struggle to find good content on there. It's there, but we don't make often use of it.

Scrolling, scrolling, scrolling, scrolling, scrolling, scrolling. There goes your time. We're not to be seduced by worldly thinking in terms of morals and family and justice and economics.

All areas of life for the Christian are to be built upon biblical principles. I'll give you one example. One huge area of the propaganda wall in our modern world is this area of sexuality.

[27 : 12] Morals, family, and now gender issues. With governments wanting to control how people speak because it doesn't fit their narrative. So in South Africa, we've got the hate speech bill that is coming up.

I think it's been passed by parliament. It's got to be passed by the Council of Provinces. And we've actually commented on that. Remember, we sent out... We said there's problems with it.

And in the parliamentary hearings that they had, parliamentarians from some of the... Well, the two biggest parliamentary groups said, No, we want this bill.

We're tired of pastors telling us what to do and how to live our lives. You just go away and leave us alone. Go back to your churches. Your morality has no place in politics. It's very interesting that that same message was sent to the...

Under apartheid, to the freedom fighters. It was the government then that said, No, we don't want your politics in... We don't want your religion in politics, I said to Bishop Tutu at the time.

[28 : 15] Now it's changed. They still don't want it. Recently, the Church of England took a synod-level decision, not us, the church in England, in England, to bless same-sex marriages.

And it's going to rip the Anglican communion apart. It's busy doing that. Our presiding bishop, Glenn Lyons, was asked to send a video comment saying that he stands with certain churches in England that don't go with these blessings of same-sex marriages.

Here's a question. Would we stand up and vote against that? In this meeting, everyone is agreeing that this is the way to go. Do you have the guts? Do you have the ability to say, No, no, we can't do this.

We do love people. We can't go this far. Or do we compromise and go with the worldly waves of doing things? When these things start to take place in our school and universities, are we willing, are we able to make a stand?

Not fight the people, but fight what's behind them. I guess what this means is we need to choose sides. We can't be a bystander in this fight. There's no other way to cut it.

[29 : 31] This is a binary situation. You're either with Christ or you're not with Him. He says that Himself. Those who aren't with me are against me. It's right or wrong, good or bad, light and darkness, truth and lies.

But that's helpful because you want to know who your enemy is. Another application for us to think about. Don't be a camouflaged Christian.

Don't be a camouflaged Christian. In warfare, you camouflage yourself so people don't see you.

Well, I mean, it's helpful if you're a sniper. Let's be honest. But what you don't want to do is dress like the opposite side and sound like them and talk like them and listen to the stuff they listen to and live like the way they live and then claim to be a Christian.

You just can't do that. And we're not going to accept it here because Christ doesn't accept it. Do you look and sound and act the same as God's enemies?

God wants us to fly our Christian flag. We look high in the workplace and in schools and in businesses and especially in our homes. Remember, that doesn't mean attacking people personally or calling them by names or belittling them.

[30 : 53] We do what we do out of love for Christ and love for them, but the Bible does call us to engage in the world and to tell the truth and to accept the consequences.

But there's one last reason why we really want to engage in this battle. The first two reasons is you need to listen and you need to not compromise because you don't want to be caught out with the enemy because, I don't know about you, but it sounds like this angel is going to take them out. It sounds like God is going to win. And besides, we all know, if you're God's enemy, who's going to win that battle? You just can't win that battle. But there's one other reason why we want to join sides with God and listen to Him.

That's because we need His help and also because victory is guaranteed. So if we listen and don't compromise, we don't have to actually do any fighting. God promises to do all the fighting and actually make it easy for us.

He's going to make it easy for Israel to overcome their enemies. Let's have a look at a few verses again in Exodus 23. So notice in verse 20, He will guard them. He will protect them and bring them and lead them into the land.

[32 : 02] Verse 22, I'm going to, your enemies are going to be my enemies. Do you remember Genesis 12 when God blessed Abraham? Whoever blesses you, I will bless. Whoever curses you, I will curse.

Verse 23, God is going to take them out. When my angel goes before you and brings you to the land of all these peoples, I will wipe them out.

They're just a stain in the world. They're big and strong to you. To me, they're just a little bit of coffee that I spilled. Done. Verse 27, God is going to send His terror and they're going to run away. I will send my terror before you and will throw them into confusion and all the people who come against you and all the people who come against you and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you.

You just have to walk into the land. They're going to turn and run. Sounds like a cool war to me. That sounds like a cool way of fighting. Verse 28, I'm going to send, and if that doesn't help, I'll send some hornets to take them out.

[33 : 12] Verse 28, I will send hornets and they're going to drive them out. Verse 29, I will drive them out. Verse 30, I will drive them out. Verse 31, and you will drive them out.

So there's this partnership with God and His people, but the person doing the fighting is God.

Friends, we can expect the same result if we listen to Jesus in our battles.

And our battles are real. We face big enemies. Sin inside us. Propaganda in the world out there that's lying. And behind them, the devil. You can't fight that war by yourself.

But you do need to fight it. And we don't need to be scared. Because God has promised we'll win.

So Ephesians 6 again. Finally, Paul writes, in the same section, finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

Put on the whole armor of God that you might be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and have done everything to stand firm.

[34 : 22] So we don't have to worry about evil. But friends, we mustn't be complacent. We've got to put on the full armor of God and stand and be ready and pray.

And Jesus will do the rest. This is God's pep talk for His people before the big game. Boys, listen up.

There's a big fight coming. We've got big enemies out there. I want you to man up. I want you to stick to the game plan and listen to me.

And you'll come home champions. But this is a team game. We're all in this together. Our home groups, our church, that's the place where we get our weekly pep talk to listen to God, to help encourage each other.

Hey, your armor. You forgot some of your armor there, buddy. Let me help you out. And then we stand together as soldiers on a battlefield with shields and swords ready for the fight.

[35 : 29] When we face our battles, we need to hear from God and we need to hear from others on our side that God's got the big guns, that He's going to win and that we can do it. So we pray and ask God to help us.

Heavenly Father, we've caught a glimpse of your battle plan for the world.

That there's big, evil things out there. There's evil within us and we need to choose sides. Lord Christ, will you have mercy on us? Enroll us in your army.

Give us your strength. Give us your truth. Give us your armor and help us to manfully, nobly, with everything in us, fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil and to overcome.

In Jesus' name. Amen.