

Wartime Readiness

2 Samuel 2:1-3:1

“There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David...”

Introduction: In order to be *combat ready*, a military force must adopt a mindset that war is an inevitability and is an imminent reality. According to US Army guidelines (at least as of 7 years ago), the Army was *combat ready* if they had the following:

*Army Readiness is based on four pillars of **manning, training, equipping, and leader development**. Readiness is benchmarked against the Total Army Force ability to **defeat, deny, or deter hybrid, near-peer threats and meet operational demand requirements**.¹*

This means that a military force must have the proper amount of soldiers who are trained, resourced, and lead, which also means there is a high amount of preparation for what *could* happen in the future. The key to this is the **time** it would take to move from identified threat to actual mobilization, and that difference determines defeat or victory. Looking at history, we have examples of nations like the US in WWII who were NOT combat ready when attacked at Pearl Harbor, but mobilized an immense amount of people and resource at a breakneck pace, seeing the entire nation united in the effort. We also have an example of France heading into the war with a tremendous effort of spending and time going into the *Maginot Line*, a supposedly impenetrable defensive line that gave a false sense of security to its military. Though it had superior numbers, they were NOT ready for the onslaught of German *blitzkrieg* and ended up surrendering much more quickly than anyone would have imagined. Their readiness had nothing to do with manpower, but everything to do with mentality.

The Bible frames the Christian life in military terms: *war, battle, and soldier* are just some of the descriptions of our life in Christ. While the Old Testament tells about physical wars, often brutally so, the New Testament tells of battles *within* and battles in the *unseen realms*. **James 4:1-2** says, “*What causes quarrels and what causes **fight**s among you? Is it not this, that your **passions are at war within you?** 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.*” **Ephesians 6:11-12** “**Put on the whole armor of God**, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”

This language is not only descriptive but helpful for us to cultivate a **wartime mentality**, a combat readiness knowing that there is **true opposition that is against us**, and these are unrelenting and never ceasing. That is why J.C Ryle said this in his classic work called “*Holiness*”:

*“The true Christian is called to be a **soldier**, and must behave as such from the day of his conversion to the day of his death. He is not meant to live a life of **religious ease**, [laziness], and security. He must never imagine for a moment that he can sleep and doze along the way to heaven, like on traveling in an easy carriage... If the Bible is the rule of his faith and practice, he will find his course laid down very plainly in this matter. He must “**fight**.”*

¹<https://www.army.mil/standto/archive/2016/05/19/#:~:text=Army%20Readiness%20is%20based%20on,and%20meet%20operational%20demand%20requirements.>

And John Piper said this in *“The Dangerous Duty of Delight”*:

*“Life is war. The casualties are millions, and the stakes are eternal. What we need today is not a call to simplicity, but a call to war. We need to think in terms of **“wartime lifestyle”** rather than a “simply lifestyle.”*

We have been entrusted with the greatest message in the world, one that transforms people, creates hearts of flesh out of hearts of stone, moves people from death to life, and reconciles us to the God of the universe, allowing us to do what we were originally created to do: worship the God of the universe, glorifying Him by enjoying Him forever. But that message of forgiveness will be vehemently opposed and runs counter to our sinful hearts. Our enemy would like nothing more than convincing us that there *is no war, that life is supposed to be easy and comfortable, and the devil does not exist.* But we know better and have to be prepared at a moment’s notice to fight.

This morning we will look at a passage where **David**, after all the running, hiding, and waiting, will finally be able to take the throne of a long awaited kingdom, but it will not be an easy, quick, or painless process. He comes back into the land of Israel scattered with Philistine conquerors, Saul sympathizers, and outright aggressive challengers for the throne. He must embrace the challenge, that even though God had promised the throne, it would come through a hard fought battle. What we will see is that what David modeled in 2 Samuel, wrote in Psalm 2, and was embraced by the early church in Acts 4 is the same mentality we need as a church, for such and time as this and for every time after. There will be opposition, but we must be ready, not to wilt or draw back, but **boldly push forward with the true reality of the gospel.**

Priorities of Wartime Readiness (1-4)

*After this **David inquired of the Lord**, “Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?” And the Lord said to him, “Go up.” David said, “To which shall I go up?” And he said, “To Hebron.” 2 So David went up there, and his two wives also, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. 3 And David brought up his men who were with him, everyone with his household, and they lived in the **towns of Hebron.** 4 And the men of Judah came, and there **they anointed David king over the house of Judah.***

Last week, we left David at a memorial service, mourning the death of Saul and Jonathan, which marked the end of a reign and life, and the beginning of a new rule. The text says that David moved his band of 600 soldiers and their families to the city of **Hebron**, a town with rich covenant memories, since Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah were all buried there (Gen. 23:17-19; 25:9-10; 49:29-32; 50:13). It was about 19 miles south/southwest of Jerusalem at about 3000 feet in elevation. Remember, Jerusalem was not yet a royal city for David, so Hebron became the place of his first visible kingdom, a place where all people could see, especially those of Judah.

Now, if you are like me, you grew up with Sunday school stories of David, or at least most have some reference point of this great king of Israel. But sometimes we get lulled into thinking it kind of just happened for him, that he beat the Philistines as a teen and got the throne as an adult. But that is not the case at all. In fact, verse 11 says that he ruled in **Hebron 7 ½ years**, and was only king of Judah (the southern part of the land) during his forty-year reign. These 7 ½ years were tense, tenuous, and far from certain, at least humanly speaking. What set David apart from Saul was his **reflex to trust the LORD, and when he came to a decision point, his first thought was to inquire of the LORD.** At this point, this meant working with Abiathar the priest and using the Urim and Thummim, but as he did, God made it clear that it was time to leave Philistia and Ziklag behind, and begin his time in Judah.

But that begs a question: *how do we inquire of the LORD today, especially when faced with decisions to make for our families, business, life, etc.?* The answer is clear: **the Word of God and prayer**. This answer feels too simplistic, but typically it's not that people have done the deep dive in each of these and found them lacking, it's that we don't believe they are enough and neglect them for worldly means. *What does the Bible say about decision making?*

James 1:5 - *5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*

Romans 12:1-2 – *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”*

Scripture may not give us **specific** information about a particular decision, but it will tell us what **priorities and attitudes honor God and what pursuits a follower of Christ should undertake**. It tells us that we are to seek and advance the glory of God and not our own. We are to think differently than the world, since it is always trying to get us to **conform** to its wisdom. This is where Bible intake and prayer intersect, as we both study and seek to conform ourselves to His will, not try to cram our desires back into Scripture.

Our enemy would love for us to make decisions out of a desire for ease, to fit into “what everyone else is doing”, or have a group of believers who actually have no idea **why** they make the decisions they do. Take the issue of **resource in terms of treasure and time**. *What should we do with our finances?* Are we simply trying to get more so we can spend more on our pleasures? Are we simply trying to justify our materialism by playing the comparison game, or do we have a greater grid of what we are seeking to do with our treasure, knowing that it reveals what we treasure the most. Or consider **time**, how we invest our nights and weekends. *Do we listen to coaches and recruiters more or does God's Word drive our decisions FIRST and everything else takes a secondary role after that?* Our enemy would LOVE for us to trade what is CLEAR BIBLIALLY for what is acceptable as an anomaly, and what is BEST for what is NOMINAL in our life. I'm reminded of a discussion I had with a friend years ago who was obsessed with working out (and it showed!), but struggled with leading his family spiritually. He knew discipline, hard work, and commitment, but he chose what is of *some value* instead of investing in something that has **value in every way** (1 Timothy 4:8 – “for while bodily training is of some value (its good), godliness is of value in every way, as it *holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come*”). In a **wartime mentality, we must be transformed rather than conformed, seek to worship God not self, and pray that God gives us wisdom in that pursuit**.

So David moved into Hebron, along with his men and their families, and was **confirmed by anointing there**, taking the throne as king over Judah. This is where he began to act kingly and face challengers.

Peaceful Pursuit of Wartime Readiness (5-7)

When they told David, “It was the men of Jabesh-gilead who buried Saul,” 5 David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-gilead and said to them, “May you be blessed by the Lord, because you showed this loyalty to Saul your lord and buried him. 6 Now may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you. And I will do good to you because you have done this thing. 7 Now therefore let your hands be strong, and be valiant, for Saul your lord is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them.”

The men of Jabesh-gilead were studs. They remembered Saul's willingness to fight on their behalf, delivering them 40 years ago from the Ammonites (1 Sam. 11). After Saul and his sons were beheaded and their bodies were pinned to the wall at Beth-shan, these brave and brazen warriors stealthily snuck in and released the bodies, giving them a proper burial. These men were located far up North and were protected from the Philistine onslaught as it seems clear they did not cross the Jordan River in their attack. As the kingdom's future hung in the balance, David made sure to **humbly and graciously call for the unity of these brave people**. David easily could have seen these as threats or their loyalty for Saul as reasons to write them off, but instead he sought to **build bridges** instead of assume enemies.

In wartime readiness, it seems prudent to make sure we know who we are unified with and who we must resist. Sometimes Christians and churches can engage in friendly fire, shooting our wounded (figuratively) and needlessly dividing. In wartime, a nation will put aside preferential differences for the sake of a much bigger mission – like the US involving itself in metal and rubber drives during WWII – and we as a church are much more effective when we can partner with other churches that have the same view of God's Word, Christ, the gospel, and the essentials of doctrine.

But in spite of seeking the LORD and pursuing peace, there will always be opposition, from the most likely places (Philistines/*unbelievers*) and unlikely (Fellow Israelites/those claiming to be believers). Here David faced opposition from the Northern tribes, bringing him to the brink of a civil war.

Preparation of Opposition in Wartime Readiness (8-32)

*But **Abner** the son of Ner, **commander of Saul's army**, took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim, 9 and he made him king over Gilead and the Ashurites and Jezreel and Ephraim and Benjamin and all Israel. 10 Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he **reigned two years**. But the house of Judah followed David. 11 And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.*

The rest of this chapter is as fascinating as it can be a bit confusing. For **seven and ½ years**, David reigned at Hebron, staying in the south in a divided reign. It seems like there was still a battle raging in the North that continued on by the remaining army of Saul, who were still led by his cousin named **Abner**, who set up shop in Mahanaim, an area East of the Jordan and seemingly out of the main thrust of the Philistine onslaught. It also seems like this battle went on for five years, at which point there was enough momentum to name **Ish-bosheth**, Saul's remaining son, king over all the land of Israel that David did not claim. This was a direct affront not only to David but to God's plan for the nation. It's important to remember that at this point, the generals of the armies (both the remaining remnant of Saul and the burgeoning force under David) had much in terms of political and practical power.

At some point in these last two years, Abner brought a force down to **Gibeon**, putting them precariously close to the army and rule of David. This prompted a response from **Joab**, David's general, who brought his men to meet the force at the pool of Gibeon. It was here that a confusing and unprecedented standoff took place: it was decided that 12 men from each army would arise and **compete** (*play*) in some sort of "king of the hill" competition. Instead, in the ultimate "play stupid games get stupid prizes" result, all 24 men fell in death as they each plunged their blades into the other, leaving the sight named **Helkath-hazzurim**, which means "dumb men played dumb games" (just kidding – it meant "field of sword edges")

As a result of the bloody draw, with passions and anger stirred up, the force from Joab's army pursued Abner as they tried to high tail it back across the Jordan river. In the pursuit, a fleet footed young soldier

named **Asahel**, who happened to be Joab's brother, sprinted to bring down Abner, perhaps stripping himself of armor to be able to close the gap of ground. As Abner tried to reason with him to turn back from the chase, Asahel refused, causing Abner to turn his spear into the young man, having the end of the spear pierce him through, causing him to die. The remaining two brothers (Joab and Abishai) continued the pursuit until Abner appealed to a cessation of brothers killing brothers. As a result, Joab called off the hunt, allowing Abner to get across the Jordan to safety, leaving 20 of David's men dead and 360 of Abner's men muerto. This was the beginning of a long and drawn out war between Saul and David, one which David would grow stronger and stronger through (2 Sam. 3:1), and Saul's would become weaker.

But what in the world does this have to do with us, or on our wartime readiness?!??? I may not have convinced you yet. That is where we will look at **Psalm 2 and Acts 4**.

*Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?
² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,
 against the LORD and against his Anointed*

The Psalm does NOT tell us who wrote these words, but Acts confirms for us that it was David. I believe it was during this time that David faced opposition, not only from the Philistines but from his own people that he was going to rule. This Psalm is power packed on its own, but it's how the early church in Acts viewed it which is important for this discussion.

In Acts 4, the early church was led by the powerful leadership of the Apostles Peter and John. After healing a lame beggar at the Beautiful Gate, they boldly proclaimed a message of repentance (3:19), proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus (4:2) and that there was salvation in no other name (4:12). Because of the disruption, they were brought before **Annas** the high priest and **Caiphas**, the same men who had judge Jesus months before. They tried to find ways to punish these men and keep them silent, but were amazed by their boldness even though they were **uneducated and common men**. Instead of doing anything, they merely threatened Peter and John (4:17, 21), at which the men said they would continue to speak of what they had heard.

After this, they went back to their friends and reported what had happened before the chief priests and elders, and they prayed together, **citing the above passage from Psalm 2 as the basis of their confidence!** Opposition was inevitable, especially among their own countrymen! But this opposition created **opportunity for the burgeoning church**, and freed them to operate in strength and conviction, rather than ease and comfort. Like a startup company that has to fight for its survival vs. the established and bloated titan, the church is at its **most effective when it embraces that war is upon us**. This early church gave us **5 principle of wartime readiness**:

1. **They trusted a Sovereign God who predestined all** – *“for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever you hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”* (4:27-28) – From the death of Jesus to the opposition we face, it is all a part of the unfolding perfect plan of God
2. **Boldness** – They prayed to speak with boldness in the midst of threats (4:29)
3. **They were filled with the Holy Spirit** – Far from a whimsical or emotional response, being filled with the Spirit is a constant yielding to the indwelling Spirit in obedience, even when it's hard or feels bad

4. **They continue to speak the word of God with boldness** (4:31) – Again, the Word has to be central in our life, family, and church in order to be convictional in our beliefs and bold in our words and stances.
5. **Unity** – Because the early church was in the midst of opposition and the battle, they were of **one heart and soul**, meeting the needs of each other and caring for those in need, there was great grace upon them as they focused on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, not their preferences or dislikes.

David had to adopt wartime readiness to face opposition as he took on the kingdom. The early church had to adopt wartime readiness to thrive in the inevitable opposition it faced from their own countrymen. We must adopt wartime readiness by evaluating our lives in terms of what the Bible calls us to, not trying to justify ourselves back into the framework of Scripture. It's interesting that we will see once David **ceased** being wartime ready, he tumbled down into a pit of sin, staying home instead of going to war, choosing ease over the fight, giving into carnal pleasure rather than pursuing the mission God had for him (see 2 Samuel 11). We can take this cautionary tale to heart, making sure we are searching our own heart in light of Scripture and readying ourselves for the war that is absolutely upon us, at our door, and seeking to knock it down.