



Are We Prepared for Battle?

The Battle #4 | Feb 25, 2024 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Steve Howell

Opening

Let's talk military strategy for a minute.



In a battle for air superiority between the United States Air Force (USAF) and the Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF), who wins?

I've always been fascinated with military technology, and fighter jets always capture my attention. Whether seeing a flyover for a sporting event, watching takeoffs and landings at the Marine Corps Air Station in Yuma (Arizona) while visiting Deb's family, or watching the dogfights in Top Gun, I'm always in awe of the power, agility, and capabilities of these fighting platforms.

The USAF boasts some of the most advanced planes on the planet. 4th Generation fighters like the F-16 Fighting Falcon have been around since the late 1970s, and with upgrades they continue to have success in the field against foreign planes today. But newer 5th Generation planes like the F-22 Raptor and the F-35 Lightning boast more advanced technology. They feature all-aspect stealth, internal carriage of precision weapons, sophisticated radars, and extreme maneuverability. They are the most fearsome fighter jets around!

But that's starting to change. China has recently developed its own 5th Generation fighter – the J-20 "Mighty Dragon." It might not be as original as our planes (in other words, they stole some of our designs!), but the J-20 is a formidable aircraft that could be just as capable, if not more so, than its American counterparts.

Strategists and tacticians weigh the capabilities of these Chinese and American jets, and they pit the fighters against each other in simulations, trying to decide which pilots would have an advantage in aerial combat.

And the jets could see action sooner than we think...



China considers the island of Taiwan to be part of its territory. Taiwan operates as a self-governing democracy. The United States remains somewhat ambiguous as we try to do business with both nations, but China has stated its goal of reunification. Those 5th Generation fighter simulations are academic right now, but with tensions involving Taiwan and mainland China escalating each year, there is a chance the jets could be in the theater of war within the next few years.

We need to know *now* whether we are prepared for battle *then*! Are we ready?

Recap



These are real-world questions that are above our paygrades, but they highlight answers and attitudes you and I need as we consider conflict, both on and off the battlefield.

In our current sermon series, over the last few weeks, we have been exploring our views on war. As Christians, we need to know when and how to fight *righteously*. Conflict is all around us, and we must be wise as we decide questions like:

- **Should we fight?** Are there times when fighting is permitted or required?
- **Who do we fight?** Is our enemy physical or spiritual?
- **When do we stop fighting?** How long should we fight, and how should we decide?

I hope you have learned some new things and been challenged to submit your views to God, rather than letting culture and patriotism provide all the answers. We need to weigh these issues with Him in mind, trading our own priorities for His.



But in situations where we find ourselves involved in a war or conflict we can't ignore, the question is less about what we "ought" to do, and more about "how" we'll do it. In other words (for our final question in this short series): ***Are we prepared for battle?***

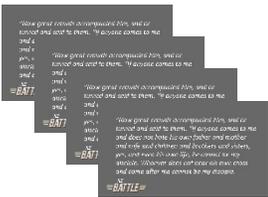
Are you *ready* for the conflict in a "just war" or as you "fight the good fight?"

Counting the Cost (Luke 14:25-33)



To answer that question, we must *count the cost*. You've probably heard that phrase before. It's an obvious business practice, but the phrase has Scriptural origins. We find it on the lips of Jesus as he talks to his followers in Luke 14.

In Luke 14, Jesus has been gaining notoriety. Large crowds have taken notice of Him, and they follow Him to listen to His spiritual authority. Their motives are varied – some want Jesus to be more politically active against the Roman government's oppression, some want to have their illnesses healed, some just want to see what the fuss is all about. But in Luke 14, Jesus addresses them regarding their ability to follow Him.



"Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."

For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.

So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:25–33, ESV)

This is a difficult teaching – in practice, if not in concept! Jesus challenges those who wanted to follow Him. He gives them two unexpected directives:



- **You must “hate” your family (14:26).** Now, some of you might be thinking, “Done! My family is the worst!” But the word choice here doesn’t mean “detest.” Here, it’s being used as a comparison to mean “loved less.”

(ex: a school bus driver must “hate” sleeping in if she wants to keep her job. She might really want to enjoy a lazy morning, but she must prioritize the job more than her beauty rest!)

Jesus says that following Him must matter more than the family members you love. He challenges His followers to put Him first.

- **You must “hate” yourself (14:26-27).** In the same way, being a follower (a “disciple”) of Jesus requires caring more about Him than caring for your own needs. We must be willing to die to self (“bear our own cross”) or else we aren’t really following Jesus.

Then, Jesus shares a couple of real-world parallels:



- **A building project (14:28-30).** When going into a construction project, Jesus says, you get the finances figured out first. You literally “count the cost” to see the price of supplies and labor. Comparing those expenses to your expected cash flow, you decide if you can make it all the way to completion before you ever break ground. In other words, you don’t start if you think you can’t finish. And if you don’t, you face the repercussions of that failure.
- **A battle (14:31-33).** When figuring out the battle, Jesus says, you compare forces. He uses contemporary examples, but it’s the ancient equivalent of comparing the F-35 (USAF) vs the J-20 (PLAAF) like we discussed at the start of today’s sermon. Can our 10,000 troops achieve victory against their 20,000 troops? If not – if each of our fighters is incapable of dealing double the damage that their fighters can – the king had better negotiate the best surrender deal he can get! If not, it’s going to get ugly fast.

Note that in Jesus’ analogy preparation doesn’t always mean victory. Sometimes stuff happens – the bank fails on your financing, the contractor’s work fails inspections, the supply chain breaks, your forces underperform – but the point here is that you don’t

start out with uniformed assumptions. You need to *know* what you're getting into. And Jesus says, if you are going to follow me you need to be prepared for what it will take.



“So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:33, ESV)

If we follow Jesus, we need to count the cost. We need to know what kind of fight it will take in order to be His “Christian soldiers.” We need to understand what will be required of us, and what we will face.

Are we prepared for battle?

The question isn't just for military strategists. It's for us. So, this morning, let's start counting the cost.



Knowing Our Resources

Armor of God (Ephesians 6:10ff)

If we're going to fight, we need to know the resources at our disposal. And there is no more well-known passage regarding our battlefield resources than Ephesians 6. You've heard this one a lot, because it makes for great Bible study and sermon material. It's a discussion of what the apostle calls “the armor of God.”



“Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,” (Ephesians 6:13–17, ESV)

We need to be aware that these weapons exist, and that they are in our possession. Yet it's not enough to have them; we must be able to use them properly.

I've told you before about the weapons training my daughter has gone through for Taekwondo. Because of her, we have possession of a bo staff, num-chuks, askrima sticks, swords, commas(?), and more. But the weapons are far more effective in her hands than in mine! Each weapon has certain movements and positions and grips that allow the weapon to be used effectively (ex: Lines of strike – how to position for head, torso, leg, center mass). For the weapon to be a resource in battle, I must know how to put it to use.



God has provided armor for us. Have you practiced using each piece?

- **Belt of truth** – are you being honest with people? Do you eliminate lying from your lips?

- **Breastplate of righteousness** – are you doing right? Are you *repenting* of sin and living according to God’s standards?
- **Shoes of the readiness** of the gospel of peace – do you have a firm footing to share the good news? Can you explain the gospel to someone else? Are you ready and willing to go and do so?
- **Shield of faith** – do you trust God, even when it’s difficult? Do you believe His promises? Do you keep walking the narrow road when it is dark and unlit?
- **Helmet of salvation** – have you accepted Jesus’ free gift of forgiveness for your sins? Do you actively have hope because of it?
- **Sword of the Spirit** – are you aware of what your Bible says? Are you allowing the word of God to do what it should? Are you trusting your own words, or allowing the Spirit to convict you via Scripture?

God has provided the armor for us, and He equips us to use it. So, as you count the cost, list that armor as a resource available to use.

Other Tools

The “armor of God” may be one of the most well-known resources we have for fighting, but God provides us other tools, too. They are implied by Scripture or stated in other passages that help us count the cost as it relates to our preparations.

Maps



*“And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, **having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place**, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,”*
(Acts 17:26–27, ESV)



We have maps! Maps can help us envision the “boundaries of our dwelling place;” they show us where our opportunities are. We could draw a map of our week and mark out where we spend time (or pull it up on Google, since your phone tracks everything you do anyway). Where are the locations we frequent? Where are the physical intersections where we have relational intersections? Where are we investing time with a chance to invest in people?

- ➔ **How many of you work out of town, or spend time outside for activities (ex: kids’ softball)?** Your impact for the kingdom may be less about what happens in your neighborhood and more about who you see in the office or at the ballfield each day...and it may never bear fruit in terms of attendance at TCC! That’s okay. Growth here is great, but I’m equally happy if we stay under 250 each week yet fill the churches in Lawrence and KCK with new believers who can impact those communities!

We can count the cost and be prepared for battle with our maps.

Supply Chains

In the book of Philippians, Paul describes another tool that helps prepare us for battle. In talking about how the Philippian church sent him financial resources, Paul says:



“I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:18–19, ESV)



We have supply chains! Supply chains help us equip and enable ministry in the local church.

As a church, we pool together our physical, financial resources and direct them to bless others and to make an impact. We make plans, and we send money to our missionaries in the field, so they have shelter and equipment...we buy curriculum to help teachers instruct kids in Sunday School...we invest in meals for those in need.

Overall, as a church, we might not have the size or economic status to do huge things,¹ but we can do some things together if we are good stewards of what we have.

By faithfully contributing (even when you aren't here in person), you help the church stay equipped and ready to take care of needs – both needs in the **trellis** (the support stuff like buildings and ice melt and paper) and needs in the **vine** (the ministry stuff, the evangelism and discipleship of the church).

We can count the cost and be prepared for battle with our supplies.

Our Champion



“But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.” (2 Thessalonians 3:3, ESV)



In the battle, we have a lot of other tools, but really our preparation boils down to one thing: we have the Lord!

Have you ever been on a team where you had a “ringer?” ...where you had the 6'7” athletic kid on your middle school basketball team? ...where you had the smartest kid in school in your group project? ...where you had 100 horsepower more than the other cars in the race?

In our fight against the enemy, we have the Lord. And as long as we stay on His team and play by His rules and follow His lead, there is nothing the enemy can do to win. God might allow Satan to have temporary success against us, but eternal victory is ours.

¹ Ex: My old church was huge and could do big things spontaneously – like a Sunday school class deciding to take up a special offering for a missionary visiting, and it was over \$20,000!

When we count the cost and determine if we are prepared for battle, never forget that the Lord can and will guard us!



Knowing the Enemy

Victory is assured, but we would still do well to count the cost and prepare for the types of battles we will face. We still need to know our enemy!

Where Are the Battlefields?



Where are the battlefields where we'll face him in the coming years? We can't predict the future, but we should pay attention to the culture and know the issues we might be facing.

There are lots of issues going on now. We see the obvious moral ones that get debated in culture. They've been around forever, just now repackaged as the sin flavors of the day – some gaining popularity and presence as the seasons and decades change. No one should be surprised by them, especially after reading your Bible.



“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power...”

(2 Timothy 3:1–5, ESV)

Prepare for those battles! But there are other battlefields maybe you've never thought about:



- **What is the role of AI when it comes to church?** You've seen the rise of this technology in so many areas of life. How much (if at all) should we rely on it to help us generate content for communications...or lessons...or songs...or sermons? Will it enhance our creativity or water down the truth?
- **How will churches train leaders as Bible colleges close?** You may have heard that colleges were struggling, closing, or merging. Who will provide the instruction our leaders need if they don't have ready access to godly mentors in the classroom? What will it look like for our churches to train the next generation?
- **How will we be affected by Christianity's shift to the global south?** You may have heard that Africa, Asia, and South America are growing Christians far faster than North America and Europe. Who will be the leading voices of the global church? How will their perspectives shape our scholarship and worship?

Pay attention to what is going on around you and the trends you see developing. Don't face them with fear, but prayerfully consider how you'll be able to address the issues and proclaim Jesus in these new frontiers.

What Are His Weapons?



Also, be aware of the weapons the Enemy will use as he fights. We have our armor and the resources described earlier. These will face attack from the weapons wielded by Satan.

- **Appeals to the flesh.** Satan will prey on your hungers, taking the good, God-given desires we have and pushing them to have an outsized influence beyond what God intended (e.g. hunger to gluttony and lust).
 - o *"For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world."* (1 John 2:16, ESV)
- **Deception.** Satan will twist truth and keep us away from knowing what God wants us to know.
 - o *"In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."* (2 Corinthians 4:4, ESV)
- **Distraction.** Satan doesn't have to attack your faith...he can just grab your attention elsewhere, through a focus on other things (good or bad).
 - o *"but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful."* (Mark 4:19, ESV)
- **False Flag Attacks.** Satan can try to make his plans seem good, pleasant, or even godly.
 - o *"And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light."* (2 Corinthians 11:14, ESV)

The Father of Lies is always ready to attack, prowling like a roaring lion ready to devour us. That is who we face.

If we count the cost, we must know that Satan will fight...but we must never forget that he will not win.



Conclusion

Are you prepared for battle?

There will be some battles you can't avoid. There will be a spiritual enemy looking to pull you away from Jesus. There will be times that the battle is exhausting. But it is my prayer that you are more prepared now for the fight than ever before.

Count the cost before you enter the fray, knowing the resources you have on hand as well as knowing the enemy that you face.

Remember:

You are equipped. You are aware. You will be victorious in Christ. So....go fight well!

Amen?!?!

Amen.

Prayer

Invitation

As we prepare to sing our invitation song this morning, we invite anyone who needs prayer to come forward and share with us so we can pray for you this morning.

And we invite anyone who is ready to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior – if you've been thinking about baptism, or just want to start the conversation – to come forward as well.

Share with us as we stand and sing!

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Notes

Counting the Cost (Luke 14:25-33)

Knowing Our Resources

Armor of God (Ephesians 6:10ff)

Other Tools

Maps (Acts 17:26–27)

Supply Chains (Philippians 4:18–19)

Our Champion (2 Thessalonians 3:3)

Knowing the Enemy

Where Are the Battlefields? (2 Timothy 3:1–5)

What Are His Weapons?

(1 John 2:16; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Mark 4:19; 2 Corinthians 11:14)

Discussion Questions

Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

- When you know you have a difficult day ahead of you, what do you do to prepare yourself? How effective is your preparation in helping the day turn out better?

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- Read Luke 14:25-33. What does the phrase “count the cost” mean?
- What is the cost of following Jesus? Is it worth it? Share the reasons for your answer.
- Do you typically try to fight the battle with your own power, or do you rely on God to prepare you for the conflict?
- Review Ephesians 6:10. List the pieces of the “armor of God.” Which item fits you best? Which one do you sometimes forget to wear?
- How many armor pieces are for attacking? How many are defensive? What does that tell you about how God prepares you for battle?
- Other tools help us prepare for battle, like maps. Where do you spend the most time during your week? Is it in your hometown or in another community? Have those places provided opportunities to build relationships with others?
- Jesus is with us when we go into battle (see 2 Thess 3:3). How does His presence encourage you? What helps you be more aware of His presence as you fight?
- What battles do you think you’ll face against Satan in the next 5 years, personally? Which will confront our church? Why?
- Which weapon of Satan’s is most alarming: appeal to the flesh, deception, distraction, or disguising as an angel of light? How does God equip you to counter the Enemy’s weapons?
- Rate your confidence in God as you face battles against Satan on a scale of 1 to 10. How could you improve that number?

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Pray for God to make you aware of the tools and resources He has provided to fight the enemy. Ask for help as you practice using them!