

How to Fight a War

1 Sam. 7-8

(preached 4/15/15; Pine Grove BC Wed PM)

Introduction

The US military has a number of war colleges.

The Army has a war college, as well as the Navy and the Air Force.

There is also a National War College in Washington DC.

And according to the purpose statement of the National War College, the college is...

“A senior-level course in national security strategy to prepare future military and civilian leaders for high-level policy, command, and staff responsibilities.”

Some of the people who graduated from it include some of the biggest names in the US Military..

Colin Powell, John McCain and Wesley Clark and other high ranking officials...

The owner of the BBQ restaurant where I worked had a son who taught at the army war college.

If I remember right, he taught military strategy on the battlefield to the students there.

But students also study other aspects of war there as well as leadership skills and other necessary aspects of being part of the military service.

George Patton, a famous general of WW2 graduated from the Army War college in 1932.

Stormin' Norman Schwarzkopf was a graduate of the Army War College in 1973..

Needless to say, these war colleges train men for war.

They train them for battle at the highest level.

As we look at 1 Samuel 7 tonight, we are going to walk on the battlefield with Israel once again.

The first two times have been disastrous for Israel as they met the Philistines on the battlefield.

But tonight, we are going to learn a few things about war in 1 Samuel 7...

We are enrolling in war college tonight as we watch Israel once again fight against the Philistines.

But we aren't going to learn how to line up your men on the battlefield.

We aren't going to learn which horses to take to battle or which weapons to choose...

We are going to learn about spiritual warfare while we learn how Israel went to war in chapter 7.

Obviously, the church isn't Israel.

We don't go out to war and meet our enemies on the battlefield...

But I assure that we fight against the enemies of God everyday...

Ephesians 6:10...

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against ^[e]flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

God's people in the church may not go to the battlefield against the enemies of God in the same way that Israel went to battle..

There is no battlefield we go to so to speak...

But we fight a spiritual war every day...

And I think we can learn from God's people Israel some important principles of warfare in 1 Samuel chapter 7...

I have divided chapter 7 into 3 sections.

In the first 6 verses, we will learn..

I. How To Fight Before the War (1-6)

Then in verses 7-11, we will learn...

II. How To Fight During the War (7-11)

And then we will see in verse 12-17..

III. How to Fight After the War..

So, let's look at these chapters and prepare our hearts to fight against the forces of darkness that wage war against our souls every day...

So, let's begin by looking at...

HOW TO FIGHT BEFORE THE WAR in verse 1-6...

I. How to Fight Before the War (1-6)

Verse 1...

7 And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took the ark of the Lord and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord. ² From the day that the ark remained at Kiriath-jearim, the time was long, for it was twenty years; and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.

To get our minds back in the context of what is going on...

Remember that this time is Israel is a dark time..

The sins of the people are made worse by the sins of the priests..

We have watched the wicked priest Eli and his sons, Hophni and Phineas, be killed in chapter 4 when the Israelites were defeated by the Philistines a 2nd time.

The loss was humiliating for Israel but it caused Israel to lose the ark of God to the Philistines.

And so in chapters 5-6, we watch God strike the Philistines with tumors and death to cause them to send the ark back to Israel.

The ark comes into Israel to a town called Beth-Shemesh, but when chapter 6 closed....

God had also killed a number of people in that town because they tried to look into the ark..

And so the people of Beth-Shemesh also want to get rid of the ark, so they call for men from another town in Israel, Kiriath-jearim to come and get it..

And when chapter 7 opens, that is what we see happening....

And so the men come and get the ark and take it to the home of Abinadab and made his son Eleazar the guardian of the ark there..

Then, verse 2 says that the ark stayed there for 20 years before Israel cared about God again..

Those 20 years we probably filled with idol worship and sin and rebellion against God...

But eventually, God caused the people to seek after the Him again...

The people lament, or mourn or long for the LORD.

So, in verse 3, we finally hear the name of Samuel again.

He has been missing from 1 Samuel since chapter 3, but now he returns..

The last time we saw him, he was most likely a teenager who was called by God to be a prophet and judge and even a priest to Israel...

And now in verse 3, Samuel returns to the story ready to call the nation to repent and turn back to the Lord.

Look at verse 3...

³ Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, "If you return to the Lord with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your hearts to the Lord and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines."

You ever disciplined a child and they responded with "I'm sorry," and then you say...

Well, if you are really sorry, you won't do it again.

That is the idea behind what Samuel is telling Israel here..

They are mourning because they have forsaken God.

They are sad because they have turned from God.

They are weeping because they have neglected God.

And Samuel simply says in verse 3...

If you are sorry with all your heart...

Which is another way of saying, if you are really sorry...

Then remove the foreign gods in the land and return to serving the Lord.

And there we see this idea of "IF you are really sorry move beyond your tears to action."

Samuel is teaching what true repentance is...

It is not just an emotional response, it is an emotional response followed by corrective action.

Repentance is certainly "I'm sorry God" but it is also "I am taking steps to change God."

You have all witnessed this...

Someone who hasn't been in church in many years walks in on a Sunday morning...

Responds to the message with tears....

Runs down front to the altar, weeps, and then what happens?

You never see them again.

Is that repentance?

No.

True repentance is sorrow over sin but also a turning from sin.

That is why it takes time to recognize true repentance..

Because you need to allow time for people to take action...

Jesus described it as "bearing fruit worthy of repentance."

Yet, so many have forgotten that today, and now tears equal true repentance.

You may or may not weep if you truly repent but you will definitely change.

And so Samuel says, it is good to lament and long after God but you also need to remove the false gods from your lives...

And then in verse 4, we see true repentance...

⁴ So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth and served the Lord alone.

And there you see it.

True repentance takes action to correct their sin.

Then look with me at verse 5...

⁵ Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah and I will pray to the Lord for you." ⁶ They gathered to Mizpah, and drew water and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day and said there, "We have sinned against the Lord." And Samuel judged the sons of Israel at Mizpah.

As a result of Israel's fruits of repentance, Samuel invites all of Israel to gather at Mizpah.

And there they pour out water before the Lord and fasted.

Some have said that this was a symbolic act of going without bread and water to demonstrate their renewed dependence upon God.

Some have said this was symbolic of the washing away of their sins.

I take the second view.

I see a preview of baptism here.

No one truly knows why they poured out water, but if it was symbolic of baptism, it is a great picture of baptism.

And notice the order of how this happened..

The people were sad over their sin..

Then took steps to turn from their sin, and then Samuel led them in a ceremony.

Which came first the ceremony or the repentance?

Well the repentance always comes before the ceremony...

That is why nothing special happens when a person is baptized.

The water doesn't remove the sin.

Faith and repentance is what causes sin to be washed away.

We have faith in the blood not in the water.

Now, should you be baptized if you have repented and believed?

Absolutely.

But the act of baptism is only a representation of what has already happened in the heart.

Sins are gone long before you get wet.

Now, some denominations don't believe that.

And that is a big problem because you know what they do when they see baptism as necessary for salvation.

They have created a gospel of works..

Now, they believe that a person is saved by faith + baptism...

And that is a false gospel.

We are saved by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

Now, we hold the act of baptism very dear because Jesus commanded that all believers be baptized.

But we must never confuse the two..

Repentance and faith are what save us...

And baptism follows to testify to the world what is already true about our life..

And so, we even see that order here..

The people truly repent and then Samuel invites them to a ceremony that demonstrates their true repentance...

Now, the question you are asking is this teaching us
HOW TO FIGHT BEFORE THE WAR.

Israel isn't at war in these verses..

There doesn't even seem to be a threat of war in these verses...

Well, I will answer that in a minute as we move to the section of **HOW TO FIGHT DURING THE WAR....**

So, let us look at verse 7...

And I will try to answer both of those questions in this set of verses...

II. How to Fight During the War (7-11)

Verse 7...

⁷ Now when the Philistines heard that the sons of Israel had gathered to Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel.

Some people live their lives looking for a fight.

Sometimes, if they don't have a good reason to fight, they will simply make up a reason to fight.

That is what the Philistines did here.

Israel had gathered in Mizpah for a ceremony to show their repentance before God, but the Philistines assumed they were gathering there to go to war..

Now Mizpah is a town about 8 miles north of Jerusalem.

You can see it here on our map.

As Israel gathers seeking God, the Philistines gather and seek to fight.

The end of verse 7...

And when the sons of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines. ⁸ Then the sons of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry to the Lord our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines." ⁹ Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it for a whole burnt offering to

***the Lord; and Samuel cried to the Lord for Israel
and the Lord answered him.***

Now let us think about this for a minute...

Remember back in chapter 4 when the Philistines
beat Israel the first time...

The elders of Israel gathered and said to
themselves...

I wonder why we lost.

Let's take the ark with us this time; it will be our
good luck charm against the Philistines.

In chapter four, Israel looked to the power of
superstition to save them from the Philistines...

However, this time, they look to the power of
prayer to save them from the Philistines...

They turn to Samuel and ask him to pray to God
that he would save them.

They don't turn the ark here...

They turn to the God of the ark.

A very important difference here.

Now, my question to you is this...

Why did they think differently this time?

Simple...

They are now a repentant people.

In chapter 4, the nation was in sin from top to bottom.

Eli the priests was in sin..

His sons were in sin.

And the nation had followed...

In chapter 4, they were a nation living in sin..

In chapter 7, they are a nation living in repentance.

And guess what the effect is on their way of life?

They think clearly.

They make better decisions.

And this goes back to how do you fight before you go to war?

Well, you clear your heart of sin.

You make sure that you are living in the Spirit, which is a NT way of saying that you are walking with the Lord daily.

This doesn't mean you are sin free, but it does meant that you are constantly reading your Bible, talking to the Lord, confessing sin, constantly repenting of sin.

That is Israel at this point in their history.

They have repented of their sin and they are back in fellowship with God.

And when that is true in the life of God's people, you are prepared for anything.

Israel had no way of knowing that the Philistines were ready to fight..

But when that fight came, they were ready.

And they reacted rightly by turning to God in prayer for protection.

There are so many applications to our lives from this...

But here is the point, you can deal with the battles in your life better if you go into them already in fellowship with the Lord.

For instance, people come to me with problems...

Marriage problems, financial problems, spiritual problems...

And what I always try to do in the first meeting is to ask them about their walk with the Lord...

How is your fellowship with the Lord?

Are you reading your Bible consistently?

Are you praying regularly?

Are you living in a sinful lifestyle?

Are you constantly turning from sin in your life?

I want people to examine their own walk with the Lord before anything else.

If your fellowship with God is broken because you aren't reading his Word and talking with him...

If your fellowship is broken because you are continuing to sin openly against God...

There is no counsel that will help you until you restore your fellowship with the Lord first..

And often times, we that is fixed through repentance, the problems disappear as well.

That is not always the case because sometimes we go through trials without any clear reason...

But most of the time, life's trials go away when we repent and restore our relationship to the Lord..

And here is Israel making their first good decision in a long time..

"Hey, Samuel, pray for God to save us"

They are acting right because they have been restored to their God.

And that is really the lesson of the first section..

How do you fight before the war?

Maintain your close fellowship with the Lord through Bible reading, prayer, confession and repentance.

And then you are better prepared for the daily battles that come your way...

And that is what happens here...

Because the Philistines bring the battle to Israel..

Verse 10...

¹⁰ Now Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, and the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the Lord thundered with a great ^[a]thunder on that day against the Philistines and confused them, so that they were ^[b]routed before Israel. ¹¹ The men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and struck them down as far as below Beth-car.

So the battle starts, but it is over before it begins..

And how do you fight during the war?

You let God fight for you..

In verse 10, God answers the prayers of Samuel and sends out a great thunder that confuses the Philistines and God destroys them.

Now this is an interesting method that God uses to defeat the Philistines..

I want you to think back to Hannah's prayer in chapter 10 of 1 Samuel...

If you remember that prayer, Hannah was offering it to God after Samuel was born.

It was a prayer of thanksgiving but also a prayer of praise to God..

And look how she describes God in verse 10 of that prayer...

*¹⁰ “Those who contend with the Lord will be shattered;
Against them He will thunder in the heavens,
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;
And He will give strength to His king,
And will exalt the ^[e]horn of His anointed.”*

And what do we see here in chapter 7..

The Lord literally thundering in the heavens and shattering the Philistines...

So how do you fight during a war?

You simply pray and beg God to fight for you.

And that leaves us with one last section beginning in verse 12....

III. How to Fight After the War (12-17)

Verse 12...

¹² Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it ^[c]Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the Lord has helped us.” ¹³ So the Philistines were subdued and they did not come anymore within the border of Israel. And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. ¹⁴ The cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even to Gath; and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. So there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

After the battle, what does Samuel do?

He sets up a memorial stone that testifies to the Lord’s help in saving Israel.

We have seen this time and time again in the OT.

Where Israel will simply put up a visible reminder of God’s goodness to them as a nation.

This one was named Ebenezer, which means the the Lord helped them.

Each of us could put up our own stone named Ebenezer because the Lord has surely helped us.

In fact, the greatest help came to us at Calvary when Jesus died as our substitute.

Reminds me of the lyrics of one of my favorite hymns..

Mercy there was great, and grace was free;
Pardon there was multiplied to me;
There my burdened soul found liberty
At Calvary.

Of all the things that the cross did, it was without a doubt the greatest help to all our souls...

And that is one way we fight even after the war, we don't take credit for victory based upon our own strength, wisdom of intelligence..

Instead, we come out of war not pointing to ourselves but pointing to the Lord.

And the chapter ends by giving a summary of Samuel's ministry...

Verse 15..

¹⁵ Now Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. ¹⁶ He used to go annually on circuit to Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpah, and he judged Israel in all these places. ¹⁷ Then his return was to Ramah, for his house was there, and there he judged Israel; and he built there an altar to the Lord.

And instead of just reading this little closing of the chapter and moving on...

I want to point out one other way we continue to fight after the war...

And I think we see it in the life of Samuel...

We often point to the big events of life..

Even in chapter 7, the majority of this passage is about a big event in Samuel's life where he called the nation to repentance...

And led the nation to rely on God and defeat the Philistines...

And it is easy to miss this final section which is simply a summary of Samuel's faithfulness to God for many years after this victory.

We see in verse 16 that he made a circuit around Israel for many years calling the nation to follow God.

Before finally going back home to settle in Ramah.,

And what is the point?

The point is this...

The Christian life is not always flashy victories, death defying trials.

People seem to want that in their life to prove that they are some super spiritual Christian.

Samuel was a man of God, but he didn't lead Israel to great victories on the battle field everyday.

For the majority of his life, he simply followed the Lord and faithfully served Him.

In fact, most of his ministry never made the front page of the Israel Daily News.

Most of his ministry was simply seen in the normal routine of life as he served God's people.

And that is true for many ministers today.

They don't grab headlines.

They don't seek attention.

Instead, they faithfully teach God's people and shepherd God's flock.

And the same is true for many Christians as well.

We aren't writing books or singing great solos at church.

We simply obey and serve the Lord where he was placed us.

We study our Bibles.

We talk the Lord everyday.

We confess and repent of sin continually.

Do you know what keeps you from sin?

Living a quiet and peaceable life of obedience, confession, and repentance.

And maintaining an ongoing relationship with the Lord.

And do you know how most people view that lifestyle?

As routine, unexciting, and boring.

We live in a world that constantly wants drama in their life.

Though Samuel's ministry had some drama, most of his faithfulness came in the tours around Israel where he taught people to follow the Lord with their whole heart.

1 Thess 4:10..

***But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more,
¹¹ and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life
 and attend to your own business and work with
 your hands, just as we commanded you, ¹² so that
 you will ⁱbehave properly toward outsiders and
ⁱⁱnot be in any need.***

I think there is some truth in there for us...

How do we fight after the war?

WE do the daily things to keep our lives away from conflict.

It is like maintaining a car.

Though people seem to like the drama of a blown engine or a flat tire or a car that wont start...

The way to keep a car running is to do the routine maintenance on it that keeps it from trouble.

The same is true of our lives...

We need to do the routine things in order to avoid the tragic consequences that others experience.

And that isn't always exciting, but it is supremely important to maintaining our walk with the Lord.

Now, let me throw out this disclaimer..

Even though you may do the routine maintenance in your life and you aren't living in a sinful unrepentant lifestyle...

That is still no guarantee that trials will never find you.

Sometimes, trials come to grow our faith and to test our walk with the Lord.

But I would say this...

You are going to be more prepared to handle whatever comes when your relationship with the Lord is fresh and vibrant rather than stale and dull.

Conclusion

What is the sum of all this?

Well, Israel learned that the battle went better when they went into it in repentance and dependence upon God.

And Samuel's ministry of making rounds in Israel and encouraging obedience to God also led to peace in the land.

From that, we see the need to keep our noses clean so to speak before the Lord.

We avoid hiding our sin from Him, rather we confess it quickly.

We avoid fighting our own battles but rather rest in His strength and wisdom.

And then we maintain our lives after the battlefield by doing the routine things of keeping our relationship to the Lord active and fresh.

We talk to Him. WE read his word. We recognize and repent of sin.

And we obey from the heart day to day.

And instead of seeing the everyday activities as routine and dull, we see them as a blessing of living a life free from drama and consequences.

Let us pray.