

**Sermon Transcript from April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016**  
**Understanding Violence**  
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I am excited this morning. I understand you guys have been walking through the Bible, which is amazing. That's great. This morning, we want to dive in particularly into "how do we understand the violence and, particularly, holy war in the Old Testament?" Right? Because holy war can be probably the most extreme form of violence. We kind of hit these passages and you're like, "Dude, what is going on? Is God a genocidal maniac? What is happening in some of these part?" Right?

And I think for many of us there can be this fear that holy war is kind of the skeleton in God's closet, right? This tough topic where, if we were to open up the closet doors, if we were to really open up Scripture and take a closer look at these passages, I think the fear is that we could find that God is not truly good or worthy of our trust. You know, I've found that I think we often feel that way because we have a caricature of what's going on in the Biblical story. So, one of the things I want to try and do this morning is try and offer a few paradigm shifts that can just sort of help us reclaim and reframe a healthier, more robust understanding where we see these topics arising because of the goodness of God, not in spite of it or in contradiction to it.

At the end of the day, my biggest hope for this morning is not necessarily just to give you answers to questions that I raise. It's that we could reclaim a greater confidence in the goodness of God. That He is good through and through, all the way down into His very bones. So, this is, particularly, a personal topic for me, right? Back in the day I had the chance to work on the Navajo reservation and was there for about six months on a land rights case. And this was a group of these phenomenal native leaders and this indigenous community of shepherds that were dealing with the land rights case with a big, international, multi-billion-dollar mineral company.

While I was there, I got to learn a lot more about native history in general and their particular history, and became just grieved at some of the injustice and tragedy that's taken place in our country's history. The broken treaties, the forced migrations, the massacres. A U.S. Senator, Daniel K. Inouye, has remarked that, of over 800 treaties that we made with native peoples, we've broken every one. And, like a black eye in this history was the idea of manifest destiny. This ideology in the 1800's that liked often to draw a kind of language and imagery from the Old Testament in this sense that sort of Europeans coming over were sort of like this new Israel, right? And these here becomes like the promised land. When you get that, then suddenly native peoples are put into the position of being the Canaanites, right? Indigenous inhabitants.

That ideology could be used to justify some of the injustice that had taken place and I found myself struggling and going, "Man. God, I'm kind of a newer believer. Is this what I signed up for? Because, if this is what's going on, I think I'd rather side with the Navajo." Right? So, I personally wrestled with this topic over the years, but I dove into the Old Testament and, as I was reading, there was this strong sense emerging that something different is going on here. This is something radically different.

I don't know that I could've fully put my finger on and articulated it super clearly at the time, but I do think that, over the years, there's become this growing conviction that like, yeah, what's actually going on in the Old Testament, I would say, is God confronting the mainstream version of holy war. Right? This is a radically different picture we find where it's not just kind of different like it's a few variations or a few lines drawn in different directions. It's like God is taking the mainstream picture of holy war painted across the history of our world and He's flipping it upside down on its head and confronting it.

Holy war is as old as time, right? Inca and Aztec. Chinese and Mongols. Greeks and Romans. This belief that like, dude, the gods are in our corner of the fight ring telling us to conquer our neighbors and take their stuff,

and we use the gods to justify the wars we want to wage. We see throughout, you know, I think when we think of holy war we tend to think of the strong using God or the gods to justify their conquest of the weak. I want to suggest this morning that it actually works in the opposite direction in the Old Testament. It's not the strong using God to justify their conquest, it's God arising on behalf of the weak against the tyranny of the strong when it's raged for far too long.

So, let's dive in. Alright. So, I think when most of us think of holy war, the picture that we get in our heads is probably a little something like this. Right? Dude. I loved Rambo growing up. I don't know. I loved watching the movies. But, there's a sense that he's strong, right? He's fighting for the rightness of his civilization. He's got kind of his weaponry and he's coming in to save the day. So, we tend to think of holy warriors throughout history as the muscle-bound, machine gun heroes. Right? They're muscle-bound, they've got strength on their side, they're picking fights like, "Yeah. We're fighting for God and, whether or not he shows up though, we've still kind of got this in our back pocket."

They've got machine guns, they've got advanced weaponry and the ability to engage at that level. And they're heroes. They believe in the greatness of their cause or their civilization. I want to offer three paradigm shifts this morning and suggest that the Old Testament takes each of these three categories and flips them dramatically on their head. So, let's start by just kind of asking the basic question: who is Israel? This is a good place to start, right?

Israel is not who you'd expect. They are a nation of slaves who have been getting their tails kicked on the outskirts of the empire for centuries. They're depicted as the last and the least and the weakest of the ancient world, and they're going up against Egypt and Canaan, the mightiest imperial powerhouses in the ancient world that dominated the region. They should get crushed. This is not who usually fights mainstream holy wars. So, let's jump in and take a look at each of these categories.

We're going to start with machine guns. Alright? Weaponry. What kind of weapons or machine guns does Israel have? They go in, they are radically outgunned and outmanned. So, it's not like they left Egypt and there was like a stockpile of AK-47s waiting for them out in the wilderness. Right? Canaan, they've got like high tech horses and chariots – which were sort of like tanks and jet fighters back in the day – and Israel's got like sticks and stones and whatever they've been able to muddle together in the wilderness the last 40 years.

Israel is like a kindergartner going up against the high school senior class with a whiffle bat. Right? As far as defenses, Canaan has heavily fortified military outposts like Jericho. They've got high walls and defensive systems built in. Israel, in contrast, her defense system is this small wooden box, the Ark of the Covenant, that she's built in the desert. The significance is that God's presence with her is about the only thing she's got going for her as far as her defense. There were generals. Canaan has generals who practice strategy on the surrounding nations, establishing their dominance in the region. Israel, meanwhile, has been fending off snakes in the wilderness.

If we look at armor, Canaan has high tech metal, the best armor of the day, to repel any incoming advances and blows. Israel, on the contrary, has the same ratty clothes they've been walking around with for the last 40 years. Israel is storming Ft. Knox with a water pistol. Right? This is a radically different picture. Think about the warriors, right? Canaan is known as a land of giants. They come in and they're intimidated and scared, like, "Dude, this guys are huge."

And they should be. They've been feasting off the land of milk and honey for generations. Right? So, they're massive. Israel, in contrast, is depicted comparatively as a nation of runts. Right? Like, while Canaan has the wealth and affluence and all the confidence that that brings, Israel marches in like ants under elephant's feet; small and intimidated. So, if we want to think about Israel's weapons, I would suggest that they look less like this and more like this. Right?

Israel is going in radically outgunned and outmanned, and it's here in this place that she learns to sing the song in the Psalms where she says, "Some trust in chariots, some in horses. But, we trust in the name of the Lord our God."

In the ancient world and the empires, some trust in their militarization and their mighty tanks and their defensive systems and their advanced weaponry. Our trust and confidence is that God fights for us. A weak and defenseless people; the last in the ancient world.

This is antithetical to mainstream holy war. It's inversion. Israel is the dramatic, laughable underdog. Like, if we think of the NFL, this isn't necessarily like a lesser ranked team going up against a higher ranked team, this is like the NFL Super Bowl champions going up against your Pee-Wee Football team at the local high school. Right? They're in a different league all together and should get crushed. Their only hope from getting routed is that God is the one fighting for them.

Alright, well, let's move on. So, machine guns. Now, let's move on to "muscle-bound." We tend to think of holy warriors as strong and they've got strength and they've been training and working out and getting ready for the fight and they've been anticipating this day and they're ready to step into the ring. But, I want to suggest to you that Israel looks a bit more like this. When we think about strength and strategy and what they've got going for them, Israel's strategies are ridiculous. Continually ridiculous.

So, we start with Jericho. This is kind of the opening battle where Israel is going into. It's the first kind of entrance into the promised land. Jericho is like this fortified military outpost. Its defensive systems are guarding the roads that lead up to where the people are and other places. Right? So, Jericho, this fortified military outpost. So, Israel kind of comes out through the wilderness and they're facing it and going, "Alright, God. What's the plan of attack? What's the battle strategy? How are we going to take this?"

And God goes, "Alright. Here's the plan: I want you to march around the walls for seven days and blow trumpets."

Right? That is a really dumb battle strategy. Okay? If you can, imagine soldiers in WWII storming the beaches of Normandy with rock guitars and drums. Right? Ridiculous. Or the Mongols rioting or charging up to the Great Wall of China with trumpets. Or, in the U.S., if we had Canadians and Mexicans marching along the borders with a marching band as a declaration or act of war, we would laugh. We would consider it humorous.

So, what's the point? You know, I'd say that with Jericho the point is that they are coming and entering in a posture of worship and they're expecting God to be the one who does the fighting on their behalf. This is radically different. I would say the strategy is intentional. It's designed to be ridiculous. It's designed to see that God is the one who's fighting for them.

This isn't just Jericho. That's kind of the first. But, you just start tracing them and look for it and you see all their strategies are fairly ridiculous. Go to Gideon in Judges where now they're kind of in the land but they're being oppressed by these different powers in Canaan. So, the Midianites are one and they rally all their forces and their goal is they're going to take out Israel. It says that they were as numerous as the sand on the seashore. The Midianites are. So, God raises up Gideon to kind of defend the people. Gideon is depicted as the least in his family. His family is like the last tribe in Israel. They're like the weakest in their tribe and their tribe is the last in Israel.

So, once again, God goes to the last, the least and the weakest and pulls them out to show His strength as He rises up to defend His people. Alright? As Gideon kind of mobilizes what he can, he's able to rally 32,000 troops. So, he's got 32,000 troops and goes, "Okay, God. What's the plan? What's the battle strategy? How are

we going to deal with these numerous as sand on the seashore armies?"

Right? And he waits for it and God says, "Here's what I want you to do. I want you to send 99% of the troops back home."

This is the story where they drink the water and if they drink lapping it up they stay. Right? So, 99% of the troops are sent back home and he's left with 300. That is a ridiculous battle strategy. If you can imagine Abraham Lincoln in the Civil War saying, "Alright, let's send 99% of the Union soldiers, let's just send them back up north just to prove a point."

Or William Wallace, Braveheart, storming up with the Scottish armies and all and just going, "Hey, you guys. Why don't you just go take the day off and go on? I'm going to take on the English by myself."

That's kind of the picture here. And God actually tells Gideon, "There's a reason I'm doing this. The reason is so that Israel may not boast: 'my own strength has saved me.'"

Jericho, Gideon. The battle strategies are designed to be ridiculous to show that God is the one doing the fighting. Otherwise, it's a death wish. It's not a battle strategy, it's a death wish, unless God is the one doing the heavy lifting. There's this verse that has become very popular over the years. "Be still and know that I am God."

I love this verse, but usually when you see it, it's kind of like on a Hallmark card or there's a picture of a beautiful, peaceful meadow and the greenery and the flowers are blooming and everything's lush and growing and there's kind of a quiet bench and you go and you sit there to reflect. "Be still and know that I am God." There's kind of this sense of like, "The world is crazy and busy and distracting, so step away and quiet yourself and sit in silence and rest."

Those are all good things, but it might surprise you to know that in the original context, "Be still and know that I am God" was a holy war verse. A little bit of a different context for it. It comes from the battle at the Red Sea where Israel is coming out from Egypt and Egypt, Pharaoh and his chariots and armies are chasing down, they're hot on her heels and she's about to get crushed by the political forces of Egypt's empire. And Pharaoh's army is on the one side and then on the other side, in front of her, are kind of the raging, roaring waters and everything. They're like, "Dude, we can't pass. We've got these natural forces of chaos on one side and these political forces of chaos on the other. God, how are we going to survive? How are we not going to get annihilated here?"

And Moses steps up and he says, "Here's the battle strategy: do not be afraid, stand firm and you will see the deliverance of the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you. You need only to be still."

Hebrew scholars say this gets picked up in Israel's history and becomes this Hebrew phrase. "Be still and know that I am God." Yes, everything seems overwhelming and like you're about to get crushed. But, cry out to Him, look to Him, depend on Him and watch Him fight for you. When we hear "be still and know that I am God," I think the picture here, that's Israel's battle cry. The picture here is not so much a monk and a monastery kind of detached from the world – I'm not saying that's a bad thing. That's fine. But, the picture we should have in our heads is something more like a kid with disabilities getting beat up on the playground by 15 bullies who are bigger and older and stronger. And suddenly, his father steps onto the field, pushes him to the side and says, "Sit back, son, and watch me take care of these guys for you."

Like, that's the picture. It's God arising on behalf of His defenseless people. Old Testament scholar, Ben Ollenburger, puts it this way:

"Every other nation in antiquity claimed that their gods participated in war and were responsible for giving their warriors victory. But, only Israel came to understand this claim to mean that it was unnecessary to fight."

When Israel does step in, when they are called to enter the battle, they're just finished off a job that God has brought to 99% of completion. Right? But, in the bigger picture, her only hope is that God is the one fighting for her. Israel is not taking on the empire for God; God is taking on the empire for Israel. This is important, because I think this confronts terrorism today. Right? Because we could say, "Alright. Yeah. Well, throughout history, often the strong have used the gods to justify their conquest of the weak, but don't terrorist think that they're the weak fighting on behalf of god against the strong?"

Like, could this be used to sort of justify terrorism? But, we see a radically different picture here. This terrorist motto is "we will fight for God;" Israel's motto is "God will fight for us." This is not a group with billions of dollars in international oil money kind of hiding in the shadows and taking pot shots at civilians from the rocks, right? This is a visibly vulnerable, identifiable people group out in the open ready to get crushed unless God arises to their defense. This is a different picture. Once again, this is not "we will fight for God," this is "God will fight for us, and if He doesn't, we don't stand a chance."

Alright. Well, let's move to the third. So we've been looking at how they don't have machine guns, they're not muscle-bound, but are they heroes? Heroes. Generally speaking, in history, there's this sense that like, "Dude, we're justified in conquering you because of how great we are and how great our civilization is."

Throughout history, holy warriors have used the greatness of their civilization to justify their conquest. So, you think about Rome and the Roman Empire. They believed in the Pax Romana, the peace of Rome, and they believe their wars were justified because, as they conquered and assimilated nations, yeah it was going to be hard for a minute, but they were bringing them into the blessing and greatness of their civilization. The peace of Rome, the great and mighty Roman Empire. Right?

If we think about in the colonial era of Western history, there was a sense of, "Dude, we're justified in entering your land and establishing our dominance and pulling out your resources because of how great the civilization is that we're bringing."

The phrase come up in this era, kind of the white man's burden. Right? This sense that like, "Dude, we're actually called. There's this duty to go out and spread the greatness of the civilization to the peoples of the world, even if that means extracting their resources and establishing our dominance in the area."

People have used the greatness of their civilization to justify invasion and expansion and kind of conquering and assimilating other nations. Today, it might look less military at times and more economic invasion, right? Like, we're justified in kind of taking over and establishing our dominance because we've got Coca Cola and computers and compact cars. Like, the greatness of our civilization justifies us doing this. There's a sense of our heroism. Israel's history turns this on its head.

We're told in Deuteronomy 9:5, a central holy war passage, God says to know for certain as you go in, "It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, [...] for you are a stiff-necked people."

Not a great compliment, right? Stiff-necked people. God's going, "Hey, know for certain that you're not the heroes. This is not because of your greatness or how wonderful you are. You're actually not all that great."

Right? Which is ironic because, generally in history, we say the victors write the history books. And what we mean by that is the victors, those who win the battle, get to tell the story of how everything went down. And when they do, the victors tend to depict themselves in the history books as strong, heroic, courageous and

noble. But, when you read through the Old Testament, – and pay attention and you'll see – Israel depicts herself in the opposite as weak, fearful, idolatrous, unbelieving, dishonest, disobedient. Right? Israel depicts herself as the anti-hero of the story. It's almost as if she hired a reporter to walk with her through the whole ordeal and track down all of her biggest flaws and failures and mistakes and blast them all over the pages of her history books.

The victory occurs in spite of herself, not because of herself. And Israel had a numbers problem. In the ancient world, having a lot of people be in a large and numerous nation was a sign of power and strength. Right? It was a sign of how many people you had conquered and assimilated and your own greatness and all. But, Israel's depicted as the last and the least of the people as we see here in Deuteronomy 7:7. It's another central holy war passage.

Moses reminds them, "The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples."

She's not just a little bit behind, she's dead last. Right? And why was this? Why was Israel so few in numbers? Well, a couple things. You know, for starters, you can imagine when God calls Abraham at the beginning of Israel and the nation begins, it's a couple generations after the other nations have been starting and exponentially exploding. Right? So, it's like the other nations have been running in a few laps on the population racetrack before Israel even gets to the starting line. And with Moses and Egypt, there had been the attempted genocide when Pharaoh tries to kill all the babies under two years old, and this would have had a decimating effect on their population.

Ezekiel depicts God finding Israel. In Egypt, there's this picture where God's like walking out in this field and He hears this baby crying and He comes upon it and He sees it's been abandoned in this field and it's bloody and it's exposed and it's about to die. And God picks her up and takes her to Himself as His own. But, it's not a very flattering picture for Israel, right? Like, you were this abandoned baby out in this field. God is saying, "You're not the hero in this story, Israel." Right?

So, what is going on here? I think the significance here, if we zoom out to kind of the 50,000-foot level, I would suggest to you that God is choosing the smallest, weakest, most helpless, vulnerable, powerless people in the ancient world to declare to the mightiest, wickedest, bloodiest, nastiest, powerhouse empires that this is the kind of God He is. One who arises on behalf of the vulnerable, the exploited, the defenseless and oppressed. That God is patient. He will be patient for a long time; patient for centuries. We're told in Genesis 15, God tells Abraham, "The reason your people are going to have to go into slavery is because I'm being patient with Canaan. I'm going to be patient 400 years while their injustice and their idolatry and their destruction grows."

But, when His patience runs out, His patience will not last forever. God is way more patient than we might be led to believe. But, His patience will not last forever. Because God is good, God will ultimately arise to tear down our empires and establish His kingdom in their place. To tear down the oppressive and exploitative structures and systems that we've built. And in this story, we see He's actually handing it over. He's handing over His garden, handing over His promised land to this nation of homeless, wandering slaves. That sends a message. How you treat them is how you treat me, because I'm a God who will arise, ultimately, on behalf of the exploited and oppressed.

Alright. Well, this morning, in light of all this, I kind of want to teach you how to fight a holy war. Right? I know that's really why you all came this morning. "How do I do this myself?" Right?

So, I'm going to give you the ten steps to fighting a holy war. Here they are. A true, Biblical holy war. Alright?

Number one: throw away your armor.

Number two: burn your tactical training books.

Number three: find the cheapest, most ineffective weapons you can.

Number four: visit a rehab center to find military leaders with issues.

Number five: hire a report to meticulously track all your flaws and failures.

Number six: boast to your enemies about how backwards your civilization is.

Number seven: find the biggest, baddest super power who will surely kick your tail.

Number eight: pick a fight.

Number nine: walk into the middle of the battle field.

Number ten: pray that God shows up.

No one in their right mind is going to fight a war like this today. Right? I think one of the concerns with Old Testament violence through passages like this is, "Man, if you believe in that than you're going to become more violent today. You're going to want to do things like that today."

But, no one in their right mind is going to want to do something like this today. Right? When we really get a clear picture of what's going on, we actually see – you know, I love Miroslav Volf, a theologian. He talks about how, "Dude, when we really kind of a get a right understanding of why God, in His goodness, comes to deal with injustice and all those things in our world, this kind of stuff should make us less violent, not more."

Right? Because we don't need to vindicate ourselves. We don't need to take vengeance for ourselves. We entrust. "Vengeance is mine," says God." Like, we entrust vindication into God's hands. We can live our lives with sacrificial love, we can be vulnerable in the world in the midst of these hostile powers, and we entrust ourselves to the God who will ultimately fight for us.

All of this I think is summed up in the famous story of David and Goliath. David and Goliath, it's more than just a cute children's story about a runt taking down a giant. There's actually something more going on. For Israel, this was not only a holy warrior story, it was kind of the holy warrior story. We jump into David and Goliath and we see that it takes place at the Valley of Elah. Right? The Valley of Elah, this is the place where Israel's encamped on one side and the Philistines are on the other. On the other side is basically the last portion of land in the promised land to be taken. So, this is the end. It's the climax. It's the finale of what started back with Joshua. This is the completion of the Kingdom taking shop in the promised land.

So, as this battle starts, we start to see David and Goliath as, yes, themselves, but it's also like they draw into themselves this entire history. Goliath looks a lot like Canaan. Like, he's tall, strong, this giant. He's got the armor and the weapons. He has got the most advanced weaponry of the day. Right? He's got the most advanced armor. He's like an impenetrable fortress. And David, in contrast, looks like Israel has looked throughout this thing. Right? He can't even wear the armor. It's too heavy for him. So, he comes out and he's wearing his shepherd clothes and he can't even carry the sword. So, he's got his sling and stone and the vision to the ancient world, they see this thing going on and it looks laughable.

Goliath's strategy, it makes perfect sense. Like, "Yeah. Just walk up to your opponent and chop off his head."

You know? David's strategy looks ridiculous. "Throw pebbles at Mount Everest and hope it falls down."

Goliath boasts about his gods, basically saying, "Hey, on behalf of my god, I'm going to fight for my god and I'm going to crush you."

And David in response says, "No. God's going to fight for me and He's going to take you down."

And, like this whole history, the runt and the giant, a sling and a stone and down goes Goliath. It's this picture of everything that's gone before. This is not just a holy war story; it is the holy war story. David and Goliath. And we actually find that, in Christ, Jesus is the new David. Right? Jesus identifies with us in our weakness. Jesus places Himself underneath the empires and powers of our world like Rome and the Jewish leadership of the day. He places Himself under the power of our highest courts and our truest priests and allows Himself, vulnerably, to be crushed. Like, He trusts the Father, His Father, to arise, ultimately, in His defense on His behalf in the resurrection.

Jesus walks out onto the battlefield of the cross visibly vulnerable and exposed, trusting in the Father in the cross and the tomb. Ultimately, He places Himself vulnerably under the power of the grave, and entrusts God, His Father, to fight on His behalf as the Son. And He does, raising Him from the grave, victorious as the beginning of the new creation, reestablishing God's kingdom reign in the earth. God's kingdom reign on earth as it is in heaven where God's reign is being established through Christ, taking over where sin's destruction has for too long reigned.

So, I want to ask today: what do we do with this? Right? Is there any kind of conclusions that we can draw? I'm going to point to a few things here. Three things. First off, I would suggest that this story starts to look like hope for the world. Right? This is the dramatic underdog story. I would suggest to you that there's a reason why we want the underdogs to win. We see this massive theme in movies. So, whether it's the Mighty Ducks or pretty much every Adam Sandler movie ever made, we want – I loved Aladdin as a kid. It's like he's the underdog and he gets drawn into this. The Hobbits. Right? They're like the rejects of Middle Earth and they're brought into this amazing story.

You look throughout our fairytales and our stories and all and we love to root for the underdog. I suggest there's a reason. That it's actually embedded in the structure of the universe. That this is the kind of God, the kind of creator that we have. He is a God that, yeah, He's patient and He's patient with our world today, but there are a lot of underdogs getting crushed around the world today. I oversee our local and international ministries where we work with foster care and homelessness and anti-trafficking and things like that in our city, and you see people getting crushed under the exploitative and oppressive power of other's greed and lust and pride.

I work internationally, particularly in Cambodia and Vietnam, and you just see international systems and structures and processes and you see people getting crushed underneath the weight of some of those. Not only historically, but even today around the world. For me, these have actually become a source of hope. I opened kind of talking about the Navajo reservation and native peoples, and I've come to say to you that this actually starts to sound like hope for that story. Right? But yes. God has been patient, but He hears the cries rising up from His devastated earth. He hears the blood that cries out from the ground. And ultimately, He will come to vindicate and to redeem.

And yes, there are still some difficult issues here. So, tomorrow night at the lecture, some of you are already going, "Yeah, but what about..."

There are some tough passages. Things like where Israel is given what I like to call some "drastic marching orders." Like, "Utterly destroy them, do not leave alive anything that breathes, show no mercy." That can sound

like genocide, right? That can sound pretty rough. But, I invite you to come out tomorrow night. We're going to be diving deeper into passages like those and what I want to show tomorrow night is that there's actually a lot more nuanced picture that's going on in the Old Testament. And when we see that, we'll start to see that Israel actually radically raised the bar on ancient warfare practice.

Last week, Dave preached on how the ancient Near East was brutal and how God kind of accommodates and steps into the realities of the time, but is pulling Israel forward, out of some of the muck and the gnarly practices and towards a better way and restraining some of the worse things. We'll see tomorrow night that God does similarly. He raises the bar in ancient warfare practice. And I think we'll also see, perhaps surprisingly, that Israel even actually raises the bar on modern warfare practice. That, man, the history, even of the modern West, as a modern Westerner owning my history, that we've looked a lot more brutal than we might like to imagine in the 20th century. Our wars in the modern world have been way more brutal than anything Israel could have ever dreamed of.

So, if there's still some questions about it I'd invite you tomorrow to kind of come. We can grapple through some of that. But, big picture here, we'll end up kind of going, "I believe this story is hope for the world. God is a God who hears the cries and will ultimately arise on behalf of the underdog."

So, it's hope for the world. Second landing pad here is I think for us to ask, "Hey, where are we in the story?" Right? Because the dangerous tendency is to go, "Well, we're the heroes. Right? We're Israel."

We saw that in early American history where Europeans assumed, "Hey, we're Israel. We're the good guys." But I suggest that, actually, the modern West, we can look a lot more like Canaan at times. You look at our history. I mentioned how the 800 treaties with native peoples, every one broken. I think about slavery and the legacy there. Over 10 million enslaved to build what we have today. And the question arises: does God hear their cries? Does He hear their blood that cries out from the ground?

And I believe the answer is "yes," and it's in this Old Testament history that we find the hope that God is a God who sees and hears; that He is patient. And I think today we could maybe think, "Well, yeah. That was back then. But, we're a lot better today. We're really great. Right?"

But, there's a lot of gnarly stuff that happens today and the international systems and structures and things that we've built. So, we're sort of in the tech hub here, right? And I was reading, and we can think of technology and social media, well, that's really polite. In society, that's good stuff. There's nothing bad there. But, I was reading an interesting article in Wired this week, and it was talking about how the amount of people that have to be employed to kind of protect what we see on social media and how this by and large gets exported to impoverished countries where people spend their days sifting through just brutal images of violent pornography, of kids being abused and exploited, of bestiality, and beheadings. And they're in charge of deleting and removing this stuff so that we don't have to see and deal with it. Psychologists are saying, "Man, most people can't make it more than a few months in these jobs because it just starts to wear on you."

Right? They're saying, "Man, when you see this stuff like that, you're forever impacted." This is just one little lens on a system we have today where it's like that. So, the article includes saying, "So, companies like Facebook and Twitter rely on an army of workers employed to soak up the worst of humanity in order to protect the rest of us, and there are legions of them. A vast, invisible pool of human labor. Well over 100,000. That is about twice the total headcount of Google and nearly four times that of Facebook."

It's huge. There's been a growing awareness of how tantalum this product in many of our iPhones and just a lot of computer technology has often been used coming out of Congo, one of the most brutal war zones in the world where, since 1998, 5 million people have been killed. Rape has been used as a weapon of war. Organizations and companies are trying to figure out how they can best source their stuff to not get it from

that, but there's still this overarching reality where experts are going, "You can't really trace it." Right? At some level, there's this reality that some of these violent conflicts have been fueled by the wealth and stuff we have today.

I've spent time living in Rwanda and Cambodia, home to two of the worst genocides in the 20th century. And one of the things that just grieved me was finding the role that even our Western history has played in some of those. Like, in Rwanda, the Belgium and colonialism and kind of the Western presence there had in dividing Hutus and Tutsis in a way that ultimately lead to the genocide. Or in Cambodia, the way that one of the most intense bombing campaigns in the 20th century just devastated Cambodia, destabilizing the country and setting the path for the Khmer Rouge to rise up and take power. My point is not necessarily that people all have these bad intentions or that social media or other stuff is bad. I have an iPhone. I'm a fan of social media. My point, though, is that we live in the midst of international structures and systems and we live at kind of the height of them that often have hard, destructive impacts for people in the world.

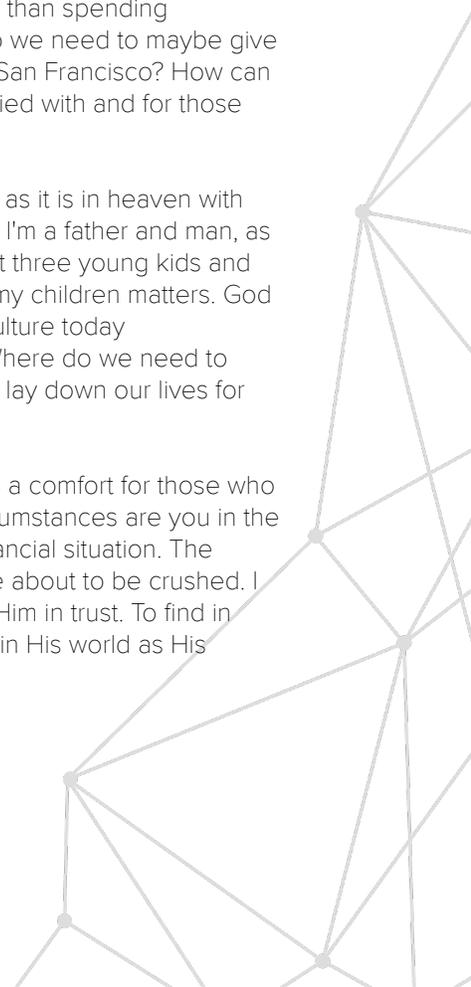
I want to declare that the Old Testament proclaims that God is a God of hope for them and for us. That the unjust and exploitative things that we have, often, as humanity constructed, do not, at the end of the day, have the final word over God's good creation. And if there's an analogy for Israel, it's not America, it's not Europe, it's the Church. Right? Like, we are the people who are called to fight, not with the usual weapons of war. We're not to wage war with the weapons of the world, but we're to stand vulnerably in the midst of God's world to work for justice on behalf of the oppressed and to trust God to fight for us and vindicate us.

So, the final question that I want to ask us this morning is just, dude, are we living for the empire or for the kingdom? Are we living for the empire or the kingdom? Where is our hope ultimately set? It's been said that the Gospel, when it shows up, it's about to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. Right? So, I'd ask you this morning: where are we comfortable? I'm convicted of this kind of preparing for this this week. Where have we grown too comfortable in the ways of Babylon or the modern international structures? We live at the heights of a global economy, right? And where have we grown too comfortable rather than spending ourselves on behalf of the vulnerable, working on behalf of the oppressed? Where do we need to maybe give generously? Where do we need to lay down our lives for the vulnerable right here in San Francisco? How can we, as the body of Christ, live lives with sacrificial love that see God's presence identified with and for those who are being crushed?

How can we come alongside and embody His kingdom, as His people, here on earth as it is in heaven with them? So, for some, we might need to repent of ways that we've abused our strength. I'm a father and man, as a father, there's probably no more place than your family at home with my kids. I've got three young kids and just recognize the weight of how I have authority and power at home and how I treat my children matters. God cares. They are the kind of vulnerable ones in my midst. It's too easy. We see in our culture today abandonment and abuse and other things. So, I think God is calling us this morning. Where do we need to repent of ways we've abused or abandoned or not used the authority that we have to lay down our lives for the vulnerable ones in our midst?

And the other side of this is going, "Where are you afflicted? Because God's Gospel is a comfort for those who are afflicted." Where do you need, this morning, the God who fights for you? What circumstances are you in the midst of? Maybe it's that relationship or your marriage is struggling. Maybe it's your financial situation. The areas where life feels so overwhelming or you feel like you've been crushed or you're about to be crushed. I think God invites us this morning to come to Him and to cry out to Him and to look to Him in trust. To find in Him the one who fights for us. Because of that, we can live vulnerably and sacrificially in His world as His people.

Would you join me in prayer as we close?



Holy Father, God, I thank You that we are not without hope. I thank You that You are strong, God, and that Your strength is good and right and true, Lord, and that we need Your strength. Your strength is hope for our world. God, I thank You that You are patient and Your patience is good news for our world. It allows us to run today and thrive. And yet, Your patience, God, may we live with the awareness that it will not last forever and that this, too, is good news for our world, God. That those who have been trampled and crushed underneath, God, their blood cries out from the ground, Father. We know that You see and You hear and You are good and You are coming to set things right and to restore Your world.

So, we pray this morning, Father, that we as Your people could be an embodiment of Your Kingdom come, Lord, and Your will done right here in San Francisco as it is in Heaven, God. If there are areas where we have grown too comfortable, God, may we, in the midst of things in our world as they are, would we sacrificially and generously lay down our lives for the vulnerable in our midst, in our city and in our world, God.

If there's areas, God, I pray for all those who feel overwhelmed by life, Lord, and surrounded. Maybe they've been crushed in spirit, God, or intimidated by the circumstances that we face. Father, we look to You and we ask, God, would You fight on our behalf? Would You empower us, God, in the power of Your Spirit, to live dependent on You, to make ourselves vulnerable in Your world, because we trust that You are good. And God, that ultimately, even if it's on the other side of the grave, You are coming with victory to redeem and to establish Your goodness in the world forever. In the name of Christ we pray, amen.