

# The Story: The Battle Begins

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[ 0 : 00 ] For anyone who doesn't know me, my name's Kent Dixon. It's my privilege to be the lead pastor here at Bramard. There's some folks here who are new this morning. Lots of you are sick of hearing me say that, but some of you didn't know, and so now you know.

And this morning, we're continuing our sermon series in the story. If you were here last Sunday, I'm sure you enjoyed Noel's sermon on wandering.

And Noel's sitting back at the computer. I hate to point him out, but get ready, Sayers. Here it comes. So if you were here last Sunday, you would have heard this sermon.

If you weren't here, I encourage you to check it out on their website. Because all of our sermons are posted, and so Noel's sermon is there. And in my opinion, it was worth at least 10 church points.

I'd say. 10-ish, maybe. I don't know, maybe 20. Now I'm going to go 20. Is that fair? I'll go 20. And you know what? I loved how Noel unpacked the idea of mindset and attitude.

[ 1 : 01 ] If you remember that, you might be smiling and nodding. He also highlighted for us the fact that God has no interest in simply having better informed Christians.

God is looking for better prepared Christians. Do you remember hearing that? Noel encouraged us to seek to be people who are by nature graceful, grateful.

Who seek God and his kingdom first. He encouraged us to be both humble and teachable. Sheesh, you know, the more I think about it, I think it's maybe worth more points than that.

But he gave out a lot of church points, and I don't think that's fair. There are a lot. He was just throwing them around. But I guess when the pastor's away, that's what happens, right?

It's just anarchy. Have you ever come face to face with an overwhelming challenge that scared you to death? If so, did you confront it?

[ 2 : 09 ] Or did you retreat? I came much closer to a bear than I would have liked when I hiked ahead of a larger group a few summers ago.

It was all family, and they still joke about, all of a sudden, Kent disappeared. And the next thing we knew, he was up at the top of the mountain. And the next thing, I was just done hiking. And I wanted to get it done. And I ended up on a trail, probably from here to the stairs.

Everybody can turn and look. From here to the stairs, I came around a bend, and I looked down this path, and there was a bear on the path. So I didn't run.

And it must be like experiencing a great white shark in the ocean. This bear appeared out of nowhere. It was completely silent. It stopped, sniffed a bit, kept going into the trees.

Silent. And I thought, yikes. That was scary. So I came much closer to that bear than I would have liked. But fortunately, that story didn't have a more grisly ending.

[ 3 : 12 ] I mean, I'll wait. But it definitely was a Kodiak moment. So this morning, this morning as we continue our series and the story, our sermon is titled, The Battle Begins.

Oh, I didn't leave the module. Thank you, Pastor. The battle begins. And so, as we find in the story at this point, Israel is facing an overwhelming challenge.

It's now 600 years since God made that initial promise to Abraham. That he would make him a great nation. And the children of Israel are ready to advance into the promised land.

But there's a big problem. There are wicked people already living in the land. And among those people are some literal giants.

Can you picture what it would be like to encounter a giant as they are described in Scripture?

Personally, I seem to encounter giants all the time. That's being vertically challenged.

[ 4 : 31 ] But do you know who Danny DeVito is, the actor? So Danny DeVito, I'm not comparing myself. I'm far taller than him. Danny DeVito is five feet tall.

So now imagine him standing next to basketball legend Wilt Chamberlain. Have you heard of Wilt Chamberlain? He is seven feet, one inch tall.

Seven, one. Danny DeVito, Wilt Chamberlain. So that's what the difference would seem like between a person of average height and a giant.

And as you learned last week, Israel had spent the last 40 years on a road to nowhere. They were wandering and they were grumbling.

All the people who had been slaves in Egypt had died except for two. Joshua and Caleb. And you heard about Caleb from Noel last week during his sermon.

[ 5 : 33 ] And at this point, Moses himself had also died. So as we continue in the story this morning, the children of Israel have a new leader named Joshua, who had been Moses' right-hand man.

And they're at a place called Kadesh Barnea, where 40 years earlier they took a major wrong turn. The wilderness of disobedience and defeat was behind them now.

And the new generation was camped at Canaan's edge. Under Joshua, God tells the new generation to take the land.

And Joshua is told by God four times, four times, to be strong and courageous. Four times.

God is clear to Joshua that now is the time for courage. God begins by telling Joshua and the people three things that they need to be successful.

[ 6 : 42 ] This is not a three-point sermon, so don't get excited. He tells them, first of all, that they must be people of the book. People of the word of God.

And the Bible says, in Joshua 1, verse 8, let's read this together. Keep the book of the law always on your lips.

Meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. The land of Canaan was a place of conquest and victory for Israel.

When Israel obeyed, God faithfully delivered her enemies into their hands. But when they failed to trust him, they missed out on the fulfillment of those promises.

Part of God's directive to Joshua and all his people was to be people of the book. People of God's word. People who honor God's word by obeying it.

[ 7 : 49 ] But then we come to Joshua 1, verse 7, and we read, We can read this together. Don't be afraid.

But the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things. Achan, son of Carmi, son of Zimri, son of Zerah, the tribe of Judah, took some of them.

So the Lord's anger burned against Israel. So why the list? Why the genealogy in there? Why the genealogy in there?

Because of the disobedience of one man who chose to ignore God's directive, Achan, as scripture tells us, Joshua and his army lost a battle in a place called Ai.

So when the Israelites lose that battle, Joshua is clearly confused and distraught. Because in following God's will, how could his people and his army have caused, They caused the great city of Jericho to fall.

[ 9 : 26 ] They followed God. They obeyed God. Jericho fell to the ground in a demonstration of God's power. In response to the faithfulness of his people.

And yet here they were at a relatively small place called Ai, Where they experienced a total defeat. They faced a small city and were defeated.

God is very clear to Joshua that his directive has been broken. And ultimately, when they do their homework, It is Achan who is found guilty of having broken God's command, When he coveted and stole from the plunder taken from the city.

Joshua was clear that that was not to be touched. He was clear that that was God's will. And yet Achan did what we often do and said, Oh, no one will miss this.

So you can read about Achan's punishment in chapter 7. I won't go into detail right now. And then early in chapter 8, After the people have repented, After they've turned back to obeying God, Then the enemy city of Ai is destroyed.

[ 10 : 46 ] So God had revealed Achan's sin and called Joshua's attention to it. But then God forgave the sin.

And the people were ultimately victorious when they reoriented. After that victory at Ai, We read in Joshua 8, 34 and 35, That Joshua restored the covenant between the people and God.

Let's read this together. Afterward, Joshua read all the words of the law, The blessings and the curses, Just as it was written in the book of the law.

There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded That Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, Including the women and children And the foreigners who lived among them. So not surprisingly, It was likely the ten commandments That were read to the people that day. And as we explored a few weeks ago, When we looked specifically at the ten commandments, Those same rules for how we are to relate to God And to other people Are just as relevant for us today As they were when they were first given.

[12:03] God also tells the people that to be successful, They are to be people of prayer. God talks to them and says, Talk to me before we go into battle.

And I will be up front. I will lead you. I will go before you. Could I have that next slide? Thank you. Are you a person of prayer? We're blessed in our country That we will quite likely never be called To go into a literal battle.

Knock on pulpit. But do you ever pause to think about that? For the most part, We go about our lives in no significant danger.

At least none that we can perceive in a tangible way. But do you recognize That a battle rages around us constantly?

[13:10] Do you recognize that? I once read a theologian who described That if we could see the battle that rages around us In the spirit realm all the time, It would quite literally Possibly scare us to death.

There is a battle. So if you believe in angels and demons, I hope you do, As literal beings that exist Just as we do, Then you must also recognize, As scripture says over and over, That they are at war with one another.

War, my friends. All the time. All around us. Have you ever considered that your prayers, Your most passionate requests of God, Have the potential, Have the potential, If you trust God, And believe in faith, What you bring to him in prayer will be answered.

Do you believe that they can be more powerful Than any weapon, Any physical weapon, You can imagine? A Christian who does not pray, Is like a tiger without teeth, A gladiator who enters the arena without a sword or a shield, Maybe even a skydiver without a parachute, Without prayer, Without intentional, Ongoing, Active conversation, Between us and God, Between you and God, We are no different than anyone else.

Hear that. Without prayer in our lives, Christians are no different than anyone else. God will still act according to his will.

[15:18] Hear me on that. And he may possibly still use us in some way. But a Christian with an active prayer life Is someone who has almighty God In their corner.

The God of angel armies is by your side. One day I plan to preach a series on prayer And the many ways that we can understand it.

The ways we can approach it. The ways we can appreciate it. But for now, Suffice it to say That prayer is a critical, Critical aspect Of your life as a Christian.

And I don't mean Praying before you go to bed. It's good. Praying before supper. It's good. But Unsheath that sword of prayer And swing it in battle And you will win.

When we call on God Or cry out to God in faith And trust that he will act According to his will Not necessarily Hear me on this Not necessarily According to our wishes But according to his will Amazing things are possible As we read in the early chapters Of Joshua As the Israelites Carry the ark of the covenant Before them They are following God In a very literal sense When they followed God They sought God's path And God's will first When they did that They had success And the same thing Can be true for us Do you believe that?

[17:08] Because it's true Another thing God told Joshua And the people That they needed to be successful Was to be people Who identify With God We have another verse Just after the Israelites Crossed the Jordan River We read about a command God gave to the people In Joshua 5 verse 2 Let's read that together At that time The Lord said to Joshua Make flint knives And circumcise the Israelites again So Joshua made the flint Flint knives Sorry And circumcised Thank you Oh good pronunciation even I had to look it up Gibeath Haraloth So you may be wondering At this point When you read that passage Especially if you're male God commanded the Israelites To be circumcised again So they may have been thinking Gee Lord

Once was actually enough I'm good But remember When you read this The Israelites Who had been part of that Original covenant That original circumcision covenant With God Under Abraham They had died During the time Between Abraham and Joshua So again here That word again Refers to the fact That many of the young men Were uncircumcised At that time You know what I found this fascinating In my research Other cultures at the time Also used circumcision But they used it As a sign of entry Into adulthood For males But only Israel Used it as a sign of Following God Only Israel And this literal act Was also intended To be a sign of Don't cringe Cutting off the old life And beginning a new life With God Making a clean break And starting over By being circumcised At Gilgal The males of Israel Were making a sign Of their identity With God Their identification In and through God And so remember That this circumcision At Gilgal That happened Came even before The Israelites Began their conquest Of the promised land So when God God was saying In effect Before you go Into battle I want all the soldiers To identify With me It was a form Of swearing allegiance To their heavenly Master and commander In Joshua Chapters 5 Through 7 We read Battle after battle That the Israelites Fought As they took The promised land With God

In command And leading the charge We see miracles The Jordan River Is dammed up And the walls Of the great city Of Jericho Crumble Under God's Mighty power Miracle After miracle As the people Seek and follow God The Israelites Defeated 5 Gibeonite kings We read And took cities In the south And they defeated 14 more kings In the north So by the time We reach Joshua 11 23 We learn that The Israelites Had taken The entire land Let's read that together So Joshua Took the entire land Just as the Lord Had directed Moses To Israel According to their Tribal divisions Then the land Had rest From war So if you read on In Joshua 12

That's homework If you like You'll get the full list Of kings That were defeated By the Israelites With God leading The way And Joshua As their earthly leader If you look at that list In scripture There are 31 kings On that list 31 Chapters 13 to 31 Of the book of Joshua Chronicle in detail Then how Joshua Took the spoils Of the conquered land And divided them up Among the tribes Of Israel So we see here That through Jacob's Original blessing Of his sons Do you remember that?

[ 21 : 53 ] Back in Genesis 49 And Moses' blessing Of the 12 tribes Of Israel In Deuteronomy 33 You see this?

It's a story The type of the land That each tribe Would receive Was already known So as we look back In Genesis As we look back In Deuteronomy The plan Was established there That is Surprise Being carried out here God's plan Is at work So why did God Command Israel To take the promised land?

Here we go back Let's take a look back And see what the Bible Says in Genesis 15 Verse 16 Let's read this together In the fourth generation Your descendants Will come back Here For the sin Of the Amorites Has not yet reached Its full measure Four generations From now You'll be back Pretty neat The Amorites Were one of the nations That lived in Canaan And Canaan Was the land That God Had promised Abram Abram Sorry Before The covenant Where he became Abraham God knew The people Of this land Would become More wicked And that they Would need to be Punished one day And part of that Punishment Would be that God would take Away their land And he would Give it To Abram's Descendants God had a plan

Four generations Ago In his mercy God was giving The Amorites Plenty of time To repent But he already Knew they Wouldn't And at the Right time God knew Already That they would Have to be Punished Do you recognize That everything That God does Is true to His character He is merciful He knows All He acts Justly And above All His timing Is perfect The people Who lived In that land Scripture Describes it In more detail But they Practiced Detestable Adultery Idolatry Be clear Which included Using prostitutes In worship Believe it or not And sacrificing Children to their Gods But even more Important than All of that

God wanted to Make himself Known among The nations Through the Victories of His people That's what God is about At least Nineteen times In scripture God declares This to be His mission To make Himself Known And God Told Abraham That through Him You'll remember This All the Nations of The world Would be Blessed God wants All people To be in Relationship With him Gee Pastor Kent That's great So what does That mean What does That mean For us Today What does That mean For us Right here And right Now My friends Are you A person Are we A church Who are People Of the Word of God Are we People

[ 25 : 36 ] Of prayer Have you As a person Or we As a church Identified With God In covenant Through baptism Friends Through Christ It is no Longer Through Circumcision That we Identify With God And declare Our allegiance To him But through Baptism How are you As a person How are we As a church Taking this City For God How are we Making him Known In our Schools In our Workplaces In our Neighborhoods Our Communities The places Where we Serve Or live Alongside Other people Because You know What People Are God's Strategy His natural Resource For making

Him known Among the People Of the World To put It bluntly We Are responsible For our Communities And neighborhoods God is Calling us To care Calling us To action For our Neighborhoods For our City Because we Are his And they Are also His It's time For us I believe To make The courageous Decision And rise To the Challenge That God Places Before us This Challenge In our Lives And in Our Church