

The cost of allegiance

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[0 : 00] You're probably familiar with these words of Charles Wesley.!

I want to explore his strange design. Because in these passages, I think in the whole of this Matthew 10 here, Jesus is explaining his plan of campaign.

And as Charles Wesley observed, it's not necessarily an easy one to get your head around. Too many people have failed to grasp the nature of discipleship and made shipwreck of their faith as a result.

So how can we try and understand what's going on here? I don't suggest you look this up now, but it's an interesting reading at some time, if you want to do so, to look in 1 Chronicles 11, chapter 10, through to chapter 12, verse 40.

And there you find a list. It's a list of King David's mighty men, the heroes of David's army. And it lists their exploits.

[1 : 30] It's almost like something out of a comic. It's almost the amazing things you're told that these mighty men did.

How they slew 300 men with a spear and things like that. Those are the heroes who united the nation and defeated David's enemies.

And of course, Peter, James, and John and the other disciples would have been very familiar with these histories. They were part of the history of their nation, after all. And perhaps they were now expecting a call to battle against the Roman occupiers.

Perhaps they were gearing up to be the new generation of mighty men. And indeed, Jesus here, who's the descendant of David, the son of David, is indeed preparing his own mighty men for the coming conflict.

This is the captain briefing his lieutenants for the battle, isn't it? Since the dawn of warfare, the captain has addressed the army before the battle.

[2 : 43] Because it's an obvious thing you need to do. You need to explain the plan of campaign. Because otherwise, how are the people in the fog of war? How are the soldiers going to react in the right way?

Simple prudence dictates that warriors must understand the battle plan and be warned what to expect. In the Gospels, later, we read, for example, that when Jesus was arrested, Peter drew his sword to defend him.

But Jesus stopped this, because it would have undermined Jesus' whole strategy. As Napoleon has reputedly said, never interrupt your enemy when he's making a mistake.

So, as we try and explore this strange design, I'd like to look at these verses in, not focusing closely on the exact wording of each verse, but to try and get the, see what the nature of this battle plan that Jesus is setting forth is about.

So, I'd like to just do that under three headings. First of all, to show that it's a necessary war. And secondly, and the key thing, really, is Jesus' unique strategy in this war.

[4 : 12] And thirdly, what kind of warrior is required for this war? So, in a sense, I'm picking up some things I said two weeks ago.

Remember I said two weeks ago that no kingdom in history has been established without conflict. opposition is inevitable.

And this is certainly true of the kingdom of heaven. But opposition from whom? Who is the primary enemy here? The apostles might have thought there was the occupying Romans, but Jesus refers them to this prophecy of Micah.

This is, as we said last time, a civil war. Just consider some of Micah's graphic phrases. All men lie in wait to shed blood.

Each hunts his brother with a net. The ruler demands gifts. The judge accepts bribes. Do not trust a neighbor. Put no confidence in a friend. Even with her who lies in your embrace, be careful of your words.

[5 : 22] The enemy is your friends and your neighbors here. Even with the one who lies in bed with you. And at the center of this rather ghastly poem, and remember in Hebrew literature the center of the poem is often the most important part, we find these words.

The day of your watchman has come. The day God visits you. Now is the time of their confusion. It's not entirely clear whether the watchman prophesied by Micah here are the old condemned leaders who are going to reap the confusion or the agents bringing about God's visitation. I couldn't quite make up my mind which was meant there, but it doesn't really matter because the meaning either way is clear that God is going to sweep away the old guard, the old corrupt administration and bring in a new deal.

And of course, civil war leaders always promise that, don't they? But that's what Jesus is certainly promising to do here. But when God says he's going to do it, he perhaps will succeed where others have not.

And so as we said two weeks ago, this is firstly a civil war for the soul of the nation of Israel. And it has all the nastiness of any civil war in which families are set against each other.

[6 : 53] Loyalties are tested to the limit as we read in verse 37. We've been thinking about D-Day, haven't we, over the last week or so.

And there's a sense in which the Second World War was initially a European civil war. And there was an enterprising journalist who dug out the story of Ernest Salter.

Ernest Salter, during the Day Day landings, served on a British minesweeper. He was clearing the mines away so that the troops and ships could land safely on the beaches.

But at that very same time, his cousins and his uncles, people who he had played with as a boy, people he had gone on holiday with, people he knew well.

Some of them were manning the German coastal defences. One such relative, turns out, had been part of a crew of a coastal defence gun battery.

[8 : 06] And the report was that after the war, this man had actually claimed to have spotted Ernest through the binoculars and not fired on the ship. Whether that's true or not, as Ernest himself says, he's not entirely sure, but maybe embroidered a little.

But the truth of it is there, isn't it? In essence, the main fact, it is true. Civil wars do turn brothers into enemies.

And so Jesus has to demand our first loyalty because our loyalty will be tested. But of course, what we know about the Second World War is it may have started in Europe, but it soon spilled over to engulf the whole world.

The Americans and the Japanese and many other nations were dragged in. And in many ways, the Pacific War turned out to be more horrific even than that in Europe. And that is true of the conflict that Jesus is preparing his followers for here.

It starts, as it were, as a civil war for the soul of Israel, but it will soon engulf the world. Or what about the Great War of 1914-18?

[9 : 27] Described as the First World War and of course was described ironically as the war to end wars. That was second phrase was soon proved disastrously wrong, wasn't it?

Apart from the war to end wars, it was the war that laid the seeds of the conflict in the 20th century. But actually, the first claim that it's the First World War is not really correct either because the First World War is the one that Jesus is unleashing on the world in verse 34.

And as Revelation makes clear, and we've been looking at Revelation in the mornings here, it's still being fought today. It's this war which is the true war to end wars. So when the Apostles set out on the mission, the first skirmish commences and the battle is joined and the enemy is decisively engaged.

but that's not the end of it, that's just the beginning. The crunch has come and it's time to choose a side. So newer and deeper loyalties have to be established.

Surgery is always painful but sometimes it's the only way to preserve life, isn't it? And sometimes, as we see from history, war is the only route to peace.

[10 : 52] it's time to choose a side. But what's the battle plan? What's the strategy for this war?

In some ways, this is a war like any other but there are respects in which it's utterly unique. It's at one point way in particular which this conflict is utterly unique.

No such battle plan has ever been attempted before or since. So let's think about it a bit. You know the story of Spartacus.

I made a good film of it years ago. Spartacus was a slave who called his followers to war against the Romans and demanded loyalty to the death. And history records that some of them were indeed loyal to the death.

But Spartacus engaged the enemy with his own weapons, with their own weapons, with sword and spear and siege engine. But there are no siege catapults or warships in the forces of Jesus.

[11 : 57] These warriors don't wield sword or spear. They don't carry assault rifles or laser guided missiles. Jesus' mighty men and indeed mighty women as well.

Notice that it talks about women as well as men in this quotation from Micah. They're not like Jashoboam who was the first of David's mighty men listed in 1 Corinthians 11.

He lifted his spear against 300 men whom he killed in one encounter. But that's not the battle plan that Jesus has in mind. Instead, they're to be sheep among wolves.

Matthew 10 verse 16. Their weapon of choice is the gospel, the message that the kingdom of heaven is near.

Verse 7. They're to bring healing, not injury. See that in Matthew 10 verse 8. It is true that the sword will be unleashed.

[13 : 06] Verse 34. It's true that the apostles do pronounce judgment. That, of course, is the significance of shaking off the dust from their feet when they leave the town.

And Jesus indeed says it will be worse for that town than for Sodom and Gomorrah, those cities of notorious wickedness that we read of in Genesis. But notice that judgment is not to be executed by the apostles.

All they do is shake the dust off their feet. they remember that vengeance is mine, says the Lord. And Paul would later expand on this principle.

Again, some words we're probably familiar with but it's worth reminding us of them. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians, for though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

[14 : 23] We take the captives that we take are not bodies as it were but we take every thought, captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Jesus' plan of attack is not at all like that of his ancestor! David. His mighty men are not to be expert with sword and spear but rather with gospel words and gospel actions.

so this policy of non-violence is certainly unusual. Certainly it would be unusual by both Jewish and Roman standards.

Both nations were well versed in the arts of war. But it's not this that makes Jesus' strategy absolutely unique.

There have after all been other religious leaders and philosophers who have advocated non-violence and often with some success. The name of Mahatma Gandhi comes to mind as that great advocate of non-violent resistance to British rule in India and his policy was a success.

[15 : 32] So it's not just non-violence that makes Jesus' battle plan unique. What makes Jesus' plan utterly unique is we're told in verse 39.

It's the pursuing of life through death. Notice before we dig into this a bit more, verse 32 starts with the words whoever or all in the Greek, pass in the Greek.

Jesus is no longer referring just to those apostles. This applies to anyone who wants to be a disciple. As I said, it applies to men and women.

Notice that there are more women referred to in verse 35 than men, actually. men and! If the disciple is planning to follow Jesus, he or she had better be sure that they want to go where he is going.

If you're going to follow the leader into the battle, it's a good idea to have a good idea of where you're heading. where is Jesus going? Jesus has an appointment with death, doesn't he?

[16 : 57] Not just any death, but that shameful death of the criminal, the crucifixion, painful and shameful and horrible method of execution that the Romans carried out.

And that event is still some time in the future when Jesus said these words. And perhaps the apostles didn't know it yet. Jesus was preparing them for it.

But Jesus was well aware that he had this appointment with death. And so he tells them to take up the cross. This is where Jesus is going to the cross.

cross. So the one who follows must go there too. So what would this mean to those inhabitants of the Roman Empire?

A man carrying a cross was not an unusual sight. What would you make of it if you were out about a business in the market and you saw a man carrying a cross?

[18:10] Well that man you know is a dead man walking is the American phrase. A person on his way from the cell to the place of execution is called a dead man walking.

And a man carrying a cross in the Roman Empire is a dead man walking. A man on his way to the place of execution. Jesus has laid out his master plan.

Jesus' strategy to defeat death is to embrace it. Now clearly this is Jesus is saying something important here.

So I think we need to spend a moment or two thinking about what it is Jesus is actually saying here. Is Jesus telling his disciples to seek martyrdom?

Is Jesus telling his disciples to seek martyrdom that the only way to salvation is to get yourself arrested and killed by the Romans?

[19:18] Is that what he's saying? Certainly the disciples have to be prepared for that possibility but this is not I think the primary meaning of Jesus' teaching and as we ought to be sure of that perhaps we need to look a little more in the scriptures and there is another occasion on which Jesus talked about taking up the cross and we find that in Luke 9.

The wording is similar but it's not quite the same. It has a couple of interesting differences. Luke 9 says if anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me for whoever wants to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for me will save it.

What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit his very self? When you think about that it's actually rather strange.

After all you can only be executed once can't you? You can only carry the cross once on the day of your execution.

You can't walk to the place of death every day and yet Jesus tells his followers to take up the cross daily. We are to live each day like a man or woman on the way to the place of execution.

[21:01] Samuel Johnson rather saw the point I think. He said depend on it sir. When a man knows he's to be hanged in a fortnight it concentrates his mind wonderfully. The man or woman on death row has a different focus, a different set of priorities.

The affairs and loyalties of this world are no longer so important. they still have some importance but they fade, they're not the first priority are they? The affairs of the kingdom of heaven loom large at least if that person is a believer.

forever. So what Jesus is telling us to do here is to embrace the cross, to live every day as though we are dead men walking, as though we are giving up our life for the sake of the gospel and that's the way to find it is what Jesus says.

But we do need to be aware because it's not that any death will do. Most deaths in fact are futile and meaningless.

That's what death is in many ways. It's the end of meaning, the end of significance. The teacher, the author of the book of Ecclesiastes knew this well.

[22:29] In fact, it's really the whole theme of the book. If you read Ecclesiastes all the way through, you get this repeated phrase, meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless.

The old version, vanity is vanity, everything is vanity. Here's just a couple of examples. In chapter six, we read, For who knows what is good for a man in life?

During the few and meaningless days, he passes through like a shadow. Who can tell him what will happen under the sun? After he has gone? We'd all like to know, wouldn't we, what faces our children and grandchildren after we've gone?

But nobody can tell us that. From chapter 11, However many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many.

Everything to come is meaningless. this. Which is at least the case if you're not finding your life in the Lord Jesus. And so Jesus tells us in verse 39 that to cling on to life is ultimately to be defeated

by death.

[23 : 49] But the one who embraces the death of Jesus, who lives daily, giving his life to Christ, will in the end conquer death and find life.

That's what Jesus is saying. Isaac Watts caught it well in his hymn, didn't he? This verse that is left out for some bizarre reason. It's left out of many versions of When I Survey the Wanderous Cross. That's the key verse in my view. It says his dying crimson, Jesus' death that is being grasped here of course, his dying crimson like a robe spreads all the body on the tree.

Now I am dead to all the globe and all the globe is dead to me. If we embrace the death of Jesus and say that is our death, now I am dead to all the globe and all the globe is dead to me.

that is the way Jesus says to find life. So that's the battle plan to conquer death by embracing it.

[25 : 05] So if that's the plan, what sort of warriors are required? And if you think about it, not every experience of war is the same, is it?

There are some truths that are universal, of course. Absolute commitment to the cause and a refusal to be inhibited and entangled by civilian ties, to put them aside, or at least to downgrade them, to focus on the task at hand.

war. But while some things are universal, in fact, different kinds of war actually require different kinds of warrior, don't they? So the stormtrooper is all fire and hot blood.

But the sniper or the drone pilot is very different. The sniper has to be calm, cold-blooded and deadly. The bomber pilot crosses the span of the world with a war of engines.

The submariner hides in silence beneath the waves. The secret agent also hides, in her case, by blending in to the civilian population.

[26 : 25] different ways of warfare demand different kinds of warrior. Jesus is seeking warriors for the war, so what kind of warrior is he seeking?

So I thought it might be handy to have a recruitment policy, a poster, so I'll put one together. David's mighty men were experts with sword and spear and bow.

What kind of warrior does Jesus require? And that unique battle plan requires a unique kind of warrior. And so I put together a bit of a poster here.

These basic requirements are based on Matthew 5, which is the Beatitudes, which you were wondering. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

If you plan to conquer the world in Jesus' army, an essential requirement is meekness. Now you know where all those emperors and dictators went wrong in the past, don't you?

[27 : 42] They weren't exactly noted for meekness, not from Alexander the Great through to Adolf Hitler. Arrogance is what destroyed them. But those who inherit the earth in Jesus' army will be meek.

Arrogance disqualifies you from the start. And if you're going to wage total war, what sort of attitude do you have?

Well, Jesus says, blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. You need to be wedded to the concept of peace, not war for its own sake, but the concept of making peace, peace between men and women, peace between people, peace with God.

Families are torn apart, as we've seen in this war, and yet we should be aiming to make peace, bring people together, and in particular to reconcile men and women to God.

Fair and just peace is the object of this war. Normally, a warrior requires a certain ruthlessness.

[29 : 02] Actually, if you think about it, I mean, I suppose many of us here have been in military service, but if you think about it, to stab a fellow human with a sword or a bayonet, or even more so, to pull the trigger of your rifle on an unsuspecting victim, requires a certain hardness of mind, doesn't it?

It's not actually natural to people, but in the wars of this world, it's an essential skill, and people have to actually be trained to do it. But that's not the kind of training that Jesus wants his warriors to go for, because he says, blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

In Jesus' army, we train not for ruthlessness, but for mercy. And there was a time, wasn't there, when actually, if you were a soldier, it was paid to be well off, because that meant you could buy the best armour and the best sword.

Nowadays, of course, nobody can afford the military hardware, and you have to rely on what's supplied by your government. But if that's true in modern armies today, it was always true in this army.

In fact, Jesus warns us, doesn't he? He says, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Don't turn up with your lunch, thinking you've got all you need to keep you going through the war, because you haven't.

[30 : 44] Jesus wants people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness who seek what he has to give. And he said, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Don't turn up in your shiny uniform and your polished armour and whatever it is, whatever weapons you have that you've run out to be purchased, because they won't do you any good at all.

Of course, Jesus says the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are poor in spirit. You know that they need the equipping that God gives them.

They need the protection of the spiritual armour that God gives them. To win this battle, it's no good bringing your own stuff. You notice that Jesus tells them that in verses 9 to 11 of chapter 10, doesn't he?

Let's read it again. Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts. It's no good being rich. You've got it, leave it at home.

[31 : 57] Take no bag, no extra tunic, no sandals or staff, for the worker is worthy of his keep.

Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave and so on.

Don't bring your own stuff. Depend on what the Lord Jesus provides on the way. The last requirement is the strangest of all and yet it's the most natural if the battle plan is to conquer death by embracing it.

Jesus says, blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven for the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. when the sword of the spirit which is the word of God is unleashed when it's applied with courage and determination the world reacts violently only to be expected.

The conflict is inevitable the war is necessary. False accusation and actual persecution are very likely to follow.

[33 : 31] In this country, thank God, we are unlikely to be put to death. There are plenty of places in the world where Christians are being put to death. But certainly other sorts of persecution are likely.

Certainly false accusation being accused of all sorts of false things, being accused of being stupid or unjust or unfair to people.

Certainly I suspect it won't be long before Christians start being arrested for their faith in this land. I said once that it's a small step from burning books to burning people that's happened in this land before.

My God, it won't happen again but it has happened. In fact, as Jesus says, when the world reacts with insult and false accusation and persecution, that actually just shows we're on the right message just as it did to the prophets of old.

As I said, they did this to the prophets in the Old Testament and they'll do it to you too. This is the path to victory. This is the heavenly reward.

[35 : 01] This is the battle plan that we stand up to whatever the world has to throw at us. we declare ourselves, as it were, dead men walking every day.

We say we're no longer part of this world that, although we live in it still, and Paul, of course, when he commented on it, pointed that out, we do live in the world and yet our loyalties are different.

Our first loyalty is to the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we're putting our trust in his death. His death is what gives the path to life.

The world tells us to get a life, doesn't it? But Jesus tells us to lose a life. Give up your life for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

And that is the path. to life, to true life. Chapter 11, verse 30, chapter 10, verse 39. Whoever finds his life will lose it.

[36 : 16] So if you get a life, if you take the world's advice and get a life, you're going to lose it eventually. But Jesus says, whoever loses his life for my sake takes up the cross and becomes a dead man walking.

Then whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Jesus is going the way of the cross. And the disciples follow him.