

“Unconventional Warfare”

Mark 4:35-41
1 Samuel 17

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The Philistines were the biggest, baddest dudes in the neighborhood. They were more organized and more technologically advanced than the Israelites. They had armor, spears, swords, shields. All they latest technology. On the other hand Israel was a loose collection of tribes made up of farmers and shepherds. The only bronze or iron tools they had were for farming. In fact, we learn earlier in 1 Samuel that there were no blacksmiths at all in Israel. Israelites had to go to the Philistines to get their farming tools made and sharpened.

This loose collection of tribes began to unite for the sole purpose of defending themselves against the Philistines. And now they had their own king, Saul, to lead them in this effort. He had had some success here and there, but his small rag-tag; under-equipped army was no match for the Philistines in an open field. They stuck to guerilla warfare in the hill country, relying on ambushes.

But little by little Israel began to attempt to arm itself just like the Philistines with armor, sword, and spear. But then here comes this shepherd boy with nothing but a sling, a stone, and the Spirit of the Lord to defeat the biggest baddest dude of the biggest baddest army.

You know the story, I'm sure. Boy meets giant. Boy slays giant. This is the favorite story of sportscasters. "We've got a real David and Goliath match up for you today. The Mighty (insert- Gators, Sooners, Trojans, Longhorns- sorry Volunteers fans, not quite in the Goliath category these days) vs. the Fighting Sponge Bobs of East Popcorn State." And 99 times out of 100 the mighty wins, but you watch for a quarter or so in hopes that you might see that 1 in a hundred game, whereby some miracle happens and East Popcorn State puts together the most lucky and bizarre string of trick plays with the help of some undiscovered superstar for a day quarterback. But usually somewhere around the 13 minute mark of the second quarter we are reaching for the merciful remote to put it to rest and move on to a more traditional match-up.

I am afraid though, that the sports analogy fails to carry the point of this story: the Victory of the Lord is a sure thing. God, the God of Israel, the true God, is no underdog, but he fights for the underdogs of this world. But this God doesn't win by turning underdogs into Goliaths. He doesn't simply raise up giants to face giants. He takes a shepherd boy with nothing but a sling and a stone and faith, and reigns victorious.

David was given armor, sword, and spear to fight, but as one led by the Spirit he was not comfortable with the conventional tools for fighting so he takes them off. He relies upon the Lord for his victory and he races to the battle line without doubt.

I think this is the lesson for the church today: Rather than taking on the

technology of the world in order to fight the tide of culture, we should rely on the Lord. I think that one of the mistakes the church has made in the past and continues to make is to fight the evils of the world with conventional warfare. We get our own lobbyists, we garner influence with elected officials, we circulate petitions. And so on and so on.

Or we try to make the church more attractive to the culture in the same way Madison Avenue ad firms do. We use the same media. We try to package our faith as some sort of self-help pop psychology easily digestible best-selling product. Coffee shops in the lobby. Slick presentation, light shows, and the whole Broadway style performance that you see in mega churches all over the country.

We judge our success by the numbers, like at a stockholders meeting. Baptisms are up 13%, membership by 23%, giving by 28%. We are really hitting God's goals well!! Invest more!

Shepherd boy, sling, stone, faith.

There's an old story of a bishop whose cathedral was about to be robbed. The bandits demanded the "treasures of the church." So the bishop went into the shelter and gathered up the poor, saying, "These are the treasures of the church." The bandits left empty-handed that night.

The bishop did not cower away from the fight, but he didn't meet the bandits by pulling out a gun. He met them with unconventional weaponry. He shocked the bandits. They did not know how to fight that kind of fight. God's victory was sure.

There was once a robotics engineer who used to make robots just to impress people. But then he started thinking about his purpose in this world and God's dream for the world. He's still a robotics engineer, but of a different kind. He designs robots to dismantle land mines so children in countries like Afghanistan can play without worrying about getting blown up. Before the robots came, many of the land mines were being dismantled by little kids who were paid next to nothing and often had their hands blown off. He's a missional robotics engineer, disarming the world for Jesus.

God signed him up to fight an unconventional war, with unconventional weapons.

Another mistake I believe the church makes is that it has the tendency to flee the fight or at least turn away from it. But I love the imagery of David running right toward the battle line with his sling in hand. He meets the daunting challenger without hesitation, without fear, sure of God's victory.

There is a married couple who was deeply disturbed about the conflict between Israel and Palestine, but they weren't sure how to stop just complaining about the way things are and start living into what could be. So they just went there. They are business entrepreneurs, so as they built relationships with the Palestinian people, they saw the need for jobs. They started a fair-trade t-shirt company that employs nearly a hundred

Palestinians giving them dignity and hope. It may not be what their parents expected them to do with an Ivy League business degree, but they make it possible to imagine another world in the Holy Land.

Rather than tanks and suicide bombs, they brought hope. Unconventional warfare.

God's solution for the world is not to create bigger Goliaths to fight his battle. I do not think he raised up America to be a kind of Goliath for God to go dominate the world into faith. God's victory is secure in the faith of the underdogs and those who side with them. This is the message of the story.

Surely, this could not be made clearer to us than in the story of a carpenter, the descendent of David. The eternal victory that he secured was not done on the world's terms. He did not conquer by force. He did not coerce by power. He did not even win by reason and rational debate. Convincing the world. He won by the cross, striking a fatal blow to sin and death, the conventional ways of this world. He won with a weapon the world knew nothing about, had no defense of, had no response to: love- sacrificial lay down your weapons and lives love. God's victory is as sure as his love for us.

God is waging an unconventional war with unconventional soldiers using unconventional weaponry. You and I are being enlisted. He's arming us with the most surprising weapon of all: love. He commands us to run right toward the battle lines of the fight, love in hand, no fear, sure of God's victory.