

1A call to war

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Jesus gave a number of difficult commands:

- \$ “Leave the dead to bury their dead”
- \$ “Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor”
- \$ “Forgive your brother forty-hundred and ninety-times a day”
- \$ “Take five loaves and three fish and feed fifteen thousand people with them”
- \$ “Get out of the boat and walk on the water”

But none are more demanding than this: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). What did Jesus mean by this? The context gives us some idea. Jesus has just finished talking to them about trusting God for even our most basic needs in life, and in this teaching He makes this statement, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24). Mammon is a synonym for money or material possessions. Just as Paul presents us as slaves either to God or to sin (Rom. 6:16), so Jesus presents us here as slaves. The only choice we have is this: we can choose to be slaves either to God or to money. Note that Jesus does not leave us with a third option. The default choice, because we are sinners, is to be slaves of money, and only by the power of the Spirit can we make the choice to serve God instead. But one thing is clear: we will serve one or the other, and we cannot serve both. Let’s take a little liberty by widening out the definition of mammon to include everything this world has to offer independent of Jesus Christ. That makes your life a battleground. Jesus gave His life for yours, but Satan will fight tooth and nail to keep it for himself. The future of the church is always in the hands of those who are young. Satan has specific strategies to divert your life at the earliest opportunity from the path God intended for it, and so to destroy what your life could mean for the advancement of the kingdom of God. We mistakenly think the battle is finished once someone has given their life for Christ, but in fact the battle has only begun. For how you as young Christian men and women set your course in life will determine whether you are the last generation of believers in this land, or whether your generation will open the floodgates for a far greater harvest to come. My wife and I have done our part for the propagation of the human race by having eight children, but if none of them followed in our footsteps and had children, it would all end there. So it’s great that you’re saved, but is it going to end there? Will you be spiritually barren or spiritually fruitful? Let me lay out the battleground and provide three suggestions to help you in this war.

1. Know your enemy

As a young man, Daniel was discipled and trained in the ways of God’s kingdom and prepared by God for his future role in national leadership in a pagan culture. This he managed to do without ever diluting his testimony. Two cultures clashed, and Daniel’s preparation and faithfulness enabled him to transfer the values of the kingdom of God into the pagan culture. Today we also face a battle of two kingdoms, the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. Young people are the main battleground in this conflict, just as in Daniel’s day, for they

represent the future. God's purpose is to raise up Daniels who will profoundly influence culture and society without compromising their faith.

The kingdom of darkness manifests itself in different ways at different times. Today in western culture it often comes in the form of what is called postmodernism. Modernists (the Woodstock generation) denied the Bible but still maintained a belief in values. Sometimes these values sounded similar to Biblical values (peace and love), while being redefined in meaning. Nevertheless, values existed which were considered to be above and beyond the definition of the individual. As our society moved further and further away from Biblical truth, however, it became apparent that there was no objective or real standard of truth underlying modernist values. The Christian holds certain values because God has revealed them and we believe they have eternal validity. For the modernist, however, there is no actual basis for values other than an apparent consensus in society. Modernism increasingly became a set of ideals without evidence to support them. In addition, modernism gave no compelling reason to serve the interest of others before ourselves. President Kennedy's charge to serve the nation or society rather than yourself could never stand without a basis of Biblical truth behind it. Sooner, or later, sinful human nature takes over and redefines all good in terms of what is good for me, illustrating the famous statement of Dostoevsky's, "If God does not exist, everything is permissible." Without an enduring foundation, modernism began to crumble. Biblical truth undergirded western civilisation for nearly two thousand years. Modernism, its apparently invincible successor, lasted all of twenty or thirty years. What came after, as we all know, is postmodernism. In postmodernism, the *content* of what a person believes doesn't really matter; the fact that they believe it is good enough. If there are not transcendent truths, truths bigger than you or I, then all that is left is us. The world no longer revolves around mutual acceptance of basic moral values, but around what is satisfying, meaningful, enjoyable or fulfilling to all the individuals who dwell in it. It doesn't really matter what you believe, as long as it works for you. To summarize:

Biblical truth states something is good because *God says it is good* (believe the Bible).

Modernism says something is good because *society says it is good* (believe Oprah).

Postmodernism says something is good because *I say it is good* (believe yourself).

Where, then, can we see the hand of Satan at work? Clearly, Satan worked through modernism in its denial of Biblical truth. Society moved away from Christian values and embraced destructive practices such as gross materialism, promiscuity and abortion. But it is in postmodernism that the hand of Satan becomes the clearest, in that each person is brazenly and openly seeking not some great social ideal, but only things which benefit themselves. Now we have truly returned to Genesis 3, where the serpent approached Adam and Eve on the basis of rejecting the values God had established for them, and choosing instead what worked for them. For the postmodernist, truth is found in pleasure and self-fulfilment, not in service toward others, whether that service is motivated by Christian or non-Christian ideals. We may engage in acts of service, but only if doing so makes us feel good or self-fulfilled. Thus we have come to live in probably the most hedonistic or pleasure-oriented society that has ever existed. And this is the battleground you are entering into. If you don't fully realize the implications of it, the battle may be lost before it is even joined.

We can contrast the nature of the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness, as manifested in postmodernism, as follows:

<i>Kingdom of God</i>	<i>Kingdom of darkness</i>
Absolute values based on Bible	No absolute values
Pursuit of the cross (sacrificial love)	Pursuit of self-fulfilment (happiness)
God is God and I am His servant	I am god
Concern for others	Concern for self
Truth found in dying to self and living for God	Truth found in attainment of pleasure and satisfaction

In this battle between the two kingdoms, we can contrast the strategy of God with the strategy of Satan as follows:

<i>Strategy of God</i>	<i>Strategy of Satan</i>
To prepare generations to penetrate nations with a revelation of God and His ways	To prepare generations to penetrate and dilute the Kingdom of God with the values of the world
To focus this preparation on the youth (such as Daniel)	To focus this preparation on the youth (such as the postmodern generation of today)
Who then have a conviction of purpose and destiny	Who then become aimless and purposeless (other than a desire for pleasure)
And become influencers, not influenced	And become influenced, not influencers

We can contrast the overall goal or purpose of God with the purpose of Satan as follows:

<i>Purpose of God</i>	<i>Purpose of Satan</i>
Through teaching and discipling in the physical and spiritual family, strong believers are prepared and strong families and churches created to move forward the kingdom of God	Focussing youth on the pursuit of pleasure creates consumers, not disciples; this destroys both families and churches and allows the kingdom of darkness to move forward

2. Put your armour on

Once we are fully aware of the battle going on around us, we need to step out boldly and aggressively into the fight. The truth is that the devil is more fearful of you than you are of him, and the thing he most fears is that you will realize it. It was not without reason that Jesus said,

“From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men are taking it by force” (Matt. 11:12). John thought that all opposition would fall when Jesus came, but when he got himself thrown in prison, he began to doubt and sent messengers to ask Jesus if He really was the one. It was in response to this question that Jesus made this declaration, pointing out that John didn’t quite understand the depth or duration of the battle. The ministry of John the Baptist unleashed the first forces of the kingdom of God upon the earth, which then came to full strength in Jesus. But since then, this kingdom has suffered violent attacks, and wherever it advances, violent or evil men are attacking it continuously. The “violent men” here are not bold believers seeking to advance the kingdom but those opposing the Gospel, for both the verb “suffers violence” and its related adjective “violent (men)” always refer to evil, vicious or rapacious persons or acts. What is the message. You and I, as soldiers of the king, are caught up in a life and death battle. The fact that our weapons are not the terrorist threat or the suicide bomb, but righteousness, truth and the love which leads us if necessary to lay our very lives down, does not make us any less lethal as warriors. We are lethal opponents of the kingdom of darkness, and the weapons in our hands will bring down that kingdom and the lies by which it operates. *“The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every proud thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ”* (2 Cor. 10:4-5). Whether you like it or not, you’re at war. When Jesus taught us to pray, *“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one”*, He made a compelling point: either you learn to pray, or you will *become prey*. Prayer is our communications lifeline with God. An army whose communications are cut is dead in the water, and so are we if we stop hearing from God. If we don’t hear from God, we will wander further and further from His will. Our hearts will become hardened. The flow of strength, grace and divine power will dry up. What kind of relationship can you have with a person if you never talk to them? If prayer is one-half of our armour, the Word of God is the other. Paul wrote, *“Having been rooted and grounded in Him and established in your faith, just as you were taught... see to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception... let no one defraud you of your prize”* (Col. 2:7-8, 18). Either you remain rooted and ground in God’s Word through daily reading and meditation, or I guarantee that you will be robbed and cheated out of your inheritance. The devil has a constant mission to undermine the authority of God’s Word and to make us lazy in our study of it, because he knows that once our mind is no longer directed and filled with God’s Word, we are sitting ducks for his deceptions. How many professing Christians are there who live by the philosophy, the standards, the thinking of the pagan society in which we live? And the tragedy is, they don’t even know it! They are out of the battle already. And by the way, the Word always leads you into your rightful place within the Body, not as independent agents but as submitted soldiers of the King. We live in a kingdom, not a democracy.

3. Find your destiny

The very concept of destiny demands a standard which is established outside ourselves, a set of high ideals impossible or at least very difficult to reach. We find our destiny in being called upward toward those standards, drawn by a power greater than ourselves. Destiny implies a hand beyond ourselves assigning a value or purpose to each of our lives. Destiny -- or the hand of God -- makes us greater than we could ever be in ourselves. It enables us to reach higher

heights and go further distances than otherwise we ever could. It inspires us to superhuman feats of strength and endurance. Only a supernatural, personal God can make such destiny real. That is why outside the Judeo-Christian tradition, most people believe not in destiny but in fate. For Hindus or Buddhists, ultimate reality is impersonal and our fate is as much a matter of chance as anything else; we are ruled by an impersonal system which grinds on and which no god or human can alter (karma). Even for Muslims, the saying *Inshallah* ("If God is willing") is often more a statement of resignation to fate than the confident belief that a loving Fatherly hand is guiding and watching over us. The concept of destiny as the supernatural purpose of an eternal, personal God for our lives is one of the major factors over the centuries behind the material and technological progress of western civilization, and its lack accounts for the poverty of most nations which have lived by the values of other religions. It is the cultures influenced by Christian values and principles which have understood that the destiny of man, as chosen by God, is to steward creation and enrich it. If all is determined by fate or karma and my next life might be as an insect, then what is the point? Destiny may not be a Christian concept, but it is only Christians who can truly understand it and grasp its power for our lives.

Young people today have moved away from, if not rejected, the personal God of the Bible. Nor, as children of western civilization, do they believe in the impersonal system of karma or fate. What they are left with -- apart from bits and pieces of new age mysticism and superstition -- is themselves. Each is his own "god" and determines what happens to himself. The highest good, therefore, is what gives me the most benefit, happiness, achievement or success. This reduces destiny to nothing more than the achievement of personal pleasure. But the God of the Bible does exist and continues to operate the universe by the principles of His Word. God alone defines true happiness and shows the path to it. God has placed within the heart of every human being a sense of destiny and purpose. Even though this is twisted and distorted by our postmodern thinking, it is still there. It drives us to set out hopefully at the beginning of our journey. Inevitably, we crash along the way, never achieving the heights we long for, because we are not seeking our destiny the way God has commanded us, through the way of serving Him alone, the way of the cross, of self-sacrifice and of love.

As Christians, now is the time to rise into your destiny., God has created you for a unique purpose. Now is the time to ask yourselves some searching questions:

Who or what is leading you? Is it God? Is it a burning desire to obey His will, to be right with Him, to see His kingdom come? Or is it ambition, is it mammon, is it the search for personal significance, is it the desire for power and recognition? Are you, like Coke, the "real thing", or are you a poser with a Christian veneer?

Where is God joining you? Have you asked the Lord which part of his family you belong to? Are you looking for a job and hoping that you'll find a church, or are you committed to a church and trusting God for a job? This church was built on the second kind of people, people who decided to seek first His kingdom, people who then saw "all these things" added to them.

Do you have a sense of destiny? It doesn't mean knowing everything that's going to happen to you -- thank God most of us don't. But it does mean knowing deep in your heart that God put you on this earth for a reason, that He has a purpose for your life, a purpose no one else on the face of

this earth could fulfil. If you don't have that, you will be *"infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men..."* (Eph. 4:14).

When my dad was nineteen, war broke out and he spent the next seven years of his life in His Majesty's service. When war breaks out, everyone's plans take second place. We are at war. Your plans are worth nothing. Only God's plan counts. Once I received a prophetic word telling me to put aside all my plans because God had something else in mind. You can find out what God wants, because you have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16).

Tonight is as good a time as any to step into His plans, to find your destiny, to put your armour on, and to step boldly into the battlefield. Will God be your master, or mammon? Will you seek first His kingdom or your fulfillment? That's the choice that lies before you tonight. Make the right decision – the rest of your life, and your impact for eternity, depend on it.