

**“What are We Fighting For?”
Luke 6:27 – 36; Micah 4:1 – 4**



In my 30+ years as a follower of Jesus, I've never heard message preached and only ever taught about the issue of war once.

Which, the more I thought about it, was intriguing.

I mean, I grew with memories of watching black and white war movies on the television and learning about major conflicts in school.

Almost every evening on the news are pictures of some armed conflict taking place in some part of the world.

Often there are multiple conflicts occurring at the same time.

At High school we discussed wars implications. Different social groups express their concern.

Yet the church that I was a part of was strangely silent (except for saying these wars were a sign of "the end").

So I was wondering, who here has ever heard a sermon that addressed the topic of war – anyone?

Any teaching or preaching from the pulpit?

For some people in other parts of the world this is a hot button – something you do not want to touch.

I heard one time that a pastor was told not to talk about war by some people in his congregation. He was not to critique his nation's actions, which would be disloyal to "our boys". If he did they would not be coming back.

When it comes to war we have ask ourselves, where should we stand on the matter?

**So what is the *Christian* view on war?
Is there a Christian view?**

What do you think?

Statistics

Where do we even begin?

We do need to begin with the reality of war.

Yesterday was ANZAC Day first commemorated in 1916.

New Zealand suffered terribly during World War I.

A few years ago a letter to the New Zealand Herald caught my eye.

It read:

As ANZAC Day comes around and we recall our losses in World War 1, I wonder if we really grasp, as a nation, the catastrophic effect.

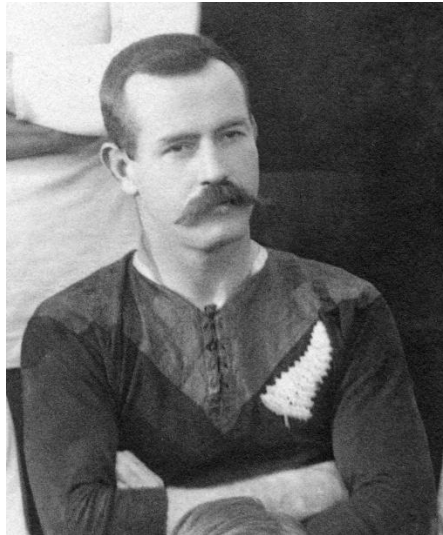
Half the adult male population able to go to war enlisted. One-tenth of the population went overseas to fight. Of these 103,000 men, 18,000 died. A sixth of our soldiers were killed. About 40,000 more were wounded – that is, about half our men who came back were injured.

We can never really reckon the effects on this small country. We did not know how to deal with that kind of great tragedy and the aftermath and, in a sense, it has never been dealt with.

Behind every statistic though, is a story.

One of those was a man who was one of the oldest to fight. The average of New Zealand soldier in 1916 was 27 years old; he was 44. He enlisted for service in the First World War after a younger brother was killed in action.

He died in an attack during the assault on Passchendaele; his name was David Gallaher, the first All Blacks captain.



What is not often said though, is how Gallaher died. He suffered a grievous face wound (from a bullet or shrapnel) and lingered for a number of hours before he succumbed to his injuries.

Lloyd never talked about the war until the final years of his life. Although he served on the HMS Gambia, witnessed the Japanese surrender first-hand and was part of J-Force after World War 2, his family was completely unaware. It could have been that the destruction he witnessed on the Japanese mainland so horrifying. At one some years later he became tourist bus driver for Japanese tourists, perhaps as a way of reconciling with former enemies. Although never physically wounded there are deeper unseen scars.

As of late 2025/early 2026, there are over 130 active armed conflicts globally. In 2025 global spending on arms reached USD2.63 trillion worldwide.

These statistics and stories like these are what we take into our discussions about Christians and war.

War in Scripture

As Christians what do we ask?

What does the Bible say?

Between the pages of Genesis and Revelation war features in Scripture.

Prior to the fall it is not part of human experience and will come to an end at Jesus' return.

So what ways does war feature in Scripture?

- Deuteronomy 6 gives rules of engagement for warfare
- In the Book of Joshua God is part of the plan of war

- King David – a man after God’s own heart – is portrayed as being a mighty warrior for the Lord and comes into prominence in a battlefield situation
- War is not one thing; there are many types of war in the Bible:
There are:
 - *liberative* wars where captives have been taken
 - *passive* wars which where war-making is left to God
 - *defensive* wars against invading attackers
 - *punitive* wars where God punishes other nations but uses human agents to do so.
 - *passivist* where Israel is commanded not engage in war
- In Matthew and Luke’s Gospels, we are told not to resist an evil person and to love our enemy,
- and also in the Gospel of Luke, soldiers are told to be good soldiers but they’re not to give up their profession.

When reflecting on the Bible we have to be very careful with noting where it is being *descriptive* versus *prescriptive*.

There are times when the Bible describes what has happened; it tells us events.

It doesn’t give us the authority to do the same.

This is certainly true of the wars in the Old Testament.

When the Bible is prescriptive is it saying, go and do likewise.

These are clear commands given to believers.

Stances towards war.

Christians have always wrestled with the place of war and their participation in it. Not surprisingly we followers of Jesus have advocated for different positions on war.

Pacifism

Pacifism is a most misunderstood position.

It’s seen as a position where we allow people to walk all over us, we become the proverbial doormat.

Pacifism takes seriously though the Jesus’ teaching in Matthew and Luke:

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one

cheek, turn the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt.

Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.

But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Pacifism then mustn't come from a place of cowardice or fear but from *conviction*.

It is better understood as assertive and forceful without becoming violent. Killing is never an acceptable option.

Many people object to pacifism because it doesn't work in the “real world”.

Mahatma Gandhi toppled the British Empire; Martin Luther King demonstrated it in America over civil rights.

In the Philippines, former President Ferdinand Marcos was defeated because Catholic nuns lay down on a main highway in front of oncoming tanks. The tanks stopped within an inch of their bodies and Marcos had to flee. They termed it the bloodless-revolution.

The Just War Theory

Another of the principles that has arisen over our history is that of the Just War theory, a way of defining whether or not war can be legitimised.

It comes in slightly different forms but all would agree on the following:

1. War is the only means by which a country can defend itself.

In other words, another nation or nations is an aggressor who will not relent in their intentions to attack the other. They will not listen to reason or argument or diplomatic petitions.

Built on this:

2. All alternatives to war have been exhausted.

It is a genuine last resort.

What are the alternatives? Diplomatic talks. Sanctions. War crimes indictment. Pressure from surrounding nations.

3. Must have a just cause and right intention.

The must not be for illegitimate gain, or because of some historic injustice, or as a means of revenge.

It might be in defence of another nation or group of people or their liberation.

4. The good achieved outweighs the evil that is done.

This acknowledges the inevitable harm that is caused by war.

Death and casualties and societal destruction will occur with the hope the outcome of lasting peace will be reached.

5. That there be an avoidance of civilian casualties.

There must be a clear differentiation between combatants and civilians in any military action. Targeting homes, schools and places of worship is strictly forbidden.

6. There must be a reasonable expectation of success.

It's all well and good to speak in terms of theory but let's talk in examples.

World War II in Europe. Was responding to Nazi Germany through war fit under the Just War Theory?

Have a chat and see what the consensus is?

A major proponent of pacifism admitted that World War II was a major win for those holding to the Just War Theory.

It was only after that the full horror of Nazi Germany was uncovered that the war was seen as a necessity to stop evil.

In the face of a tyrannical regime such as Adolf Hitler's, I could see myself going to war.

Nowhere in the New Testament is war-making included in the list of activities that are incompatible with Christian profession.

Pre-emption

Pre-emption is a recent development largely because of huge developments in surveillance technologies.

Increasingly, nation-states can ascertain what another individual, group, or state is about to do. In light of that advance knowledge, they can act before they are acted upon.

In other words, if you knew a group of people were going to act in such a way that scores of people were going to be left dead, would you strike first?

Technologies enable nation-states to act pre-emptively, to do unto others before it is done unto them.

***“In view of these positions where do you find yourself?
Has your stance changed over time?”***

Let us be clear: whatever place we come to in assessing whether war is just or nor, war is a *scourge*.

It is the result of evil and sinful human beings.

It robs people – of their lives, homes, family, dignity and health.

So what's the takeaway from this morning?

I've got three.

First, our allegiance to the God of the Bible trumps any other authority.

In other words, if God is not truly God or King, then we will be following an idol.

Remember an idol is anything that has so captured our allegiance – our loyalty, our trust, the centre of our lives – that we begin to compromise some of our Lord's commands.

In other words, instead of the Lord calling the shots in our lives, something or someone else does.

This can apply to a nation's military.

That means there may be times when we have to *refuse* a certain request made of us.

That means there are times when we *cannot* give our support to our countries, or any nations, military action.

That also means there may be times where a Christian involved in the military will have to make a conscience call. They may perceive that a military action is unjust.

They may have to risk a court-martial and lose their career.

Second, we are to take seriously Paul's words in Ephesians chapter 6:

“...our struggle is *not* against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”¹

These powers led by the adversary Satan, want to wreak havoc in our world and bring death and destruction.

They deceive and delude; the appeal to the sinful, selfish nature in us.

For Christians then, our warfare is now primarily spiritual.

It recognises that most – if not all – conflicts around the world have a spiritual source.

Our prayers should be against these powers for the sake of flesh and blood.

Third, the Gospel the – Good News – of Jesus is the true source of ongoing peace.

The God of the Bible – who trumps any other authority – has revealed Himself to us in the Person of Jesus; in his teaching, life, death and resurrection and ascension.

Jesus who created, lived, died and rose again on this planet is one day going to redeem it.

Let's turn to Micah 4:1 – 4:

“In the last days
the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established
as the highest of the mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills,
and peoples will stream to it.
² Many nations will come and say,

¹ Ephesians 6:12 [Emphasis mine].

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the temple of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths.”
The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
He will judge between many peoples
and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide.
They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.
Everyone will sit under their own vine
and under their own fig tree,
and no one will make them afraid,
for the LORD Almighty has spoken.”

This is a stunning picture of the end, of God’s rule coming in its fullness.
Not only will war cease, but the weapons of war will be used for cultivating the
earth and gather in crops.
Everyone will live in a place of peace.
Peace on Earth will not be achieved through political means but by a miracle of
God.
Only God can cure the true source of war – redeeming, forgiving and healing
sinful human hearts.

Now some might say, “Sure this passage is all very good but it’s clear that it’s
talking about the end of the age, not now.”
And that’s true to a point.

Yet we are to be people who live in anticipation of the end.
We called to be a sign, witness and foretaste of the coming Kingdom of God.
We, as a community of God’s people, are meant to represent something of the
coming peace and wholeness that Jesus is bringing to His entire creation.

We seek peace we not only seek the worlds good in the now, we are also
saying this is how things are going to under the reign of God the King.

Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.