

Chapter 1

The Red Pill

You were born into a world at war, and you will live all your days in the midst of a great battle involving all the forces of heaven and hell and played out here on earth.

---John Eldridge, *Waking the Dead*, p.13

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

--Jesus of Nazareth, (Matt. 10:34)

Life is hard! Have you noticed? Whether you are raising young children or just starting out in a relationship, whether you work at the local burger joint or own a multi-million dollar corporation, this thing we call *living* can get extremely complicated in a very short while. You know what I mean. It's like the time you finally got the boss to let you have an evening off to go watch your daughter's fifth-grade play, only to have the car break down en route; or what about that time when you resolved to let bygones be bygones and made that fresh commitment to really step it up in your marriage by planning a romantic evening, only to watch the same old issues somehow surface again in the middle of it all; and what about our spiritual lives? Doesn't it seem that the more committed we become to Christ, the more the hassles increase?

A friend of mine recently had one of those "God

encounters” at a men's retreat--the kind that can really change your life. He felt a renewed commitment to his faith. He was ready to do anything, give up anything, and serve anywhere for Christ. This wasn't just a pep rally: it was a personal encounter with the God of the universe, and he knew he would never be the same. My friend went home excited--thrilled even--to be part of God's great adventure for his life, but he was also more than a little nervous.

Not everyone was happy with his renewed commitment. Within hours of coming home, first his young daughter was almost stung by a scorpion in her bedroom. Then his teenage son was bitten by a copperhead snake in the backyard. He almost died in the emergency room! Maybe it was just bad luck or crazy circumstances. Or maybe someone, or something, was out to get him.

A Fighting Religion

Make no mistake: Christianity *is* a religion of warfare, or as C. S. Lewis referred to it in *Mere Christianity*, “a fighting religion.” Does that statement somehow bother you, make you uneasy, sound too militant--or perhaps too exaggerated? Even as I sit here in my office typing this, having just finished a fine Italian luncheon, sitting in a comfortable, soft leather chair while enjoying iced tea and soft music in the background, I have a hard time believing it myself. Yes, I know there is a devil and that Jesus came to defeat his evil power. I am even aware that I am somehow caught up in that battle from time to time -- but Christianity as a religion of warfare? My biggest battles tend to be in the realm of work headaches, slow traffic, maybe a spat with my wife. Hardly the stuff of *Saving Private Ryan*. Even where my faith is concerned,

perhaps especially there, I seldom feel like a warrior.

And what about this man Jesus? Didn't he teach us to turn the other cheek, love our enemies, and bless those who curse us? Isn't this Christianity? Isn't Christianity all about love and peace, rather than war and strife?

The Invasion

To be certain, Christianity is about a man: the Man Christ Jesus. Christianity is about God: God incarnate. Christianity is about doing unto others as you would have them do unto you, about loving your neighbors, cultivating a relationship with the God of the universe, and changing lives. Christianity is about living water and fulfillment in Christ.

But before all of that could take place, Christianity was about an invasion, an invasion into enemy territory:

A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born.
(Rev. 12:1-4)

Immanuel, God with us, the creator of the universe, plans the greatest, most daring coup of all time. He invades the very creation that has rejected him! He flies in covertly under the cover of humanity, into a small

village on the outskirts of a defeated nation, placing himself in the direct line of fire with only a teenage girl and a carpenter as bodyguards. He then waits patiently--for years--finally assembling a small band of misfits to recapture lost territory.

Make no mistake, though: this is no fly-by-your-pants, “shoot first, ask questions later,” Rambo-style warfare. This has been thousands of years in the planning. Way back in the book of Genesis, immediately after Satan’s first victory, God announced this upcoming invasion: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen. 3:15). In other words, “I’ll be back!”

The Call

So Jesus, as he prepares to welcome his first recruits to boot camp, quotes the prophet Isaiah: “The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). Standing up in that synagogue and taking that scroll, he draws a line in the sand: “This is who I am; this is what I came to do.”

Jesus is here, and he is in no mood for negotiations. He is here to release prisoners of war! And he has called us into that same battle. The Great Commission is not so much a call to see how many commitment cards we can get signed at a revival, however important that may be. Instead, the Great Commission is a call to make *disciples*--literally those who *do* what the Master was doing.

Yet, it still seems strange, foreign, and perhaps even somewhat heretical to look at my faith in the context of

warfare. I mean, hasn't Jesus already won the battle? Besides, what would I have to offer? Quite honestly, my life would be simpler without this whole fighting thing. Further, we certainly don't want to give the Devil any more glory than he already has.

The reality is that we *are* in a war, whether we like it or not. In the enormously popular movie *The Matrix*, Neo, as he is just beginning to recognize the reality of the story behind the story, is given a choice by Morpheus. Either take the blue pill and continue to live in ignorance of what is really happening around you, or take the red pill and enter into the world of the Matrix, the world of fighting for your life. Satan has been feeding us the blue pill for centuries, blinding our eyes to the truth.

The Screwtape Letters, C. S. Lewis' brilliant and insightful series, paints a dramatic picture of the demonic. Listen as Lewis describes a senior demon instructing a younger apprentice tempter:

My dear Wormwood, I wonder you should ask me whether it is essential to keep the patient in ignorance of your existence. That question, at least for the present phase of the struggle, has been answered for us by the High Command. Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves ... [for] when they believe in us, we cannot make them materialists and skeptics.

(C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, p. 32)

The truth is that there is much more going on here than meets the eye. We have been anesthetized and caught up in a spell. It is time to wake up.

I am offering you the red pill. I am asking you to join me as we explore this great deception and reveal our Enemy for who he really is, while we learn to follow our Commander into the heart of this battle.