

Liberty, Property and War

(Sermon at Beaverkill Community Church, 7/8/2018)

There is no human liberty without property. If a man cannot keep the fruits of his labor, he is not free. He is, in fact, a slave of some other person, family, tribe, or nation.

On the other hand, there is no property without force. Whether the property is personal, like cattle or food, or the property is land, it becomes or remains your property only when you occupy, hold and defend it, by force of arms and violence if necessary, from the claims of others. When a trespasser refuses to leave your land, you can call upon the court and sheriff of the county to remove the trespasser, and the sheriff will use force and violence to do so if necessary. When nations are involved in a battle for land, it is called war, and armies are required for this purpose. Hundreds of philosophical and legal books have been written on this subject. The Bible recounts this truth again and again.

In the last weeks, we have followed the Book of Samuel's account of the Israelites' rejection of God as their ruler, God's appointment of a king, Saul, to rule over them and lead them in battle after battle until Saul displeases God by not following his orders to the letter. This is followed by the appointment of a new king, David, who continues the battles and gains victories up to and including that reported in today's reading: the conquest of Jerusalem, the City of David, the City of Zion, the capital of the Land of Canaan.

While Canaan was the so-called "Promised Land," that is, the land promised by God to Moses as the home of the Israelites, God did not just hand it over to them on a silver platter. Instead, God showed them what they had to do in order to overcome the kingdoms and the peoples who already were in Canaan: these people had to be conquered by war.

Today's reading shows the end of the conquest of Canaan, under King David, but the conquest of the land promised by God to the Israelites, actually began with Moses as set forth in the Book of Numbers. Recall that Moses had taken the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt and they barely escaped destruction by the Pharaoh's army via the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea. They found themselves on the Sinai Peninsula in the desert wilderness under the leadership of Moses and, more importantly, under the leadership of God who tells Moses what to do.

Thus, the first thing God orders is a census of the warriors and officers which will comprise His army:

"The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, "Take a census of all the congregation of the people of Israel, by families, by fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male, head by head; from twenty years old and upward, all in Israel who are able to go forth to war, you . . . shall number them, company by company."

And the Book of Numbers then sets forth the number of men in each of the twelve tribes of Israel, and when you add them all up there 603,550 men. That is a huge army, including by modern comparisons. Moreover, if do the population math by adding in likely amounts of woman and children, you discover that the total number

of Israelites in the Sinai wilderness must have exceeded 2,000,000 people.

After the census is taken, God gives Moses his orders and instructions for appointment of officers, organization of encampment, line of march and order of battle, and off they go, following God's pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, to the Promised Land. Many generations of Israelites later, after many wars and battles, and many conquered and dead people later, they end in Jerusalem, in the Promised Land, under the kingship of David. At that point David ordered another census of his army, a counting of "all men who could use the sword." At that time the number had increased to 1,300,000 men. That number would indicate a total population of men, women and children in ancient Israel of perhaps 5,000,000 people. By comparison, the total population of the United States in 1776 was 2,500,000 people.

Last Wednesday, our Independence Day, celebrated the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, 242 years ago. The war fought to secure that independence actually began fourteen months earlier, on April 19, 1775, at Lexington, Massachusetts. There, a column of 3,000 British regular troops sent to seize the arms of the Massachusetts Colony stored at Concord, Massachusetts, confronted about 80 members of Massachusetts militia commanded by Captain John Parker who famously ordered his men to "stand steady, do not fire unless fired upon, God knows we do not want war, but if war it must be, let it begin here." Shots rang out, and the American Revolutionary War began. As a practical matter, the War ended on November 25, 1783, when the British army evacuated, and General George Washington occupied, the Island of Manhattan.

Thirty-five years later, John Adams, second President of the United States wrote to a friend as follows:

"But what do we mean by the American Revolution? Do we mean the American war? The Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people; a change in their religious sentiments, of their duties and obligations...This radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections of the people was the real American Revolution."

Adams' observations and sentiments on point are worthy, but the fact is that a bitter war had to be fought and won to hold and defend the land and property of the colonists against the armed might of the British King and his Tory and Indian tribe allies.

And how was this war fought? The Continental Army under direct command of General Washington amounted to only 4,000 troops at Valley Forge and never more than the 29,000 he had when the British evacuated Manhattan. The bulk of his forces consisted of the colonial militias which during the entire 9-year war amounted to perhaps 230,000 men, though only perhaps 40,000 were active at any one time.

What were these militias? In the American colonies, every able-bodied man between the ages of 16 and 50, sometimes older, was a member of the militia, callable into an organized force for the defense of the colony, and required to possess and bring infantry weapons when called to service.

The system remains in place in the United States today. New York's Military Law provides for and creates an organized and unorganized militia. We know the organized militia as the New York Guard, a part of the federal National Guard system of the 50 States. The unorganized militia, callable into service by the

Governor of New York in times of war or other emergency, consists of every able-bodied male citizen of the State between the ages of 18 and 45 years of age. New Jersey's Military Law includes female citizens. Every state has similar provisions.

The militias of the Thirteen Colonies, the militias of the thirteen original states, the militias of the additional 37 states as they were admitted into the union, played a crucial role in the war that created our nation, free of the British King, and free of any king. The militias played a critical role in the many wars fought to support the Great Westward Expansion over many generations until our nation ran coast to coast and included all the land in between.

There are a number of similarities between the march from the Sinai under Moses, guided by God, ending with the conquest of Promised Land ending in Jerusalem under King David.

The Founders of this country, the signers of the Declaration of Independence, knew the Bible backwards and forwards. The Founders of this nation knew, and the people who expanded this nation to the Pacific Ocean knew, the contents of the Books of Exodus, Numbers, and Samuel very well. They knew the Biblical parallels between the Israelites and themselves. They believed that they, too, were under God's protection but that they had to do battle to get to the Promised Land. Their religion inspired them.

They also knew that they, unlike the Israelites, had rejected having a king ruling over them to lead them into battle. They had rejected King George III as their leader. They eventually accepted that had to secure their nation themselves. "We the People,"

constituted into a republic, had to do it, but with God as their king, and that is the way it happened.

So, as a postlude, please consider the British national anthem sung even to this day:

God save our gracious King!

Long live our noble King!

God save The King!

Send him victorious,

Happy and glorious,

Long to reign over us:

God save The King!

Compare this anthem to the last verse of the hymn we sing today, "America, My Country, 'Tis of Thee":

Our fathers' God to Thee,

Author of liberty,

To Thee we sing.

Long may our land be bright,

With freedom's holy light,

Protect us by Thy might,

Great God, OUR King.

Amen.

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