

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: LET US RESIST EVIL

Scripture: Book of Mormon, Alma 21:135-139.

Now the Nephites were taught to defend themselves against their enemies, even to the shedding of blood, if it were necessary. Yea, and they were also taught never to give an offense; yea, and never to raise the sword, except it were against an enemy, except it were to preserve their lives. And this was their faith, that by so doing, God would prosper them in the land; or in other words, if they were faithful in keeping the commandments of God, that he would prosper them in the land; yea, warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger; And also that God would make it known unto them, whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies; and by so doing, the Lord would deliver them, and this was the faith of Moroni; And his heart did glory in it; not in the shedding of blood, but in doing good, in preserving his people; yea, in keeping the commandments of God; yea, in resisting iniquity.

Let us resist evil and whatsoever evil we cannot resist with our words, let us resist with our swords, that we may retain our freedom.

One of the most difficult and pressing problems of our day is the problem of what should be our personal and national attitude towards war. The Christian recognizes that he owes his primary allegiance to God; but he also recognizes that he owes an obligation to the nation which has been established under constitutional law for the purpose of giving collective protection to the lives, liberty, and property of its citizens.

Even the most ardent pacifist recognizes the need for some kind of government. Usually he also recognizes that so long as men are imperfect, the state must exercise restraining and corrective force to curb wrong-doers, or else resign itself to a state of utter anarchy in which no man's life, freedom, or property will be safe. It is on the question of how this force of government shall be exercised, and by whom and upon whom, that the disagreement comes. Many pacifists who freely recognize the need of some form of government, and the right of the government to use force, personally refuse to hold public office (especially as policeman or judge), to sit on juries, to serve in a posse, or to bear arms, lest they be drawn into a personal exercise of force upon other men. Is it right for a nation to protect its citizens against individual criminals at home, but wrong to protect them from the criminal and unprovoked attack of a foreign army? Is it right for a Christian to exert

armed force as a policeman but wrong for him to serve as a soldier? Or are both equally wrong?

If it is both the right and the duty of government to protect its citizens, and if the state is only the sum-total of all its individual citizens, organized for action, then it follows that each citizen has a right to receive the individual protection of the state, and also an individual responsibility to assist in providing that protection for others. The position of those who accept the rights and privileges of citizenship without also accepting all of its obligations is untenable.

If we turn to the Bible for a solution of this problem, we get a confused and contradictory picture. The law of Christ undoubtedly requires us always to manifest a forgiving and conciliatory spirit, to seek no revenge, to love our enemies, to overcome evil with good, to live peaceably with all men, to turn the other cheek, go the second mile, and give up the cloak as well as the coat. But the Bible by no means gives us a complete blueprint in this field of human relations.

Jesus himself placed a limit on forgiveness. According to the gospel of Luke, we are to forgive up to seventy times seven, if the offender comes to us saying, "I repent." Forgiving an unrepentant man only confirms and strengthens

him in his sin. There is nothing in the Bible or the teachings of Jesus which specifically tells us what to do after the other cheek has been slapped, or both coat and cloak taken, or the second mile already travelled, except that we should always manifest a spirit of conciliation and be willing to suffer if necessary rather than to close the avenues of reconciliation by belligerence and revenge. I have often wondered what Jesus would have had the Good Samaritan do, if he had come along while the outlaws were still beating and robbing their victim, instead of after they had finished with him. What would you have done?

The same Jesus who commanded his disciples to "resist not evil men," took a whip of cords, and with physical as well as moral force drove out the entrenched evil of the racketeering merchants and money-changers who took their exorbitant toll from every worshiper who entered the temple.

Jesus once admonished his followers to "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." In the same vein Paul wrote to the Romans: "Let every man be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God." Can the pacifist refuse to assume the lawful obligations of citizenship and still obey this counsel?

Another proof text often used by pacifists is Jesus' saying that "all they that take the sword shall perish with (i.e. by) the sword." Mark, Luke, and John omit this saying. Was it meant to have universal application? Historically it does not, for although history has many examples of fierce, ruthless, warlike men who took up the sword of aggression and later perished by the sword, it also has numerous exceptions to this rule -- warriors who survived a lifetime of warfare and died comfortably in bed.

The Twentieth Century New Testament translates this passage: "All who use the sword will be put to the sword." Since, as we have seen, this is not true of all men who take the sword, is it not reasonable to assume that it had a limited application --that it was intended to apply only to the eleven? Perhaps what Jesus really meant was, "If any of you resist with the sword, you will be put to the sword," or "All of you who use the sword will be put to the sword." If the apostles had made any real show of resistance, they would all have been ruthlessly hunted down and put to the sword as revolutionaries and insurrectionists. Then

there never could have been a church --at least in that generation -- and Jesus' work would have ended in abrupt and ignominious failure.

There is a statement very similar to this one in Revelation 13:10: "He that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword," but a reading of the context will show that this verse applies specifically to the beast to whom the dragon gave power over all nations, and who made war with the saints and overcame them. The promise is that he, the beast, who has killed and brought so many others into captivity, shall in turn finally be conquered. By whom? Revelation 17:14 gives the answer: -- by Jesus Christ. "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them." The 19th chapter of Revelation gives us a picture of Jesus riding a white horse and leading the armies of heaven against the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies which have gathered for the last great battle of good against evil; and verse 12 says: "In righteousness he doth judge and make war." This, let us remember, is the same Jesus who once said, "Resist not evil."

The people who made and wrote the history of the Book of Mormon formulated at least a partial solution to this problem of war which might be helpful for our day. Whenever they were forced to take up arms after repeated overtures for peace, they made it very clear that their only purpose was to protect and defend their lands, houses, wives, and children, and to preserve the rights and privileges of a free citizenship. They cried unto God for help in this defense, and often their prophets received instruction from the Lord as to how their armies were to be deployed for best results. Their stated principle was: "Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies," but "ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed."

There is no easy or final solution to this problem of war. Much cannot be said within the time limits imposed by this service. We have no desire to ridicule any who hold divergent views. Atomic warfare has changed the picture so that no man can say with certainty what is right and what is wrong. But here again, for what it is worth, is the admonition of Moroni, the Nephite general: "Let us resist evil ... and whatsoever evil we cannot resist with our words, let us resist with our swords, that we may retain our freedom."