

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: RENOUNCE WAR AND PROCLAIM PEACE

Scripture: Doctrine and Covenants 95:6

This is the law that I gave unto mine ancients, that they should not go out unto battle any nation, kindred, tongue, or people, save I, the Lord commanded them. And if any nation, kindred, tongue, or people should proclaim war against them, they should first lift a standard of peace unto that people, nation, or tongue, and if that people did not accept the offering of peace, neither the second nor the third time, they should bring these testimonies before the Lord; then I, the Lord, would give unto them a commandment, and justify them in going out to battle against that nation, tongue, or people, and I, the Lord, would fight their battles, and their children's battles, and their children's children until they had avenged themselves on all their enemies, to the third and fourth generation; behold, this is an ensample unto all people, saith the Lord, your God, for justification before me.

Renounce war and proclaim peace. Lift up an ensign of peace,
and make a proclamation of peace unto the ends of the earth.

If we believe in scriptural prophecy, or even if we can interpret current events, we are forced to the conclusion that our sin-sick old world will see more war -- not less-- until Christ comes again to set up his kingdom of glory, and to fulfill the prophecy that "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ." Wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom, were to be one of the signs of the imminence of our Lord's second advent. It is rather a forlorn and unscriptural hope then, to expect world peace this side of the millenium.

War is sinful and evil. It is a result of sinful thoughts, ambitions, attitudes, and deeds by sinful, unregenerate men. War existed before time began. Before the creation of the world, there was a war in which one third of the hosts of heaven were cast out. War will exist to the end of time, for the last great battle in which the devil and his angels will be subdued and cast into the lake of fire will come after the resurrection of the wicked -- at the end of the millennial reign, and at the time of the last great and eternal judgment. So long as sin reigns in human hearts, we shall have war, for a very small minority of sinful men can always destroy the peace of our world as it is today.

The Christian is therefore faced with a dilemma. He must work for peace, pray for peace, lift up an ensign of peace, expect and hope for peace, and have faith that peace shall some day prevail upon earth. He must deal with all men -- even with his enemies -- in ways that will encourage and make for peace. At the same time he must recognize the ugly facts about sin and evil. He must be prepared to stand his ground and fight if and when such resistance becomes morally right and necessary. Whether armed resistance to sin and evil is ever morally right and necessary is still a highly debatable and controversial issue. Should a Christian ever fight at all? When, if ever, may fighting be considered necessary under the code of conduct laid down by Jesus?

Contrary to some popular notions, Jesus was not a pacifist, or an advocate of peace at any price. He used force to expel the money changers from the temple. Recognizing that his doctrines would bring division he said, "I am not come to bring peace, but a sword." After first sending out his disciples without purse or script or sword to demonstrate to them that God would provide, Jesus later said, "he who hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one."

In his own passion and death, and in

all the sad events leading up to it, Jesus did not defend himself or fight back; he also prohibited his followers from using armed force to rescue him. But we never feel that he is passive in his acceptance of that fate. He is in control even of the men who send him to his suffering and death. They do not take his life from him; he gives it up of his own will. He stands like the master of ceremonies at his own trial and execution -- not like a passive and helpless victim. He sets the example of being willing to bear suffering, even to death, rather than to inflict suffering on others; but whether he intended this to be an invariable and universal rule for his followers, for all time, in every possible situation, is quite another matter.

It is required of one who would follow Jesus that he be full of love, even for his enemies -- that he be meek, patient, unselfish, long-suffering, kind, conciliatory. He must be willing to turn the other cheek to one who smites him on one cheek, to go the second mile, to give up his cloak as well as his coat. He must be willing to suffer for the sake of keeping the peace and setting an example of forbearance and forgiveness. He must always be willing to renounce war and proclaim peace. Jesus commanded that if one offends against us seven times in one day, and each time manifests a true repentance and a desire to make amends and do better, we shall overlook the offense and grant him forgiveness, even to seventy times seven -- or indefinitely. But on the other hand, Jesus never required or demanded from his followers an unlimited or unqualified forgiveness of enemies and those who wrong us. To forgive and excuse and condone an unrepentant offender is only to encourage and confirm him in his sin. Forgiveness must be preceded by true repentance and when possible by restitution. The followers of Jesus will lift up an ensign of peace, follow peace with all men, work for reconciliation with offenders, keep the door always open for reconciliation, be willing to suffer himself for the sake of peace; but he is not required to forgive an unrepentant offender indefinitely.

Even when dealing with the unrepentant offender or the aggressor nation, however, we need to guard against harsh and unrighteous judgment. It is human nature to demand redress for grievances or wrongs. It is also human nature to be much more aware of the wrong others have done to us than of the wrongs we have done to them. It is human nature to shun

suffering ourselves, but to demand that others shall suffer if they wrong or harm us. An injured man's concern for justice is never quite pure; it is almost invariably tinged with vindictiveness and revenge; and revenge is always wrong, whether it is manifested on the personal or national level.

Only God can judge a righteous judgment. Revelation 19:11 gives us a picture of Jesus, the Son of God, seated on a white horse, ready to fight the last great battle with Satan, and then adds: "In righteousness he doth judge and make war." In human warfare, there is nearly always an element of unrighteousness, because of this human desire for revenge -- this human proclivity for preferring to inflict suffering on others rather than to bear suffering ourselves for the sake of peace. Jesus suffered for our guilt, not his own. He bore the impact of our sin and of the evil in his judges and executioners, without any complaint or any desire for revenge. Thus he revealed the hideousness of sin, and forever broke its power to harm those who are willing to suffer with him.

The Christian should never give offense; and if offense is unwittingly given he should immediately repent and be reconciled to the one offended. He should never raise the sword in anger or in aggressive warfare. He should renounce war and proclaim peace. He should lift up an ensign of peace. But if an offender comes against him repeatedly, persistently, without remorse or repentance, in spite of all warnings and efforts at reconciliation, the Christian has not only the right but the duty to resist evil, even by force of arms if necessary. Even if we are personally willing to bear suffering rather than defend ourselves by force of arms, we all owe a certain duty of protection to our families and loved ones. We are obligated to defend them against evil force and ruthless violence. We are obligated to defend the government which protects our lives, our property rights, our peace, and our freedoms. Defense of one's person, one's home, family, church, and government against persistent, deliberate, unrepentant offenders is justified in the sight of God, and if we judge righteous judgment in meekness and in love, such defense is not out of keeping with the spirit of Christ who helped fight a war against Satan in heaven before the beginning of time, and who will again fight a battle with him in the end of time to destroy all wickedness and sin, that God's kingdom may be established on earth in peace and righteousness.