

Let Liberty's Light Shine
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July 10, 2022

A number of years ago a little eight year old girl was taken on a vacation to New York City and while she was there she saw the Statue of Liberty. Like so many others she was impressed by this grand old lady of freedom, standing there in the New York harbor lifting aloft her torch of liberty to enlighten the world. In fact, the scene made such an impression on the little girl that she couldn't go to sleep that night. So after tossing and turning a while, she finally got up out of bed and said, "Daddy, I've been thinking about that beautiful lady out there all by herself with nobody to help her hold up her lamp. It's dark out there. Shouldn't we be helping Miss Liberty to hold up her lamp?"

Yes! That's exactly what we ought to be doing. For the world is growing darker day by day. The fires of freedom are being extinguished in one country after another and here at home the lights of liberty do not burn as brightly as they once did. Even during this past Fourth of July celebration, there was a growing chorus of celebrities and other individuals who demeaned our national holiday. But what can we do? How can we help the light of liberty shine into the hearts of all mankind? How can we rekindle the flame of freedom? What can we do as individuals and as Christians in this continuing struggle for liberty?

First of all, we can join with those who are willing to fight for it. One of those was a man by the name of Peter Muhlenberg. In 1775 he was serving as the pastor of a large Lutheran congregation in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. One Sunday morning he announced that his text for the day was Ecclesiastes 3:1. Reciting this passage of Scripture he said, "For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven." Then speaking on that text he addressed his congregation saying, "There is a time to preach and a time to pray, and there is a time to fight, and that time has now come." Stepping down from the pulpit, he pulled back his robe so that all could see that he was wearing the uniform of an officer in the Continental Army. That very day he recruited almost 300 men who were willing to fight for the cause of liberty. And he himself faithfully served in Washington's army during the entire Revolutionary War, rising in rank from colonel to major general.

Throughout our nation's history there have been many who have fought for our nation's freedom. My father-in-law fought on the battlefields of Europe during the Second World War, and a fellow pastor and dear friend, Stan Beach, was severely wounded while serving as a chaplain with the Marines in Vietnam. Many within this community have served in the Armed Forces of our Nation and we all know the story of the brave men who gave their lives on the beaches of Normandy in June of 1944. Fighting for the cause of liberty, however, involves more than guns and armed conflict. It involves fighting for the values and principals upon which our nation was established. Our country is a unique creation, unlike any which have preceded it. It is based upon the idea that government should be by, of and for the people.

That was an unprecedented concept when it was first conceived in the seventeen hundreds and it still is today. It needs to be protected at all costs including our ballots during elections and our personal involvement in the political process by which we choose our nation's leaders.

Second, we must do something else as well, especially as Christians. We must pray for those who are responsible for protecting it. When Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States in 1860, he realized that was imminent. He also realized that upon him had been placed the awesome responsibility of preserving the Union. Speaking to his friends in Springfield, Illinois, just before his departure to Washington, he said:

I go to assume a task more difficult than that which has devolved upon any other man since the days of Washington. He never would have succeeded, but for the aid of Divine Providence, upon which he at all times, relied. I feel that I cannot succeed without the same divine blessing which sustained him, and on the same Almighty Being I place my reliance for support. And I hope you, my friends, will all pray that I may receive the divine assistance without which I cannot succeed, but with which success is certain.

The same is true today. If we are to preserve the liberty which we hold so dear, then we must pray for those who are responsible for protecting it. That includes our president, our congressmen and women, our governor, and our state and local representatives. These individuals require the guidance of God as they make decisions that will affect our lives. With His help they will succeed and without it they will fall, which reminds me of a story that took place while a group of ladies were touring the Capitol in Washington D. C. During the tour the guide pointed to a tall benevolent gentleman and said, "He's the congressional chaplain." Whereupon one of the ladies asked, "What does he do? Does he pray for the Senate or for the House?" "No," said the guide. "The chaplain gets up, he looks at the Congress and then he prays for the nation."

Seriously though, we need to pray for our elected leaders and those who serve and are a part of our nation's government at every level. Never within my lifetime have I seen a more troubling set of challenges and potential calamities than what our nation is currently facing. Both at home and abroad our liberties are being threatened by a whole host of unrelenting enemies. I could list them but that would take a long, long time. You, I am confident, know who and what they are. Therefore, I will simply state what Paul said so long ago to Timothy, "First of all, then, I urge that petitions and prayers, requests and thanksgivings be offered to God for all men; for kings and all others who are in authority, that we may live a quiet and peaceful life, in entire godliness and proper conduct" (1 Timothy 2:1-2). So what can we do to let freedom's light shine throughout our nation and around the world? We can pray for those who are responsible for protecting it.

And there's something else we can do. We can speak out against those who are attempting to destroy it. In the Old Testament there is a memorable account of a contentious meeting between King Ahab and the prophet Elijah. The king desired a vineyard near his palace which was owned by a man named Naboth. The king offered to buy it, but Naboth would not sell his property. It had been in the family for generations and was treasured.

Ahab was upset and when his wife, the notorious Jezebel, heard about it she worked behind the scenes to have Naboth accused, convicted and executed on false charges. The vineyard came into the possession of Ahab. Soon thereafter, even while Ahab was enjoying his new acquisition, Elijah showed up and confronted the king with what he had done. He was not afraid to speak out about the terrible injustice that had taken place. Not only Naboth's liberty, but indeed his life had been taken away from him and Elijah would not be silent, even at the risk of his own life.

Here in our own country who has not heard those famous words uttered by Patrick Henry prior to the Revolutionary War. He was not afraid to speak out for freedom. Standing before his fellow Virginians in Saint John's church in Richmond, Virginia, in the year 1775, he cried out, "Give me liberty, or give me death." Today we need men and women like Patrick Henry who are not afraid to speak out even if they have to face severe repercussions. All too often we have remained silent when we should have spoken. Whether it's a letter to the editor of a newspaper, a speech before an assembled audience, or simply a conversation expressing our personal beliefs, we can no longer be silent. There is a concerted effort to transform our nation into a socialistic society where personal freedoms are no longer tolerated. It's taking place within our schools and universities and even our businesses and industries. If we are silent today, the light of liberty will be extinguished tomorrow.

Sometimes liberty requires more than even our words, our deeds and our prayers. It requires sharing the liberating power of Christ with those who so desperately need it. Paul declares in his second letter to the Corinthians, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." In other words, when the Spirit of God is present, freedom begins to blossom and grow. That's what happened when evangelists like Billy Graham began to speak and hold evangelistic crusades behind the Iron Curtain prior to the fall of the Soviet Union. People embraced Christ and began to turn away from the atheist indoctrination of the Soviets. Have you ever wondered why totalitarian regimes always persecute Christians? Once again, for example, China is closing churches and putting pastors and church leaders in prison. They know that when people become Christians, a desire for freedom and liberty is the undeniable consequence of that decision. They know that they can never exercise absolute authority over someone who has truly given their heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ. For Christians possess a dual citizenship. They are citizens of earthly kingdoms, but more importantly they are also citizens of heaven, a citizenship that cannot be taken away from them even by death. That's why, now more than ever, we need to do everything within our power to share the love of Christ with people here in America and all around the world.

In response to the little girl's question, "Shouldn't we be helping Miss Liberty to hold up her lamp?" Our answer should be a resounding, "Yes!" Now more than ever we need to do everything we can to let Liberty's light shine here at home and all around the world. May we never forget those immortal words from the book of Leviticus in the Old Testament which are inscribed upon our very own Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof" (Leviticus 25:10).