

THE LURE OF SLAVERY, THE COST OF FREEDOM

1 Samuel 8:1-9

By Raymond White

Numbers 14:4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

Until now, Israel had only grumbled about the hard life that their new freedom had brought. But now, they actually planned to abandon freedom and willingly return to lives of slavery. People are at times so fearful that they will gladly give up their freedoms preferring instead the security (as they imagine it) of entitlements. Grumbling is dangerous, and stupid talk eventually leads to stupid action.

[1] GIDEON

On one occasion, just after winning a battle, Israel wanted their general to become their king. Fortunately for Israel, the general wasn't interested.

Judges 8:22 Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian. :23 And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you.

Eventually, every nation will be tempted to trade its freedom for entitlements. What such nations need at that moment of bad judgment is a Gideon to say no to the tempting offer, and remind them just how important and precious and rare their liberty is.

Few leaders are able to resist such an offer. Gideon was one such leader, and George Washington was another. Each, in his time, walked away from such "glory" when it was offered.

The irony of history is that those men, Gideon and Washington, history rewards with a greater glory because they did not seek it, while other men who grab glory are forgotten, or remembered as villains.

[2] AMIMELECH

So Gideon declined the poor glory of kingdom. But unfortunately, his son did not.

Judges 9:2 Speak, I [Amimelech son of Gideon] pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal [Gideon], which are threescore and ten persons, reign over you or that one reign over you?

Although Gideon's wisdom delayed tyranny for a generation, the next generation embraced it. Amimelech, Gideon's son, presented himself and offered to be Israel's monarch: "Do you want one ruler or seventy?" meaning his seventy brothers, Gideon's other sons. Unfortunately, Israel accepted Amimelech's offer and made him their ruler.

Amimelech began his reign of terror by killing all his brothers, except one who escaped. Then he launched a series of wars that cost many thousands of lives.

So much for having one man in charge.

We see from this episode how fragile a thing is freedom, and how quickly the destiny of a nation changes when its people decide to follow a tyrant. For all the good that Gideon did, one stroke of a pen and Amimelech undid it all.

Did Israel learn its lesson? For a few generations yes. But eventually the lure of tyranny was too much and they again wanted a king.

1 Samuel 8:1 And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. 8:3 And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment. 8:5 And [Israel] said unto [Samuel], Behold, thou are old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.

The people wanted a king. They want a solidifying central government. But they already have a solidifying government founded on God and God's law. They just didn't have faith enough to trust it. And with judges like Samuel's corrupt sons, Joel and Abiah, who can blame them for wanting a change? This shows the extent of damage a corrupt government can cause. Not only is the corruption bad and causes injustice, but it also sparks revolution and pushes the people exactly in the wrong direction.

A modern example: Chiang Kai-shek was the corrupt leader of China. He was so corrupt that he executed merchants who refused to accept his valueless currency, and that finally motivated the Communist revolution under Mao Zedong who ultimately murdered 40,000,000 Chinese. Tyranny just leads to more tyranny.

But back to Samuel and his rotten sons. Government (in this case, two corrupt judges) showed itself to be flawed. So how did the people respond? By trading their freedom for tyranny thinking that will solve the problem. They didn't realize that they were throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Freedom is to be cherished, even with bad judges. Submitting to tyranny for *any* reason is a terrible mistake.

[3] SAUL

What was their solution to bad leadership? Get a king, a true tyrant that they can't shake off.

1 Samuel 8:7 And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. :9 Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.

You want to sell your freedom away? God will let you do it. God will protest, but in the end, you'll get what you want.

Let's see what they got.

1 Samuel 9:2 And [Kisk] had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people.

Here's the future king: Saul. He was handsome, strong, tall — the local celebrity, the rock star, the football hero, the big screen superstar, every woman's fantasy and every man's wanna-be. And he was a total loser. But that's what the people wanted, so that's what God gave them. You want a celebrity? Here he is, people: Saul. Good luck.

1 Samuel 12:17 Is it not wheat harvest to day? I will call unto the LORD, and he shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking you a king.

Even though God accommodated their demand for a king, God still considered their demand wickedness. They were a free people. Now they are a monarchy. God is all in favor of government, yes, but government by divinely established laws, a constitution, not a government of tyranny where the leaders can create whatever laws they want to suit themselves.

[4] KINGS AND OTHER TYRANTS

Proverbs 20:2 The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion: whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul.

The point of this is that governments are here to stay, “resistance is futile.” So learn to live within the system. If you sin against the king, you do so at your peril.

Ecclesiastes 8:4 Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?

You can't question the king. You can't say, “What are you doing?” In other words, you can't fight city hall. We give up a lot when we submit ourselves to a central government.

John 6:15 When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him king...

It's amazing what people will give up their freedom for. They would have forced Jesus to be king. And for what? Because the night before he fed 5,000 people. They were willing and anxious to turn themselves over to a king just for free food. How cheaply people hold their liberty.

[5] ZEDEKIAH

Jeremiah 38:5 Then Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he [Jeremiah] is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do any thing against you.

Zedekiah, for all his faults, at least understood the limits of his power. Ultimately, the people will have their way, good or bad, and there's not much that even the king can do about it.

***Jeremiah 34:8** ...king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people, which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them. **:9** That every man should let his maidservant, being an Hebrew or an Hebrewess, go free; that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a Jew his brother.**:11** But afterward they turned...*

Now that the people are threatened by Babylon, they yearn for freedom — to the point where it seemed a good idea to free all their slaves. And Zedekiah agreed.

But it was too little and too late. They should have been seeking liberty long before now. But now, they just couldn't give up their spoiled lives, they changed their minds and grabbed their Jewish slaves back. It was a noble effort, freeing their Jewish slaves, but they couldn't stick with it. And when they broke that covenant that they had made with the king and with God, that was the last straw. God brought the Babylonians to conquer them and they became themselves slaves.

[6] CIVIL RIGHTS

***Lamations 3:35** To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High. **:36** To subvert a man in his cause, the LORD approveth not.*

We do have essential civil rights that God has given us. And when tyrants take those rights away from us, God does not approve of that.

America is playing with its own forms of tyranny. When courts legislate from the bench and order legislatures to pass certain laws, that's tyranny. When the president issues executive orders to force the county to obey him, that's tyranny. The temptation to despotic power is just too great for most men to pass up. Lord Acton said it best in 1887: "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." And America is not immune.

Here is my short list of some of the civil rights which we ought to defend.

[6.1] RIGHT TO ASSEMBLE

***Nehemiah 2:20** Then answered I them [Ammonite and Arabian local governors] and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.*

The right to assemble must mean to assemble *exclusively*. If you think you have the right to assemble but the law requires you to admit anyone who asks without discrimination, then you do not have the right to assemble at all. Consider the Boy Scouts. They exclude gays. If we deny them the right to exclude, then we deny them the right to assemble. The right to assemble means *with those you choose*, not with those that the government chooses.

[6.2] RIGHT TO FREE SPEECH

Jeremiah 23:28 The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? Saith the LORD.

God is talking about false prophets. We don't need to shut down false prophets, let them say what they have to say. They have as much right to be heard as anyone else. The lie (chaff) has as much right to be heard as the truth (wheat). You should be able to tell the difference.

[6.3] RIGHT TO PROPERTY

Ezekiel 46:18 Moreover the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession...my people be not scattered every man from his possession.

Governments are taking more and more from us. Outrageous taxes, inflation, rent controls, confiscation for invented conservation, oppressive regulations, and eminent domain to take private property to give it to developers — by all these methods and more, government steals from us. And all of that is still not enough to satisfy government's appetite for our stuff so government runs deficits of trillions of dollars which will likely bankrupt us.

[6.4] RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Micah 4:4 ...and none shall make them afraid...:5 For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.

We will worship Jehovah, but everyone else will worship whoever they choose. That's the way it should be. Although the God of the bible often killed people for doing evil, he nowhere killed people for unbelief. It was not the false gods that was the issue, but the evil that those false gods caused people to do. Religion (for that matter all beliefs) must be a matter of personal conscience.

The Mormons perhaps say it best with their *Article of Faith 11*: We claim the privilege of worship Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.