

**Genesis 14: 1-20; “Abram the Man of War”, Sermon # 43 in the series –
“Beginnings”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on, April 28th, 2019,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

In Chapter 13, we read about Abram the peacemaker. When he and his nephew Lot discovered that their possessions of flocks and herds and tents were too great for the land to be able to support them, that they might dwell together; strife resulted. There was strife between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock. And so Abraham took the initiative to be a peacemaker in this situation. He said, “Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren.” Now in this text, in such a close proximity to that one in time, we find Abram becoming a man of war. Is this possible? Can a Christian actually be both; a peacemaker and a man of war? At this hour I would like to show you that it is a very commendable thing to be both.

Although it is not always the desire of the Christian to involve himself in wars between nations, there are times when he should, and even times when he should enlist in the military, if the cause is just. You will say to me – What does this incident of Abram’s rescuing Lot have to do with whether I fight in a war? Well, I think that as we go through this message, you will see that it has very much to do with it. For the motives and considerations that Abram thought of, when he went to war, are the same motives and considerations that you and I should think about, when we consider whether any of us ought to go to war. Let me give you 3 of them.

1st of all – The life of one of his own relatives and the safety and stability of the whole region that he lived in, was in jeopardy. (verses 1-12)

As you may know, there are some people who believe that war is never right for a Christian to engage in. They believe that “Thou shall not kill” is a commandment that which extends beyond the prohibition to murder; it also extends to war initiated by nations, as well. They are pacifists and conscientious objectors to any participation in war. While it is true that James in James chapter 4: 1, tells us that wars and fights come from the desires for pleasure that war in your members, and this is not something that a Christian can condone in himself; yet there are righteous wars, and righteous causes, which take place on the level of cities and nations, that all true Christians may participate in, as we shall see from this example in the life of Abram. Sometimes a person’s involvement in a war begins with issues that do not seem to involve them directly, at first. That is how things fell out in this case.

Abram had been given this land by God, but at this time it was being fought over by the rulers of various cities and regions in that area of the land of Canaan. Neither Abram, nor his descendants had any actual possession of it yet. He was a pilgrim, a sojourner and a stranger in this land. This war came about as a result of a number of power hungry kings who wanted control over the region in which Abram lived. In those days, there were cities who individually had kings over them, and they would confederate together; they would join together, to either expand their collective reign, or to resist the attempts of other kings of other territories, to conquer them. This was a war between 4 kings and 5 kings; the 4 wanting the 5 to submit to them. Chedorlaomer, the king of Elam, asked 3 other kings, Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, and Tidal king of Goyim, to join with him in suppressing a rebellion against his hostile takeover of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar; each city having a king ruling over it.

These 3 kings first mentioned would share in the spoils of these nations. They would share in the power and domination of what it would mean to have these nations under their thumb; they would all profit greatly from it. It says in verse 4, that the 5 kings had actually served Chedorlaomer for 12 years before this already, and they didn’t like serving him, or paying him tribute. So they rebelled, and that is why Chedorlaomer came and attacked the places mentioned in verses 5 to 7. The 5 kings joined together in the battle against the 4 kings in the valley of Siddim, and they lost the battle. It says in verse 10, that the valley of Siddim was full of asphalt pits; and

the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled; some fell there, and the remainder fled to the mountains. Then Chedorlaomer and his forces “took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way,” it says in verse 11. Abram probably would not have been drawn into this war at all, except for what it says in verse 12. “They also took Lot, Abram’s brother’s son who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.” So, the first motive and consideration that Abram had, in entering this conflict, was that the life of his nephew Lot was in danger. And along with this, the defeat of the King of Sodom in this battle meant that the peace and safety of the whole region had been destabilized, and that he and his neighbors, who had befriended him, who had permitted him to come and dwell among them, were also going to be in danger in the future. They would be in danger of receiving the same kind of treatment at the hands of these tyrannical kings.

So there was a present problem, and there was potentially a worse future problem that was developing. Often this is why Christians find themselves going to war. The Christian is normally for peace, but when he speaks, others coming against him, are for war, as it says in Psalm 120: 7. It is because either they themselves, or someone close to them, or others in their city or country has had their freedom threatened; that is why they go to war. They have been threatened with kidnapping, or with being killed, or they have been threatened with the confiscation of their property, or the taking away of their rights. There were no clearly defined civil laws or Constitutional rights in the days of Abraham. But that did not mean that there were not righteous or unrighteous principles being used by men, which would form the basis of justification for going to war. This is the first war recorded in the Bible, and two men who knew the Lord were being dragged into it. Lot was taken by the forces of the 4 Kings because he had not only pitched his tent toward Sodom, but now here in verse 12 it says that Lot had taken up living in Sodom. It was not at all a wise move for Lot to have gone to dwell in Sodom, as God was not at all pleased with the people of Sodom because of their many sins.

Abram could have said to himself, “Well Lot has been unwise in moving into Sodom, and so I am not going to go and rescue him. I am going to leave him to the consequences of his own mistakes. At least I will have peace and I’ll deal with Chedorlaomer if he comes towards me, later on. But that is not how Abram thought. He understood that the actions taken by these 4 Kings had brought the whole region that he lived in, into danger, and that his own nephew and brother in the Lord, had been taken captive. The state of war already existed, and his responsibility was to try to see if he could bring about a righteous and favorable end to it. War is not something that can be long ignored without grave consequences. If we love our relatives, if we love our freedoms, if we love peace, and order, and stability in our lives, we must think of what we must do to deal with it, when it comes near to us.

The Christian has considerations in front of him when thinks about war. There is the literal conflict that may come, when wicked men who lead other peoples and nations, attempt to take control of the nation that he lives in, by force of arms and aggression. And then there is the spiritual battle, that each person who knows the Lord is engaged in, that it is not fought with flesh and blood, but is a struggle against the forces of satanic darkness; the evil spirits who oppose the advance of righteousness and truth. Abram was involved in both. He was a man who loved his neighbor as himself. He was a man who studied to live a quiet life, but he knew that there were times when men must act, and they must act quickly, in order to stem the tide of evil acts and the wickedness of evil men. This was one of those times. There was no army that he could join, and so he knew that he must act on his own.

Well Abram’s 2nd motive and consideration for fighting in this war was that he would, by faith in God, love His neighbor as himself. (verses 13-15)

It says in verse 13 that, “One came who had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eschol and brother of Aner; and they were allies. This is the first mention of the Hebrew nation in the Bible. Abram was the father of the

Hebrew nation. We have here the first taste of what God was intending to do through Abram to make him a mighty nation. He was the father of his people, and this people God was going to make into a mighty nation. But its beginnings would be small. Here in Abram's life experience we have a foretaste of the victories in battle that God would give to the Hebrew people, to cause them to inherit the land. Abram's going to war would involve great acts of faith, even in the physical wars that he engaged in. He would not be great in himself, but he would do valiantly with God acting with him. God had providentially ordained these wars in the Old Testament to advance the nation of Israel. He gave them the land of Canaan to possess, but they were commanded to drive out the inhabitants of it, later on. God would have the Hebrew nation and people drive out all of those nations that God had determined were worthy of judgment. The Lord commanded His people to be the instrument of His judgments against these horribly sinful peoples of the land, to enact His judgments upon them, to show forth His justice.

The reason that Abram was a man of war was that God was, and He is still today, a God of war on sinful nations, as well as sinful people. It says in Exodus 15: 3, "The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is His name." Yes, it is very important that we understand that our God who loves all mankind with a general love, and His own people with a special and particular love, is also a God who will wage war against all sinners who will not repent of their sins. When it comes to the sinners who will not repent, God will sharpen His sword against them. In Old Testament times He commanded His own Hebrew people to enact the judgments of His vengeance upon them. Let me take a few minutes now, and tell you why this command of God's was His righteous command. Turn with me over to Deuteronomy 7, verses 1-11. "When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when the Lord our God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them." "You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them."

"Nor shall you make marriages with them." "You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son." "For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly." "But thus shall you deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire." "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth." "The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of the king of Egypt." "Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and repays those who hate Him to their face; to destroy them." "He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face." Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them."

Now, notice, that prior to entering the Promised Land of Canaan that God told them that He would deliver these nations over to them, and that their responsibility was to conquer them and utterly destroy them. The words "conquer them and utterly destroy them" are translated in the ESV as they must "devote them to complete destruction". The Hebrew word "herem", in the context, means that the Israelites were to kill the Canaanites, they were to devote them to destruction as an act or offering of worship unto God. In Joshua 6: 21, God told them to kill, "both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys". I believe that it is very important that we should understand that this was not genocide that God was commanding, but rather it was their killing the inhabitants of the land as His just judgment that He was bringing upon these nations.

And He was commanding Israel to be His battle-axe against His enemies and theirs, in their warring against them. God was righteously judging the Canaanites for their wicked deeds, and not because of their ethnicity. In authorizing this killing, He was also commanding it of Israel, in order to keep Israel from falling into the sins which were being committed by these nations; particularly their sins of immorality and idolatry. This is also why He prohibited the Israelites from marrying with the peoples of the land.

So actually, it was because God would have His people to be a holy people to Himself that He commanded this killing, and not because He was commanding Israel to exercise any base motive or any sinful malice, or because of His instilling evil thoughts in Israel, or His commanding that they should obtain anything of the Canaanites unlawfully. The Lord was actually commanding them to do this killing, He states, because He had set His love upon Israel and loved them; not for any reason in them, not for any reason other than His sovereign choice of them, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to their fathers; including Abram whose name God had changed to be Abraham, for He would make him the father of many nations.

Furthermore, we ought to remember that when Israel went into the land, that the Canaanites initiated the aggression against Israel. They attacked them first. Even when Israel was told to go up against Jericho, that city was said to have “fought against” Israel. (Joshua 24, verse 11) But in every case where Israel was commanded to utterly destroy and to devote to destruction the inhabitants of the land, it was because God had righteously decided that their wickedness could not continue on; that having been patient with them for some time before this, that now He would come against them to judge them through His own people, because He would have them put sin to death in killing these hardened God-despising sinners. He commanded it to show them and all the world, His Justice, and so that they would be willing to put sin to death in their own hearts, and mortify their own sinful actions. You will notice that in Deuteronomy 7: 4, God says that He knew that these Canaanites would turn their sons away from following Him, to serve other gods, and then the anger of the Lord would be aroused against them (the Israelites) and He would come against them and destroy them suddenly.”

To make this point very clear for ourselves: In New Testament times we have no such commandment to kill all the people of wicked nations, as Israel did when they were coming into the land of Canaan. Our instruction on war, however, should be enhanced from what we read about Abram, the first Hebrew, here. Abram had no command from God to go to war, but He did live his life by the righteous principles which would later be codified into the 10 commandments upon Mt. Sinai. Abram, we should understand had grace from God at work in his mind and heart, to keep the two greatest commandments; to love God and to love His neighbor. And we, as true believers in God and Christ should also have these in our hearts and in our minds, in all of our consideration of whether we should go to war; that is, that we would love God with all of our heart, and that we love our neighbor as ourselves, and any killing that we do is done is to prevent further evil from taking place, toward our nation and our people.

This incident took place before Israel had developed into a theocratic nation, and so we have much we can learn from Abram, in terms of the righteous principles that he worked by, and we can apply those principles to our times. You will notice that Abram had allies in this war; men who went with him into it. Aner, and Eshcol, and Mamre went with him. He, no doubt, talked the matter over with them, and he asked them if they would join with him as he took this initiative. Abram had a plan. It is not a good thing to go to war on your own. In our days you go to war in connection with the nation that you live in, and you hopefully can submit to their government and the initiatives in war that the governmental leaders take. It is always good to take counsel with other godly people, as to the righteousness of the cause and whether you can support the government’s initiative. It is always good to make allies of them of those who are righteous.

In Proverbs 24: 6, it says, “For by wise counsel you will wage your own war, and in a multitude of counselors, there is safety.” And Proverbs 20: 18 – “Plans are established by counsel; by wise

counsel wage war.” I believe that these neighbors and friends of Abram confirmed all that was in his heart and mind, and they encouraged and strengthened his hands, to do what he was about to do. He had 318 trained servants whom he had trained to defend his household and his livestock. He had trained them in defense, and he had also trained them to pursue thieves and marauding bands which might do harm or violence to his people.

He had no doubt prayed about this, and laid his plans before the Lord. And God gave him the assurance that even with this small force, that if they pursued the forces of the 4 kings, that they could defeat them. It was indeed, an act of faith. We see here, Abram as the leader of men; able to inspire his men and to take the initiative with them, to lead them to do these military exploits. “He divided his forces against them by night, and he and servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus,” it says in verse 15. What we need to see from this, is what can be done with even a small force, by faith, having good plans, and most of all, having the help of God. Abram was bold, and he was decisive in his actions. And he was this way, because of his faith in the Almighty.

The 3rd motive and consideration in Abram’s mind to go to war was that he believed that God Himself would help him and bless him as he went out to wage this war.
(verses 16-20)

I take this from the words of Melchizedek in verse 20 of our text. “And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” How much we need to see in our own day and time, that when we go to war that God is the One, and the only One, who can grant success to any military efforts that we as a nation, will make. It will not simply be our using skillful strategy when we make our plans, or the size of the force that we come with, or even the weapons that we will use, that in the end will determine the outcome of the battle. These are important and significant factors, to be sure. And we do need to count the cost of a bigger army coming against us when we are a smaller force. But it is the Lord of hosts who will determine the outcome for His people, and indeed the outcome of the whole course of human history. And thus we need to see and understand that the rise or fall or deliverance or establishment of any nation are in His hands.

I am sure that for Abram, this was a dark and difficult situation. For him to think of pursuing, overtaking, and fighting with the forces of the 4 Kings who had already defeated and put to flight the forces of 5 Kings, before him, it must have seemed daunting. What could he do with such a small force? But his spirit was like that of David’s in 2nd Samuel 22: 29, where he said, “For you are my lamp, O Lord; The Lord shall enlighten my darkness.” “For by You I can run against a troop; By my God I can leap over a wall.” “As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him.” This was the attitude of faith that Abram assumed. I cannot do much myself, but by You, O God, and with Your help, I can run against a troop. God will illumine my darkness. He will give me wisdom, strength, and skill to do what others could not accomplish, and to have success. Verses 33-35 of that same chapter says, “God is my strength and power, and He makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of deer, and sets me on my high places. He teaches my hands to make war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.” When God is our teacher we learn in the way that will lead to real success. He is the One who gives the ability to overcome our enemies.

Listen again to 2nd Samuel 22, verses 37-42 – “You enlarged my path under me; so my feet did not slip. I have pursued my enemies and destroyed them; neither did I turn back again till they were destroyed.” “And I have destroyed them and wounded them, so that they could not rise; they have fallen under my feet.” “For You have armed me with strength for the battle; You have subdued under me those who rose against me.” “You have also given me the necks of my enemies, so that I destroyed those who hated me.” “They looked but there was none to save; even to the Lord, but He did not answer them.” “Then I beat them as fine as the dust of the earth; I trod them like dirt in the streets, and I spread them out.” Well, we must ask - What enabled David to do all this? Verse 47 declares it. It is because – “The Lord lives!” “Blessed be my Rock!” “Let God be

exalted, the Rock of my salvation!” “It is God who avenges me and subdues the peoples under me; He delivers me from my enemies, You also lift me up above those who rise against me; You have delivered me from the violent man.”

So the question is not whether, or if, you as the Christian, must at times go to war. I hope that I have proved to you that it is a given. It is God alone who can “make wars cease to the ends of the earth”. (Psalm 46: 9) Rather, it is for the Christian to determine whether He is trusting in God; whether the cause is just, and one that he can participate in, and whether God will be with him in it. Abram, in this instance, is a picture of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us who are rightly related to him. Earlier in our lives we pitched our tents in the Sodom of this world, hoping to find pleasure and satisfaction in it. But because of our sinful mistakes, we ended up being kidnapped and held captive by the devil and the schemes of evil men. Our Elder brother Jesus felt love and compassion for us. He did not let us remain in this state. He came to rescue us from what we had brought ourselves into, by our wrong doing and our sinful and worldly thinking.

Verse 16 of our text says, “So Abram brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people.” This is exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ does for us as well, in the spiritual sense. He brings back all of God’s Elect people. He redeems them by His blood and rescues them from the grasp of the Devil. The difference our Lord and Abram is that our Lord had to die for us in the battle for our souls, in order to bring us out of our captivity in sin, and in order to bring us into a righteous state in the sight of God. But through that means, we have been most certainly delivered from all our enemies, and forgiven of all of our sins. Because He went to wage war against sin and the Devil on the cross, and won that battle through His death, God raised Him from the dead, and highly exalted Him, and gave Him a name which is above every name. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords, and He is still waging war against every false system of religion and every kingdom that opposes His Kingdom’s righteous advance. He is still delivering those held captive by the Devil.

This is the greatness, the glory, and the significance of war. All the enemies of the Lord shall ultimately fall and be destroyed forever. All of God’s Elect people shall be rescued and delivered, and they will all be established in Christ’s kingdom forever. May it be that case, that in our days, that our Lord Jesus Christ will bring back those persons whom we love, from the far country of sin and deception; those who are being held captive by the Devil to do his will. Thank God that our Lord Christ was stronger than him, and He has prevailed against him. Let us pray that He will bring more and more back from being held captive in the far country of sin. May He be the strong Deliverer of many sinful people, in our days, as we preach His gospel. Let us remember to speak and sing of His triumphs.