

Independence Day, 2010

Samuel Wilson remains one of the most famous and beloved people in the illustrious history of our nation. Now you might question that claim at first, because it is likely that you have never heard of Samuel Wilson who was born in 1766 and died at the ripe age of 88 in 1854. But when I finish telling Wilson's story, I think that you will agree that he remains one of the most loved figures in our nation.

Wilson was a meat packer who lived in Troy, New York. It was his job to pack meat for the infantry during the war of 1812. He did such an efficient job for the army that he was made the inspector of all of the army food supplies after the war ended. Part of his job as the army inspector was to stamp all of the meat barrels with the insignia U.S. When the mess officers received the food with U.S. stamped on it, they knew that it had passed inspection and was fit for consumption.

Because of Wilson's long, flowing beard and avuncular appearance, and because he was the man who stamped U.S. on the approved barrels of food, the army quartermasters throughout the Northeast began to call Samuel Wilson Uncle Sam. Someone even came up with a slogan - "Uncle Sam, he feeds the army".

Today, most people associate Uncle Sam with the entire United States government. But that was not always the case. At first, Uncle Sam stood for a real, living person. Samuel Wilson whose job it was to inspect the food and stamp U.S. on every barrel that passed his scrutiny. And I believe that you would agree with me that Uncle Sam is one of the best known and best loved people in our country.

It is both natural and healthy for a person to have a love for his or her country. God created us with a need for security, a need to feel at home. Our country provides a place to belong for us. We learn needed cultural norms, and accepted practices as we grow up. And most often, we grow to take these for granted. But it is very unsettling for us to go to a different cultural environment and not know what is acceptable or unacceptable there. We speak of culture shock that a person goes through when forced to live in another country for some reason. Missionaries, government workers, overseas business people, anyone who is forced to live abroad for a lengthy period of time must undergo this culture shock, and they will tell you it is a stressful time for any person. Part of the stress comes from the fact that it seems that many of the security blocks have been kicked out from beneath the person who is now adjusting to a new, national environment. It is always good to return home, back to the land where we are comfortable with the cultural norms. And because of this need for security that every person has, there is a natural love that is within each one for his or her country. It doesn't matter the country where a person is raised. This natural affection is good and

healthy. We have seen this evidenced in the variety of national fans that have been in South Africa cheering on their soccer teams in the World Cup.

Jesus was a Jewish man. He had a love for the country of his birth. This is often overlooked in studying the life of Christ. We often emphasize Christ's statements that his kingdom was not of this world in a way that makes it appear that he despised the land where he was born and raised. But such was not the case. Jesus Christ was a patriot. He loved his country. And we would like to look at the example of Christ's patriotism on this special holiday Sunday in which we celebrate our nation's independence. For as in every other area of life, when we study Christ's patriotism, we find the balance which is needed in our own love for our country.

In the 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Matthew's gospel, Jesus is approaching the end of his ministry and life. This is likely an account of the final Tuesday of Christ's life. He would be crucified later on this week. But in these final moments of his life upon this earth, there is a sudden burst of patriotism from him that reveals how much he loved his earthly country and specifically the capital city, Jerusalem.

READ MATTHEW 23:37-39

MT 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.  
38 Look, your house is left to you desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' "

1. Notice, first of all with me, Christ's love for his country - He loved Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel.

This is seen clearly in his outburst of affection for Jerusalem. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . "

2 days earlier, Jesus had actually wept as he looked over the city of Jerusalem after he had made that triumphal entry on Palm Sunday for he realized the destruction that was going to take place there and he loved this city so much. Dr. Luke the historian records this touching event (Luke 19:41). It was as if great emotion welled within him late in his life as realized how emotionally attached he was to this capital city which represented, of course, the whole nation of Israel.

In his life and example, Jesus teaches us that it is both natural and healthy for us to have an affection for our native land. It is natural for us to have a lump in our throats when we sing the national anthem. It is natural for us to appreciate the great leaders in our country who have gone before sacrificing for our liberty. It is natural to think that our land is among the greatest on the earth. And we also should not be surprised when other people from other countries have an emotional attachment to their native land.

Sir Walter Scott once wrote with poetic eloquence:

"Breathes there a man with soul so dead, who never to himself hath said:

This is my own, my native land! Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned,  
As home his footsteps he hath turned, From wandering on a foreign strand?

It is natural for every person to have an emotional affection for his or her country. God made us this way. So, in balance, a love for country is a good thing, it brings a sense of security and belonging to our lives.

2. But we must also see a second observation from this passage. JESUS WAS NOT BLINDED BY HIS PATRIOTISM - He recognized the prophets who were killed in Jerusalem. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you."

Now this is very important for us to see. Jesus Christ did not allow his love for his country to blind his eyes to the injustices that had been committed by the legal and legitimate rulers of his country. We must remember that many of the prophets of God were executed by Kings of Israel and Judah. Jesus, himself, would shortly be condemned to death by the Sanhedrin which was the legal ruling body of the Jewish people.

Many allow their patriotism to blind their eyes of discernment. Because they love their country, they then move to a position where they begin to believe that everything that their country does is right. But there is only one who is perfect in righteousness and justice - and that is God himself. So, you see, the person who becomes blinded by his patriotic love for his country actually comes to the place where he begins to deify his native land. Yes, our homeland can become a god in our lives. We can actually come to the place where we begin to trust our government more than we trust God himself. And this is a very dangerous position. It is dangerous in our spiritual lives - for God will not allow any other god before him in our lives. It is also dangerous in our temporal lives - for no government is able to bring the contentment and security that God alone can bring.

Arnold Toynbee, an historian and philosopher, once observed several decades ago: "Nationalism (and by this he meant the worship of one's country) is the common religion of the people of the world, on both sides of the iron curtain. It is an offense against both God and men. It is the worship of men instead of God, and is idolatry. The worship of one's own nation is also an offense against the human race. When we worship our own nation, we treat the rest of the human race as if it were not fully human."

Yes, it is natural to have a love for one's country. But it is also God's will for us to have a discerning love, not a blind love. God's law remains higher than any Supreme Court law. God's sovereign plan will remain when all political programs falter. God's ways alone are absolute in their righteousness; man's decisions often reflect the selfishness of his own concerns.

3. So then, if Jesus loved his country but also recognized its weaknesses and imperfections, how was Christ's love for his nation demonstrated in a tangible way. JESUS PATIOTISM WAS SHOWN IN HIS CONCERN TO HELP HIS COUNTRY.

"How often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."

It is not happenstance that Christ chooses the picture of the mother hen with her chicks to compare his concern for the people of his national heritage. For the mother hen's love and concern for her chicks is legendary. And this is the same type of concern that Christ had offered to his people. He had offered and offered his help to them. He had spoken God's words of truth in his teaching. He had extended his healing touch to their illnesses. He had performed miracles to show them God's divine power. Christ had done all that he could to offer God's divine help to them. That is how he demonstrated his love for his country.

And I believe that we can learn a great deal from Christ's example. For we live in unprecedented days of liberty and freedom in our nation today. Roman citizens could not march in protest. Nine tenths of the people living in Christ's day were not even citizens of Rome - they had no vote, no voice, no standing whatsoever. Most were viewed as slaves, property to be bought and sold.

Today, we live in a representative type of government where our voice can be heard. Indeed, our politicians want to know what we are thinking. They regularly commission polls so they can know what the American public is thinking about an issue. As Christians, we need to show our love for our country by expressing our concerns to our representative leaders. Shame on us if we talk to one another and complain about the direction of our nation and never write to our representatives or call to express our opinions. Every letter or call is recorded and it does have an impact. If we really love our country, if we are good patriots, if we are to follow the example of Christ, then we will do what we can to offer our help in setting a righteous course for our nation. Now, we will never build a heaven on earth no matter how hard we try. But we can make a difference. If the recent Tea Parties have proven anything, it is that people voicing their concerns can make a difference. We can be the salt and light that Christ instructed his disciples to be.

So then, Jesus shows us that an affection for one's country is natural and healthy. But it must not be a blind patriotism. It must be discerning, allowing God his rightful place as the supreme judge of right and wrong. And one's patriotic love should be a motivation to be a godly influence of divine help and guidance. This is how our love for our country can be shown in a tangible way.

But now in conclusion, as we prepare our hearts for the celebration of the Lord's Table, we must broaden our vision to see another application to this passage. Yes, Jesus Christ was born a Jewish citizen in

the city of David, Bethlehem, and he showed a special affection for Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel. But before Jesus was born in that stable, he existed in all eternity past with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. And long before Israel even became a nation, God the Son was concerned for all that he had created. For Christ made all things, all nations. So in a very real sense, Jesus Christ has a special tie with every nation and every people. For he had the power to deliver himself from the painful death of crucifixion. When the one thief and members of the crowd taunted him to "save himself", he could have done just that if he had chosen to do so. But if he would have left this world which is being hopelessly consumed by the degradation of sin and wickedness, he knew that we would never be saved. So Christ accepted that cross. He suffered the agonies and pains of death, so that we might be spared.

Jesus Christ reaches out in love and compassion to you this morning. He longs to gather you as one of his children under his protective wings. Are you willing to invite him into your life and accept his gift of forgiveness and eternal life?

If you have trusted in Jesus Christ, then the Lord's Supper has a very special place in your heart. For it reminds you that however great your love for the U.S.A. is, your love for God and his son, Jesus Christ, and heaven is even greater. For our true nation is heaven. And our citizenship papers have been purchased with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.