

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: HE THAT RECEIVETH MY SERVANTS RECEIVETH ME

Scripture: Matthew 21:33-41

Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country; And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize upon his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the Lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits of their seasons.

He that receiveth my servants receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth my Father, and he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father's kingdom. (Doctrine and Covenants 83:6)

In the preceding sermon of this series we have discussed the topic, "Peace shall be taken from the earth." If we are to have peace, we said, we must repent, and forsake our way for God's way. Going one step beyond that, it follows that if we are to repent and walk in God's way, we must know what God's way is; we must know who is authorized to speak for him today. We must know what scriptures contain his word. We must know how to interpret those scriptures correctly. We must choose what doctrines we shall believe and act upon. We must choose which voice to follow, out of the many that claim to be his. We cannot evade such choices. Not choosing is choice.

Man is always reluctant or unwilling to hear the voice or the instruction of God and his servants. Not a single Old Testament prophet enjoyed wide acceptance and popularity among his contemporaries; and Jesus was rejected by the very people who should have been eagerly watching for him because of the promises of their prophets.

Jesus told at least two significant parables in which he took notice of this rejection of the prophets and of himself. One was the parable of the householder and his rebellious husbandmen, which we have read as a scripture lesson. According to the parable, the householder first sent servants to receive his share of the fruits of his vineyard. They were all rejected, stoned, cast out, killed. Then

he sent his son, whom they slew also. Out of the mouth of the Pharisees themselves came the condemnation of themselves; "He will miserably destroy those wicked men."

The other parable is not often thought of as applying to the rejection of Jesus and the prophets who foretold him and his coming. It is the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Dives. Just before Jesus told the parable, the Pharisees had derided him, and Jesus reminded them that "The law and the prophets were until John." The law and the prophets had spoken of him. Because the ancient prophets had spoken, the Pharisees should have known and accepted Jesus.

It was against this background that Jesus told the parable of the poor beggar, Lazarus, who died and was taken to Abraham's bosom, and the rich and selfish Dives, who in the torments of hell asked for one drop of water from the tip of Lazarus' finger. Denied this, Dives asked Abraham to send back Lazarus to warn Dives' five brethren, lest they too come into torment. Note the reply: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one should rise from the dead." Those willing to hear God's message will hear those whom God sends, and not ask for another. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me," said Jesus. Those who are rebellious and unwilling to hear and heed the message of God would not believe though one preached a hundred and twenty

years, as did Noah, or though one should rise from the dead, as did Jesus. The followers of Satan know their master's voice, just as Jesus' sheep know his voice. Each man follows the voice and the authority which will permit him to do what his nature desires and wills to do.

Many ignore the voice of God, the voice of truth, because it doesn't come from the source they expected, or because it doesn't tell them what they wanted to hear. Jesus was rejected because he didn't come from the priestly hierarchy, and because the truths he proclaimed ran counter to entrenched power, prestige, and wealth. The voice of God does not speak from the powerful, the socially accepted, the majority. Not very often does it speak what the man on the street wants to hear. Much more often, the voice of God speaks from strange places, from among the poor, the lowly, the disfranchised, the socially unpopular. Much more often the things that God says through his humble servants are dangerous to the political, social, economic, and ecclesiastical status quo. The man who knows and loves and is looking for truth, however, will receive it from whatever source it comes.

The price of hearing the voice of God as it comes through his prophets, servants, and apostles, is sometimes high. Unregenerate man is rebellious, not humble. If he gives heed to the voice of God, he must forsake his friends and companions in sin. He must often give up political and social advantages -- meet ridicule and persecution -- suffer loss of property and perhaps of life. He must break with many of the bad habits and wrong attitudes of the past. Few people are willing to pay this price.

With so many men claiming to speak the word of God, how can we judge which man should be heard? We all must obey some voice. Saying that the task of choosing is too difficult does not relieve us of the responsibility for choosing. Shall we say that the voice of the people is the voice of God? Sometimes it is, but not always. As we have shown in a previous sermon, when every man walketh in his own way, with no regard for God's authority, peace is taken from the earth. Shall we then accept whatever authority already exists, simply because it does exist, or because it is old, established, venerated? The authority which rejected Jesus was all of that, yet it was wrong and arrogant and false. Shall we accept the proud authority of Absolute power? No, because God gives no man absolute and unconditional power or authority to speak or act for him. The authority he gives

to men is always contingent upon their faith, their preparation, their humility, their morality, their worthiness, their obedience. True authority is the authority of humble, loving, skillful service -- not the authority of absolute power. God is the only absolute ruler who can be trusted.

Every man needs to ask himself honestly and discerningly, "Which voice do I hear as the voice of God? Why do I follow this authority?" Any man who is honestly concerned about this problem may know for himself what authority to follow and what voice to heed if he will live so humbly, so obediently, so unselfishly, so close to God, that he will have God's Spirit -- the Spirit of light and truth -- the Spirit which guides men into all truth -- the Spirit of discernment. The light of this Spirit comes only to those humble enough to follow it. Turn aside from it, and it will turn aside from you. Follow it, and you will be led to heed the voice of God's prophets, servants, and apostles as they speak in God's name today.

Those who are truly God's servants will not only correctly teach and interpret the words God has given in the past, but will give prophetic new words of instruction, warning, counsel, reproof, comfort, wisdom, light, and knowledge today. They will testify with prophetic spirit that Jesus is the Christ. They will preach repentance and salvation in his name. They will counsel obedience to all his commandments, not to just a convenient few.

When you hear these words, test them by your personal knowledge of and experience with God. If you have no such knowledge and experience, seek it in prayer and communion. Study the word already given, and test the words of those who profess to speak for God by those words given in the past which have stood the test of time and of collective human experience. Test them by the light of his Spirit. Test them by the freedom they bring -- by whether they attempt to force men, or leave them the right to choose -- for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

Failure to heed the words of God's prophets, servants, and apostles because they speak today from unexpected places, or because we do not agree with what they say, does not excuse us. If they speak God's truth, we shall be held accountable for our acceptance or rejection of their words. "He that receiveth my servants receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth my Father, and he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father's kingdom."