

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: CONTINGENT PROMISES

Scripture: Doctrine and Covenants 58:6

It is not meet that I should command in all things, for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore, he receiveth no reward. Verily I say, Men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; for the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good, they shall in no wise lose their reward. But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned. Who am I that made man, saith the Lord, that will hold him guiltless that obeys not my commandments: Who am I, saith the Lord, that have promised and have not fulfilled? I command, and a man obeys not; I revoke and they receive not the blessings; then they say in their hearts, This is not the work of the Lord, for his promises are not fulfilled. But woe unto such, for their reward lurketh beneath, and not from above.

I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say, but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise. (D.C. 81:3)

Men who make promises with the best of intentions often find that those promises go unfulfilled. Promises to pay are sometimes not met, and the mortgage is foreclosed. Wedding vows are neglected or forgotten, and marriages are dissolved by divorce. Promises to forsake sin and serve God are made with every good intention, but all too often are easily forgotten. Absolute faithfulness is a trait all too seldom met with in the human family. Only God is faithful in all things; only God always fulfills his promises.

It is reasonable and good and proper to trust in God and in his promises. But many men have trusted in God, only to be disappointed and let down. Why? Not because God is faithless, or because he fails to remember and fulfill his promises, but because God's promises insofar as they apply to any individual man, are always contingent. They are conditional. There is always an "if" either expressed or implied. If men will respond to God's promises in a certain way, if they will obey his laws, if they will prepare themselves, if they will fulfill the prerequisites, if they will meet the conditions, then they may claim the promise. But if they do not abide by the conditions, God is not bound, and men have no right to expect to claim the promise.

Many disappointments and frustrations grow out of the fact that men take God's promises as absolute and unconditional, rather than conditional and provisional, and contingent upon men's response. Israel believed that God had covenanted with them. He had. Through the prophets, he said again and again that he would not -- could not forget that covenant, even though Israel did forsake him. The covenant to remember Israel still stands. But as the promise applies to individual men of Israel, or even to entire generations of men, it is always conditional. When the people of Israel fell into the error of believing that because they were the chosen covenant people they would be saved and spared and blessed regardless of their response, God's promise always failed them. God had not failed them; they had failed God. God's promise failed because it was contingent upon their response.

There are still many people who believe that God's promises to Israel were absolute rather than conditional. There are still many people who think that God's promise that David should never lack a man to sit on his throne was absolute, unconditional, and unequivocal. David himself understood very well that it was not, for he gives the conditions

of that promise in Psalm 132:12: "If thy children will keep my covenant..." Israel did not keep the covenant; David's posterity did not keep the covenant. Within a few generations the kingdom was divided, destroyed, and the royal line of succession broken -- not because God was unfaithful, but because his promises are always conditional.

In other instances God's promises have been misunderstood or wrongly interpreted by the ones to whom they were given; and as a result the promise is not realized according to expectation. For example, there are those who put all their trust in the promise, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved," and who expect one act of confession to save them, no matter what. They forget the contingencies of that promise contained in many other scriptures -- that men shall be judged according to their works -- that he that shall endure to the end shall be saved -- that we must add to our faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity if we wish an abundant entrance into Christ's kingdom -- that we are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.

Many others have claimed the promise of Jesus, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," but have neglected to notice the conditions of that promise. "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, (and then) lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." There is no promise to those who neglect the teaching of the nations, or to those who neglect to baptize them, or to those who change the teachings of Jesus, add teachings of their own, or omit any with which they don't agree.

There are many who have tried to claim the promise, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," but who have forgotten the contingencies or conditions of that promise. "Take my yoke upon you --" that is one of the conditions. The yoke is a symbol of slavery or servitude -- a symbol of full surrender and willing obedience to a Master. It is also an instrument for making labor more efficient, more productive, and less tiring. It does not indicate release from labor, but is designed to increase the results of labor. There can be no peace, no rest,

without the yoke of servitude.

Another condition laid down by Jesus for those who seek his rest is that they "learn of me." Unfortunately, our English preposition "of" has two meanings. In the original Greek the meaning is plainer. "Learn of me" does not mean that men should learn about Jesus from the pages of a book, or from the preaching of his ministry. It means learn from me, first hand, person to person, as my Spirit, my Presence teaches them to you. It signifies or connotes a close and satisfying companionship, an unceasing and perpetual communion, a continuing revelation, so that the one seeking rest and peace may always know his Master's nature, his will, his requirements, and find peace in doing them. How many who have sought peace and rest from Jesus have been unwilling to fulfill these conditions, and therefore have not been able to claim Jesus' promise?

God cannot safely give the full blessings of his kingdom to men who have not disciplined themselves to keep his kingdom laws. Results follow obedience to law. If results came only by wishful thinking, the universe would be a most disorderly and wholly unreliable place in which to live. Everybody could wish for anything he wanted, and everyone could have everything he wished for -- but at what a cost! Not a single law of Nature could be relied upon. We could never be sure that fire would burn, or water quench thirst. Gravity might pull down one moment, and up the next. There could be no standard weights or measures. We could never be sure that a chemical or mathematical formula would work the same way twice. If God is to be trusted at all, he must be trusted absolutely, and according to law. We cannot add our own conditions and expect his laws to work. We cannot neglect his conditions, and continue to claim his promises.

It is one of man's responsibilities to seek out, discover, and apply the laws of God -- the contingencies which govern every promise he has made. Humble, obedient, repentant men are willing to do this. Rebellious, proud, self-sufficient men seek to claim God's promises according to their own conditions, and when God's promises are not fulfilled, they say that God is false and his promises undependable, unreliable. Woe unto such, for their reward lurketh beneath, and not from above. "I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say, but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise."