

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: OF HUMAN BONDAGE

Scripture: Doctrine and Covenants 98:10 (Given in December of 1833, shortly after the expulsion of the Saints from Jackson County, Missouri.)

And again I say unto you, Those who have been scattered by their enemies, it is my will that they should continue to importune for redress, and redemption by the hands of those who are placed as rulers, and are in authority over you, according to the laws and constitution of the people which I have suffered to be established, and should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles, that every man may act in doctrine, and principle pertaining to futurity, according to that moral agency which I have given unto them, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment. Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage to another. And for this purpose have I established the constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood.

It is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another.

Slavery is far from being a dead issue in today's world. Behind the iron curtain and the bamboo curtain millions of slaves labor in slave camps under cruel masters, without reward and without hope. The United Nations has discussed the slavery issue several times in late years without tangible results; but reports indicate that there is still a well organized slave trade carried on in which luckless and unsuspecting African negroes are sold as slaves to wealthy Arabians who are cashing in on the rich flow of oil in the near East.

Elsewhere in the world the ideological and social and economic slaves are waking and stirring and throwing off their shackles. The colored races of the world are on the march. Colonialism, as it was practiced a century ago almost exclusively for the benefit of the white man and at the expense of the native, is dead. Two world wars, fought for the avowed purpose of preserving human rights, and the declarations of the United Nations regarding the inherent and inalienable freedoms of men have at least impressed the teeming millions of earth who have never really known freedom. They want the "four freedoms" for themselves -- freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, freedom from fear -- and they are resolved to have them. It is one of the tragic ironies of life that so many of the underprivileged nations which have been exploited under capitalism have turned to Communism, only to find the little freedom which they had destroyed, and

their slavery made more abject and hopeless than before.

Is slavery right or wrong? Is it right under some conditions and wrong under others? Is it right that some races should be slaves and other masters, and wrong if the situation should be reversed? Our scripture text says "It is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another." It is not right for a man to be politically free, but a slave to economic circumstances over which he has no control. It is not right if a man is made an intellectual slave by being denied an education, or access to full information which is necessary to wise choice. It is not right if men are made slaves to superstition or ignorance or fear in the name of religion. It is not right that men should be made slave to social custom which denies them the right to choose their profession or calling, or to develop to the fullness of their potential capacity. It is not right that men should be so impoverished that they are made slaves to debt or to economic oppression. It is not right that any man should be under bondage to sin, or to death.

God's way is always the way of freedom. He sent his Son into the world in order that through his death and resurrection life might be restored as the alternative of death, so that men might be free to choose which they would have in eternity. Jesus came to set men free. "He breaks the power of cancelled sin; he

sets the prisoner free." Not only does he set men free from the bondage of sin and death, but if all men would obey his laws, men would be set free from all other forms of bondage and oppression, from want and from fear. When men use their free moral will and agency to rebel against God, to disobey his laws and defy his counsel, by those very acts they choose bondage for themselves rather than freedom -- and they drag innocent men down to bondage with them. In the history of Israel, rebellion and apostasy always brought conquest and slavery for the nation that had once been freed from the bondage of Egypt.

Slavery is against the law of God, against the law of human nature, and the law of the universe. Every nation which has continued to condone and sanction and practice slavery has sooner or later come to grief. Abraham Lincoln was expressing a great historical, as well as a prophetic truth when he said that this nation could not exist half slave and half free. That was the historical experience of the Hebrews, the Greeks, the Romans, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Egyptians, and many others. When one group or class or race of people come to the place where they expect another group or race or class to do all the work, it is only a matter of time until the "master" race becomes soft, weak, passive, unimaginative, without vigor and without initiative. Then they are an easy prey to immorality, mental and physical and moral decay, and eventually conquest by some more virile race.

Why is slavery wrong? There are some obvious reasons, and some not quite so obvious. In the average human mind, slavery is commonly associated with cruelty, oppression, and suffering -- with the branding iron and the whip. But slavery can also be humane, paternalistic, and benign, with even a deep affection existing between master and slave. Therefore, although cruelty is wrong, slavery can and sometimes does exist without cruelty.

Nevertheless, slavery is always a denial of basic human rights and dignity. It results from inequity, and it results in inequity -- and inequity is the same thing as iniquity. The slave becomes a slave either because he is so impoverished and debt-ridden that he voluntarily sells himself in an attempt to better his economic position; or he is a slave because he is a captive of war, or the victim of men who are stronger, more clever, more cunning, more wealthy, or more politically powerful than himself. The nation or the society which allows such inequity

to exist that a man must sell himself to feed his family, is an iniquitous nation or society because it violates the Christian principle, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." A nation or a society which allows the weak to be enslaved by the strong, the clever, the cunning, or the wealthy, is an iniquitous nation or society because it violates the Christian principle that men should bear one another's burdens and serve each other in love, with the greatest becoming the servant of all.

The greatest evil of slavery, however, is that it violates man's free moral will or agency. God's way is to make each man responsible and accountable for his own deeds. All Christian teaching points to a day of judgment, when men will be appraised, called to account, and rewarded or punished according to the deeds done in the flesh. Judgment presupposes agency, or freedom to choose. If a man is not free to choose, he is not responsible for his choice. He deserves no blame and no punishment for the evil things he has been forced to do against his will. He deserves no commendation and no reward for the good things which he has done unwillingly, under compulsion. Where acts are compelled, they have no moral value for either good or evil.

Free moral will or agency exists in order that men might be morally accountable for their acts-- in order that God's judgment may be just. Government exists in order that this principle of agency or freedom might be preserved -- in order that one man or one group of men may not destroy the agency of others by superior force, craft, cunning, wealth, or political power. It is the duty of every good Christian to support, protect, and defend his government, so long as it protects and defends his freedom, his right to choose for himself, his free moral will and agency.

God's way is that every man shall be free to "act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to that moral agency which I have given unto them, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment. Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another." May we always be a free and righteous nation, grateful for our founding fathers, for our Constitution which guarantees our liberties, and for the sacrifices of those who have died to preserve our freedoms. And may we always respect and defend all the rights and freedoms of others as we respect and defend our own, knowing that "it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another."