

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: THE FULLNESS OF THE EARTH IS YOURS

Scripture: Doctrine and Covenants 59:4,5.

.....inasmuch as ye do this, the fullness of the earth is yours: the beasts of the fields, and the fowls of the air, and that which climbeth upon the trees, and walketh upon the earth; yea, and the herb, and the good things which cometh of the earth, whether for food or for raiment, or for houses or for barns, or for orchards, or for gardens, or for vineyards; yea, all things which cometh of the earth, in the season thereof, are made for the benefit and use of man, both to please the eye, and to gladden the heart; yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body, and to enliven the soul. ... And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made, to be used with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion: and in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments.

Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused,
if it be received with thanksgiving.

Perhaps you have heard the story about the grim old deacon who took one bite out of a dish of ice cream, and then refused to eat the rest on the grounds that anything which tasted that good must have been invented by the devil. A great many religious people still have that attitude towards the good things of earth. They preach that man should always be sad, serious, sober, cheerless, glum -- that he should expect no pleasure, look for no joy. They counsel us to "touch not; taste not; handle not." Jesus did preach a gospel of self-denial, it is true. He commanded those who would follow him to take up the cross, and deny themselves all ungodliness. But he also told his disciples "Be of good cheer," and he himself said "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

In the modern revelation from which we have read at the beginning of this service, there is detailed instruction concerning the attitudes men should take in dealing with and using the things which God has created and placed in this world. The kernel of that instruction is that "the fullness of the earth is yours," that "all things are for the benefit and use of man." This agrees with Paul's counsel to Timothy, when he warned that in the latter days some should "depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their con-

science seared as with a hot iron: Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth." The first mistake in dealing with and using God's gifts, then, is in attempting to permit the use of a few and deny the use of many. "Every creature of God is good," and the fullness of the earth is yours.

The second mistake we make in using God's gifts is using them selfishly -- in such a way that others are denied what they need, and what is rightfully theirs. This would include not only selfish hoarding and all manner of waste, but particularly it would apply to the selfish wasting of fish, game, and wild life, and of those practices which deplete our top soil, our minerals, our oil, our forests, so that none remain for future generations.

The third mistake we make in using God's gifts is to use them for extortion, by cornering the market, creating a monopoly on some natural resource in order to make the people who need that commodity pay exorbitant prices to get what they need and must have. God's gifts were intended to serve all men, not to enrich a few.

The fourth mistake which we make in using God's gifts is using them to excess.

The person who places a true value on the things God has given will not use more of them than he needs, or use them to such excess that he is harmed rather than benefited. Any good thing ceases to be good if it is used to excess. We should enjoy what we eat, but over-eating can be dangerous. None of us could exist without sunlight, but God tempers the sunlight with darkness, with clouds and rain, lest too much sun make a desert. Intemperance in the use of any of God's gifts can make that gift a curse rather than a blessing.

Our scripture says that all these gifts are to be used with judgment. It is possible to use a perfectly right and legitimate thing in a wrong, sinful, and dangerous way. A knife may be used by a murderer to kill, or by a surgeon to cure. Narcotics, used with judgment, are legitimately used to control pain; without judgment, they can be used to enslave and produce hopeless addiction. Alcohol has countless legitimate uses in industrial and chemical processes; but when used to produce partial or complete intoxication, it is being used without judgment. Tobacco is a good bug killer, but when used in such a way as to produce lung cancer, it is being used without judgment. Judgment tells us the manner in which each of God's good gifts should be used. And we should always remember that just because someone uses certain things without judgment, those things are not in themselves necessarily wrong. They are still God's good gifts to man.

The sixth mistake is failure to use God's gifts "in the season thereof." It is possible to use the right thing at the wrong time, and produce misery instead of happiness. There is a time to wear overcoats and a time to store them away in moth balls. The wise preacher of the Book of Ecclesiastes says that there is a proper time for everything under the sun.

It is always possible to use God's good gifts unselfishly, without extortion or excess, with good judgment, and still to use them ungratefully, with no thought of acknowledgment to the Giver of every good and perfect gift, with no sense of stewardship or of obligation to God. This is our seventh mistake -- using God's gifts ungratefully. The scripture we have read says that we should "thank the Lord in all things," that we should "confess his hand in all things," and that against none is his wrath kindled save those who do not thank him and confess his hand in all things. and consequently

do not keep his commandments.

The eighth mistake in our use of God's good gifts is using them irreverently. In paragraphs just previous to those read as today's scripture in the book of Doctrine and Covenants, God commands that we should go to the house of prayer on his holy day, there to pay our devotions, to offer our sacrifices and oblations to the Most High in righteousness, to bring him an offering of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. We are commanded to observe the Lord's day as a day of rest and worship, and told that on this day we should do "none other thing," save to prepare our food with singleness of heart. If we do this, "the fullness of the earth is yours." God's gifts should always be used reverently.

The ninth mistake which we make in using God's gifts is using them cheerlessly, or without joy. The phrases to single out from our scripture in this connection are "with cheerful hearts and countenances;" "with glad heart and cheerful countenance." God wants his people to be cheerful -- to enjoy his gifts. Man is that he might have joy, and the wise and prudent use of God's gifts will produce joy and happiness.

The tenth mistake we make in using God's gifts is using them in disobedience and rebellion. The disobedient and rebellious have no right to claim God's blessings. The continuation of his permission to enjoy them is contingent upon our loving and serving him in obedience. Therefore this section of the Doctrine and Covenants counsels those who would enjoy God's gifts to love neighbor as self, to beware of theft, adultery, murder, and all other crimes and sins. "Against none is his wrath kindled save those who confess not his hand in all things and obey not his commandments."

God's gifts were made to be used and enjoyed. They are for the benefit and use of men, to gratify his physical senses, to please the eye, to please his sense of taste and smell, to gladden the heart, to strengthen the body, and to enliven the soul. But those gifts must always be used unselfishly, without extortion or excess, with judgment, with gratitude, with reverence, with joy, with obedience. If we do this, "the fullness of the earth is yours," and we may claim and use any of God's blessings.