

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: ACCOUNTABILITY AND STEWARDSHIP

Scripture: Doctrine and Covenants 101:2

Ye shall organize yourselves, and appoint every man his stewardship, that every man may give an account unto me of the stewardship which is appointed unto him; for it is expedient that I, the Lord, should make every man accountable, as stewards over earthly blessings, which I have made and prepared for my creatures. I, the Lord, stretched out the heavens, and builded the earth as a very handy work; and all things are mine; and it is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine; Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor, and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment.

It is required of the Lord at the hand of every steward, to render an account of his stewardship, both in time and in eternity.

How many of the things which we claim as our own personal property are actually ours? Our lives were given to us by someone else; none of us created ourselves. We are beggars, tenants on an earth which we did not create, which was ready-made when we arrived. We use coal and oil and minerals which were created millions of years before we were born, and we say that they are ours. We sow and reap, and freely use the abundance of plant life all the way from giant trees to radishes -- but man is powerless to create the spark of life that will cause any plant or tree to grow, or to create the soil, the sunlight, and the rain essential to its growth. Everything we use -- even the physical bodies in which we live -- is borrowed from God.

We are stewards over all these things which God has conditionally given to us to possess, to use, to enjoy. We are stewards, and not servants or slaves, because God has given them to us with no strings attached. They are ours to use as we please, without interference from him, except that we are expected to use his property in ways that will be pleasing to him and harmful to none of his creatures. A servant or slave must look to his master for orders in the most minute and inconsequential affairs of his master's business. Because the master makes the decisions, it is he who must bear the responsibility for success or failure. On the other hand, a steward is one who has full use and control over another's property. The master gives that

property into his charge and keeping, and goes away, leaving him to manage it as his own. Because the steward makes the decisions, he is responsible for success or failure in the management of his master's property, when that master returns to demand an accounting.

Two conditions are therefore essential to a true stewardship. One is possession and control over the property to be managed. We say that we "own" property, but that word is relative, not absolute. Society recognizes man's right to "own" personal property and real estate so that there will be some means of placing responsibility for the management of that property, but man, who borrows everything from God for the term of his earthly existence, is never an owner in the absolute sense. He is only a steward. He is a good steward when he recognizes God's ownership and uses his property according to God's will. He is a poor steward when he fails or refuses to recognize God as creator and owner of all things.

The first condition of stewardship is therefore possession and control. This involves free moral will or agency -- or freedom to do with that property as the steward deems best. The second condition of stewardship is accountability. If God, the absolute owner, gave property to a steward and then went away, and never again checked up on the steward's use of that property, that would be a gift, not a loan, and man would be an owner and not a steward. A steward always knows that

some day, sooner or later, the master is going to return and demand an accounting for the use of his goods.

"It is required of the Lord at the hand of every steward, to render an account of his stewardship, both in time and in eternity." Many men who recognize somewhat reluctantly and fearfully that God will require an accounting in eternity, refuse or fail to give any accounting to God in time, in this life, now. This life is the time of our probation. We prove our worthiness to use eternity by the use we make of time. We prove our worthiness to receive the true riches by the use we make of the perishable riches of this earth. God will give eternal life -- its riches, its joys, and its greater opportunities -- only to those who have proved their worthiness by a wise stewardship by giving a voluntary accounting in time, as well as in eternity. The unfaithful steward, by waiting until eternity, proves that he would not give an accounting even then if he could evade it any longer.

"Let no man deceive himself that he shall not account for his stewardship unto me." (D.C. 118:4) Some accounting is automatic, and therefore inevitable. We are judged daily and hourly and sometimes instantly by every choice we make. Every action has its consequence which judges us. We are accountable whether we wish to be or not, for we cannot evade consequences. Spend all your spare time watching television instead of practicing your piano lesson, and you will give an accounting for your use of time and talent, for the consequences will automatically decree that you will never be a good piano player. Hate others, and you will be hated -- and that is an accounting of your stewardship of love. Use your wealth and property so as to cheat and oppress and enslave others, and your failures will account you a poor steward.

There is another way in which man should render his accounting in time. Our scripture lesson says "Organize yourselves, and appoint every man his stewardship, that every man may give an account unto me of the stewardship which is ap-

pointed unto him....." This organization was to be accomplished under the direction of the spiritual authority of the church, and management of stewardships of property is an ethical and moral problem. Those who recognize the authority of the church to render ethical and moral judgment, and who recognize the authority of priesthood ministry to represent God, will make their accounting for their stewardship to the church, through the ministry designated by the church as proper officers to oversee the organization of stewardships and the accounting for them.

It should be emphasized, however, that such accounting must be voluntary -- the result of the free moral will and free agency of its members. Unless it be so, obedience has no moral or ethical value. And furthermore, the church has no legal authority or moral right to use force in commanding obedience. That is the province of the state, not the church.

In this matter of accounting, we are also accountable to each other for the use we make of our stewardship. We owe a debt to the society of which we are a part. No man is self-sufficient. One man, alone and isolated on a desert island, could not produce for himself all the blessings and benefits of a modern civilization. He needs the help of many others with their many and varied talents and services. Therefore society has a stake in the use you and I make of the property which society has helped us acquire, and rightfully demands an accounting. We recognize that accountability every time we file an income tax return, or publish the financial statement of a bank or corporation.

All men are accountable as stewards -- to God and to each other -- in time and in eternity. We are free agents, given possession of untold material wealth and blessing that we might prove our worthiness or unworthiness to receive the riches of eternity. "Let no one deceive himself that he shall not account for his stewardship unto me," both in time and eternity.