

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

This sermon script is furnished with
the good wishes of the Reorganized Church
of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
World Headquarters: The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri

Program Number 214
Evan A. Fry, Radio Minister
All Rights Reserved

The Sermon: GOD'S PUNISHMENT

Scripture: Doctrine and Covenants 76:4 (portions)

(Jesus) saves all the works of his hands, except those sons of perdition who deny the Son after the Father has revealed him; wherefore he saves all except them; they shall go away into everlasting punishment, which is endless punishment, which is eternal punishment, to reign with the Devil and his angels in eternity, where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched, which is their torment; and the end thereof, neither the place thereof, nor their torment, no man knows, neither was it revealed, neither is, neither will be revealed unto man, except to them who are made partakers thereof: nevertheless, I, the Lord, show it by vision unto many; but straightway shut it up again; wherefore the end, the width, the height, the depth, the misery thereof, they understand not, neither any man except them who are ordained unto this condemnation.

Surely every man must repent or suffer, for I, God, am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless punishment.

In earlier days preachers used to vie with each other in depicting the horrible torments of hell -- the heat of the eternal fire and brimstone -- the wrath and vengeance of an angry God. Today the pendulum has swung the other way, and many people no longer believe in hell. Long ago people began to ask some practical and skeptical questions. Where does the fuel come from to maintain these perpetual fires? If the souls committed to hell are without bodies, there would be no nerves to feel the torment; if they are with physical bodies, the bodies would soon be consumed and the pains ended. Modern people argue that only a monster or an inhuman fiend of a God would decree endless physical torture for the souls he had created. It was this thought which led one of the leading infidels of a past generation to exclaim to a minister who was warning of fiery torments to come: "Your God is my devil."

Is hell merely a myth? Let us not be too hasty to conclude that it is, even though we may disagree with some of the ancient concepts of it. We cannot altogether ignore the fact that God is a God of justice, as well as a God of love. If there is no justice for the man who harms his neighbor, God has no love for the one the sinner has harmed. If God were not just, as well as loving, therefore, he would cease to be God. Justice demands punishment for violations of law, for sin, for disregarding the rights of others, for harm and injury inflicted up-

on others. If there is no punishment for sin, then the universe in which we live is not a universe of law, but of anarchy where men can do anything they please and get away with it. Make no mistake -- there is a hell; there is punishment for the sinner. "Every sinner must repent or suffer, for I, God, am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless punishment."

Punishment is of three kinds. First there is retaliatory or vindictive punishment. This is the kind by which the injured one attempts to get even, to have his revenge on the guilty, to make the sinner suffer and pray for what he has done. Its principal objective is to satisfy the feelings of the injured party. God, being the kind of person he is, does not inflict this kind of punishment. God never needs to retaliate. His punishment is never vindictive; for retaliatory or vindictive punishment only widens the breach between the estranged ones, and hardens already hard hearts.

The second kind of punishment is corrective punishment. It is designed to show the offender the enormity of his crime and to bring him to repentance. It is designed to teach him how to live without sin, on a higher, better, finer, nobler plane of life -- how to be a useful and profitable member of society. Such punishment may have to be harsh and restrictive, but it is always administered in love, kindness, calmness, and mercy,

not in wrath. The one who administers truly corrective punishment, because he loves, often suffers more than the one being punished. When the object of corrective punishment is achieved, punishment ceases. To carry it any further would change it into retaliatory or vindictive punishment.

A third kind of punishment might be called the punishment of consequences. That kind of punishment was in the mind of whoever first said "We are punished not for our sins, but by our sins." Consequences may sometimes be postponed, but they can never be evaded. They are inevitable. In the fable of the grasshopper and the ants, the grasshopper's punishment was to be without food when winter came. If we plant no seed, our punishment is to suffer the consequences of no harvest. If we plant tares instead of wheat, our punishment is to reap tares. If, like the foolish virgins in Christ's parable, you have no oil in your lamp at the bridegroom's coming, your punishment is a consequence; you can give no light to the wedding procession, and will be too late for the wedding feast. No possible forgiveness can change or mitigate the punishment of consequences; but true and timely repentance can make it a stepping stone to perfection.

Unrepentant, willful, rebellious continuing in sin is a rejection of Christ's atonement. If you reject the only thing that can save you, the consequence is that you cannot be saved; the consequence is that you become as if there had been no atonement made. The punishment that follows a rejection of Jesus is not vindictive, or even corrective, but is a punishment of consequences. What are those consequences?

The atonement of Christ was designed to be universal and infinite -- efficacious for every son and daughter of Adam. It was designed to overcome physical death by uniting spirit and body inseparably and eternally; and to overcome spiritual death (or separation from God) by restoring redeemed man to the presence and fellowship of God. Because of the atonement, every man who ever lived will come forth either in the first or the second resurrection, raised from mortality to immortality, with body and spirit inseparably connected so that there can be no more death -- for after the second resurrection death and hell (i.e. hades, the abode of the dead) shall be cast into the lake of fire and destroyed. In this resurrected state, every man will be brought back into God's presence for judgment.

When that happens, who will stay? Not the wicked who have refused to repent or to accept the atonement of Jesus Christ. As the wicked stand before God, and become acutely aware of God's glory, might, majesty, righteousness, power, and dominion -- his sinless perfection, by contrast they will become aware of their own guilt and shame and rebellion. They will stand convicted by their own conscience, without a single excuse or alibi, and in desperate haste to escape the brightness of God's glory, they will depart into outer darkness, carrying with them an awful sense of shame and guilt and remorse. But now it is too late! They must remain in outer darkness forever, suffering the punishment of consequences, with no hope of release by death, eternally separated from the God they rejected in the day of their probation, eternally reproaching themselves with thoughts of what might have been had they been willing to repent and accept Christ's atonement while they still had time. It is this state of spiritual death which is called in scripture the "second death," and its torments of remorseful conscience are likened to a lake of fire and brimstone which burns eternally and unquenchably in heart and mind and conscience. Mercy has no claim on such men. They suffer the just and irrevocable consequences of their own decisions.

Will this punishment ever end? There is no scriptural promise that it ever will. This life is the time of probation, of opportunity, of decision. God is endless, timeless, eternal. As long as he exists, his punishments will exist; therefore his punishment is called endless or eternal punishment; but it may not be endless for every individual. For example, as long as there are state governments and laws and penitentiaries, there will be punishment, which in a sense is perpetual or eternal; it continues for ever. But we do not sentence a man to the penitentiary for eternity.

God's punishment is eternal punishment. Whether his eternal punishment is ever remitted we do not know, for all God's judgments are not given unto man. But do not forget that there is no possible way to remit all the punishments of consequences. The harvest missed is gone forever. The wedding feast, once missed, will never be held again. The wealth and years wasted by prodigal sons in riotous living can never be reclaimed. The punishment of consequences is also God's punishment. It is just and righteous. It is eternal, unending, and inevitable; for even God's forgiveness cannot remit the eternal punishment of consequences.