

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: THE SPIRIT OF SPECULATION

Scripture: Doctrine and Covenants 56:5,6.

Woe unto you rich men, that will not give your substance to the poor, for your riches will canker your souls; and this shall be your lamentation in the day of visitation, and of judgment, and of indignation: The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and my soul is not saved! Woe unto you poor men, whose hearts are not broken, whose spirits are not contrite, and whose bellies are not satisfied, and whose hands are not stayed from laying hold upon other men's goods, whose eyes are full of greediness, who will not labor with their own hands. But blessed are the poor, who are pure in heart, whose hearts are broken, and whose spirits are contrite, for they shall see the Kingdom of God coming in power and great glory unto their deliverance.....

The spirit of speculation, the exhibition of greed for gain is unseemly, and should be avoided. It has the appearance of evil. (127:7)

The time in which we live may yet go down in history as the era of rising wages, easy money, easy credit, vast spending, inflated prices, quick paper profits, speculation, and something for nothing. It is the era of door prizes to encourage attendance, lotteries, bingo games, contests with fabulous prizes, give-away shows, government handouts, and "get yours while the getting is good." It is an era in which it seems that nearly everyone is waiting for the lucky break that will make him rich. A poll reported in the Christian Century for February 20, 1952, revealed that 45 per cent of the American public indulged in some form of gambling -- one of the most popular ways of trying to get rich quick without working. This is a crazy and a confused age in many ways. It is an age in which the spirit of speculation and greed for gain seems to be particularly prevalent.

There are two kinds of people who exhibit this spirit of speculation and greed for gain -- the rich, and the poor. When the rich man becomes possessed of this spirit, he can never acquire enough. He never gives away any of his money, or spends it to serve humanity or supply human need, but continues to pile up dollar after dollar in selfish unconcern about the needs of others. Our scripture reading contains a "woe" for that kind of rich man -- who will not give any of his substance to the poor. His riches will canker his soul, which will then be unworthy of salvation in God's kingdom, here or hereafter.

Poor men, too, become possessed with this spirit of speculation and greed for gain. When they do, they become covetous, unsatisfied, discontented. They do not see their all-too-frequent sins of laziness, improvidence, carelessness, and neglect. They begin to shout very loudly that it is sinful to be rich, that wealth should be shared. They try by every legal and extra-legal means to lay hold upon other men's goods without working for them. They don't always limit their larceny to seizing the goods of the rich man or "soaking the rich." They frequently bring pressure to bear on legislators for laws which will take money out of the pockets of men no richer than themselves and re-distribute it to pressure groups in the form of pork barrel appropriations, subsidies, or doles. There is a "woe" for this kind of poor men, too, who are never satisfied, and who live without work by laying hold on other men's goods.

We often hear a statement of the Apostle Paul mis-quoted to read, "Money is the root of all evil." It is not money, but the love of money, which is the root of all evil. Money is neither good nor bad in and of itself. It is good or bad according to the way it is used, and according to the motives in the one working for it and possessing it. When it is acquired with righteous motivation, honesty, and highest morality, money and wealth can be a blessing to the possessor and to all humanity. When acquired through extortion and immoral excess, and used sel-

fishly to satisfy one's own evil and covetous lusts, wealth can be a curse both to its possessor, and to all about him.

Money and wealth are both useful and necessary in the kingdom of God on earth. In that kingdom, human needs and wants still need to be supplied, and on an even more liberal and equitable scale than we have in today's world where nearly half of humanity goes to bed hungry every night. The kingdom of God needs the wealth of money, machinery, homes, factories, buildings, industries, mines, farms, forests, business institutions and corporations, oil wells, tools, implements, and many other things which when dedicated to the service of God and humanity can produce almost unlimited commodities, goods, and services for the satisfaction of human needs.

It is not necessarily wrong then for one with proper motivation and morality to make money, or even to get rich. Every worker is entitled to a living wage as high as he can get, if he returns services to the amount of the value received. Every investor is entitled to a fair return on his investment, always on condition that with his money he also invests his own labor, skill, talent, knowledge, wisdom, training, and experience, motivated by a desire to serve others and make it possible for them also to profit by a mutual interchange of goods and services. It is fair and right that the man who is willing to work harder and longer, to risk more, to study and train and prepare himself, should be entitled to a greater return for his effort. But it does not follow that the return is exclusively his, to be used solely for the gratification of his own lusts. As a steward under God even that which a man earns or honestly acquires belongs to God, and must be used for God's purposes, according to God's will.

Men always need to be on guard against the spirit of speculation and greed for gain. In the business of producing, creating, and earning wealth, motivation is all-important. If we seek money for its own sake, for the purpose of simply hoarding it, our motivation is all wrong. If we seek money and wealth because of the good and morally profitable things they can do for us, for those about us, and for God's kingdom on earth, then our seeking is good, and all our wealth will be consecrated to purposes that are primarily spiritual.

The spirit of speculation and greed urges men to use their wealth and strength

and skill primarily to get more wealth for the sake of self alone -- not as a means of serving or blessing others or helping them to earn and produce more -- and not as a means of establishing God's kingdom of righteousness, peace, equity, and plenty upon the earth. The spirit of speculation and greed sees in such basically good things as state and national governments, political parties, fraternal and service organizations, economic organizations, corporations, labor unions, and even in the church and kingdom of God, not a means of blessing men and supplying human needs, but only another possible opportunity to exploit someone else for the sake of easy money.

One very serious manifestation of the spirit of speculation and greed for gain is to be found in humanity's propensity for gambling. The aim of the gambler is always and completely selfish. He always hopes to gain what another loses. He assumes the right to take more out of society than he puts in, which is simply an easy and non-violent means of stealing. Gambling, whether it be the big time operations of organized hoodlums and racketeers, or the small time card game, bingo party, or office pool on a football game, gives wealth to the few who do not work for it, at the expense of the many who do. It makes of the winner a parasite, who contributes no goods or values, who creates no wealth, but lives on the toil of others.

It is unthinkable that one who recognizes God as the creator and owner of all wealth, and men as stewards over the wealth, should risk God's property on a game of chance where the odds are always hopelessly against him. It is one thing to calculate risks, lay careful plans, take every possible precaution, and still venture natural hazards for the sake of producing a return or rendering a necessary service. The farmer does this every time he plants a crop -- the business man every time he establishes a new business. But it is quite a different thing to risk God's money on the turn of a wheel or a card, in the hope of taking away from other people some of God's money over which they hold stewardship also.

Whether you be rich or poor, then, beware of the spirit of speculation and greed for gain. It is unseemly and should be avoided. Your attitude towards and the use you make of the material wealth of yourself and others is an excellent indication of your attitude towards God, and your worthiness or unworthiness before him.