

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: WILL ALL MEN BE SAVED?

Scripture: Book of Mormon, II Nephi 12:9-12.

There shall be many which shall say, Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us. And there shall also be many who shall say, Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God; he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this. And do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God. Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false, and vain, and foolish doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts, and shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; and their works shall be in the dark; and the blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them.

Woe unto him that has the law given; yea, that has all the commandments of God, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state!

There is a very old and popular and widespread notion that appeals to a lot of shallow thinkers, but which is completely erroneous. It is the idea that God is too kind, too loving, too merciful, to be very strict with a sinner, or to exclude that sinner from his kingdom. "Oh yes," say those who believe this doctrine; "God will punish us if we sin, but in his mercy he will beat us with just a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God."

In Book of Mormon times there was a teacher by the name of Nehor who taught this heresy. He taught that all mankind should be saved at the last day, that sinners need not fear nor tremble, but could lift up their heads and rejoice, because the Lord had created all men and had also redeemed all men, and in the end all would have eternal life. This Nehorian heresy continued through several generations, and deceived many, in spite of the efforts of the prophets to point out its fallacy and its error.

Perhaps the old idea of a fiery burning hell in which the bodies of the damned writhed in eternal torment did much to further this belief. It is difficult for men with even a minimum of mercy to conceive of a God who could be so monstrous as to punish men with unending physical torment just to satisfy his own vengeance, inasmuch as no good purpose could be served by such torment if there was no hope of reformation and release.

God is kind, loving, merciful, long-suffering, forgiving. But these attributes must of necessity be balanced and complemented by the attributes of justice if he is to continue to be a perfect God. For example, if I seriously injure you, cause you pain and suffering, or do you a great injustice, yet show no contrition, no repentance, make no apology, and make no restitution, but continue the same sort of conduct, what would you think of a God who in his mercy forgave me everything and allowed me to go on in the same way? There would be no justice for you in such mercy and forgiveness for me; and God must be just if he is to continue to be worthy of our worship as God.

Justice demands -- if not punishment -- at least consequences for violation of any God-given law. If God's laws may be broken with impunity, then neither God nor his laws are to be trusted.

God's punishments are not vindictive, but corrective. When their purposes are achieved, they cease. Consequences are different. Consequences are eternal. Every deed we do has its consequences, which are indelibly written into our personality. We shape our personality by the choices we make, by the deeds we do in the flesh. Mercy may remit punishment when the purposes of punishment are achieved; but even mercy cannot altogether cancel our consequences, or change character, once it is formed. The prodigal son, though forgiven and restored to his

father's house, had nevertheless lost his share of the family fortune, plus several years of his life, and neither could ever be restored, in time or eternity.

Men are to be finally judged according to the deeds done in the flesh. This life is the time of man's probation. The choices we make and the deeds we do during this life determine our character. Our character, in turn, determines what degree of God's light, power, glory, purity, splendor, and majesty we can tolerate and enjoy. If the glory of God is too much for the kind of person we are, we won't be able to stay in his presence.

The resurrection of the body is not going to change our personality or character. The same spirit which left the body at death will return to it in the resurrection. If that spirit was mean, petty, selfish, unforgiving, or cruel at death, it will be the same in the resurrection. Face this question honestly for a moment. Which of us could endure the glory of God's presence now, at this moment? None of us could stand before God or remain in his presence on our own merits; but if we have claimed the atonement and redemption of Christ, repented of our sins, been born of him, and received of the life of his Spirit, then there is no more guilt for sin, no more shame or regret. If we again stumble unwittingly into sin, we have an advocate with the Father who pleads our cause.

What if we have rejected this redemption, this atonement, this salvation, and have refused to repent? What if we continue to rebel, and refuse to obey God's laws of life? Those who reject Christ's saving power become as if there had been no atonement made, except that their bodies will be resurrected, body and spirit reunited, and brought before the bar of God for final judgment. There they must stand in their own worth, in their own strength alone, because they have rejected their Redeemer. Confronted with God's glory and perfection, they cannot help but be aware of their own unworthiness, their filthiness, their guilt. Since they have rejected the means of mercy, they cannot claim mercy. Since they have not repented, they cannot claim forgiveness. In guilt and shame, unable to abide God's glory and holiness and righteous perfection, they will shrink

from him into outer darkness, never to return. God does not have to sentence them to a never-ending hell; they sentence themselves. They reap the consequences of their own choices and their own deeds, and those consequences are irrevocable.

The torment endured through eternity by those who are lost and banished from God's presence is not the torment of literal fire and brimstone. It is the burning of a guilty conscience. The wicked cannot die, because they have been resurrected and become immortal. Therefore through the countless ages of eternity they will be tormented by self-recrimination, knowing what they might have been if they had chosen more wisely while there was yet time, remembering vividly all their sin and shame and guilt, but realizing too that it is everlastingly too late to become the kind of person who could enjoy the presence of God. They can hope for no release in death, no escape, no redemption, since they have rejected the only name by which redemption can come. This is the second death --the lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames ascend for ever and ever.

Will all men be saved? Not unless they choose to be in this life while they have opportunity. Not unless they repent of their sins, and seek God's forgiveness through the merits of their Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus does not save men IN their sins; he saves them FROM their sins. He does not save sinful men; he saves repentant men who are willing to make an effort to sin no more.

God does not condone sin in the least degree. If a man sins and repents, he may find forgiveness and go on to perfection; but if a man sins complacently, without repentance, without bothering to claim Jesus' redemption or without responding to the upward promptings of his Spirit, hoping that God will simply be too busy or too kind or too unconcerned to punish him by excluding him from the kingdom, he is due for a rude awakening and bitter disappointment. All men will not be saved. The inevitable and eternal consequence of wickedness is banishment from God into the eternal and unquenchable fires of remorse, regret, bitter memories, ceaseless self-recrimination, and guilt.