

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

World Headquarters: The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri

Program Number 238
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The Sermon: CURSED BE THE LAND

Scripture: Book of Mormon, II Nephi 1:6-15.

Notwithstanding our afflictions, we have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands; A land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children for ever; And also all those who should be led out of other countries, by the hand of the Lord. Wherefore, I, Lehi, prophesy according to the workings of the Spirit which is in me, that there shall none come unto this land, save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord. Wherefore, this land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring. And if it so be that they will serve him according to the commandments which he hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto them; Wherefore, they shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity: For if iniquity shall abound, cursed shall be the land for their sakes; But unto the righteous, it shall be blessed for ever.

Wherefore, this people shall keep my commandments, saith
the Lord of hosts, or cursed be the land for their sakes.

Every good thing which God has created, or which he has permitted men to create out of his materials, may be used in either of two ways -- for good or for evil -- according to physical, mental, moral, and spiritual law or in violation of law -- to bless men or to curse them. Things, in and of themselves, are neither good nor evil. It is the use that good or evil men make of them that makes them good or evil.

That which blesses and preserves when properly and righteously used in obedience to law can often become the means of death and destruction when used unwisely, wickedly, or in defiance of law. Fire can warm men's homes, supply power for industry, and dispose of trash and undesirable debris; or it can destroy life and property when used by a pyromaniac. Water is essential to life. It can give endless pleasure to the swimmer, the fisherman, and those who ride in ships; but it can also kill and destroy. Atomic power could usher in the golden age of man, but we may use it to destroy all life on our planet. Food is essential to good health and continued life, but men may eat unwisely to the point of producing illness, or may even dig their own graves with their teeth.

The earth is good, not evil. The

curse pronounced upon the soil after man's expulsion from Eden was not simply a whimsical or petulant outburst from an angry God who had lost his temper. It was simply a statement of cause and effect. Fallen, sinful man would inevitably use the good earth in such unwise and unrighteous ways that it would bring forth thorns and briars rather than good fruits.

Most, if not all of our trouble, sorrow, misery, and suffering in this world is the result of using good things in bad ways -- sometimes through ignorance, sometimes through deliberate and willful rebellion. When we use good things in bad ways, they become a curse instead of a blessing. The greater the potentialities for good inherent in a person or thing, the greater the potentialities for evil as well. A gun in the hands of a righteous man is much more useful than a slingshot in protecting men from wild beasts or criminals; but if you had to meet a gangster, a murderer, or a bank bandit, would you rather have him armed with a gun or with a slingshot? The potentialities for evil would be immeasurably increased by the gun.

In the sermon immediately preceding this, we pointed out that America is a land choice above all other lands -- that it possesses greater natural resources

and richer blessings than any other territory on the globe. Rightly used, those blessings will keep us the richest, happiest, and most powerful nation under heaven, free from slavery and from bondage, and from all other nations under heaven. On the other hand, a wrong use of these abundant blessings will bring inevitable consequences that will curse and destroy us -- individually and nationally -- much more quickly and effectively than lesser blessings could do. Unto whom much is given, from him is much required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation.

The Book of Mormon warns again and again of the sore cursing that shall come upon this land and its people if they do not serve God, obey his laws and commandments, and work the works of righteousness by using their rich heritage in godly ways. Jacob, in condemning polygamy, concubinage, and whoredoms, says: "This people shall keep my commandments, saith the Lord of hosts, or cursed be the land for their sakes." Alma, another Book of Mormon prophet writes: "Cursed shall be the land, yea, this land, unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, unto destruction, which do wickedly, when they are fully ripe....." Two thousand years before Christ the prophet Ether wrote that whatsoever nation should possess this land should serve God, or be swept off.

Consequences are sometimes immediate, sometimes delayed, but always inevitable. We always reap what we sow -- but not until it is ripe. God often delays judgment in mercy, giving men time to repent. Always he waits patiently, hoping that men will repent before they are fully ripened in iniquity. Never does he strike in blind wrath or petulant anger; but once a people or a nation is fully ripened in iniquity, the consequences of their wrong choices and their sin, the consequences of their prostitution of God's good gifts will destroy them. Man cannot postpone or evade this process any more than a thistle can prevent its seeds from being blown away when they are ripe, or any more than an apple can keep itself from falling off the tree when it is fully ripe. God has warned the people of America specifically through Book of Mormon prophets that in the day when they are fully ripe in iniquity, they shall perish.

The Book of Mormon also teaches us a

historical lesson as to the truthfulness of such warnings, and the inevitability of such consequences and such cursing when people continue in wickedness. Twice in the ancient history of this continent, before the coming of Columbus, great nations and civilizations were destroyed because they failed to heed this warning and repent in time. They were destroyed, not by any foreign aggressor, but from within, by their own wickedness and iniquity, by fratricidal war, lawlessness, anarchy, and wicked ambition and pride. It can happen here; it has happened here twice already; it can happen again, even to a nation as rich and proud and powerful as our own beloved United States, for God's warning is plain and sure -- serve God or be cursed and swept off when you are ripened in iniquity.

"If iniquity shall abound, cursed shall be the land for their sakes..." The pagan concept of a curse is a calling upon some sort of demon, spirit, or deity to work harm or injury upon a man simply because you hate him. No man has the right or the power to enlist God's help in paying off a personal grudge; no man has power to curse another man in this pagan sense. Men are cursed by the consequences of their own folly and wickedness. Every man that is cursed brings upon himself his own condemnation. Cursing comes upon an individual, upon a land, or upon a people, because of their wickedness and abominations -- as a natural result -- not because someone in a fit of anger speaks certain magic words.

Jesus pronounced many beatitudes, or blessings upon the righteous, and occasionally a cursing; but he never blessed or cursed a man or a nation whimsically, arbitrarily, irresponsibly, or on the sole basis of his personal likes and dislikes. Jesus used blessings and cursings simply as authoritative declarations of the eternal connection between right doing and happiness, and wrong doing and misery. God never curses without cause, or for light and inconsequential reasons. His reign and his law are universal; there is no possible chance of escaping the consequences if we defy his omnipotence and disobey his universal laws. We shall therefore do well to heed his warning that to the wicked, the land of America -- a land choice above all other lands -- shall be cursed forever; and to claim his promise that unto the righteous it shall be blessed forever.