

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: ALWAYS IN DEBT TO GOD

Scripture: Book of Mormon, Mosiah 1:53-59.

Now I say unto you, that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day by lending you breath that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another; I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole soul, yet ye would be unprofitable servants. And behold, all that he requires of you, is to keep his commandments; and he has promised you that if ye would keep his commandments, ye should prosper in the land; And he doth never vary from that which he hath said; therefore, if ye do keep his commandments, he doth bless you, and prosper you. And now, in the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted to him. And secondly; he doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you, which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, for ever and ever; therefore of what have ye to boast?

Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

How much does God owe you? How much do you owe him? You can partially answer those two related questions by trying this experiment. Take two sheets of paper. Use one for debit items, and one for credit items, as you would the two sides of an old fashioned ledger if you were keeping books.

What has God done for you which needs to be entered on his side of the ledger? On one sheet of paper set down everything that you can think of which God has given to you, or done for you. You may need more than one page for this before you have finished. He created the universe in which you dwell, the world on which you live, the sun, moon, stars, and planets, the forces and laws by which they are governed. He created the atmosphere for you to breathe, with just the right proportions of oxygen, hydrogen, and nitrogen. He created the water, the soil, all the minerals, the coal, the oil. He created plants, trees, birds and animals. He created the life that is in us, and gave it to us. He sustains that life from moment to moment and from day to day with the things his wisdom planned and created millions of years ago, to supply our needs, today.

As if this were not enough to put us forever in God's debt, we have all sinned, and placed ourselves more than ever in his debt by ruthlessly appropriating and heedlessly misapplying to our selfish -- and sometimes immoral and criminal pur-

poses, many of the good gifts which he has supplied. We have made ourselves unworthy to receive his blessings -- much less to demand anything from him by way of obligation.

Now let us turn to the other side of the ledger, and continue our bookkeeping operation. What have we given to God? We have given him a little of our service when it did not interfere with our other plans -- but he gave us our life. We have given him a little of our time, when we had some to spare, but he offers us eternity with himself. We have offered him a few gifts of money, of tithes and offerings, of material things which are his anyway and merely loaned to us for the duration of this life, but he has given us the world and all things therein. We have given him a little love, but his love for us began before time, and will extend through all eternity -- and that love prompted the greatest and most generous gift of all time -- the gift of his Son.

Put down any other entries you can think of on either side of the ledger, and then balance your books. Total up each side of the ledger, and see who owes whom. How does your ledger stand? I know how mine stands, and I am quite certain that your ledger is not significantly different from mine. All of us owe an overwhelming debt to God, a debt that is quite unpayable.

If God were only a ruthlessly efficient business man, demanding that every investment and every transaction show a profit, keeping books inexorably according to strict rules of profit and loss, then he would long ago have written off the whole human race as a worthless and unprofitable investment. And what does a good business man do with a hopelessly unprofitable investment? He closes the books on it; he salvages what he can, and liquidates the rest at whatever price he can. Have you ever wondered why God doesn't liquidate the whole human race?

From the angle of strict bookkeeping alone, there can be no doubt about it -- we are all unprofitable servants. We are not worth our salt to God. We have never shown much of a return on his huge investment, and we never can and never will, because he has invested vastly more in us than we can ever repay. We are all beggars, dependent on his love, his mercy, his bounty, his charity, to keep us alive from day to day.

God does not ask us to pay this debt. He realizes that it is impossible, and he does not expect the impossible. All he asks of us in return for all that he has done for us and given to us, is that we love him, serve him, and obey him. But if we do this, he immediately blesses us with an increase of his bounty -- and we are more in his debt than ever! No wonder King Benjamin, who is the source of our scripture quoted from the Book of Mormon, said that "ye are still indebted to him, and are, and will be, for ever and ever."

There are certain theological and philosophical truths growing out of this fact. One of the most important is that salvation is of grace, not of debt -- of love, not of obligation. No man can total up the two sides of his ledger and come to God demanding salvation as his right, or as a debt God owes to him. No man, not even if he lived for ten thousand times ten thousand years on this earth, and served God day and night for all that time, could pile up enough merits, or enough credits, so that God would be in his debt. No man can render enough service to God to make his life profitable if the worth of that life is considered on a cold, calculating, practical, bookkeeping basis. God never owes us. We always owe him.

God cancels the debt of our sin (for those who will receive this grace)

through the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ. Those who will repent of their sins, accept him as Savior, and serve him with might, mind, and strength, will never be charged with this debt. It is cancelled, paid, written off the books, forgotten. Yet human nature is a funny thing. Sometimes we are so embarrassed by the generosity or kindness of those who have given or loaned us money, that instead of being grateful to them we are a little resentful of the fact that they have done something which we cannot repay -- that we cannot return the favor -- that though the debt is cancelled, we are still under moral obligation. Then, instead of loving and cultivating the companionship of the one who has done us so great a favor, we ignore, avoid, or even spurn him.

Yet reason and gratitude demand that we recognize our moral obligation to the one who has cancelled and paid this great debt, by returning our love, our appreciation, our obedience, our service, to the Christ who has set us free because of his love and his grace. He did not come to put us under obligation to him, but to set us free from all obligation. He does not demand our allegiance, our love, and our loyalty as his right, even though it is his right, and we do owe them to him. He leaves us free to choose whether to serve him or not. And if we do choose to serve and love and obey him, his blessings of peace and joy are increased many fold, so that we are still in his debt.

Sometimes in the course of bookkeeping procedure certain assets appear which have great value, but a value which cannot be measured in dollars and cents. Such assets are often carried on the books at the token value of \$1.00. In real estate transactions, payment is often legally represented as "One dollar and other valuable consideration." God sets no monetary value on his gifts of life, earth, water, air, and natural resources, or on the gift of his Son. He does not even set a bookkeeping value on them. All he asks is that we use them in ways pleasing to him and in keeping with his laws, so that we may find peace instead of strife, fruition instead of frustration, and happiness instead of misery and woe. He will never attempt to collect that debt. The only "other valuable consideration" he asks from those who are eternally in his debt is our love, loyalty, and obedience to him, and our fellowship with him.