

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: THE ROD OF IRON -- GOD'S WORD

Scripture: I Nephi 2:62-69, with omissions.

And I beheld a rod of iron; and it extended along the bank of the river, and led to the tree by which I stood. And I also beheld a straight and narrow path, which came along by the rod of iron, even to the tree by which I stood;... And I saw numberless concourses of people, many of whom were pressing forward, that they might obtain the path which led unto the tree by which I stood. And it came to pass that they did come forth and commence in the path which led to the tree. And it came to pass that there arose a mist of darkness;.... insomuch that they who had commenced to the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost. And it came to pass that I beheld others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; And they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree.

I beheld that the rod of iron was the word of God, which led to the fountain of living waters, and to the tree of life.

If you should begin to associate with a group of Latter Day Saints, especially in their prayer meetings, the chances are that it would not be long before you would hear someone saying that he wanted to "hold fast to the rod of iron." This expression has become one of the favorite sayings of our people. It is derived from the Book of Mormon account of a vision by Lehi, the patriarch and leader of a colony which migrated from Palestine to America in 600 B.C.

In this vision, Lehi found himself wandering through a dark and dreary waste. He was joined by a personage in a white robe -- an angel of God, and together they wandered for another long time until Lehi was constrained to pray for deliverance. After he had prayed, he beheld a large and spacious field, and in the field a tree whose fruit was desirable to make one happy. He partook of the fruit, and found it white, and sweet, and a joy to eat. Then, because the fruit was desirable above all other fruit, he began to wish that his family could also partake of it. He looked about, and saw his wife and sons standing near the head of a river of water which ran through a gulf near the tree from which he had eaten. He called and beckoned to them to join him. His wife and two of his sons did; but two other sons refused.

Along the river's edge Lehi saw a rod of iron -- a sort of handrail that

led to the tree by which he stood. Then he noticed that the rod of iron marked a path that led along the bank of the river to the tree, and that the rod of iron extended for some distance into the field, seemingly to guide people to the path and then to guard them against falling into the dark and filthy waters of the river. He saw numberless concourses of people in the field who seemed to be seeking the path. Many of them did press forward, and did find the path that led to the tree; but a great mist of darkness arose and blinded some so that they became confused. They strayed from the path and lost their way. Others who were pressing forward caught hold of the rod of iron and held fast to it as they walked the path, until they came to the tree and partook of its fruit. Then Lehi noticed that even some of those who had reached the tree became confused and ashamed as they ate of the fruit, because on the opposite side of the river there was a great and lofty building filled with all kinds of richly dressed people, who stood scoffing, ridiculing, and mocking those who ate of the tree's fruit. Some who had already partaken of the fruit drifted away into dangerous and forbidden paths as a result of this mockery, and were lost. Others continued steadfast and immovable, holding fast to the rod of iron.

Lehi also saw other great crowds on the opposite side of the river, moving towards the great and spacious building,

but because they had no rod of iron and no path, many fell into the river and were drowned; and many wandered and were lost on strange roads, while a great multitude entered into the large and spacious building and joined in mocking those who were partaking of the precious fruit.

The interpretation of this vision is so simple as to be almost obvious. The field is the world. The river of filthy water is wickedness and sin. It flows through a gulf that divides the wicked from the righteous -- the gulf of hell. The mists and darkness that arise from the gulf are the temptations of the devil, which blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men, and lead them away in confusion, into broad roads where they perish and are lost. The tree is the tree of life, and its fruit represents the love of God which is pure and sweet and desirable above all other things. The large and spacious building filled with mocking people represents the vanity and pride of the world. And the rod of iron represents the word of God which leads men safely to the tree of life through the mists and darkness of temptation, if they will but hold fast to it.

Life is a complicated process. Very often it seems that we are wandering through a dark and dreary waste, with no path for our feet and no light for our eyes. The way that leads to God seems sometimes hard to find. Decisions are hard and difficult to make. Temptations, like mists of darkness, often cloud our vision, obscure the path, and entice us into ways that seem good, but which end in failure, loss, and death. And yet finding and walking the path that leads to God is so simple that even a child can do it! All one has to do is to find the rod of iron, and then hold fast to it; for it is placed to protect those who want to keep the path, but who cannot always see it through the mists and darkness of temptation, doubt, fear, persecution, and discouragement. When you cannot see the way, hold fast to the rod of iron, and you will never go astray or be lost.

The rod of iron is God's word -- the

written constitutional law of his kingdom. By that law all men will be judged; by that law Jesus will reign in glory after his second advent. By that law men must live, if they would be citizens of God's kingdom, and partake of his life and his love. Jesus knew God's word. He had studied and mastered the scriptures. When Satan tempted him in the wilderness, he met every temptation with the words. "It is written," followed by the scripture which proved Satan's error and duplicity. If we would be safe as we travel the pathway to eternal life, we too need to study the word of God, to be familiar with its content, its interpretation, its meaning. We need to know not only God's laws and commandments, but his promises, and the conditions of those promises, so that in any time of emergency or stress or temptation we too may reply, "It is written," and then shape our lives, make our decisions, and guide our steps by the things contained in God's word.

We must hold fast to the rod of iron! If we once permit indifference, or the taunts of men to persuade us to let go, even for a brief moment, with every intention of coming straight back, the mists of darkness may close in so quickly and so thickly that we may be unable to find that rod of iron again. Hold fast to the rod of iron!

There are still many who have not yet found the rod of iron, and who need to be told about it. There are some who refuse to grasp it or to follow where it leads. There are some who grasp it, follow it for a time, and then let go. Those who have found the safety and security of this guide, and who have partaken of the tree of life, have a responsibility to all these. They have a responsibility for pointing lost and straying ones to the path, and to the rod of iron that marks and safeguards it. Some will heed the invitation; some will not; but it is still the responsibility of those who have tasted of the love of God to make every effort to share that love with others, to encourage and strengthen those who may be faltering or straying, and to guard themselves against becoming castaways by holding fast to the rod of iron, faithfully, tenaciously, unswervingly, to the end.