

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: SAY NOTHING BUT REPENTANCE UNTO THIS GENERATION

Scripture: Doctrine and Covenants, Sec. 18, Par. 2, g-k.

I command you to repent - repent - lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore -- how sore you know not! how exquisite you know not! yea, how hard to bear ye know not! For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer, if they would repent; but if they would not repent, they must suffer even as I; which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit, and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink; nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men; wherefore, I command you again to repent, lest I humble you by my almighty power, and that you confess your sins, lest you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken.

Say nothing but repentance unto this generation.

Are you the same person you were yesterday? If you are, then you ought to be ashamed of yourself -- unless, of course, you were perfect yesterday. If you were not perfect yesterday, you should have made some change in yourself, however slight, in the last twenty-four hours. You should have seen something in your character and personality which needed to be changed and corrected; you should have repented, made the change, and become a different person in at least that one particular.

Who needs to repent? Everybody needs to repent. But those who need to repent may be divided into two general classes. First, there are those who need to make a major decision -- to reverse the entire direction and purpose and objective of their lives. They need to surrender to God, to lay down their arms, to cease their rebellion, to accept and obey Christ, to be born again into his Spirit. With this major decision made, with the direction of their lives changed, with allegiances transferred, they are new creatures, but all is not yet done.

The second class of people who need to repent are those who have made this major, governing decision, and who have been born again. They now need to continue their repentance daily -- perhaps hourly, as long as life continues on earth. Having seen Christ in all his perfection, and sworn allegiance to him -- having compared themselves and what they

are with what they ought to be, they will see many things of which they need to repent if they are ever to arrive at perfection. As they take each step towards perfection, as they make each new adjustment, as they make each addition to or subtraction from their total nature by this continuing process of repentance, they will continually gain a new insight and a new perspective which will enable them to see still other faults and shortcomings that should be the next objects of their repentance.

One of the most dangerous attitudes into which a Christian can fall is the attitude that one repentance makes him perfect for all time because Christ has forgiven his past sins. He is like the doctor in a recent best selling novel. Someone remarked that this doctor had had thirty years' experience. "No," replied another, "not thirty years' experience, but one year's experience repeated thirty times." He had been repeating his old mistakes for thirty years. Because he had a diploma certifying that he had arrived, and could write M.D. after his name, he had been satisfied with his ignorance and inadequacies for thirty years.

We conclude then that everybody, saint and sinner alike, needs to repent. Repentance is a continuing process. Acceptance of Christ and the new birth are the beginning of repentance, not the end. The man who has been born again cannot continue in sin. Because his spirit, his

attitude, his nature are now different, he will no longer willfully, carelessly, or rebelliously do the things he knows he should not do. He will be dissatisfied with his ignorance and inadequacy; he may still make mistakes. He may fall short of the goals which he has set for himself. When he finds himself in the wrong, the "right spirit" within him will lead him to a new repentance and a new forgiveness, through the continuing pardoning grace of Jesus Christ.

Until we reach perfection, then, even the born again Christian needs to repent every day. John, the Beloved Disciple, was writing to his "brethren in the faith" when he said: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

There are certain well-defined steps in repentance, whether it be the repentance of the sinner or the saint. First, there must be godly sorrow for sin. Paul contrasts this godly sorrow with worldly sorrow. Worldly sorrow is sorrow at getting caught, sorrow that one can no longer enjoy the pleasures of sin, sorrow that one must now pay the penalty for sin. Godly sorrow is an acceptance of sin in its true guise. It is a recognition of the anguish that sin has caused to God, and the injury which it has caused to other men. It is an acknowledgment of the rebellion and selfishness out of which the sin has grown. It involves a complete acceptance of the responsibility for sin, with no flimsy excuses or alibis or attempts to shift to another the blame for one's decisions.

Repentance involves next a complete change of attitude. Someone has said that repentance is making a U-turn. Things you once loved, you now hate. Things you once hated, you now love. Your allegiance has shifted; the center of your life has shifted from self to God. You turn completely away from the old sins. "By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins; behold, he will confess them and forsake them."

Repentance next involves restitution, whenever restitution is possible. Zacchaeus, when he felt conviction of sin, said, "If I have taken any thing from any man by unjust means, I restore fourfold." If one is guilty of the sin of theft, repentance will obligate the sinner to restore what he has taken. If one has

slandered another, repentance will require that he do all he can to recall and correct the slander. If the nature of the sin makes complete restitution impossible, the obligation of the sinner is still to seek reconciliation and forgiveness from the one injured or offended. He has no right to ask for God's forgiveness until he has asked for the forgiveness of the one he has wronged.

It is not enough simply to forsake evil. Repentance is both a ceasing to do evil, and a learning to do well. The place left empty when evil habits are cast out must be filled with good, or seven evil spirits will come to fill the place left empty by the one which was cast out.

The last step in repentance is seeking the forgiveness of God, who is always ready and eager to forgive, but who cannot forgive an unrepentant man lest he be encouraged to continue forever in his sin. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Repentance is following the light given. God's Spirit strives with men, urging them to repentance, giving them sufficient light to see the sins of which they need to repent. "He that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven; and he that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received, for my Spirit shall not always strive with man, saith the Lord of Hosts."

The voice of the Lord to the church through the nineteenth century prophet, Joseph Smith, was: "Say nothing but repentance unto this generation." At first thought it seems like a strange and unbalanced statement. It would indeed be, if repentance consisted only in ceasing to do evil. It consists also in learning to do well; and the process of learning to do well may be extended indefinitely. Certainly it continues through all this earthly lifetime. Therefore anything which teaches men to achieve a new or better or higher or more fruitful way of life is a teaching of repentance. Men need to repent not only of their sins of commission, but of their sins of omission, of their ignorance, their apathy, their indifference, their neglect of duty, their lack of training and skill, their lack of spiritual power. As long as these sins continue among people who have named the name of Christ, the instruction will still be timely and appropriate, that we should say nothing but repentance unto this generation.