

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

This sermon script is furnished with
the good wishes of the Reorganized Church
of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

World Headquarters: The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri

Program Number 188
Evan A. Fry, Radio Minister
All Rights Reserved

The Sermon: MEN ARE AGENTS UNTO THEMSELVES

Scripture: Doctrine and Covenants 58:6c,d,e,f.

Behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things, for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward. Verily I say unto you, Men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; for the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good, they shall in no wise lose their reward. But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned.

Behold ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge, and he hath made you free.

There is an old proverb which says, "The Lord helps those who help themselves." Faith is a splendid and necessary thing. We all need more of it. We all need to trust in God, to let faith banish fear and anxiety and worry. There are times when we have done all that we can do when it is not only proper to "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him," but when that is absolutely the only thing left to do. But this verse from the 37th Psalm can hardly be used as an excuse for apathy, inertia, indecision, or the sort of lazy abandon which expects God to do everything, to make all the decisions, to fight all the battles, to do all the work. An earlier verse in the same Psalm says: "Trust in the Lord, and do good." Faith without works is dead. Trusting in the Lord is good, but unless you also "do good" your faith will not be rewarded.

There is also an old Quaker proverb which says, "When you pray, move your feet." He who prays for guidance must already be in motion. No one can steer a ship that has lost its motive power and is drifting helplessly before wind and tide." No one can steer a car parked at the curb. God cannot guide a man sitting still waiting to be set in motion. But if the vessel gets under way, or the auto moves out from the curb, or the idle man moves his feet, they can be guided.

One reason why God gave agency to man was in order that he might show by the actions of his own choosing what kind

of man he is, and what kind of kingdom he is worthy to receive in eternity. Our scripture reading says: "Men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness." A good man does good things on his own initiative, by exercising his own agency. A bad man does bad things for the same reason. The doing of good or evil things is what makes men good or bad. The man who does nothing may not be bad; he may even be "good" in the negative sense of doing nothing bad, but he is good for nothing. The good-for-nothing man waits for God's specific commandment and compulsion, while the really good man moves out on his own initiative to accomplish that which he knows needs to be done.

Another phrase from our scripture says "It is not meet that I should command in all things." Those who have been born again and enlivened by his Spirit know the mind and will and purpose of God. They know the need. They know the facilities and resources which he has supplied to their hands. They know their capacity, their resources, their capacities with the need, and proceed on their own initiative to do what God would have done. Men are free to choose what they will do. "The power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves." Salvation is of God, but man must choose to accept that salvation, and then to work out that salvation by good works in his own life. The atonement of Christ has made men free -- free to choose -- so that when they work

good, good shall be restored unto them, and when they work evil, evil shall be restored unto them. Every man is responsible then for his own achievements, or his lack of them.

"He that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward." When a man is compelled to do what he ought to do of his own free will and volition, he deserves no reward. The responsibility for his good actions lies rather with the one who compelled him. "Where there is no free agency, there can be no morality." There is no moral credit, no commendation, no reward due to a man who does good because he is compelled.

"He that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned," says the scripture. He is damned not because God is angry or vengeful or vindictive, but because that is the way the laws of life operate. If you don't plant corn or beans or potatoes, you don't harvest corn or beans or potatoes, and you starve. If you don't study, you remain ignorant, and your lack of knowledge may destroy you. If you don't practice, you remain unskilled, and are condemned to a lifetime of unskilled performance. If you never propose to a girl and take the responsibility for a family, you are automatically condemned to a life devoid of the joys and satisfactions of family relationships. If you do not pray, or cultivate the presence and friendship of God, you will never know God, and that in itself is punishment for your neglect. Men are damned by their lack of the good they might have had if they had chosen -- not by the wrath of a jealous God.

Men who have their agency, but who are not always certain they have made the best choices, always have the privilege of consulting with others who also exercise their agency. In a multitude of counsel there is wisdom. Another phrase which shortly precedes the scripture we have read commands certain men to do certain things, "as they shall counsel between themselves and me." They were to work out the detailed methods between themselves, in a spirit of prayer. When we are deciding what to do and how to do it, we should avail ourselves of all the expert advice there is available, making

sure that it comes from godly men who have the same faith, the same hopes, the same ideals and aspirations as ourselves. As men counsel with each other, they should also counsel with God. They should pray over their problems and decisions -- individually and collectively. When conclusions are reached, they should be checked by the revelation which has already come to others, and included in the Scriptures. The man of initiative will often need to counsel with God and with his fellow man, but he doesn't wait for a detailed blue-print from heaven to direct his every move.

A good illustration of the proper use of man's initiative and agency under God's guidance is to be found in the story of Israel's wandering after Sinai, in the 9th and 10th chapters of Numbers. The pillar of cloud directed them. When it hovered over the tabernacle, they stayed. When it was taken up in the morning, they journeyed. At the command of the Lord they moved or rested. But this was not a purely automatic process, requiring no thought or initiative. Numbers 9:23 says: "At the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses," they moved or stayed. Moses, through his prophetic leadership, and by exercising some degree of his own judgment, ordered and directed the journey.

More than that, Moses needed human help as well as the help of God. Moses' brother-in-law was a Midianite named Hobab. When Hobab decided to return to his own country and kindred rather than to go with Israel, Moses dissuaded him with these words: "Leave us not, I pray thee, forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes." Hobab was a good desert guide and scout. He knew the territory through which they would pass -- the camping and grazing grounds -- the water sources. Israel needed Hobab just as much, perhaps, as they needed Moses, or God; for God always has insisted that "it is not meet that I should command in all things," and has left many of life's decisions to men who have their agency and who do not need to be commanded or compelled to engage in a good cause and bring to pass much righteousness. "Behold ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves." And by the acts committed under your own initiative, you demonstrate your worthiness to receive an eternal reward.