

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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Evan A. Fry, Radio Minister
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The Sermon: YE ARE FREE TO ACT FOR YOURSELVES

Scripture: Book of Mormon, Helaman 5:85, 86.

And now remember, remember my brethren, that whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself, and whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself; for 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; He hath given unto you that ye might know good from evil, and he hath given unto you that ye might choose life or death, and ye can do good and be restored unto that which is good, or have that which is good restored unto you; or ye can do evil, and have that which is evil restored unto you.

Therefore cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves; to choose the way of everlasting death, or the way of eternal life.

Freedom is one of man's most cherished possessions. Without it, all other things are insignificant and meaningless. Wealth can purchase a lot of happiness and pleasure, but what good is wealth if you are not free to use it as you wish? What good is a fine car, if you are forbidden to travel in it -- if you are not free to go and come as you please, where you please, and when you please? What good is a library of fine books, if you are forbidden to read them, or to believe what they teach? What good is a trade or a profession if you are not free to practice it where, when, and as you choose? What good is your religion, if you are not free to practice the system of worship which you choose? What good is life itself, if you are not free?

In the processes of creation, God made some things to act, and other things to be acted upon. Wherever there is life there is intelligence -- sometimes of a very low order that can hardly be differentiated from what we call instinct. Have you ever watched a tiny one-celled amoeba under a microscope? He looks like a small blob of jelly with a dark spot in the center. The amoeba is just about the simplest form of animal life, and yet with his one cell he presumably can make some choices. He can choose to move or stay where he is. He can choose one microscopic bit of food, and reject another. He is severely limited by his physical structure and by his environment, but within those limits he is free to make certain choices with what little intelligence he has; for

intelligence always brings with it not only the right to choose, but also the capacity for choice. "All truth is independent (i.e. has the right of some degree of choice) in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also, otherwise there is no existence." (D.C. 90:5)

Man, at the upper end of the scale of God's creation on this earth, also has his agency -- his right to choose for himself within the limitations of the environment in which he is placed. Such freedom is not accidental. It is a planned-for and jealously guarded gift of God. In the scriptures there is a fragmentary story of a war fought in heaven before the world was made -- a war in which Lucifer and one third of the hosts of heaven were cast out to become Satan and his angels. Do you know what caused that war? Some of the scriptures revealed by Joseph Smith tell us that the issue was man's freedom or agency.

Knowing that man would fall, God was considering the means to plan for his salvation. Lucifer offered to come to earth as savior and compel all men to accept salvation so that not one should be lost; but he demanded as a reward for this service a part of God's own glory and honor. God rejected this plan of compulsion, and chose instead to send Jesus, who proposed to draw all men unto himself by love and persuasion, but to leave them free to make their own choice. Jesus did not ask for God's glory, and demanded no reward

except the love of men, freely given.

Cast out of heaven because of his rebellion at this decision, Lucifer made another attempt to deprive all men of their agency by enticing Adam and Eve to sin and fall. The fall brought them and all their posterity under the bondage of death. No possible choice could avert that death, for the consequences of the fall were universal. No possible choice could resume mankind from the bondage of that death unless God intervened, for death made every man a captive of Satan forever and ever, whether he chose good or evil, unless God could do something to restore the possibility of right choice, and to make that choice meaningful by restoring the possibility of life.

God did do something. From the foundation of the world he provided that his Son should come as Savior. Christ rose from the dead; he offers the power of his resurrection to any man who will choose to obey God rather than Satan. Agency is again made operative and effective, because through Christ all men from Adam to the end of the world have an alternative to death, and may freely choose to have life with Christ, or death with Satan. So important is man's freedom that the sacrificial gift of God's Son was offered to restore that freedom to the human race which had lost it.

Can you imagine a world in which there was no choice? Would you like to live in a society where every move was prescribed by law, every act dictated, every thought imposed from without by the force of authority? It would be a very drab, dull, and colorless, as well as an intolerable existence, wouldn't it? But more than that, in a society where there were ten policemen for every citizen, watching him around the clock, enforcing a multiplicity of laws that made every manifestations of individuality illegal, would there be any really good men? There might be a lot of men who never did anything bad, but would they be good? There is no moral worth in the life that is forced into a perfect but unwilling conformity.

Because all men should rightfully be held responsible for their own choices, and not for the choices of another, God

looks with disfavor upon any kind of human slavery or bondage which takes away the right of choice and substitutes the imposition of force from another -- be he master, king, dictator, priest, or what not. God made man a free agent. He wants man to be free to choose for himself. Therefore it is not right that one man should be in bondage to another, whether that bondage be political, social, religious, or economic. Anything that robs any man of his right or his ability to choose is foreign to the purposes and the nature of God, and is a denial of the whole mission of Christ, who died and rose again to set men free from death, the greatest bondage of all.

Behold, ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves. Each choice we make increases our knowledge and strengthens our character. Sometimes we make wrong choices, and like Adam and Eve find that the results are painful rather than pleasant. But even wrong choices can increase our store of knowledge, and help us to know how to make future choices. And right choices, oft repeated increase our knowledge of how to cooperate with God and with the natural laws of our universe. They put us in tune with God, and give us special claim on the Spirit of God which teaches us all truth. As we learn new truth, new and unexplored fields of choice are opened to us, enabling us to choose again and again, until the repetition of wise and righteous choice has built us a Christ-like character.

Are freedom and free moral will or agency important? God himself exercises agency. God is not righteous, kind, loving, just, or holy because some higher power is forcing him to be. There is no higher power than God; and God is good because he wants to be, because he wills to be, because he freely chooses to be in every act. He wants men in his kingdom who are good for the same reason -- because they want to be and choose to be. He never uses force, save to act in judgment upon the wicked who have chosen to be wicked. He has no use in his kingdom for captive slaves who cannot or dare not rebel. He wants his subjects to be free. Man was made to act, and not to be acted upon. Ye are free to choose for yourselves, and to receive the consequences of your choices, whether it be eternal death, or eternal life.