

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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Evan A. Fry, Radio Minister
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The Sermon: THEY SHALL GATHER HIS ELECT

Scripture: Matthew 13:24-30

The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

The time of Christ's second coming is to be a time of gathering. Before he can come, there must be a people gathered out who will be prepared and ready to receive him. Before he can come, the collective witness of the kingdom and its gospel must be preached in all the world. Before the kingdom can bear such a united witness, the subjects or members of Christ's kingdom must be gathered out in such a way that they can function as a unit, as one entity, as one body.

Functional unity always demands a certain structural and geographic unity. A body cannot function as a body if its members and organs are scattered and disconnected from each other. Though some of a king's subjects may travel, or be sent as his ambassadors to other kingdoms, the majority of the king's subjects must be gathered in one geographical place, and with a functional unity as well, or the king has no kingdom. So, if Christ's kingdom is to function as a kingdom, there must be a gathering out of his elect, in order that there may be functional and geographical, as well as spiritual unity, to which a collective witness may be born in all the world.

The Old Testament prophets who foretold the peaceful reign of the Messiah all promised that the Messiah would rule over a gathered and united Israel. Who

is Israel? It would be well to remember that the kingdom of Israel soon after Solomon was divided into the northern and southern kingdoms, and that that breach has not been healed to this day. The northern kingdom was composed of ten tribes under the leadership of Ephraim. The southern kingdom was composed largely of the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin. The northern kingdom was destroyed and its people scattered into captivity about 722 B.C., and later, about 586 B.C., the southern kingdom also went into captivity and dispersal among all nations. The ten tribes have now completely lost their identity. They are scattered through all the earth, their whereabouts known only to God. The descendants of Judah and Benjamin who have still maintained their identity are today known as Jews, and because they are the only remnants who can be positively identified as belonging to Israel, we are accustomed to think of the gathering of Israel in terms of the gathering of the Jews back to Palestine. That is one aspect of the gathering of Israel, but important and great as it is, it is small and insignificant compared to the gigantic and spectacular and miraculous task of seeking out and gathering all the unknown descendants of the ten tribes of Israel who are also to constitute the kingdom of Christ. That gathering, according to Jeremiah 23:7,8, will be an event which will dwarf the miraculous de-

liverance of Israel from their bondage in Egypt and the peril of Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea.

There is scarcely a prophetic promise of the Old Testament which is more frequently repeated or more firmly emphasized than the promise that Israel shall some day be gathered. Micah 4:6,7 reads as follows: "In that day, saith the Lord, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted, And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast off a strong nation; and the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever." Jeremiah's prophecy in chapter 30 promises "Lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity....." And in chapter 31: "Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth a great company shall return thither." Ezekiel 20:34 promises: "And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of all the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out." We could quote dozens of such prophecies, but these are representative, and will have to suffice. The gathering of Israel is a promised and necessary prerequisite or accompaniment of the Messiah's coming in glory to reign over his kingdom, which is the kingdom of Israel.

Does this mean that only those who are literally of the blood of Israel will be included in Christ's kingdom? Not at all. The people of the Lord are they who wait for him, whether Jew or Gentile. Those who are of the blood of Israel, who still wait for their Messiah, and who are willing to accept him as their King, will be the special objects of God's searching care in the day of gathering, because of the covenant he made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He has promised to send hunters to hunt them out of every hiding place, from every land to which they have been driven. But the Gentiles are not to be forgotten in this gathering. They too may acknowledge Christ as their Messiah King, and by adoption may come under the promises and covenants made to Israel. Or, as Paul puts it in the 11th chapter of Romans, they may be "grafted in" to the tame olive tree which is Israel, and thus become a functional part of the kingdom.

Another miraculous aspect of the gathering of Israel will be the reuniting of the two divided kingdoms, under

Christ, the Messiah. The house of Judah (the southern kingdom) shall walk with the house of Israel (the northern kingdom) and they shall come together out of the land of the north. (See Jer. 3:18) Ezekiel, in his "dry bones" chapter (37) says that they shall be one nation, with one King. The 11th chapter of Isaiah promises that God shall "assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah," and that "Ephriam shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephriam." The age-old enmity between the two rival kingdoms shall cease in a common allegiance to the Messiah.

Jesus also made several indirect promises of such a gathering. Lamenting over Jerusalem he said, "How oft would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." He said that in the day of his coming, the angels of heaven would be sent to gather out his elect from every corner of the earth. He told the parable of the wheat and the tares to give one of the reasons for this gathering -- that there might be a complete and final separation of the righteous and the wicked for judgment. The wheat and tares were allowed to grow up together in his kingdom until both ripened and came to fruition. Then the angel reapers would be sent forth to gather the wheat first into the safety of his barns, and then gather the tares in bundles to be burned. The gathering is a separation -- a gathering into his kingdom of all who have acknowledged him as King and Lord, and a gathering out of his kingdom of all things which offend.

Jesus also characterized the judgment as a gathering. "When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations." Out of this gathering, the King will separate and gather the "sheep" into one group on his right hand, and the "goats" into one group on his left.

We can begin this process of gathering in our own lives by acknowledging Christ as King, by obeying him in all things, by separating ourselves from Babylon which is spiritual wickedness, by renouncing allegiance to all the powers of evil and giving ourselves unreservedly in loyalty and allegiance to Him who shall some day rule as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Then we may be worthy to hear the King say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."