

# "HEAR YE HIM"

## A Devotional Series For Radio

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World Headquarters: The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri

Program Number 229  
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The Sermon: THE DEVIL'S FLAXEN CORDS

Scripture: Book of Mormon, II Nephi 12:23-28.

For the kingdom of the devil must shake, and they which belong to it must needs be stirred up unto repentance, or the devil will grasp them with his everlasting chains, and they be stirred up to anger and perish: For behold, at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good; And others will be pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say, All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well; And thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell. And behold, others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them, I am no devil, for there is none: And thus he whispereth in their ears until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance.

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He bindeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until  
he bindeth them with his strong cords forever.

In our Book of Mormon reading it is pointed out that the devil has two contrasting modes of operation. The first is an obvious method. He rages in the hearts of the children of men, and stirs them up to anger against that which is good. He provokes violence, murder, warfare, cruelty, slavery, lust, lying, hypocrisy, deceit, drunkenness, and general depravity. He encourages the conditions that bring disease, famine, and death. Anyone in his right mind can see that these methods, and the results they bring to men, are anything but desirable. Only the grossly stupid, or those who themselves are inherently evil and intent on remaining so, can be deceived by this open, obvious and violent method. In our day we do not have to look very far to discern that Satan is still raging in the hearts of the children of men.

The second method of operation which the devil uses is more subtle. He makes men satisfied with themselves. He blinds them to their faults and sins, and assures them that they are no worse than other men. He assures them that all is well, that there is no danger to their souls, that there is no devil plotting the overthrow of those souls, that God is too merciful and loving to punish a sinner very severely. He assures the sinner that a few mild sins won't make any difference, especially if he can do them without getting caught. With the assurance that "All is well," he encourages the sinner to con-

tinue his sinful ways, to postpone indefinitely the day of repentance, to ignore the inevitability of a final day of accounting and judgment. One by one he adds to the flaxen cords by which he leads men to destruction, until at last he binds them with his strong cords and his awful chains from which there is no deliverance.

If you want to give your small son-- and yourself -- an unforgettable object lesson on the power of habit to bind men, try this. First take a clean, smooth piece of paper and hand it to him with the request that he fold it and crease it tightly down the center. When he has done this, hand it back to him and ask him to remove the crease he has just put into the paper. Obviously that is impossible. Once creased, a piece of paper is never the same again. And if you continue to fold the paper again and again on the same crease, eventually it will wear out and fall apart along the line of the crease because of the weakening of the fibers by the repeated folding and creasing. This is the first half of the lesson.

Next take a spool of fine thread. Ask the boy to place his wrists together, and placing a folded handkerchief over them so that the thread will not cut into the skin, tie his wrists together with one fine strand of thread. He will delight in showing you how easy it is to break one strand of thread. Next try two strands, then three or four. Breaking them will

still be easy. But keep increasing the strands one at a time, and it will of course become harder and harder to break the wrists apart. Keep adding one more and one more, and eventually there will come a time when the boy will find it impossible to break his bonds.

In this subtle, insidious way does the devil bind men with his awful chains. He suggests one act of evil. "Just this once won't matter," he says; "the flaxen cord can easily be broken." Even twice or three or four times seems insignificant, but each time adds one more flaxen cord to the bonds that will eventually hold the victim so fast that he cannot escape without help. Habits are formed by repetition. Each repetition adds another strand of thread, or creases the paper once more, or wears just a little deeper the track travelled by our nerve impulses through the muscle and nerve fibers of the human body, until the habit is fixed and almost unbreakable.

The philosophy that "just this once won't matter" is the devil's philosophy. Even our thoughts should be constantly subjected to a self-censorship which is determined never to allow evil an opportunity to enter our lives; for a thought repeated makes an act; an act repeated makes a habit; a habit repeated makes a character; and character is eternal.

How many people do you know who are bound by evil habits? Are you? Am I? Sometimes we are so accustomed to evil, so blinded and deceived by the devil's philosophy that just a little evil won't matter, that we don't even realize how hopelessly bound we are. Hopelessly? Not altogether. For if we allow the Spirit of repentance to come into our hearts, and the new life and the light of Jesus Christ to enter and take control of our lives, the evil will be made manifest, and its control can be broken. "He breaks the power of cancelled sin; he sets the prisoner free." With the power of the Comforter -- he who comes with strength -- even the most powerful or long standing habit and all its evil can be overcome and banished from our lives. Just as the boy who cannot break the many strands of thread around his wrists when he tries alone may be successful if his father grasps the wrists and adds his strength to that of his son, so we can break evil habit if we will let God add his strength to ours.

There is another aspect of this illustration which should not be overlooked.

Habit can be good, as well as bad. It saves us a lot of time and thought and trouble by making many simple actions almost automatic, so that our minds can be released for more important work. God binds us with flaxen cords too. If you want to become a righteous person, do something positively good today. Repeat the same act tomorrow, and next day and next. Resolve never to tolerate a deviation from the righteousness you are expressing in that act. Make it a habit to act honestly, for example, in any sort of situation. At first it may be a struggle. You may have to ponder each act, and argue with yourself over a great many five-cent situations in which you could have been either honest or dishonest. But if you have formed the habit of honesty by acting honestly in hundreds of little, insignificant five-cent situations, you will almost automatically act honestly in a five thousand dollar or a five million dollar situation. The man who falls when subjected to a great temptation is the one who has followed the devil's philosophy that "just this once won't matter," and who has allowed the flaxen cords of evil to bind him instead of binding himself to God with the innumerable flaxen cords of right conduct.

Perhaps this is at least one meaning of Jesus' parable of the two houses, one built on sand and one on solid rock. Jesus says that he who "heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them," (that is, puts them into action) is like a man who built his house on a rock. One of the foundation stones of any good life or character is right conduct, repeated over and over until it has become habit. If we have responded in countless situations with right acts, and formed the strong habit of right response, then when the storm and flood and wind of some great and overpowering temptation come, every nerve and fiber of our being will be urging us to do right and to reject evil. It will be impossible for us to yield to that temptation without breaking all the flaxen cords that we have accumulated and woven into a cable binding us to God. The house of our lives will remain firm and secure on the rock of righteous and long-established habit.

Take care, then, how you allow yourself to be bound with little insignificant flaxen cords, for great cables are made of small strands, and it is always the devil's strategy to bind his victims by the neck with a flaxen cord, and another, and another, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever.