

October 12, 2014
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Hebrews
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Hebrews 2:1-4.

1. Describe what “drifting” (as verse one uses the word) looks like.
2. Review some of the divine messages delivered by angels and what the outcome of those messages was.
3. Try to describe how important the gospel is to you.

PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT YOU HAVE HEARD **Hebrews 2:1-4**

In the church or churches that received this writing were people who God had rescued from eternal condemnation through His grace. They understood salvation and appreciated salvation, though probably at times the duties of life distracted them. But there were also people in the churches who were religious but unsaved. They had heard the great news of the gospel. No doubt they considered it to some extent. Maybe they even decided that one day they would make a decision about this matter. But in their desire to run their own lives, they neglected the great salvation.

I wonder if that last description is not a fair assessment of most of the religious scene called “church” today. There is a lot of talk about church stuff, but how many people have not paid attention to what they have heard? The day comes for all such people when it is too late to consider what they should have taken care of.

Reasons to Pay Attention (vv.1-3a).

We must pay attention to what we have heard because there is always danger in drifting. The writer challenged us, *Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it (v.1)*. The word “therefore” links this statement with the previous instruction that proved that Jesus Christ is superior to angels (chapter 1). We must pay attention because God is now speaking through the Son. His revelation of His truth through prophets was really important (1:1). That instruction is so important that we are liable for all of God’s various revelations at different times if we know them. One of the different ways that God spoke at different times was through angels. God used angels in unusual ways to communicate His plans and purposes. No one who believes in angels or knows anything about them would claim that God’s communicating through them was unimportant. It was the kind of thing that shocked normal people.

But God is speaking through the Son and, according to His own assessment, that communication eclipses everything. What have we heard through this means of communication? We have heard what God is like because the Son is the exact expression of all God’s character. We have heard the Son say through the writers of the Gospel that He is the final sacrifice for sin. We have heard Him include all under sin. We have heard Him promise eternal life for all who will confess sins and identify with His cross by putting their complete faith in Him alone. Like the Christians who received this letter called “Hebrews,” we have heard a lot about the plan of salvation through the Son. But so have myriads of sinners who pretend to be saints!

That is why we have this admonition to pay closer attention. The seriousness of the challenge is expressed by the fact that it is *necessary more exceedingly*. This is a very strong statement. The statement stands up and shouts that this is the kind of thing to which we really need to take heed. It is similar to a situation in which you are hiking in an area that is unknown to you. You are aware that there are bears or mountain lions or poisonous snakes in the area. When your guide says, “Now be very careful for the next couple of miles and keep your eyes peeled for movement in the brush,” you are going to have your senses heightened. Unless you are just plain ignorant or careless.

God your guide tells you to be exceedingly more careful to *get a grip* (*prosekete*) on what you have heard. This word originally referred to setting the anchor of a ship or bringing it tight to the dock where it would be tied down. It would picture setting the ship's anchor deep in the floor of the sea. From that picture came the idea of fixing your mind or thoughts on something particular.

So God's message to us is that it is exceedingly necessary to get a better grip on the things we have heard. The implication being that at this point the readers of the letter weren't doing so well. Are we doing any better? The issue is the Word of Christ, the Bible. I think it is rather significant that the only other place where we find the word *prosekete* (hold fast) used with a negative is when Jesus was warning the disciples about the testing in the last days. First, He assured them that His Word is never going to change. *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away (Luke 21:33)*. Having established that truth Jesus warned, "***But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.***" In other words, we need to get our hearts dug into the bedrock of Christ's Word because it is never going to change.

Why is it so important for us to get dug in, anchored down? We must get tied up to the rock of Christ's Word because we are responsible not to drift. While the Greek word behind "pay attention" is a nautical term the means to anchor the boat, the word for "drift" speaks of a ship that, for whatever reason, floated by the harbor entrance. It wasn't that the captain was unwise or misunderstood how to pilot the boat, but he was careless, not paying attention.

One time I was fishing from a boat. I was out near the middle of the lake and shut down the motor in order to enjoy a few minutes of leisurely fishing. As I paid attention to the fishing line and the fact that no fish seemed to be interested in testing it, I was unaware that I was drifting toward the shore. That is until the boat went "clunk" against the bank. The good news is that the boat did not get stuck in the muck of the shallow water. The bad news is that it very easily could have and then I would have had a mess getting it unstuck.

This is the kind of thing that happens too often in reference to people who hear the good news. It is not that the gospel or the word of Christ slips by carelessly. That is impossible because the Bible is the

rock on which we stand, it is the pier to which we lash ourselves, it is the anchor that holds us fast in the storm. The drifting is our problem because we do not see that it is exceedingly necessary to hold fast to the Bible – the things God has spoken.

This applies to Christians who get distracted with life, spend more time surfing the web than reading the Bible, who are more intent on texting mere humans than talking to God in prayer, are more concerned to follow a sinner on twitter than reading the biographies about saints who honored God. Then, one day they run into the brick wall of God's chastening and, picking themselves up, they look around to discover that they are so deeply into the woods of the world that it is difficult to work their way out.

However, while this warning is necessary for all genuine Christians, the warning especially applies to unbelievers who have heard the gospel, often many times, and think that one day they are going to do something about. As we know from multiplied testimonies, "one day" never seems to come. And so, these people finally realize to their horror that they have slipped by the harbor, the day of opportunity is lost, and they can only see on the horizon the storms of hell gathering to take them down. Why is it so important to get a grip on the "rock"?

We must pay better attention to getting anchored in because the law proved to be reliable. *For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution (v.2)*. The message declared by angels proved to be reliable. Though they are a bit rare, the messages God delivered through the angels proved to be unchanging. For example, the angel told Hagar that God would make a nation from Ishmael. And what became of that promise? We still have evidence of the reliability of that message in the news every day (Genesis 16). The angels told Lot that God was going to destroy Sodom, and He did straight away (Genesis 19). The angel promised that God would protect Jacob, prosper him, and bring him back home, all of which came to pass (Genesis 28:15). There are dozens of examples in the Old and New Testaments proving that the messages God sent through the angels are reliable.

This truth is most important regarding the law the angels delivered to Moses. The angels delivered the law to Moses? Sure. Stephen alluded to this event saying of Moses, *This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at*

Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us (Acts 7:38). According to what Luke wrote in Acts, it was only a moment later in the sermon that Stephen accused the Jews, You who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it (Acts 7:53). Stephen's reference only confirms what Moses mentioned regarding the part angels played when God gave the law. He said, "The LORD came from Sinai. For his people he rose from Seir like the sun. He appeared like sunshine from Mount Paran. He came with tens of thousands of holy ones. On his right was a raging fire for them" (Deuteronomy 33:2 GW).

The point is that the messages God sent through angels, which are lower than God the Son, stand firm and are unalterable. That becomes a serious matter when we learn that the result is that transgressors of the law received just retribution. Every action that disobeyed or transgressed God's message (especially the law) received a just penalty. The people could ignore God's message if they chose to, but often they reaped the consequences of judgment or even death. God gave no quarter when He had made His will and purpose known. We know from Bible history that often God was very patient as He spent years warning the disobedient people through the prophets that they were guilty of breaking His law. But inevitably, God's judgment came to bear because His word through angels and prophets is unalterable. How much evidence do we need to convince us that God's Word is true and will come to pass?

A major purpose of the Old Testament is to establish this reality: God does what He says He will do! Therefore, we must answer this very important question. How shall we escape if we neglect what we have heard? That is what the writer asked in the first part of verse three. *How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation (v.3a)?* "Escape what?" we are bound to wonder. A quick review reminds us that the previous reference was to just retribution. For example, God made it clear in His law that people who chose to ignore His standard on murder, kidnaping, or illicit sex would be stoned to death or otherwise cut off from the nation (death). God warned that if the people chose to worship the gods of the surrounding nations that He would send famine, pestilence, or invasion by neighboring armies.

In a word then, the thing we need to escape is *just retribution*. At this point, just retribution takes on extreme value because God is warning about eternal punishment. What we must escape is eternal

existence in a body with full consciousness, feelings, and emotions that will experience all the agony of suffering in hell.

The only way to escape this horrible (but just) retribution is through inclusion in ***such a great salvation***. The story of the great salvation is: God the Son willingly becoming one of us in order to experience temptation and testing by sin, God the Son living in perfect accord with God's law in spite of the continual temptation to step over the boundaries, God the Son being executed on the cross, shedding His blood as the only acceptable sacrifice for sin, God the Son rising from the grave the third day in power and glory to prove victory over sin, death, and hell, and God the Son offering us forgiveness from guilt because of our sins if we will but agree with His assessment of us and trust His finished work to save us. That is great salvation!

So, how do people neglect this great salvation? The Greek word for *neglect (ameleo)* means to not think about, not be concerned with, not to purpose or plan, not to decide. It is quite a negative word. God offers the great salvation as the only means to escape the certain and just retribution for sinning against Him, and most people neglect the offer. It is not a matter of carelessness as much as a matter of rebellion. If humanity was wholly ignorant of God, we could attribute the "not thinking about" to ignorance.

But God has revealed His character and plan. Paul told the Christians in Rome that *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse (Romans 1:18-20).* According to this Bible passage, the fact that God will punish sin is obvious. That He is justified to punish sin (His *divine nature*) is obvious. That He is able to punish sin (His *eternal power*) is obvious. To make the matter of just retribution even more obvious, God has written His law on everyone's conscience. *For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness,*

and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them (Romans 2:14-15).

Therefore, everyone is without excuse. That means that drifting past the entrance to the harbor of escape is not due to carelessness. Everyone who neglects this great salvation does so because of *ungodliness* and *unrighteousness* (Romans 1:18). It is due to rebellion against the Creator. They choose not to think about it, choose not to plan, choose not to be concerned because they have chosen to not let God be in charge of their lives. Remember that this letter was written to a church setting. Some of the people in the assembly were born again and living by faith. Some were truly born again but needed to grow in sanctification. Some were religious, but not born again. With a spirit of rebellion against God, they gathered with God's people regularly and put off making a decision about this great salvation, the only means to escape God's just retribution.

God Affirmed the Importance of What We Have Heard (vv.3b-4).

The apostles attested what they heard Jesus teach. This great salvation *was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard (v.3b)*. We post-New Testament people, of all people, are not ignorant of this great salvation! How can we be when we have the record of how Jesus stated the gospel plainly. We have it explained in great detail in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus (John 3). Jesus explained it to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). Jesus taught it in the Bread of Life discourse (John 6). Jesus explained the gospel in the Light of the World discourse (John 8). Jesus taught the salvation story in the Good Shepherd discourse (John 10). Salvation is couched in Jesus' parables about the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 13). That is especially the case in the story of the Sower and the seed and the stories about the lost treasures.

Jesus taught the gospel in great detail specifically to the disciples. To them He taught that He is the resurrection and life (John 11). He taught that He is the way, truth, life (John 14). He taught that He is the vine who gives source of life to the branches (John 15). He taught in parables so that the apostles would understand even while the stubborn masses would not. All of that, and much, much more about salvation is all over the pages of the Gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and

John). For what more could the world possibly ask? Because Jesus told them the gospel over and over, the apostles became Christ's witnesses. Having taught the gospel in the presence of the apostles and directly to the apostles for almost three years, Jesus laid the responsibility on them to teach what they had heard. After He rose in power and glory from the grave, *Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).*

At about the same time, Jesus corrected the apostles' misunderstanding about the Kingdom and repeated His plan. Luke wrote, *So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8).*

Therefore, the Church, those who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and provider of salvation, are *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord (Ephesians 2:20-21)*. We have heard the good news of the gospel from God in creation and law, from Jesus whose words are recorded, from the apostles and from those who have heard the same thing for 20 centuries! How shall we escape if we choose not to think about, not to decide about such a great salvation? Pay attention to what you have heard!

Not only have we heard the gospel, but God Himself attested the gospel by signs and gifts. *While God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will (v.4)*. God affirmed the importance of the gospel through miracles. Jesus did amazing works to force people to pay attention and encourage them to believe the gospel. He told the doubters in His day, *"If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (John 10:37-38).*

This is also why the planting of the Church was accompanied by miracles. Peter and John healed the sick. An angel released Peter from prison. Paul restored life to dead Eutychus. Paul shook off a deadly serpent and suffered no harm. Christians spoke in tongues, healed the sick, and received revelations from God. These were signs, wonders and various miracles God gave to confirm the reliability of the gospel.

God still affirms the importance of the gospel through spiritual gifts. God gives various capacities for service to people in the Body. As people use the spiritual gifts God gives, we attest, confirm, teach, and encourage others toward embracing this great salvation. We need to pay attention to a truth to which God gives so much attention. We must keep the major things the major things.