

“PAY MUCH CLOSER ATTENTION”

I. Introduction

- A. There are times in life when paying close attention to something can be a matter of life and death.
 - 1. One of those times is when we are driving a car.
 - 2. We have all heard stories of car accidents that happened because someone was texting while they were driving.
 - 3. In such situations, a person’s failure to pay close attention resulted in a tragedy.
- B. In the verses we have just read, the writer is warning us that if we fail to pay close attention to the gospel message, it can have tragic consequences for our souls.
 - 1. This is the first of the so-called “warning passages” in Hebrews, passages in which the writer warns these Christians (and us) against the danger of falling away from the faith.
 - 2. It is important for us to take these warnings seriously.
 - 3. God did not give us these passages simply so that we could point out that none of the elect will ever fully and finally fall out of a state of grace.
 - 4. While it is true that God preserves those whom he has appointed to salvation, it is equally true that he commands us to persevere in the faith.

II. What We Have Heard (1)

- A. Our passage begins with that important word, “Therefore.”

1. Whenever we see this word, we need to look back to what was said in the previous paragraph.
 2. "Therefore" introduces an inference or a conclusion that is being drawn from what has already been said.
 3. In this case, the writer is taking the doctrine that he expounded in chapter 1 and applying it to the lives of these believers.
 4. One important lesson that this teaches us is that theology and the Christian life should never be separated from each other.
 5. The doctrines that are set forth in God's Word have a bearing on our lives, and our lives need to be shaped by biblical doctrine.
- B. The main point in chapter 1 was that Jesus is superior to everything in the old covenant.
1. God has spoken his final word to us in his Son.
 2. Jesus is the heir of all things.
 3. He is the radiance of God's glory.
 4. He has made purification for sins.
 5. He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high.
 6. He is superior to the angels.
 7. As far as the original recipients of this letter were concerned, the superiority of Christ meant that it would be unthinkable to renounce Christ and return to Judaism.
 8. Because Jesus is the culmination of all that was revealed in the Old Testament, it is now impossible to affirm the Old

Testament apart from him.

- C. The fact that the writer urged these Christians to pay “much closer attention” to the message that they had heard indicates that they were neglecting the gospel.
1. This is stated more bluntly in chapter 5, where the writer has this to say about these Christians: “you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.” (5:11–12)
 2. This shows us that the reason why they were beginning to consider turning away from Jesus is because they were taking Jesus for granted.
 3. This is an easy thing for a Christian to do.
 4. We can grow apathetic about the gospel.
 5. We can slip into the trap of thinking that we have heard it all before, that we know all that we need to know.
 6. This is a very dangerous attitude.
 7. It causes people who still profess to be Christians to stop going to worship with any regularity, to fail to join a church, to be infrequent in their Bible reading, to neglect prayer.
 8. When a person seriously neglects these things, it is legitimate to ask whether there is any real difference between that person and their non-Christian neighbors.
 9. Being a Christian is not just a matter of having once prayed a prayer asking Jesus to be your Savior.
 10. It is not merely considering yourself to be a Christian.

11. It is a matter of living your life in communion with Christ and his people.
 12. It is presumptuous to think that that communion can be sustained apart from the means that God provides for sustaining it.
 13. This is why it is imperative that we take the gospel seriously.
 14. The gospel is not just the power of God for salvation at the beginning of the Christian life; it is the power of God for salvation over the entire course of the Christian life.
- D. The Greek verb translated as “pay attention” here is sometimes used in nautical contexts to describe holding a ship toward port.
1. It is the opposite of “drifting away”, which is the danger that the writer is warning against.
 2. Just as a ship does not head towards port on its own, neither does the Christian life stay on course without careful attention.
 3. We need to be making constant corrections to our trajectory.
 4. If we aren’t proactive about keeping ourselves on course we will drift off course.
 5. The reason why this is so important is because drifting is a slow and gradual process.
 6. You don’t even notice it while it is happening, but before long you find yourself way off target.
 7. The only way to avoid such drifting is to pay close attention to what God has said to us in his Word.
 8. This is why every Christian should be a lifelong student of the Bible.

III. Such a Great Salvation (2-3a)

- A. This brings us to verses 2 and 3, where the writer draws a comparison between the message declared by angels and God's final word to us in his Son.
1. By "the message declared by angels", he is referring to the Mosaic law.
 2. The Old Testament implies that the law was given to Moses through angelic mediators, and this idea is confirmed in the New Testament.
 3. We see this in Acts 7, where Stephen says that the law was delivered by angels (v. 53).
 4. And Paul says in Galatians 3 that the law "was put in place through angels by an intermediary." (v. 19)
 5. This explains why the writer of Hebrews made such a big deal about Jesus' superiority to angels in chapter 1.
- B. The writer affirms the reliability of the message that was mediated by angels in the Old Testament.
1. It was a message given by God.
 2. If that message was reliable, then how much more reliable is the message that God has spoken by his Son.
 3. A similar point is made regarding the "just retribution" that the Old Testament prescribed for every transgression of the law.
 4. The Sinai covenant set forth appropriate penalties for every infringement of the law.
 5. If this was the case with the law, then how much more is it the case with the gospel.

6. If the gospel is neglected, there is no hope of salvation from the curse of the law.
 7. The gospel is God's only announcement of salvation.
 8. Those who neglect it have nowhere else to turn.
 9. If a person is not united to Jesus Christ, then that person will stand before God on the day of judgment and be evaluated on the basis of how he lived his life.
 10. And the standard that God will use for that evaluation is his perfect holiness.
 11. If a person falls short of that standard in even the slightest degree, he will be condemned to an eternity in hell.
 12. In other words, man has no hope apart from Jesus.
- C. Notice that the writer doesn't talk about rejecting the gospel or renouncing the gospel but about neglecting the gospel.
1. A person doesn't have to be hostile to the gospel to be in a place of great spiritual danger.
 2. If a person merely neglects the gospel, he is playing with fire.
 3. Neglecting the gospel leaves a person with no way of escape from the coming judgment.
 4. As New Testament scholar Leon Morris explains, this passage "leaves us in no doubt but that those who are saved are saved from a sore and genuine peril. Christ's saving work is not a piece of emotional pageantry rescuing men from nothing in particular." [cited in Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*, 52]

5. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only way of escape from the deadliest peril of all: the wrath of the living and true God.
 6. This is why it is vital that we not neglect the great salvation that is announced in this gospel.
 7. Children, you need to make sure that you don't just go through the motions of being a Christian without really embracing Christ in your own heart.
 8. Don't think that you can get by on your parents' faith.
 9. You need to lay hold of Christ yourself.
 10. You need to feed your faith by participating in worship, by reading your Bible, and by cultivating a life of prayer on your own.
 11. If you fail to do so, then you will be in danger of neglecting a great salvation and leaving yourself with no way of escape on the day of judgment.
- D. We might be tempted to think that we don't really need to worry about warnings like this.
1. After all, we know from other passages that none of those who truly trust in Christ will be lost.
 2. While this is true, it is also true that warnings like this are part of the means that God uses in order to preserve our faith.
 3. He means for us to take him seriously when he speaks of the seriousness of neglecting the gospel.
 4. He means for us to pay much closer attention to what we have heard.
 5. This is how he ensures that we persevere to the end.

IV. A Well-Attested Message (3b-4)

- A. We turn now to the last part of our passage, where the writer point out that the gospel is a well-attested message.
1. He says that it “was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard.”
 2. In other words, this is the message that Jesus himself preached when he came into the world.
 3. That message came to the writer of Hebrews through those who had heard it firsthand, through the apostles and their assistants.
 4. We can say the very same thing.
 5. The gospel came to us through those who first heard it from the lips of Jesus.
 6. In fact, there is a sense in which we can say this in an even more complete way than the writer of Hebrews could say it.
 7. We have the entire New Testament, which is the complete apostolic testimony about Christ.
 8. And it is a reliable testimony.
 9. There have been many attempts to attack the reliability of the Bible, but those attempts never succeed.
 10. Whenever such arguments are made, it is never all that difficult to refute them and to reassert the many evidences that show that the Bible is indeed the Word of God.
 11. Scripture really is reliable.
 12. It is well-attested.

13. It has withstood countless assaults.
 14. It is worthy of our trust.
 15. While this is certainly true, it is also the case that no matter how good the argument for Scripture's reliability is, no one will ever be persuaded of its divine authority apart from the inward work of the Holy Spirit in his or her heart.
- B. The writer also says that the gospel was attested by the various miracles that God worked in order to underscore its divine origin and authority.
1. We need to realize that those miracles really amazed people.
 2. First century people were just like you and me.
 3. They were not any more gullible than we are.
 4. They knew that there are certain things that just don't happen.
 5. They knew that dead people stayed dead.
 6. They knew that people who were paralyzed from birth stayed paralyzed.
 7. When they saw such things happening, they knew that it had to be the hand of God.
 8. Those signs and wonders were God's stamp of authenticity on the gospel message.

V. Conclusion

- A. The gospel of Jesus Christ is precious.
- B. Nevertheless, there are many things that can potentially divert our attention away from the gospel.

- C. We need to be aware of this danger, and we need to make sure that we are truly cherishing Christ and his gospel.
- D. To neglect the gospel is to neglect the most important thing in the world.
- E. May God help us to pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from such a great salvation and leave ourselves with no means of escape.