

Beware of Drifting Away

Hebrews 2:1-4

5 June 2022

Halifax, 10:30 AM

Introduction:

Today in Hebrews, we come to a serious warning.

- It is a warning that we should all pay careful attention to.
- It applies to all who have heard the gospel—and especially to those who have heard and who are members of the church.
- It applies to both communicant and non-communicant members.
 - It applies to others who has heard the gospel, but especially to church members.

It is a warning against hearing without hearing.

- I trust that you know what I mean.
 - Hearing without out comprehending the significance of what you have heard.
 - We could say, hearing the gospel without actually getting it so that you believe in a way that brings true salvation.
 - It is to be brought into close connection with what God has said without actually taking in what He has said—without actually grasping it.

This is no small danger.

- Jesus Himself warned about it again and again in His teaching.
 - He told about those who have ears to hear, but who do not hear.
 - In the Parable of the Sower, He told about those who hear and believe in a superficial way that comes short of salvation so that they are soon drawn away—
 - either because they are enticed by the world and their sinful passions or because they are offended with the gospel and the things associated with it.
 - Often it is both.
- We have seen it in our small church.
 - Over the years, there have been many who were part of the church and heard the gospel and even professed to believe it who only endured for a time.
 - Right now, we have several folks under discipline and several more who are about to be brought under discipline.
 - A couple of years ago, we had to remove Colton from the church.
 - Less than a year ago, we had to remove the Stulp family from the church.
 - Just this week, we had to suspend a young woman who grew up in the church from the Lord's Supper. I will have more to say about that later in the service.
 - We are in process with several others who are not continuing in their commitment to Jesus Christ.
 - This is not a theoretical issue—it is a real issue—a real danger.

- The issue is always that these folks heard without truly hearing.
 - If they had truly heard, they would not have been able to reject it.
 - I do not say that none of them are converted. It is possible that some of them are. If they are, they will return when the Lord deals with them.
 - But the Lord has instructed us, if they will not repent, to suspend them first from the Supper, and if they still will not hear, to remove them from the church and regard them as unbelievers.

I struggle to speak as earnestly about this subject as it calls for.

- God is my witness of the burden that I have in my heart to have you hear and believe.
- I have pled with Him to make it so.
 - It is likely that some of you who outwardly appear to be fully committed have actually never heard with true faith.
 - I pray that God will arouse you with His word.

I implore you to listen now as I read the passage that is before us.

- It is Hebrews 2:1-4
- Listen earnestly. Listen so that you will hear.

Heb 2:1-4: Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. ² For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, ⁴ God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading of His holy word.

You see how this begins...

I. We are told to give “the more earnest heed” to the things that we have heard.

A. What is meant by “the things that we have heard”?

- It is what we have in chapter 1.
 - Notice how chapter two begins with the word “therefore.”
 - “Therefore, we must give the more earnest heed.”
 - “Therefore,” because of what was said in chapter 1.
- 1. And what was said in chapter 1?
 - We were told that God Himself has spoken to us.
 - He did it first by the prophets, but then by His own Son who spoke to us not only with His own words, but as the very message and word of God.
 - We learned that God’s speaking was a speaking to His people about the way of salvation.
 - Man is not in harmony with God—we are fallen into sin and misery.
 - We are under His wrath and curse.

- We are out of harmony with God, out of harmony with each other, and out of harmony with the very creation itself.
 - But God spoke to us by the prophets to show us our need of salvation and to promise to send salvation to us by a Son that would be born to us.
 - It was an act of incredible, marvellous kindness on His part.
 - It was a display of His goodness to us in our sin that we do not deserve.
 - And now He has actually sent His Son.
 - He is the very Son of God made flesh and so He is the radiance of God's glory and the express image of His person—that is who He is.
 - By becoming a man, He shows us what it is for man to be in harmony with God—in Him we see what God is like in His character as a man.
 - It is a beautiful thing indeed.
 - And God has given His Son, the Son who is also God, but now God in human flesh representing His people, the inheritance that He promised to man originally that we forfeited by our sin.
 - He, not only as the Son of God, but now as the Son of God made man, is reigning on the throne of God until He restores all of those God gave Him to salvation and destroys all who remain in their rebellion.
 - We are told in verse 3 that He, as the one who was the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person, purged our sins.
 - He did that so that He could restore us to God.
 - He did that on the cross by His suffering and death for our sins.
 - He is now bringing all things back to God.
 - This is a revelation of extreme grace, of extreme kindness, of unbelievable proportions, and when we hear it, it ought to thrill us.
 - The only reason it doesn't is because we are blinded by our sin and twisted toward God in our minds.
2. This is a very great salvation that we have heard about!
- That is what it is called in chapter 2, verse 3, where it says, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation."
 - Just think about how great it actually is!
 - a. It is salvation from the eternal condemnation that we fully deserve.
 - Think of it. Our sin calls for everlasting punishment in hell.
 - Jesus revealed that more fully than it had ever been revealed before by what He had to do to atone for it.
 - If you see this, if you believe it, you can't just walk away from it.
 - You can be tempted by sin, but if the root of the truth is in you, you can't just conclude that it doesn't matter and leave it.
 - But it is not just salvation from condemnation...
 - b. It is salvation from corruption to holiness and purity.

- The gospel teaches us how corrupt we actually are, but it also promises deliverance from that corruption.
 - Jesus came with such beauty, living as we all were meant to live, and when our eyes are open to the gospel we see that—that as a man He is the brightness of God’s glory and the express image of His person.
 - We see His great love for us—to even go to the cross for us.
 - And the promise is that we shall be like Him—pure and holy and undefiled.
- c. It is also salvation from estrangement from God to communion with God as our husband, our Father, our master.
- Our relationship with Him was ruined by our sin, but He gives it back to us.
 - He takes us as His bride and pays all our debts and leads us in His beautiful ways as His wife.
 - We are adopted as God’s children and have His fatherly care and protection, His guidance, His provision of all that we need.
 - It’s not something you can decide that you don’t want, or that you can decide doesn’t matter, once you have seen it and as your seeing of it increases over the years.
- d. It is salvation from division with each other to perfect communion with each other.
- He leads us to live together in greater harmony, living according to the roles that He has given us as children, fathers, mothers, husbands and wives—living with true love of our neighbours in general.
 - We have a long way to go, but this is the promise of the gospel and Christ is the beginning of the community that we will all be.
 - Our failures, both before and after conversion, show us how much we need His salvation so that we keep on seeking Him.
- e. It is salvation to perfect harmony with heaven and earth.
- Jesus is Lord over all creation.
 - Death is the result of our sin—we return to the dust from which we were made—we have all that goes with that—pandemics, famines, wasting storms, shortages—but Jesus is the one who restores creation.
 - Only He can bring forth this aspect of our salvation—
 - As we continue in His word, we trust Him more and more.
- f. Our salvation is salvation by means of the triune God, by the Father ordering it, by the Spirit dwelling in us and by the Son dying on the cross for us.
- The Holy Spirit changes our heart so that receive the truth about Jesus and believe with a faith that can never let go of Him.
 - He opens our eyes to see our need and to see Jesus the Saviour.

- And Jesus procures this salvation by giving His all—going to the cross to be cursed in our place.
 - This is so great a salvation!
- This is what God has spoken to us, first through the prophets, and then through His Son.
- 3. He has done this in a very convincing way. Look at verse 3-4.
 - Heb 2;3-4: **how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, ⁴ God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?**
 - a. He Himself came to speak to us: **...this great salvation, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord Himself.**
 - Jesus went about preaching the kingdom of God. He instructed us to look to Him to be saved—this was God speaking to man.
 - He exposed our need of salvation and, as we saw already, He showed us by His life as a man what it is like for a man to have harmony with God.
 - And then He went to the cross to die for our sins.
 - God spoke convincingly by Jesus Himself.
 - b. Then God confirmed the word of salvation that Jesus spoke by those who heard Him—the apostles.
 - They are our link to all that He said and did.
 - They saw Him and heard Him and they tell us about Him.
 - God made them eyewitnesses and gave them the job of relaying what Jesus said and did to us, and they did it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that we could know that what they said was true and without error.
 - He appointed that their words be recorded in scripture, and we have this revelation that is very convincing.
 - In the scriptures, we hear and recognise the very word of God.
 - c. And finally, God Himself bore witness with signs, wonders, and gifts of the Holy Spirit.
 - 1) The signs and wonders were things that Jesus did that showed us what He will do ultimately in His salvation.
 - In feeding us bread, He taught that He was the bread of life.
 - In cleansing lepers, He taught us that He cleanses from sin.
 - In calming the storm, He taught us that He will subdue nature.
 - In raising the dead, He taught that He was the resurrection and life.
 - 2) The gifts of the Holy Spirit that are spoken of here are the ones that these who gave us the word did... to show us that they were sent by God.

- They were able (in Jesus' name) to heal people as Jesus had done, to make the lame walk, and to raise the dead.
 - They were even able, in Jesus' name, to impart these gifts to others.
- d. All this was God's way of showing us that they were His true messengers who were speaking the truth.
 - This is how the foundation of the church was laid—
 - how the church obtained the scriptures initially, which scriptures have now been passed on in each generation so that we now have them in our hands.
 - That is how the book was first brought to us, and now that we have it, it is its own convincing testimony to those who will hear it.
 - Yes there are many historical arguments that can be made about the scripture and many proofs of the resurrection and such,
 - But the thing that ultimately convinces us is the true authority of God that speaks through the scriptures.
 - We hear the truth about Him and the truth about ourselves and we recognise the truthfulness of it so that we cannot deny it.
 - The testimony it gives of the truth about us and about God's salvation through his Son is self-authenticating—it is divine.

TRANS> This is what we are to earnestly listen to that we may know the truth.

B. The language used here is very strong...now that God has spoken through His Son, **“we must give the more earnest heed to what we have heard.”**

1. It speaks of responding to what we have heard with great intensity...
 - Nothing about our response is to be half-hearted or disengaged.
 - It speaks of a response that excels, that overflows, and abounds.
 - The word translated *take heed* is used to refer to addiction—it is something you give yourself over to.
2. It is a response of your whole being to what you have heard.
 - William Gouge breaks it down for us with these words. He says,
 - “The duty here intended is a serious, firm, and fixed setting of the mind upon that which we hear; a bowing and bending of the will to yield unto it; an applying of the heart to it, a placing of the affections upon it, and bringing the whole man into a holy conformity thereunto.”
 - Yes, you set your mind to it the way an athlete sets his mind on his game, or the way a student sets their mind on a test—
 - You are absorbed in it because it speaks of things of eternal magnitude.
 - And then yes, you listen intensely so that you can act according to what you have heard—you set your will upon it—the way a chap who thinks he is going to make a fortune will set his mind on the scheme—or again, like the athlete.

- Your mind, your will, and your affections are all involved.
 - You give yourself to what you have heard with an earnest abandonment.
 - I don't mean that we don't come terribly short in our pursuit—
 - but rather that we see it as coming short—
 - we understand the importance and we come back to it.
 - We are of the truth—we get it and we can't un-get it.
3. Note well. Our text doesn't merely say that we *ought* to listen and respond this way.
- It says that we *must* do so else we will drift away.
 - That is what the word in the original means.
 - We must engage ourselves wholly like this lest we drift away.

II. Let's now look at the reasons we must give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard.

- A. First, we must give the more earnest heed to what we have heard lest we drift away.
1. *Drift away* is a good translation of the original. It is a nautical term.
 - It speaks of a boat that is not properly guided if at sea or not properly tied to the pier if it is at harbour.
 - What sort of idiot would pull up to an island in his boat, get out to explore, and just leave his boat to drift.
 - What sort of idiot, while sailing near a dangerous reef, would let his boat drift without paying any attention to where it was going?
 - Or who would leave the driver's seat to go and look for something in the back of his camper while driving in the mountains and just let the camper roll along wherever it may?
 2. That is what you do when you do not give earnest heed to what God has revealed.
 - You leave your very soul to drift wherever it may.
 - But I don't mean to say that you necessarily do this entirely.
 - You don't completely abandon what God has spoken through His Son.
 - You simply don't give earnest heed to it.
 - You are driving your boat or your car and you are not paying careful attention to where you are going.
 3. What are the dangers in view?
 - They are all the things that will pull you off course in your walk with God.
 - They are always there.
 - They are the temptations that start to get hold of you and that you ignore.
 - You start to become covetous, and you ignore what God has revealed about that and do not look back to Christ and what you have in Him.
 - You start to long for a seductress, or for a man that is showing you special attention even though you are married to someone else.

- You have grown cold in your love for Christ and you don't even notice it because you are not giving earnest heed to the things that God has revealed.
 - Perhaps it is something else—like bitterness toward another believer... or bitterness and resentment toward God for not giving you what you wanted.
 - Maybe He did not save a loved one who died in their sin, or maybe He did not heal you or deliver you.
 - And instead of considering how good He is and what He has done in Christ, and how He is at work to save you, you let bitterness grow.
 - Maybe it is that He did not give you the job you wanted, or lead you to a suitable person to marry—or one that turned out not to be so suitable.
 - Maybe you have grown weary with persecution or in the midst of chronic illness or political disappointment—or just with the load of work that is upon you.
4. Whenever these dangers are sighted, you need to give earnest heed to the gospel.
- You need to see how precious gospel is and you need to hear and remember and delight in what God has promised—
 - If you don't, you will continue to drift away.
 - It will be gradual—imperceptible at first as you get further and further away.
 - Sadly, all of those temptations and trials might have been used to draw you to Christ and set you even more securely in the way of salvation. They might have deepened your walk with God.
 - Think of Jacob. Think of Job. Think of David. Think of Paul.
 - They went to God when they tried and tempted and took firmer hold upon the gospel.
 - But if you do not take diligent heed to the gospel, to what God has revealed through His Son, you simply drift away.
- This is truly tragic, as the next reason to give earnest heed highlights...
- B. Second, we must give the more earnest heed to what we have heard because what we have heard is the only way to escape.
- Verse 3 says: **“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”**
1. Escape from what?
- Escape from God's eternal punishment.
 - a. If you neglect what God has spoken through His Son about the way of salvation, you neglect what is in fact the only way of salvation.
 - There is no other way, however much people may want to think so.
 - b. Neglecting the only way is the way to miss the only way.
 - All you have to do to go to hell is nothing.
 - We are already headed there, before we have done a thing.

- We are already sinners who are out of harmony with God and if we don't escape, we will be condemned.
 - The only way of escape is the way that God has made through Jesus Christ.
 - In the Old Covenant, He was revealed by promises—of a Son who would bring blessing to us; by sacrifices that showed that every sin must be expiated by death; and by many other means...
 - In the New Covenant, it is revealed by Jesus Christ, as we have seen.
 - And once we understand this way, once we see our need of it and understand what it is, we can't conceive of another way. This is the way that God had made.
2. So the point is, if you do nothing, you will not escape from God's punishment.
- a. Our text is telling us that we are even less able to escape if we ignore what God has said now that He has spoken by His Son than we were when He had only spoken by prophets through angels.
- Verse 2 says: **“For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward,”**
 - The Jews often spoke of how the law had been given to them by angels, as I have mentioned to you in a previous sermon.
 - This is scriptural, for example, in Acts 7:53, Stephen speaks of the fathers as those, **“who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.”**
 - We see repeatedly in scripture that those who neglected God's revelation in the Old Covenant were punished so that **every transgression and disobedience received a just reward.**
 - God demonstrated this again and again as 1 Cor 10 summarises in verses 7-11: **And do not become idolaters as *were* some of them. As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.”⁸ Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; ⁹ nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; ¹⁰ nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹ Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.**
 - Think also of the 40 years in the wilderness and the 70 years in Babylon as a reward (recompense) for ignoring God's word.
 - The point is that if the neglect of the gospel as it was then revealed by angels brought destruction, how shall we escape now that God has spoken through His Son!
 - It is the same gospel, but now it is fully revealed by the coming of Jesus.
 - All you have to do is neglect this salvation and you will perish.
- b. Sinclair Ferguson gives a striking illustration of this.

- He describes a man entering into the darkness of hell.
 - He encounters another man and asks, “What did you do to come here?”
 - And the man says, “I did nothing. I heard the gospel, and I ignored it.”
 - And the other says, “The same with me.”
- c. David Gooding explains the same truth like this:
 - He says that in our text, there is [quote] “this warning that it is possible to miss salvation and be eternally lost. ‘How?’ you say. ‘Surely people must commit some desperately outrageous sin to be lost eternally?’ So they must. But let us be clear in our minds what that sin is. It is to hear God speak, then to do nothing about it, to neglect or ignore it.”

TRANS> The idea is that we have the truth that we desperately need right here in front of us in the gospel, but never embrace it in more than a superficial way.

- We don’t move beyond the superficial because we don’t want to face the raw truth of the gospel.
 - The truth rankles us because it tells us that we are such sinners that we need the Son of God to be crucified.
 - Since we have Him, it is wonderful news that makes us very glad, but our pride makes it difficult for us to yield to it.
 - We want His help, but we can’t bring ourselves to admit that we need that kind of help—
 - We can admit that we need better government, healing and maybe some counsel about how to get through problems and even about how to be better people—but nothing like a crucified Saviour.

III. Let’s look at the differences in people who get the truth and people who don’t.

A. The fundamental difference is that those who get the truth cannot get away from the simple truth that only the Lord can save us from our sins.

1. They may be frustrated with what He does—and what He doesn’t do at times—but they can’t reject Him as the one who has revealed His salvation in the gospel.
 - They keep on coming back to Him because they are convinced that He is the only one who can save them, through His work on the cross.
2. They may have many unanswered prayers and many things that puzzle them,
 - but they cannot stop seeking Jesus—at least not for long.
 - They always come back because faith prevails. The truth is in them. As Jesus says, they are of the truth.

B. In John 6, we have a contrast presented to us.

1. This is the account of Jesus feeding the 5000 who had been listening to His teaching.
 - The crowd is duly impressed—so much so, that they want to make Him king.
 - Just think what He could do!

- They are under Roman occupation.
 - Here is the one who can surely deliver them from the Romans.
2. But Jesus disturbs them by refusing to be their king in this way.
 - In short, He tells them He has come to save them from their sin.
 - They need to see from this miracle that He is the bread of life who came from heaven to bring salvation to sinners—eternal life restored to God.
 - He tells them just what we have been looking at in Hebrews.
 - He is the Son of God who alone brings salvation into the world.
 3. But they do not diligently hear Him.
 - They don't hear so as to let the gospel itself show them and tell them what they need to be saved from most of all.
 - They don't want to go there.
 - They will decide what He should save them from.
 - So they walk away—they walk no more with Him—the five thousand!
 - The great majority have heard with hearing.
 - They were looking for something else and did not give earnest heed to what they really needed from Him—which is actually far more important and far more wonderful.
 4. Jesus is left with the Twelve—probably some others as well.
 - He looks at them and asks, “Are you going to go away also?”
 - And Peter replies for them all, “To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”
 - The Twelve were right in there with the crowd when it came to wanting Jesus to free them from the Romans,
 - but they were not with the crowd in departing from Him when He refused.
 - They had come to believe that He was the Son of God, and they were convinced that He was sent by God to save them.
 - They did not yet understand what He was going to do to accomplish that—it was too much for them at this point.
 - But they were convinced that He was the one and they could not walk away from Him the way the 5000 had done.
- C. This shows us what happens to those who profess Christ and then depart.
1. They never came to the place where they were convinced that Jesus alone has the words of eternal life.
 - They never accepted the fact that they need eternal life—that they are sinners who need to be saved.
 - Once they accept that, they have no where else to go.
 2. All the years that they were here, they were hearing without hearing.
 - The basic gospel never got through to them.
 - They went out from us (as John 2:19 says) because they were not all of us.
 - They never gave earnest heed to the word of God so as to believe.

3. This is an urgent call to all of you to give the more earnest heed to what God has spoken through His Son so that you will not drift away.
 - If you are here just looking for what you want, in time you will drift away.
 - You are not in that case moored to Jesus as He has been revealed.
 - The time of testing is the time to deepen your walk.
 - But if you are here looking for the salvation that He came to bring, you will never drift away.