

Title: Pay Attention or Die!
Text: Hebrews 2.1-4
Theme: Trust is revealed in obedience
Series: Hebrews #4
Prop Stmtnt Genuine believers will pay attention to message of Christ.

Read Text:

One summer I was in Colorado with my family and one day went with a small group of guys to climb a mountain. During the climb one of the guys told me that he wanted to take on this challenge because he had been dealing with depression and he wanted to train himself to fight through challenges instead of relying upon medication. He told me that the meds that he had been on were effective at taking out some of his “lows” but, at the expense of the highs. In other words, he did not get depressed and gloomy like he used to, but neither could he laugh anymore. He said that his emotional life was like a ladder. The medicine that he was on cut off the bottom rungs in order to protect him from depression, but it also cut off the top rungs which robbed him of laughter, pleasure and joy. Life had no valleys, but neither did it have any mountains. Everything was on a plateau. Life had no darkness, but neither did it have any vibrant colors. Now, tuck that away for a bit.

This text (2.1-4) is tough to preach. I mean that personally. My heart wants you to like me. My self-centered heart wants you to think nice, happy thoughts of me. But, if I preach this text in a manner that is faithful to the text, then some of you will probably not think nice, happy thoughts of me. I do not relish that. I know that many of you have this notion that if someone loves you, they will never tell you “no.” Some of you parent with that philosophy. It is disastrous for parenting. It is a damning approach to pastoring.

These four verses are a warning. So, I am warning you that this message is a warning. This is not a light talk because this is not a light text. Sermons that warn are offensive to a typical post-modern audience. So, if my goal is to please you and be faithful to the text, I have a problem because it appears that I cannot do both. Why not just gloss over it? Well, for one that would not be faithful to the text. Secondly, I would be putting myself under the very judgment that this text is warning about and thirdly, there are four more warning passages in this book, some of which occupy major chunks of the text. (chart)

Is it right; is it necessary for me to preach on these warning passages? My assumption is that these passages are here in Hebrews because the Spirit of God knows that our souls need to hear these declared and applied. If I do not preach these then I am saying that the Spirit of God made a mistake in including these. It is also important to note that according to (13.22) this entire letter is a sermon. I’m not sure who the author is, but I like him. He obviously likes long sermons. But, notice that he is not willing to simply speak of theology in an abstract manner. He applies it in very personal way. So, let’s ask the tough question. Is it right to preach through these warning passages when it will frighten some people? Is that a loving thing to do? How can it be loving to preach on a text that will scare people? Here is why it is such a loving thing. Try to think back in

time as far as you can. Before this world existed, or the universe as we know it, or any galaxies, there was one absolute and glorious reality – God. There was never a time when there was nothing. Even during the time where there was no time, God always was. God is the uncreated one. God is the uncaused one. God is the singular source of all that is. He is the one who is sheer existence. This singular, glorious, eternal, and undiminished being is and has been and will forever be. He is alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. He is not the means to another end. He is not the ticket to getting a good score on your ACT, or getting a good result on the scan, or the ticket to getting money. No, he is the cause and the goal. When this glorious, infinite being speaks, things happen (like creation) because he alone possesses ultimate authority. All things are from him and of him and for him and to him. Therefore, when he speaks, we, the created, the finite, the limited ones must listen. When he speaks and tells us the truth and reveals things that we must know and that will rescue our souls, he is acting in a loving manner. When he speaks and he warns us about things that will destroy us, he is loving us and protecting us. Therefore, when he speaks and warns us about the danger and arrogance and stupidity of not listening to him, the one who possesses all knowledge, wisdom, truth and authority, when he is not obligated to tell us any of these things, but tells us because he chooses to love us and direct us, then we can see how loving these warnings really are.

But the warning passages are not all that there is to the book of Hebrews. Yes, the warning passages are serious and introspective but there are other related texts in this book that will take us to great heights of glory. But we cannot understand those heights of glory if we do not explore the depths of warning. This morning, we are looking at some of the bottom rungs of the ladder of soteriology. The doctrine of salvation is an infinitely serious doctrine. It carries with it serious implications. We must look at, investigate, consider, and mediate on them and pray that the Spirit of God will marinate our hearts in them. But know this beloved. What follows the warning are truths of unfathomable glory. We love the glory parts. We love the blessing part. We love the benefit part. We do not like the warning part. It flies so directly into the face of what we want to hear, and it is so blatantly contrary to what is accepted as normal Christianity. The warning part is uncomfortable, so we tend to ignore it. But, this text, like the gospel is a package deal. If you cut out the warning part, then you will eventually cut out the glory part too. If you eliminate the topic of sin from the church's conversation, then you will eliminate the topic of repentance, redemption, justification, and reconciliation as well. These glorious topics all stand together and they fall together. When you knock over the first domino of warnings and judgment because topics like this do not play too well to culture, or even to the church crowd, you will knock down the rest of the theological dominoes as well.

So, let's dig in. Look at your Bibles and count how many times the plural pronouns "we" and "us" appear in these four verses. The author does not exempt himself from these warnings. He is concerned about himself as well as his readers. The warning is built on a *fortiori* argument. That is, it is arguing from a position of, if this is true, then this must really be true. For example, if you say, our football team is worse than the Lions. You are making a *fortiori* argument. Since the Lions are bad, anything worse than them has to

be absolutely atrocious. In this text, author is saying (chart) – the OT is reliable because it was mediated in part by angels and its authority was demonstrated because when people disobeyed it, they were judged by God. There is no question about the authority of the OT. So, if the OT message was so reliable, authoritative and consequential, how much more is the NT message consequential if it is also neglected since the NT has an even greater message and an infinitely greater messenger!?

1. **We are not neutral about the gospel** (1)

“Therefore, we must pay attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.”

Therefore – this is a logical command. If Christ is superior to the angels, and Christ has given the gospel to us, we have to pay attention to it. This verse is very clear, there is no such thing as being neutral about the gospel. We are either giving it the proper attention or we are drifting away from it. I am equating “what we have heard” to the gospel since that is what the author does in verse 3.

A. We are either giving it proper attention

Do you realize how much information you were exposed to this week? Studies have shown that the average American spends more time using media devices than doing any other type of activity while awake. We are exposed to almost 12 hours of information each day, (and that does not include our time at work). Television, Internet, text-messaging, books, magazines, cell phones, instant messaging, e-mail and radio all taken together result in a daily barrage of information which includes 1,600 advertisements.

How do you pay proper attention to Christ’s words, when you are being bombarded with so many other messages? What does it mean to pay much closer attention? According to 3.6; 3.14; and 10.23, paying attention involves holding fast that which you have heard. It has the idea of embracing a truth in such a way that it drives, it motivates you in a life of obedience. If obedience does not accompany faith, then the faith that is professed is not valid.

B. Or we are drifting away

The word that is used has a nautical tone to it. It paints the picture of a boat that instead of being held toward port, its lack of anchorage and direction results in the current causing the boat to drift. Carelessness, apathy is really spiritual blindness. It is the logical result of one who does not stop to consider how important the words of Christ truly are. The drifting past the harbor speaks of the imminent danger that these people were in because some of them had failed to attach the proper value and importance to the words of Christ.

Now, beloved, I want to spell this out as clearly as I now how. It is so obvious that the author of this book did not believe that all of the people who called themselves believers were truly regenerated. The evidence of this is seen in the fact that they failed to take

seriously the Word. He is warning them about the condition of their souls. Unless they paid attention to the gospel with their hearts and souls and beings, they were going to drift away and die without hope. I echo this author's concerns about you. Some of you have been taught, counseled, warned, admonished, encouraged, and there is no change in your heart. The same habits, the same beliefs, the same arrogance, the same excuses, the same issues still hold your desires captive. I am not speaking of those of you who fight and struggle against sin. I am speaking of those who won't listen and won't change. I am speaking of those of you who think that you know more than the rest. The sad reality is that you are drifting. The same habits take you deeper. The same excuses only add to your bondage. The same apathy brings more blindness. You are not neutral about the gospel.

What are some of the ways in which we do not give proper attention to the gospel? We do not give proper attention to the gospel when we:

- 1) Choose to stay away from the preaching of the Word in the corporate setting of the church.

Now, I am not speaking of those who absolutely cannot come and be part of the corporate gathering of the people of God. I have seen people weep over their inability to be here because of physical limits. Their souls long to be here. I am speaking of people who regularly choose not to come because they choose something that is drastically inferior over the gospel. You do what you believe. If you consider Christ to be the most excellent, most glorious, most magnificent King, and God, the very God, then you will obviously consider his word to be the most important word and you will give it proper attention. When you stay away from the means by which Christ has established for you to hear the Word preached (church) and the setting for it to be received and responded to (obedient worship), you have revealed what you really believe. I plead with parents all of the time. Do not sign your kids up for soccer leagues, baseball leagues, gymnastics or other things that will keep you and them out of church on Sunday. When you do that, you are preaching a sermon to them and to yourself that says, "This is more important than Christ." "This has more value, more meaning than Christ."

- 2) Respond to the gospel with, "oh I've heard that before attitude."

I need the gospel everyday of my life. You need to be immersed in the gospel everyday. The reason why some of you are so grouchy, and touchy, and demanding, and manipulative and arrogant and persnicity, and so full of yourself is because you do not think you need the gospel anymore because you heard a long time ago and now you have moved on to other things. We never move away from the gospel. The gospel is foundational to everything that we believe. I need the gospel to remind me that I am a sinner who has no rights. I need the gospel to remind me when I sin that I have a Savior, whose redemption is full and salvation is free and mercy is abundant and grace is rich, and love is flowing. Otherwise, I will be tempted to believe that my sin defines me or (just as bad) my self-righteousness defines me. We do not give proper attention to the gospel when we:

- 3) Sit in judgment on the preaching instead of under the weight of the text.

I have sat through some lousy sermons. And I am not excusing lousy preaching. But, when I am finding fault with the messenger or the presentation, (and there may be much room for improvement), but when I am finding fault, I am closing my heart to the text. I am saying – I don't need this because I expect finer quality presentations. We do not give proper attention to the gospel when we:

- 4) Do not value what we hear by thoughtful consideration and obedience.

Walking into a building that is labeled a church is not the goal. There is a huge difference between going to church and being church. We are the church. We go to the gathering in order to carry out what we are. Therefore, sitting through a sermon, particularly long ones is not a point system by which you accrue credits that earn you a closer parking spot at Walmart. Just doing the time and being present is not it. We have to pay closer attention. That is we have to carefully think about what the Scriptures say and examine our lives and pray through these things and intentionally apply these things. That means if you really are going to consider these things, some of you have some adjustments that you need to make to your calendar, starting today. We do not give proper attention to the gospel when we put off obedience. Pay attention or you will drift away. That is, pay attention or die.

2. **The consequences of neglect are enormous.** (2-4)

A. **The lesser revelation carried serious consequences for neglect.**

Regarding angels: In Deut. 33.2 Moses is recounting how God in his glory gave the law to the nation of Israel. Moses speaks of the accompaniment of thousands of angels in that scene. The language here picks up on that theme that angels were mediators of God's law. Clearly that was literally the case in Daniel.

The point being that (chart again) that the OT law proved to be reliable and trustworthy. The evidence of its authenticity was seen in the fact that all of the warnings that were given to the children of Israel about disobedient were carried out because they so blatantly disobeyed. Notice the language of v.2. "Every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution." How many times have you looked at the OT and said – I am so glad that I don't live under the OT law?

Ok, the greater the revelation, the greater the privilege the greater the responsibility and the greater the consequences for neglect.

B. **Greater revelation carries even greater consequences for neglect.**

Notice the language of v.3. “How shall we escape” means – we can’t. We won’t. If we neglect this awesome treasure, there is no escape. No escaping what? There is no escaping the wrath of God.

Adding weight to the argument that this gospel is so important is the fact that it was:

- 1) declared at first by the Lord
- 2) attested by those who heard
- 3) affirmed by God through signs, wonders, miracles, gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The whole point is, **DON'T BE LIKE THEM!** They disobeyed the law and it was tragic. What we have is even more precious. If we disobey this, the consequences are so very serious.

Dangers of unbelief –

What is your excuse for disobedience, greed, stinginess, lack of concern, meanness, choosing to not join, choosing to not give, choosing to not worship...