

Title: A Dull Sermon  
Text: Hebrews 5.11-6.3  
Theme: The danger of soul-neglect  
Series: Hebrews #14  
Prop Stmt Failing to heed the Word brings about a dullness of spirit that left unaddressed destroys one's soul.

5.11 – 10.18 is the theological centerpiece of the book of Hebrews. That means, that this section is the focal point of this book and since this book is so theologically dense, it also means that this section is doctrinally intense. This is not the lightweight spiritual junk-food that often passes for sermons these days. The point of the section and the point of the book is very clear. Christ is the greatest Savior because he is the perfect priest. If you turn away from Christ, you have no hope. Like a machine breaking up concrete, this truth is pounded by this text, layer after layer, point after point is made explaining why this is what the entire OT has been pointing to. Why this truth is so important and so effective and so necessary. Following this section, we are given an overview of men and women who have died for this and whose shoulders we are standing on. But before we dig into this section we are confronted by a warning. The warning comes because the AH does not think that his readers are ready for this. The fact that they are not ready to wrestle through some complex doctrinal issues concerns him and it should concern us. I fear that some of you have given in to the lie that anything beyond basic truths should be left up to the professionals. This text is a wake-up call. We are all expected to be engaged in rigorous theological study because a rich understanding of the gospel drives our perseverance and enables us to press on as pilgrims. This morning we are going to look at part of the warning that comes at the beginning of this main section.

Read Text:

Organizations have long observed and talked about the 80-20 rule. 80% of the work is done by 20% of the people. If you are involved in your kids education or in your kids soccer or baseball team you see this same tendency. 80% of the parents are usually not involved, while the 20% who are do all of the work. Recently a fairly new member was asking me about this in relationship to our church. Is that true of us? Is 80% of the ministry carried out by 20% of the people? Is 80% of the giving only coming from 20% of the people? If so, then the implication is that 80% of the people spiritually hitch-hiking? You know what I mean? A hitch-hiker takes no responsibility for the condition and upkeep of the vehicle. If you pick up a hitch-hiker, and 30 miles down the road your transmission blows up, is the hitch-hiker going to say, “hey, let me go in half with you on getting this fixed”? Of course not! He's going to say, “Hey dude, so sorry about your car – good luck” while he gets out and looks for another ride. He feels no sense of ownership or responsibility whatsoever. It is your problem, not his. In many churches, 80% of the people are basically hitch-hikers. They don't own it. They like the aloofness because if (and when) a problem, or responsibility, arises, they can say, “Hey dude, so sorry about your church – good luck” while they get out look for another ride. Yes, some of you are spiritual hitch-hikers and you need to grow up and take some responsibility.

Now, if you are simply looking at the church from a business and organizational model, you are tempted to think, “How can we get the 80% to buy in to what is going on and get them involved?” Hold the phone! I think we are asking the wrong question. If more than half of the people are not involved in the ministry of the church, and do not take to heart the seriousness of their responsibility to the body of Christ, then instead of asking “how can we get them involved?” maybe we ought to be asking “are they even a believer?” Think about that. I am not bringing that up because there is a huge need for volunteers that is going unmet and I want to manipulate and frighten some of you into getting off your rear end and doing something about it. No, I am challenging you to think through your reasons for non-commitment and non-involvement and non-support. The only reason why you would not commit, serve and support within your God-given means, would be because you do not believe that this really matters or that this is really important enough to affect your schedule or priorities. Am I wrong then to say, that if you do not believe that this is really that important then maybe it is because you do not really believe the gospel? Christ did not come and die on the cross so that you could have the American Dream. Christ did not come and die on the cross so that you could have your best life now. He came to hijack your life and turn you inside out. There is no such thing as getting about \$3 worth of God. So, here is the big idea of this text. The AH wants to teach some important things, but his readers are not ready for it, because they have stopped growing. They’ve stopped growing because they have not taken heed to what they have already been taught and the result is they are spiritually immature and anorexic.

***Failing to heed the Word brings about a dullness of spirit that left unaddressed destroys one’s soul.***

The fact that you (some) have failed to show clear evidence of growth and, in fact have gone backwards is not only grounds for admonishing (6.1), but for warning (6.4-8).

### 1) **The Problem of Dull Hearing** (11)

Dullness of hearing (stubbornness, laziness, negligence) is the result of ongoing disobedience of the Word by people who are called to be radical followers of Christ! Have you heard the expression, “the same sun that melts butter, hardens clay”? When you hear the Scriptures, and you obey them, they awaken your soul! David said in Psalm 19.8b, “the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.” The Word of God brings about a brightness, an edge, an alertness, a wide-eyed, bring-it-on, let’s go” kind of an attitude that is ready to engage, ready to work, ready to address challenges. But if you fail to obey the Scriptures, if you hear but make excuses, if you listen but do not do anything about it, then you become dull of hearing. There is an apathy that settles upon you, like a fog and it clouds your vision and dulls your spiritual senses. Some of you have heard people respond to the Word with great conviction and enthusiasm and you wondered if they were listening to the same sermon that you were, because “it did nothing for you at all.” The reason it did nothing for you is because there was nothing in you for it to do something with! – know what I mean?

v.11 – About this (that is, explaining how Christ is a high priest in the order of Melchizedek) I cannot tell you what I need to tell you because you cannot handle it because you have chosen not to. I cannot get into this because you have not paid attention to what has already been entrusted to you.

When the Scriptures speak of hearing the word, they do not simply mean audibly hearing the sounds that are spoken, or visibly seeing the words on a page. They mean to hear with your heart and to take seriously that which you hear. Well, that is what is so difficult. When you hear with your heart you end up doing some soul surgery and that is humbling and challenging.

Tending to one's soul is difficult. It goes against the grain of our hearts. My heart wants to be entertained and amused. I do not wake up every day with an overwhelming urge to read the Scriptures, confront and confess and do battle with the sin in my life. I want to live an unbothered, unfettered, and unexamined life. That way, I do not have to think real deep about anything and am free to simply pursue what feels good to me at the moment. Tragically, the contemporary church has given into this instead of warning against it and challenging it. Notice the phrase in v. 11, "hard to explain." That phrase is translated from a word that was used when dealing with subjects that were difficult to understand. But, the problem that the AH is speaking of, is not so much the subject matter as much as it was the fact that his readers had become so spiritually sluggish.

Consistently in the warning passages the AH uses "you" and when he refers to the entire church he often uses "we" leading me to conclude that when he writes these warnings, he does not have every single person in view. And while these warnings are real and strong and necessary, he nonetheless is convinced that his readers, for the most part, will persevere (6.3). So, how do you know if you should be concerned about what the AH is concerned about?

## **2) The Warning Signs of Dull Hearing (12-14)**

### **A. Dullness is seen in a failure to master the basics. (12a)**

There is a line of argument here. You are dull of hearing, evidenced by the fact that you are unable to teach others because you haven't even learned the basics. Why not? It is not that you haven't been taught. You've been taught. But you can't teach because even though you have been taught, you have not learned. Why not? You did not combine the learning with obedience.

He uses the analogy of a school and essentially asks the question – "how long are you going to just be a student?" Mature people are expected to be able to teach. Some of you have claimed to be followers of Christ for years now, but you are no closer to teaching others the basic doctrines of Scripture today than you were the day after you came to Christ. Why not!? We need you to be a teacher and you are still taking instead of giving! The fact that you haven't figured that out yet reveals that you haven't even moved beyond the basis.

Do you see the analogy here? A teacher gives and a student takes. In a moment we will look at the second part of that, which speaks of a baby (on a milk diet) versus an adult (on a solid food diet). Babies take, adults give. Some of you do not want to be bothered with serving, and your giving is stingy because you are spiritually immature and anorexic, if you are a believer for any length of time you start looking for opportunities to serve and teach and help instead of taking.

Questions for reflection:

- Are you merely a follower and observer of spiritual things or do you set the pace?
- Could you teach a group of people the basic doctrines of the Christian faith? By the way, if you cannot identify the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, then that ought to be a clue to you that you probably cannot teach them.
- Are you able to teach others or do you only want to sit and listen?
- What discernable, measurable, verifiable evidence of spiritual formation is there in your life? Is there more love for Christ, and a growing disinterest with trivial matters, and more grieving over sin in your life? Do you find a greater interest in the ministry of the church, or are you content with lesser things?

Dullness is seen in failure to master the basics.

**B. Dullness is seen in a constant need of the basic stuff. (12b-13)**

You need milk, not solid food! Ok, what is the solid food that he is referring to? Specifically it is referring to an extended treatment on the relationship of Christ (NT) to Melchizedek (OT). I want to preach this to you because you need deep truths in order to stand against strong winds, but I can't teach these to you yet because you don't care about this stuff because you haven't taken to heart what you have already heard.

false faith + adversity = apostasy = catastrophe  
false faith has no appetite for deep truth

No appetite for deep truth causes one to be "unskilled in the word of righteousness" that is, this person incapable of being able to help other people deal with the issues of life because they are not dealing with their own issues. The one who is "unskilled in the word of righteousness" describes the person who is reluctant to press home the implications of the gospel in his own life and in the lives of others. They have drawn a line in their mind as to what kind of a believer they want to be and therefore, what kind of a church they want to have. Do you want a church that will coddle you or challenge you? Do you want people who simply affirm you, no matter what, or who love you enough to get into your face and tell you what you need to hear? Are you willing to do that with others? Therefore, if you have no appetite for deep truths you are a spiritual baby who is not helping the body and you need to examine your soul.

true faith + adversity = perseverance = joy

true faith is hungry for and anchored by deep truth

Therefore, true faith, anchored by deep truth will persevere through adversity. Challenging you to think theologically is not always fun and entertaining, but spiritual junk food will not prepare you for cancer or crisis.

If you let your kids eat whatever they want to eat, they probably will not pick spinach and carrots. Why is junk food so appealing? It's fast. It's simple. It's fatty and it's filling. Did you know that Burger King's triple whopper is 1,250 calories? Wash it down with a White Castle Chocolate shake and your total is 2, 930 calories. Fast food is awful for you, so why do we let our kids eat it? We have not been trained to eat better. And it is easier in the moment to give them what they want than to feed them what they need. But, when you eat that stuff, it hits your gut like a tympani drum – know what I mean? It weighs you down and drains you causes you to be sluggish. If you are running a marathon, you don't triple whoppers. You need the good stuff. And when you get off that stuff and start eating the good stuff, your appetite changes.

I think you know where I am going with this. From time to time I get some resistance because I preach a little longer than some and take us through truths that some of you may not be accustomed to. I recognize that many leaders have said that today's generation cannot handle robust theology. They have been raised on MTV, video games and YouTube. Everything has to be quick, exciting, graphic-based and interactive. Theological preaching will kill a church. Give people the practical stuff, like 3 ways to get your kid to make his bed. But, do you see what this text is saying? Without biblical theology and life engagement, people will die.

***Even the winds of church blow against taking the Word serious which then validates soul-neglect.*** So, when the church is unwilling to examine itself we are left without a voice for the ills of our community. The easy stuff is entertaining but it will not feed your soul and you will not be ready for cancer or crisis.

Questions for reflection:

- Do you gag on theological preaching?
- Do you favor an entertaining church atmosphere over a challenging church one?

### **C. Dullness is seen in a lack of discernment. (14)**

A person whose spiritual diet is comprised of solid food is described in v.14 as being mature, whose powers of discernment are trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. In other words, this person is constantly engaged in the study of biblical truths AND in examining their own life and the world around them. Do you see the emphasis on “constant practice”? This speaks to the effect or the result of practice that sharpens the spiritual sensitivities of a person. People who live on spiritual junk food generally have very little discernment regarding cultural influences. I am amazed at what movies some people are willing to watch. And when you challenge them on it, they are offended, like

you are the church police. But a diet of entertainment never causes me to search my soul and worse yet, it can be an open cistern for mental sewage.

Questions for reflection:

- Can you be depended on as one who protects the body, or are you content to be one whom everyone has to take care of and look out for?
- Do you feel responsible for the gospel? Do you feel responsible for the ministry of the church? Do you feel responsible for the health of the church and the spiritual condition of those around you? Do you feel the need to protect the flock from false teaching and shallow spiritual junk food, or are you still so immature that all you can think about is, “what has the church done for me?”

### 3) **The Cure for Dull Hearing** (6.1-3)

Recognize that spiritual growth is not an option. The phrase, “and go on to maturity” is actually in the passive voice, which means that the AH is making it clear that moving forward is something that is done to us as we yield to God’s active influence. We surrender to God’s authority and he carries us and drives us, and pushes us to maturity. What he is saying here is that, even though you have never moved beyond the basics – you must and I am going to push you! He then speaks of what the basics are by identifying them in three pairs.

- A. **Repentance and faith** – how the Christian life begins
- B. **Washings and laying on of hands** – how we live the Christian life

Notice in the footnote of the ESV, the alternative reading for washings is baptisms. The reason for that is because the word baptizo (plural) is the word in the original language of the NT. The reason why some think that it is referring to washings is because it is in the plural, therefore it must have something to do with how the NT fulfills the OT levitical system. When I look at the first couplet, it is obvious that it speaks to how the Christian life begins and the last couplet speaks to how the Christian life ends. It seems to me that this would probably have something to do with how the Christian life is lived. And since the AH speaks of the importance of the local church in our development, discernment, discipleship, discipline and perseverance, then I am inclined to think that when the AH put down baptisms, he meant baptisms. So, what would those be? In the NT, we read of two different baptisms, that are actually related. The baptism of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12.13) takes place at the moment of conversion. Water baptism (as we have seen these last two Sundays) is the God-ordained means to publicly identify ourselves with a local church as a follower of Christ. So, “washings” or (better yet) “baptisms” speaks of our introduction into the family of believers and the laying on of hands speaks to how the church functions through the leadership.

- a. baptisms (Spirit and water)
- b. laying on of hands – how the church functions

**C. Resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment** – the end of life as we know it

These are important matters that must be taught, but we must build on them. We must help people see the entire picture so that when the winds of adversity blow, we have know the certainty of our anchor and as pilgrims, seeking that city whose builder and maker is God, we press on.

A good church is going to push you. A good brother and sister is going to push you. A good pastor is going to push you. Sometimes I am going to irritate you. But, I push you because if we don't grow up, we die.

Memorial Day – We stand on the shoulders of giants and have been entrusted with a rich, doctrinal faith that demands study, surrender and joy. Let's bequeath to our children a healthy church because the winds of adversity will blow against their souls too.