

## Pay Attention

Hebrews 2:1-4

One of the jobs I had while I was in Bible College was as a janitor in an automotive plant.

It was a weekend job and it was the night shift.

The problem with that is that I had a class on Monday morning at 8:00am.

I got off of work at 6:00am and I had just enough time to go home, have a shower, get my books and make it to class.

The first few weeks I seemed to manage ok, but after a while it started catching up with me and I had a hard time staying awake in class.

I knew I was in trouble one week in particular.

Despite trying very hard to stay awake I had nodded off a number of times and didn't really get much out of the class.

When the class was over I thought I would take a bit of a nap in my car before my next class.

Arriving at the car is when I made the unfortunate discovery that I had locked my keys in the car.

On the positive side, I had a spare set of keys, but they were back at the house I was living in which was about a 20 minute drive from the school.

One of my friends graciously offered to give me a ride and I got the spare set of keys and opened the car.

Only a few minutes went by when I proceeded to lock both sets of keys in the car.

That's when I knew the night shift and morning class combination wasn't working very well.

After a few minutes of disappointment I decided to try and pry open the sunroof and managed to unlock it with a stick.

Somehow I managed to finish out the semester and amazingly pass that class.

Thankfully the next semester I did not have a Monday morning class, because I don't think I would have been able to manage it.

The lack of sleep had made it very difficult to stay alert and pay attention which was not good for my class or anything else.

[For many things in life we need to be able to focus our attention and if we fail to do so it can have a negative impact on us sometimes the impact can be very severe. That is true spiritually speaking and that is the subject of our text this morning in **Hebrews 2:1-4**. There is a strong exhortation for us to "pay attention" the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are given three important reasons to make deliberate efforts to focus our attention on spiritual matters in this text. Number one is this...]

### **Point #1 – Enduring faith requires deliberate action. (verse 1)**

Walking with Jesus does not happen by accident. It is an intentional decision of the will to do the things that keep us close to Him.

It has been my experience through the years that people can get easily confused about the doctrines of 'justification' and 'sanctification'.

Justification is a word that means we have been made right with God.

That happens by faith alone.

It happens when we realize that we are separated from God because we have broken His laws and there is nothing that we can do to make up for it.

It happens when we realize that God sent His One and Only Son into the world, and that He (that is Jesus Christ of Nazareth) took upon Himself the penalty that we deserve dying to pay our debt.

It happens when we believe that Jesus died in this way for us and we believe that Jesus was raised from the dead and so has completely conquered death for us.

When we believe that, our debt is paid by Christ and we are right with God. That is justification.

'Sanctification' means that we are being changed so that we now fight against our desire to do what is wrong and we more often do what is right and pleasing to the LORD.

Where justification happens in the moment we believe and are saved, sanctification is a life long journey.

Now, it is important to have these two things clearly in our minds because both are of vital importance to the understanding of what is said here in Hebrews 2:1.

We must never confuse 'justification' and 'sanctification' but as J.C. Ryle has put it, we must see that you never have one without the other.

Look with me at **Verse 1**.

The word 'must' is so important here.

It translates a Greek phrase which emphatically expresses the importance of this action.

It suggests that this is absolutely necessary for our lives as believers.

What is it that we "must" do? We must 'pay attention' to 'what we have heard.'

What has been heard is the message that God "has spoken to us by his Son" according to chapter one verse 2.

That is the message of the gospel, the message of being rescued through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, which when clearly and rightly understood sees the LORD Jesus as the fulfillment of all the Scriptures.

This we are to fix our attention upon, "so that we do not drift away."

[The image that this is supposed to bring to our minds is a boat on a river. Have you ever been in a canoe on a river? Tell me, which direction to you go in if you don't paddle. If you sit there doing nothing you go down the river. Now if you are in a canoe on a river that is flowing toward a 100 foot waterfall, but long before you get to that waterfall there is a dock that you can stop at safely

what do you need to do to get to that dock? You need to paddle. Not only do you need to paddle but you have to pay careful attention to how you are paddling if you want to end up in the right place. What is going to happen if you don't? You are going to go over the waterfall.]

The writer of Hebrews is likening this world to a river, the current of which is pulling you away from the truth of the gospel.

His point is to say that we need to make a constant and conscious effort to give our careful attention to the truth of the gospel so that we do not drift away from it.

Now I believe wholeheartedly in something called the “perseverance of the saints.”

That is when God saves you He keeps you, but believing this glorious truth cannot mean adopting a passive attitude towards growing in our understanding and application of the gospel message to our lives, but rather we must see the efforts we make as the evidence and assurance of our belonging to Jesus.

The Christian life is not a passive experience. You cannot sleep through church and grow as a Christian, you cannot set your bible on the shelf and give yourself over to other influences without being drawn away from Jesus.

It can be subtle at first because the best lies often appear true and before long you can end up way down the river in real danger.

[What are you giving your attention to this morning? The devil wants you to think about lunch, or worry about the state of the world, or be fixated on something else anything else but the truth of God's word. Giving our attention to the fullness of the gospel of Christ is something we do intentionally. It is a deliberate action. Here is another lesson about why we need to pay attention to the gospel...]

**Point #2 – Rejecting the gospel has inescapable consequences. (Verses 2-3a)**

If we ignore what Jesus has done on our behalf, then we will be called to account by almighty God for every act of rebellion against Him.

As is common in Hebrews verse 2-3a draw a comparison.

This comparison is looking to the Old Testament and refers to it as “the message spoken by angels”.

Paul refers to the Old Testament this way in Galatians 3:19 and so does Steven in Acts 7:38.

While specifics are not given, somehow angels are involved in the giving of God's law to His people.

Now listen to what it says here about that message (**Verse 2**).

First the OT is referred to as ‘binding’. The word can also be translated as ‘well founded, reliable, or firm’. The idea is that

God's word is a permanently fixed point of reference that people are under an inescapable obligation to keep.

What we need to understand is that the reason this is the case is because of the nature of Who God is.

*The LORD is more than just good and just, He is unchangeably and infinitely good and just; therefore, He must give laws and commands.*

Further, it could never be enough to just give laws and commands He must enforce those laws and commands and He must do so in an equitable fashion in order to maintain His own moral perfection as the law giver.

This verse is telling us to look back at the Old Testament and see that is true.

After God gives the law, He warns His people about what will happen to them if they turn away from it (Deuteronomy 28-30).

The people, however, live in disobedience to the law and judgement does come.

That reality raises the question of **verse 3**.

If violating the "message spoken by angels" lead to consequences, it is also absolutely certain that judgment will come on everyone who ignores the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[Have you ever been in trouble with your parents? I'm sure lots of kids have been told by their parents, "Don't throw the ball in the house!" One of the most important aspects to parenting is to discipline your children in a loving manner, which means if they break the rule they get a consequence. Now if a child gets a consequence for throwing the ball in the house, how certain will it be that they get a consequence for throwing the ball and breaking a window? Pretty certain I imagine.]

Listen, God always follows through and He never misses a thing.

Far too often we mistake God's patience as indifference thinking we will get away with our disobedience.

Not true, if we willfully persist in our rebellion against Him we are going to have to answer for it.

He is holding out the way for people to be saved through Jesus Christ and if you turn your back on that you will face His infinite and eternal wrath.

Bear in mind dear ones that God is God and no one can ever change that.

[Do not turn away from Him today. Do not dismiss what Christ has done on your behalf. Pay attention to what you have heard. Embrace the message of forgiveness and redemption through repentance and faith and do not ignore it because the consequences for doing so are real and they are certain. How do I know that you might ask? We're told in verses 3b-4]

### **Point #3 – God has confirmed the gospel by His power. (Verses 3b-4)**

In the past, present, and future the LORD always shows His word to be true.

We are told here about three different kinds of means that the LORD uses to confirm the truth of the gospel.

The first is simply the verbal proclamation of the gospel.

It says this beginning in the middle of **verse 3b**.

The LORD here is almost certainly a reference to the Jesus and His earthly ministry.

When we read the gospels it is easy to get wrapped up in all the spectacular miracles that Christ performs.

As amazing as those are, we must also pay attention to the emphasis in the gospels on the His teaching.

Several times we read that those who heard Him were amazed at what He said.

If all we had was the powerful preaching of Jesus that should be enough for us to give our attention to ‘what we have heard.’

We are told more though, it says this message of ‘salvation...was confirmed to us by those who heard him.’

We have in the New Testament firsthand accounts of what Jesus said and did.

These are firsthand accounts that all of the Apostles were willing to stake their lives on.

[You may have heard of a man named Chuck Colson. He was a part of the administration of President Richard Nixon and went to prison for his involvement in the Watergate scandal. While in prison he became a Christian and he said that Watergate proved to him that the gospel is true. He said, “I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world- and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.”]

As powerful as the spoken testimony of the gospel is God did even more (Verse 4).

When we read the kind of miracles that Jesus and the apostles perform one of the things that stands out is that the majority are done in public irrefutable ways.

There have been many con artists in the history of the world who claim to do spectacular things, and what they all have in common is that they carefully script and control the environment to give the appearance of something amazing.

In the Bible we have things like withered hands being made whole in front of entire crowds, people blind for decades who can see, the ravages of leprosy

reversed, a man raised from the dead four days after his death with many eye witnesses, and on and on it goes.

Do you know that the enemies of the gospel rarely try and refute the miracles themselves and even when they do it doesn't work because it is so unreasonable?

Adding to the miracles are the “gifts of the Holy Spirit” it says at the end of verse 4.

Paul talks about these gifts in Romans 12 as well as 1Corinthians 12.

In those passages we read of gifts of wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, healing, speaking in tongues, interpretation, faith, spiritual discernment, teaching, encouraging, generosity, leadership, and administration.

Given that the lists in the two passages are different from one another we should take them to be examples of the gifts of the Spirit rather than a complete list.

What is critical to see here is the end of verse four which says the ‘Spirit distributes [these gifts] according to his will.’

That is these things are the work of God and so we know the gospel message is true because if it were not these things would never happen.

Never forget brothers and sisters that the Church of Jesus Christ is built, empowered, and sustained by almighty God.

You want evidence that we should give our attention to the gospel?

Look around you at those who believe the gospel.

Why does the church still exist? How did I, a hopeless sinner, come to love Jesus as Lord and Saviour?

By the power of the Holy Spirit at work in me.

I know often times our ability to see the work of God gets cloudy, but it is still there.

So the question for us this morning is, “Are we paying attention?”

Are we seeking to grow in our understanding and love for Jesus and His gospel?

It is absolutely essential that we do, otherwise we are going to drift away.

We cannot endure as believers and be passive about our faith.

We cannot ignore the gospel without consequences.

We cannot dismiss the gospel without denying the power of God.

Don't go through life half asleep with regards to spiritual matters, pay attention like your life depends on it because it does.