**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**Hebrews (4): The Book Of Better Things**

**“The Danger Of Drifting”**

**Hebrews 2:1-4**

**January 28, 2024**

As we have seen, the first chapter of Hebrews is all about the Lord Jesus Christ. He is God’s full and final revelation to the world. He is the heir of all things because He is the One through whom God created all things. He is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s nature. He is sustaining all things by the word of His power, so that whatever God has ordained to come to pass will, in fact, come to pass. By His sacrifice on the cross He cleansed us from sin and then sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven (1:1-3).

As good and powerful as angels are, Jesus is better. He alone is the Son. The angels worship Him; He doesn’t worship them. His sovereign rule is forever and ever. He laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are His handiwork. To no one else has God the Father ever said, “*Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet*.” Angels serve those who will inherit salvation, but He is the One who sends them (1:4-14).

This is a glorious list of stunning statements about our Savior. But there are no commands, no obligations, or responsibilities until we come to the first verse of this second chapter: “*We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away*.”

The force of that little word “*therefore*” cannot be emphasized enough. That’s our author’s way of saying “because” of everything I have just said about the Lord Jesus Christ, “stop, look, and listen! Pay very, very close attention to what you’ve just read, and listen very, very intently to what you’ve just heard. What I’m about to say is not simply good advice. Nor is it something I am merely suggesting. How you respond to what I tell you next will determine whether you go to heaven, or spend eternity in hell.”

Every single one of us is going to die, some sooner than later. Whether by cancer or car accident, heart disease, brain tumor, or just plain old age, we are all going to die. When we do, there will be only one thing that really matters. It’s the one thing that will determine what happens to us when this life has ended. That one thing is whether or not we have paid *much closer attention* to what the Bible has said about Jesus Christ.

That’s the reason the verses before us today are so very important. It’s the first of five warning passages, which will become stronger as we progress through this book. Our author begins with his word of exhortation (v. 1), followed by his reason for the exhortation (vv. 2-3a). Then he concludes by emphasizing how great God’s message of salvation truly is: **(a)** it was proclaimed by Christ Himself; **(b)** confirmed by eyewitnesses; and **(c)** it was authenticated “*by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit*” (vv. 3b-4).

**A. The Exhortation (v. 1):** “*We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.*” The message that has been heard and embraced, of course, is the message of God’s great salvation in Christ. It’s the good news that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, and that He came into this world to cleanse us from sin, and that He was raised from the dead and ascended to His heavenly glory, where He is now seated on His eternal throne (Heb. 1:4-14).

**1 Q.** So, why would any of us not pay close attention to what we’ve heard and believed about the Lord Jesus Christ? **A.** Because we often regard other things as more important. Some pay very close attention to what’s happening to our public schools, or at our southern border. Some are focused on the fluctuations in the stock market, or on the daily balances in their checkbooks and credit card accounts. Some carefully read every email or text that is sent their way, or they constantly surf the internet or shop online. For those who are so easily distracted, there will always be other things more valuable and better than the Lord Jesus Christ.

**2 Q.** If we don’t pay close attention to the good news about Christ, what will happen?

**A.** We will “drift away” from it. As commentators have noted, the word translated “drift away” occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. But it’s clear our author has a nautical metaphor in mind, as in a ship slowly drifting out to sea and past the dock where it should have been secured. In Hebrews 6:19, he speaks of the hope set before us as “*a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul*.” That hope is in the person and saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, the *gospel of salvation* is portrayed as a fixed and secure port to which we must *carefully* anchor ourselves.

**3 Q.** So, what do we have to do to drift? **A.**  Absolutely nothing! Don’t do anything, and you will drift in the strong currents of this world. That’s our author’s great concern. If we take the Christian faith lightly, we *will* drift from it; if we treat it casually, we *will* drift from it. It is easy to drift with the currents, but if we drift too far, it will be impossible to return against the stream. That’s the danger of drifting.

***Drifting*** from the word (the first warning; 2:1-4) leads to ***doubting*** the word (the second warning; 3:7-4:13); which leads to a ***dullness*** of hearing the word (the third warning; 5:11-6:12); which leads to ***despising*** the word (the fourth warning; 10:26-31); which leads to ***defying*** the word (the fifth warning; 12:25-29). There is a kind of defiance that *is* irreversible. It’s called apostasy, and only God knows with certainty when a once-professing-Christian reaches that point. It’s the point of no return!

**B. The Reason for the Exhortation (vv. 2-3a):** “*For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation*?” Here the argument is from the lesser to the greater. If what the angels said was binding, then what was said by One superior to angels must be even more binding.

The “message” spoken through angels is the Law given by Moses at Sinai, as we noted last week (Cf. Acts 7:53 and Gal. 3:19). Everything in that message was “binding,” or “unalterable” (NASB) or it “proved steadfast” (NKJV). Not all violations of the Law were of equal significance, but punishments were appropriately set for each one. The worst of these punishments was death, but under the Old Covenant, the death penalty was as bad as it got!

Therefore, if disregarding the Law – mediated by angels – brought that kind of judgment, then “ignoring” (NIV), or “neglecting” (NASB, ESV) the great salvation given in Christ will bring even greater judgment. What could be worse than physical death? Spiritual or eternal death! Hence, what’s at stake in “drifting away” and “neglecting” the salvation that has come in Christ *is our eternal destiny*. *We will not escape eternal judgment*!

But our author does *not* mean that true believers can lose their salvation. He knows that just as the Old Covenant community had *professing* believers, the same is true for the New Covenant community. If *nominal* Christians begin to drift, this may result in drifting away from their profession of faith *altogether*. Hence the need for this urgent warning to *everyone* within the church. For as we shall see, continuance in the Christian life is the test of reality (Cf. 3:6, 14).

**C. The Greatness of the Gospel Message (vv. 3b-4):** “*This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will*.” To illustrate the greatness of our salvation, our author is highlighting three important facts.

1. It was announced by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It was He who said, “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach the gospel to the poor . . .*” (Luke 4:18). He also said, “*The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*” (Luke 19:10), and “*to give his life a ransom for many*” (Matt. 20:28). Jesus proclaimed this message of salvation loudly and clearly.

2. Those who saw Him and heard Him testified to us (the author and his readers) that everything He said and did was real and true. These eyewitnesses were walking with the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry, and they saw and heard everything.

3. God the Father also validated the truth of this message with “*signs, wonders and various miracles, and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit*” (v. 4). Just as these miraculous displays of God’s power marked the ministry of Jesus (Acts 2:22), they continued to mark the ministry of the apostles since the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:43). “They were matters of common knowledge and widespread Christian experience,” writes F. F. Bruce, “and the reference to them here is calculated *to restore the readers’ faith in the gospel as God’s authoritative message*.” Simply stated, the purpose of these miraculous signs and wonders was to confirm that the apostolic messengers and their message came from Him! (2 Corinthians 12:12)

In the parable of the sower, the seed sown on rocky ground made a good showing at first. But it could not withstand the heat of the sun “*because it had no root*” (Mark 4:5-6). In His interpretation of the parable, Jesus said this referred to those who “*hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away*” (Mark 5:16-17).

This is precisely what our author fears may happen with his readers. Would they succumb to the various kinds of pressure they were facing? Would they drift away from their Christian profession and return to the protected haven of Judaism? Hence he urges them (and us) to press on; for they (and we) have everything to gain by standing fast, but everything to lose by slipping back. For “*What escape can there be for us if we ignore a deliverance so great?*” (NEB).