

† The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

The Consequence of Rejection (Part 1)

Hebrews 5:11-14

11 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

The story is told of Franklin Roosevelt, who often endured long receiving lines at the White House. He complained that no one really paid any attention to what was said. So one day, during a reception, he decided to try an experiment. To each person who came down the line and shook his hand, he murmured, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." The guests responded with phrases like, "Marvelous! Keep up the good work. We are proud of you. God bless you, sir."

It was not till the end of the line, while greeting the ambassador from Bolivia, that his words were actually heard. Nonplussed, the ambassador leaned over and whispered, "I'm sure she had it coming."

No doubt that many of us can relate to Roosevelt - having those times in which you are speaking something important, perhaps even pouring out your heart, only to realize that the people you are addressing are not listening, or at least not understanding what on earth you are saying. Sometimes this is because we do a poor job of communicating. But on other occasions, the issue is not with the communicator, but rather with the listener. For some reason they are tuned out and therefore unable to truly grasp what is being said.

This is in part, something we see in our text this morning. Our author has been pouring out his heart concerning the person and wonder of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and most recently, as the great High Priest. But almost as if he were there delivering this letter in person, it is as if the author realizes that his hearers are not really hearing him – they are simply not "getting it." He just finishes expounding the truth that the priesthood of Jesus is superior to that of Aaron and Levi of the Old Testament because it was of a different and better order - "*the order of Melchizedek*"(v. 10). But what exactly does this mean, "the order of Melchizedek"? How is Jesus related to this Old Testament priest and character? These are questions that the author wishes to communicate, but just

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not yet. Beginning in verse 11, it is as if he knew that his readers did not really understand what he was saying. Therefore he does something rather remarkable and incredibly abrupt in verse 11. He says, “Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.” Right in the middle of his explanation of the priesthood of Jesus, just after he introduces this Old Testament figure of Melchizedek, the author stops dead in his tracks. He so much wants them to be fed on the deep rich truths of God’s word and says, “**we have much to say.**” Beloved, when it comes to God’s Word and understanding the greatness of Jesus, let it be known - there is always “**much to say.**” What is God’s Word anyway but the revelation of an infinite God to finite men?

As we come to the Scriptures then, and as we learn of Jesus Christ, we will never exhaust the subject – there is “much to say”. Learning of Christ can and should always be a fresh and new experience. Yet, is it not true that we can easily grow content with our “knowledge of Jesus?” We can become inappropriately content, believing that a basic knowledge of Christ is sufficient. Don’t misunderstand me, the basics concerning the knowledge of Christ are wonderful and necessary, but remember the command of Scripture –

2 Peter 3:18

but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 4:15

but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,

1 Peter 2:2

like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

It is easy to grow complacent rather than to grow compliant with God’s Word and the knowledge of Christ. Someone has aptly said, “*Christian should not rest satisfied in having attained to a knowledge of the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, but should go on unto perfection.*”¹ Just as a pond that is stagnant and without the influx of fresh water grows putrid, so too does the life and testimony of the person who grows inappropriately content with the level of

¹ Fuller, Andrew *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller*, vol. 1, 161

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knowledge he or she has of Christ, for beloved, there is **“much to say.”** Small progress in the knowledge of Christ under the great privileges of possessing the Spirit and the Word is a grievous fault into which too many allow themselves to fall. I submit to you this morning that the question each one must ask himself is this, **“Am I growing in my knowledge and practice of Jesus Christ and His Word?”** The author of Hebrews desires for his readers to grow in both their knowledge and practice, but he is painfully aware of something that is hindering this progress. There is **“much to say”**, but they are not understanding – and they are not understanding because of at least two things we can discern from our text. The first hindrance is stated clearly in verse 11 - they **“have become dull of hearing”** and the second, stated more in principle, is that they **have become deficient in practice.**

Dull of Hearing

Let us begin with this admonition that the readers **“have become dull of hearing.”** The word “dull” is of particular interest due to the fact that the Greek word for it is used only by the author of Hebrews and only here in 5:11 and once again in 6:12. In 5:11, the readers are charged with being “dull” of hearing. Look at Hebrews 6:11-12. Here we read this –

11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 so that you will not be sluggish [dull], but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

In Hebrews 6:12 the issue is not about their “hearing” or understanding, but rather their practicing of genuine faith. These two verses form a bracket that contains the next or third warning passage here in Hebrews – a warning against spiritual dullness or sluggishness. I think this is crucial to see and understand because it will also help us to better understand one of the more difficult passages in the Bible, Hebrews 6:4-6.

Let us take the word “dull” into our consideration. As seen from Hebrews 6:12, it can mean “sluggish” or “lazy, or even slothful.” In the context of our text, the author is firmly, yet lovingly chastising these readers for allowing their spiritual lives to grow static and stale. Evidently many had once had a passion to know God and to know Him through Jesus. They had an eagerness to learn and were at one time acutely attentive to such things. How do I know this? Our text says that they **“have become dull of hearing”** implying that there was a time

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when they were diligent, hearing and understanding the things of God. In fact, I submit to you that the opposite of “dull” is “diligent.” There are in a sense only two kinds of professing believers; those who are diligent to know God and to enter His rest, and those who are dull of hearing, not really understanding and practicing the things of God.

Such a consideration made me ask myself, “What happened to these first readers?” How could they have lost their diligence to know Christ? Yet such a question often plagues us as well, does it not? Have there not been times in our lives when we were “on fire” for the Lord? Have there been those times when you opened your Bible and soaked in its message? Those times when you have bowed your head in prayer and were ushered into the presence of God, filled with His blessings. Then, somewhere along the way the Bible got more difficult to know, prayer became more of a struggle and running with Christ slowed down to a walk and then a crawl. This is what many of these first readers were facing. Can you relate?

To be “dull of hearing” speaks not so much about literal hearing, but spiritual understanding. Are you growing in your understanding of Christ? And, as we will see in a moment, one test you can use to determine if you are growing in understanding is if you are also increasing in your diligence to follow Christ.

Now I know that I am seemingly stuck on this idea of growing in our understanding of Christ, but please bear with me, for there is **“much to say.”** For the consequences of rejecting or not heeding such truths and thoughts are devastating – for as we must come to see, the true believer has as the overall characteristic of his life, a passion for the pursuit of the knowledge of Christ. His prayer and plea is, “I want to ‘know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection form the dead” to the glory of God!

So let me pause for a moment, and address some practical issues that come to mind as we consider this admonition that **“you have become dull of hearing.”** In other words, there were those in this congregation that had slowed or even ceased understanding the truth of Christ. Did you hear what I said, there were those in that congregation, they were there, present and listening to these words, who had slowed or ceased to long for the knowledge and practice of Christ. What would cause such a faith-crushing consequence as this? And, beloved, if such could be true for these addressed in this letter, just a short time since the conception of the church, could it be that some of us in here might also have become **“dull of hearing.”** To be sure, until they were confronted with such a thought, many of these, just as perhaps some of you, may be

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dangerously unaware of your spiritual dullness. Listen and heed the Word and let us consider then some of the reasons how a person might become dull of hearing. I submit three to you.

1. We become “dull of hearing” when we avoid the Word of God.

The first way a person might grow “dull of hearing” rather than diligent in the things of God is when he avoids the Word of God. The Scriptures are full of exhortations and reminders that the very source of life and way of obedience is found in the Word of God. The author of Hebrews makes such a statement in 12:25 saying –

See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.

Why does the Holy Spirit find it necessary to remind people “not to refuse [a word that means “to avoid, reject or excuse”] Him who is speaking? Beloved, I know that most of you have been professing believers for some time and that what I say now you may know in your head, but I ask you to consider carefully this truth – the reason why a person may refuse or avoid God’s Word is because it goes against our very nature and our natural desires to please ourselves. There is nothing pleasant to the flesh about having your sin exposed and being compared to the holiness and perfection of God. Remember Hebrews 4:12-13 – what a devastating thought to those who are living according to the flesh rather than the Spirit, who are walking by sight rather than by faith; to those who want to justify living in or with sin rather than being justified by God –

Hebrews 4:12-13

12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

The old Jewish rabbis had a teaching that they used to exhort their disciples to avoid sin – they said that one must remember –

1. That there is an ear that hears everything;
2. That there is an eye that sees everything;

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3. That there is a hand that writes everything into the Book of Knowledge which shall be opened at the judgment.

It is the Word of God that teaches us these things, and there are times, prayerfully short lived, in which we want to avoid God's Word because we know it will reveal to us our sin. But as the Psalmist wrote in Psalm 94:9-11 –

9 He who planted the ear, does He not hear? He who formed the eye, does He not see? 10 He who chastens the nations, will He not rebuke, even He who teaches man knowledge? 11 The LORD knows the thoughts of man, that they are a mere breath.

It may not always be a pleasant experience, but in the long run, to come to God's Word and have our sinfulness exposed so that we might experience the sanctification, that is the holiness of God, is absolutely a desire of the genuine believer.

2. We become “dull of hearing” when we take the Word of God for granted.

Another means by which we become “dull of hearing” is when we start to take God and His Word for granted. We live in such a “free” culture, that we take often fail to avail ourselves to the Word of God. Whether we say it this way or not, our attitude becomes, “I will read the Word when I get around to it – there are other things to do now.” Proverbs 8:33 says –

Heed instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it.

Or to say it another way – “Give yourselves to the constant hearing and practicing of God's Word – do not take it for granted.” Hearing and heeding the Word of God does not happen magically – it takes determination. It is a constant fight against the flesh to come to the word and know that in it God's mercies are new every morning.

As many of you saw as you came to church this morning, the outside of our building is receiving some long needed remodeling. What caught my attention was that as some of the materials were going up to repair and replace the existing exterior, I heard some say things like, “Until I saw the new materials, I didn't realize just how bad the siding of the church was?” Isn't that interesting? In other words, we grew accustomed to and took for granted the condition of the siding. But when compared to the new materials, it could no longer be taken for

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granted. The old stuff was bad and the new is demonstratively better. So it is with the Word of God. We can take it for granted and neglect it. When we do we fail to appreciate the glorious covering of righteousness and holiness that is ours to have if we heed the instruction of God's Word. Let us never take the word of God for granted thinking that we can do without it if needs be.

3. We become “dull of hearing” when we do not obey or practice the Word of God.

The final means by which we might become “dull of hearing” and lack a right understanding and appreciation for God and His Word is when we determine to not to obey or practice the principles of the Word. I know these are familiar words, but let them speak to your heart as James 1:22 says,

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

The truth of the matter is we have become very adept at equating coming to church and hearing the word with actually doing the word. Listen to the words of Jesus in Luke 6:46-47 –

Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? 47 Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: 48 he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49 But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great.

If we are giving ourselves over to disobedience, then we cannot complain about what we hear, or do not hear, from God's Word. The reason why you get nothing out of God's Word is abundantly clear – if you have no intention to obey God's Word then you cannot expect for God to make plain to you the meaning of His Word, when all you really want to do is satisfy your own pride.

Beloved, the condition of “dull hearing” makes for the consequences of a deficient understanding of Christ and a diminished following after Christ. My exhortation to you this morning is to pray for a deeper love and more fiery fervor

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for listening to and practicing the Word of God. If we fail to feed on a steady diet of God's Word, know that our ability to live honorable, wisely and demonstratively for Christ will be stymied. Let us so desire to know Christ and His Word. Let us long for and after such knowledge. And Let us know that in the Word lies such a wealth and storehouse of precocious truths just waiting to be unearthed by our understanding and practice. Let me close with two thoughts from the words of Jonathan Edwards. He wrote:

The word of God, which is given for our instruction in divinity [knowledge of God], contains enough in it to employ us to the end of our lives, and then we shall leave enough uninvestigated to employ the heads of the ablest divines to the end of the world.

There is enough in this divine science to employ the understandings of saints and angels to all eternity.

Yes, there is ***“much to say”*** so let us get to the business of hearing it so that we might, as we will learn next week, become passionate and effective communicators of the truth of Christ, having in each one of us, a heart that also has ***“much to say”*** about our God and our Savior.

Soli Deo Gloria

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