

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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

A Call to Hear and to Heed

Hebrews 12:25

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.

Please turn in your Bibles to Hebrews – Hebrews 12. As you are turning there, I begin by telling you that this has been a difficult passage for me this week. It has been difficult not because I don't know what the text means; or because I haven't had a multitude of thoughts about what to communicate. But as I was trying to work through the text, I kept coming back to the very first verse of this passage – Hebrews 12:25 and the more I looked at it, the more it seemed to speak to me. Let me read it to you –

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.

Lord, give us the meaning and spirit of Your Word while it lies open before us;
Apply Your Word with power to our souls, threatening or promise, doctrine or precept,
whatever it may be; lead us with trembling and with joy into the soul and marrow of Your Word.
(adapted from C.H. Spurgeon)

Beloved, this verse is a warning. What you see before you is nothing short of a matter of life or death; the difference between peace with God or the condemnation of God, of eternal bliss or eternal damnation. This was written to a church of professing believers, of those who at least outwardly had pledged allegiance to Jesus Christ. And in this sense then Hebrews 12:25 is an exhortation, a call, an imperative command given by the Holy Spirit to all who would profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This is a call to come to Jesus. This is the gospel. It is a call to stop whatever else it is you are doing, whatever else it is you might be thinking about and focusing your attention upon this one question – “Am I hearing and heeding the voice of the Savior?” So profound is this question that I could go no further in this text, however hard I tried. I believe there is an important lesson for us from this verse – a lesson to make sure we are hearing and heeding the voice of Jesus. Such an exhortation is not unique in the Scripture. In John 10:27, Jesus makes this plain but pointed description of one who is a true believer. He says,

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

Do you see from this statement the twin idea of hearing Jesus as well as being obedient, of heeding His calls? We see the same thing in the familiar words of James 1:22 which says:

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

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All familiarity aside, that is a rather sobering verse, for it indicates that among those who made up the earliest believers in Jesus Christ, some of whom had been taught by the Apostles of Jesus Christ themselves, were capable of hearing the word, of agreeing with the word, of mentally assenting to the word, but never getting what entered the ears and perceived by the mind flow down to the heart and become real action or service to Christ.

Beloved, I submit to you that in the church it is more than apparent that we may be quick to say “Amen” - but slow to act. We pride ourselves on growing in grace, but may it be that we never share the fullness of the ripe fruit of grace with others? I submit to you that we must be constantly on guard against complacency, apathy, lethargy, procrastination, coldness of heart, and deadness of spirit. I bring before you the Word of the Living God, who by His most blessed Holy Spirit, speaks this command to us this morning – **“See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking.”** Do you believe this to be God’s blessed Word, spoken to you and for you? If so, then this command demands all attention in this hour. Do you believe that our enemy, the devil is seeking even now in this hour to do anything to prevent you from receiving this word? Then stand firm – do not give the enemy a foothold. Do you admit that we are plagued by an indisposition to receive the Word as we ought? That even now thoughts, ideas, day-dreams, things of this world enter the mind and rob you of proper attention? If so, then be and **“keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set now your mind on things above, not on the things that are on earth” (Colossians 3:1-2).**

Now, just prior to our verse, Hebrews 12:25, we had been reminded about grounds upon which a person may seek to pursue a relationship with the living God. There are two. One way is that of Mount Sinai, where God, in a most graphic and terrifying way, displayed His holiness, His righteous, His perfection and His judgment against sin. At Sinai, God revealed His perfection in the giving of Law, a Law that said, “If you do all these things, hear My voice and obey Me, then you will live.” Of course Israel immediately said, as recorded in Exodus 19:8, **“All that the LORD has spoken we will do!”** Certainly that was a nice sentiment, but Israel was ignorant, arrogant, or stubborn. For the history of Israel demonstrates, and we will take note of this a bit more in a moment, that from the beginning, the people of Israel were neglectful of God’s Word – they did not listen to His voice nor heed His call. And so I say to you this truth, that the neglecting of God’s Word always brings condemnation and death.

The way by which a person may pursue a relationship with God is by means of Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the very glorious dwelling place of the living God. To come to Zion means, as we saw in Hebrews 12:24, to come to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, a covenant whereby man acknowledges himself to be a sinner, incapable of saving himself and of receiving the righteousness of Christ, the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. To come to Jesus is to be sprinkled with His blood, seeing it as the only and perfect sacrifice by which one is made right with God.

So then, we have the Law of God which says in effect, if you keep the Law perfectly you will live, but if you break it even at one point, and everyone has, you will die. And we have the Grace of God which says in effect, acknowledge your own inability to please God because you are a sinner; be covered by the perfect righteousness of the work of Christ for you; be enabled by grace to know the reality of your relationship of peace with God by living for Jesus and you will have the assurance of eternal life in the joyful presence of God.

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Let us not forget that Hebrews 11 and 12 deals with the subject of faith. In the opening verses of Hebrews 11, faith is explained as being, ***“the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction [or evidence] of things not seen.”*** Additionally, Hebrews 11 presented to us the examples of faith, those otherwise unassuming and ordinary people like you and me who became extraordinary monuments of living by faith in God’s provisions and promises. And then, in Hebrews 12 we have seen the call to exercise faith, to run the race of faith along with exhortations, both positive and negative concerning how to live by faith.

Hebrews 12:25-29 concludes this discussion of faith, giving us at least two more exhortations; two more calls by which we are to now exercise faith. These two exhortations speak to us of how we might know that we are living by faith in Jesus versus living with some kind of self-righteousness, some thought or dependence upon our own works which is nothing but shaky ground. For apart from the sole work of Christ on behalf of a person, there is no security whatsoever in coming to God in any other way than to face Him only through the judgment and wrath of Sinai.

So then, this morning I would like to present to you the first of the two exhortations by which we can measure the reality and certainty of our faith so that we might have full assurance and full security that we are beloved of God and coming to His peaceful presence as pictured by Mount Zion. And so I give you our main point this morning, namely that *the life of faith is one characterized by hearing and heeding the Word of Christ*. This hearing and heeding of Christ is seen in two ways; first, the responsibility to hear and to heed; followed by the reason to hear and to heed.

I. The Responsibility – to hear and to heed the voice of Christ (25a)

Again, looking at verse 25, we are first given our responsibility by way of a command - ***“See to it you do not refuse Him who is speaking.”*** In reality this is simply a negative way of saying, “Pay careful attention that you heed or obey Jesus.” We have seen this command to ***“see to it”*** before. Over in 12:15 you might remember that we are called to ***“see to it that no one comes short of the grace of God.”*** But it was also used all the way back in Hebrews 3:12 where we read,

Take care [or, “see to it”], brethren that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

In all of these instances, the verb is a present plural imperative. Each one who professes Christ is to ***“see to it”*** – to pay close attention, to watch carefully that he or she as an individual is in right relationship with God. Additionally we are also to constantly be seeing to it that other are also pursuing this right relationship. Our responsibility is both personal and public.

The command goes on saying, ***“see to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking.”*** The word ***“refuse”*** means to totally disregard, count as nothing or purposely reject. It is not a polite refusing of a second helping of food that you didn’t need anyway. It would be more like a man dying of thirst refusing to take water from someone he regards as an enemy.

And just who is speaking that we are called not to refuse and must listen to? Hebrews 12:24 is the link – it is Jesus and His blood that speaks. Jesus and His gospel then are what in

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view. Jesus has and continues (notice it does not say, “who has spoken” but “who is speaking”) to call people to salvation by believing in Him. Jesus is calling all to repent. Remember His words to the disciples before He ascended to heaven? In Mark 16:15 He said to them, **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”** Why must this gospel be preached to all the world? Because we know according to Acts 4:12, **“And there is salvation in no one else; for these is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”**

Even the book of Hebrews reminds us in 1:1-2 that **“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken (finally and completely) to us in His Son...”** In other words, Jesus is God’s final word to man concerning how man may be made right. God the Father, in that fantastic moment called the Transfiguration, where Peter, James and John got a glimpse into the pre-Incarnate glory of Jesus, said through a bright cloud, **“This is My Beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!” (Matthew 17:5).** This is our reasonability then, to listen to Jesus with the intent and desire to follow and obey.

B. The Reason – to hear and to heed the voice of Jesus (25b)

We must be careful not to refuse, to reject or willfully neglect the words of Christ. Why? There is one reason given and is found in the rest of verse 25 and tells us that refusing, or not heeding or obeying the words of Christ brings the same condemnation as upon those who refused the Law of God. Not listening to Christ brings judgment. We read, **“For if those did not escape [that is bypass the judgment of God as spoken in the law given on Sinai] when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.”** In Exodus 19, the Israelite confessed their allegiance to God even before they heard all the terms. And in Exodus 20, as God gave them the Ten Commandments, remember that they became terrified and said to Moses; **“Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us or we will die” (20:19).** Now then, they were certainly afraid; they were afraid of God and His wrath, why? Because they knew they were sinners. But I think that another reason why they did not want to hear God speak any more is that they truly didn’t want to hear any more law. In Hebrews 12:19, please note this, it says that **“those who heard begged [that word “begged” is the same Greek word translated in verse 25 as “refused” – so] those who refused so that no further word be spoken to them.”** We know that Israel’s history was simply a series of downward spirals, yet there were a few recoveries, but essentially Israel began her relationship with God by refusing to heed the word and so as the years progressed, she came to a point where she completely refused God’s Word. Prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel constantly made statements like:

Jeremiah 8:9

The wise men are put to shame, they are dismayed and caught; behold, they have rejected the word of the LORD, and what kind of wisdom do they have?

Jeremiah 9:13-15

13 The LORD said, “Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice nor walked according to it, 14 but have walked after the

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stubbornness of their heart and after the Baals, as their fathers taught them, 15 therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, behold, I will feed them, this people, with wormwood and give them poisoned water to drink.”

Jeremiah 13:10

This wicked people, who refuse to listen to My words, who walk in the stubbornness of their hearts and have gone after other gods to serve them and to bow down to them, let them be just like this waistband which is totally worthless.

Ezekiel 20:13

But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They did not walk in My statutes and they rejected My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; and My sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them in the wilderness, to annihilate them.

Ezekiel 23:35

Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, bear now the punishment of your lewdness and your harlotries.'

What was the punishment for rejecting the Word of God given in the Law at Mount Sinai – punishment, destruction, condemnation? And now the author says in effect, if these could not escape the punishment for not listening to the voice of God in law; how do you think you will escape punishment for rejecting the voice of Jesus in grace? This is nothing more than a reiteration of one of the first warnings given in the book of Hebrews. Look back at Hebrews 2:1-3:

1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable [the Law], and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, 3 how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

Beloved, let us pay careful attention that we are obeying the voice of Jesus, that we are seeking salvation by faith alone in His perfect work; that we are not boasting in anything save one thing, the cross of Christ. For ultimately there are only two options – the first and best option is to hear the voice of Jesus; hear Him as Lord and as Savior; to know that He alone is Master and to plead with Him to make you His own - purely out of His grace; confessing that you are not deserving of such, but trusting in His goodness and benevolence toward those who believe. The second option is to refuse this, but then you must know that you already stand condemned by the law as a sinner; unjustified before God and therefore destined to eternity in that place prepared for the devil and his angels, that place where for eternity there will be nothing but weeping and the gnashing of teeth, that place of unquenchable fire. Listen to the words of the gospel writer in John 3:36 as these two options are revealed:

He who believes in the Son [who hears and obeys His voice] has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

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Only two options; to hear and heed the voice of Jesus, not refusing Him, or rejecting, forgetting and forsaking His word. And from these two options comes but one question – “Have you been refusing to hear and heed, to listen and obey the Jesus?” Have you sensed His speaking to you but find yourself ignoring His Word? The words of Christ who said in Mark 7:14 –

After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, “Listen to Me, all of you, and understand...”

Is this truly a matter of life and death? Is it so important that we listen to voice of Jesus? What does Jesus say? Have you heard and heeded the words of John 5:24 which says:

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

But why is it that some do not hear and heed? And how is it that even we who profess to know Christ sometimes refuse or neglect the word of Christ? I offer you one simple reason – we refuse to hear and to heed the words of Jesus when we so fill our hearts with lesser things, with things of this world. Our minds are filled with material wants, with concerns over earthly matters, with desires for personal advancement, prestige or power. Sometimes our minds are even filled with just trying to survive; just trying to get by; just trying to make end’s meat. But even that is motivated more often than not from a “what can I do” mentality rather than a leaning and depending attitude upon Christ. And where stands it written that the heart is inclined to refuse to hear and heed Christ because of an earthly filled and earthly minded heart? Consider the words of Jesus, who when the Pharisees sought to take His life because He threatened their own personal pursuits of power, prestige and even preservation said to them in John 8:37:

I know that you are Abraham’s descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.

Such a remarkable and sobering statement, “***My word has no place in you.***” In other words, they had so stuffed their hearts and minds with other, lesser things that there was no room for the words of Christ and therefore no room to believe, to act and to follow Jesus. Are you hearing and heeding the voice of Jesus who is speaking? Just a few verses later Jesus says in John 8:47:

He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.

Are you hearing and heeding? Are you “***of God***”? Have you refused to hear Jesus who is speaking? And just what are some of the things that Jesus says that we must hear and heed? Let me share just a few statements of Jesus and as I do, I want you to carefully and prayerfully ask yourself, “Am I hearing and heeding this? Am I only being a hearer of the word

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without also being a doer? Am I in any way neglecting, slighting or even outright refusing these things?"

First, Jesus is speaking as says to all in Matthew 4:17,

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Repent, that is, do you see within your heart an internal change and a new disposition toward sin. Repentance is not simply changing external behavior; it is not simply the doing of new good deeds in the stead of old bad ones. Repentance is seeing sin as not being just hurtful to your own well-being, but most importantly is it seeing sin as an utter despicable offense against the King of Heaven. Are there sins in your life right now of which you have neglected to repent of; that you have hesitated seeing as abominations against God. Hear and heed the words of Christ.

Quickly let me give you a few more statements of Jesus that I ask you to consider and see if you are in any neglecting or refusing to hear and heed. In John 14:1 Jesus exhorted,

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.

Are you believing in Jesus – that is really knowing and trusting Him not only as Savior, as the one who died for the sins of His people, but also as Lord, as the Master, the Captain, the one whom you alone will listen to and follow. Have you been in anyway, Lord of your own life, refusing to Him who is speaking?

In John 15:4 Jesus calls those who would follow Him and says,

Abide [dwell, live, make your home, be in the continual presence; remain] in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.

Have you made yourself any dwelling place outside of Christ? Are there places you have made in your life, perhaps elaborate and ornate; or perhaps nothing more than a shack where you live apart from Christ? It may be only for moments at a time; lustful thoughts, angry feelings, a sense of self-accomplishment; but dwelling there will not bring forth the fruit of Christ.

Repent, believe, abide – believe me these are just a few of exhortations of Jesus that we are called to hear and to heed. Without time to elaborate, know that Jesus calls you to worship in Spirit and in truth (John 4); to always pray and not lose heart (Luke 18); to be anxious for nothing (Matthew 6); to love your enemies (Matthew 5:44), to love your neighbors (Matthew 22:39) and even to love God with your whole heart, soul and mind (Matthew 22:37). Have you heard and are you heeding these words. Because our Hebrews 12:25 text warns us that if we refuse these and other commands that are spoken to us by Jesus, we are on a path of condemnation and destruction.

The one who is hearing and heeding the voice of Jesus does not seek to find reasons not to follow Him; not to do these things, but rather strives to do and believe all he can. May we not be guilty of refusing Him who is speaking. We may be telling Him, however subtly, that we are too busy, too tired, too smart, too dumb, too hurt, too unappreciated, too strong, too

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weak, too important, too insignificant or just too lazy to pay such close attention to hear and to heed His voice. Beloved, we must “**see to it**” that we are not too indifferent, too self-righteous, too self-reliant to hear and to heed Him who is speaking. We must resolve not to prefer our will over obedience, lust over purity, self over the Divine. We must not cave into the fear of the world who hates to hear and heed the voice of Christ. We must not allow procrastination which cries “tomorrow, tomorrow” to be on our lips knowing full well that tomorrow means never.

No, let us not refuse Him who is speaking rather let us embrace Him; let us hear Him with a view to know His own heart and to follow His perfect ways. For those to whom God spoke to on earth through Moses and refused suffered doom and destruction. Pharaoh and the Egyptians refused and perished. The mummies Korah, Dathan and Abiram refused and were swallowed up. Judas, Ananias and Sapphira did not hear and heed and so suffered wrath. If these who refused did not escape punishment, then the only alternative and the only hope is to plead with God for ears to hear and hearts to follow Jesus who says come:

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 28:11).

Be done with the yoke of Law, with the yoke of self-pursuit and self-righteous all which yokes lead to destruction. But do not think you can be yokeless. For as Jesus goes on to say...

29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11:29-30).

His yoke is easy because He has borne the burden; He has suffered the pain of your death. The yoke of self, the yoke of the Law, the yoke of anyone or anything other than Christ is a burden that leads to death. But the yoke and burden of Christ is easy and light. And to this Jesus says come, come put on My yoke, come and follow Me. Come and to Me, hear Me, follow Me and live. The alternative is a difficult yoke and a heavy burden that will drag your soul to hell. So, let me ask you again – take this question with you into prayer – “Am I refusing Jesus in any way? Has He been speaking to me but I have neglected His voice?”

Lord Jesus, by your grace, enables us to hear your voice and heed your commands. May we begin this morning by coming to You; may the Father draw us unto you that we may find that rest for our souls, a rest that delights in the responsibility to listen and to do Your Word for Your glory. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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