

Hebrews Chapter 2 Our Response to God's Message

by A.B. Simpson

We must give heed to God's message, take heed to believe the Word, hearken to God's voice, fear the consequences of coming short, and labor to enter into God's rest.

Scripture: Exodus 15:26, Matthew 11:28, Philippians 4:7, Hebrews 2:1-3

Topics: "Faith and Obedience", "Response to God's Word"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the critical response we must have to God's message as outlined in Hebrews, urging believers to give earnest attention to His Word, retain it, and actively believe it. He warns against the dangers of unbelief and the importance of hearkening to God's voice, highlighting the promise of rest that remains for God's people. Simpson illustrates the necessity of laboring to enter into this rest, which requires a decisive act of surrender and faith. He calls for immediate action in response to God's call, stressing that today is the time to listen and respond without delay. Ultimately, he encourages believers to avoid the pitfalls of complacency and to fully embrace the life and peace that comes from trusting in Christ.

Transcript

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Heb. 2: 1).

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Heb. 3: 12).

"While it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation" (Heb. 3: 15).

"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it" (Heb. 4: 1).

"Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (Heb. 4: 11).

God has spoken. This is the first message of Hebrews. But what response does He expect from us? That is our present message, and it is answered in the passages quoted above.

1. "Let us give heed." The word "heed" is derived from "head," and it means that we should give our most earnest and careful attention and consideration to the great Messenger whom God has sent from the throne to bear His last word to men. How little attention we give to His Word! Preoccupied with a thousand other things when we hear it, and distracted afterwards by the whirl of the world's cares, pleasures and temptations, it scarcely finds a lodgment in our minds, and birds of the air bear away the falling seed from the trodden wayside. "Take heed how ye hear." If God has sent His only Son as His last Messenger to men, He expects us at least to listen to His message. "This is my beloved Son," He says, "Hear ye him."

But not only does He demand attention, but retention. "Lest at any time we should let them slip." The word means "to leak out as from a broken vessel." How much leakage there is in our recollection of sacred things! How soon we forget! The word is also translated by some "lest we should slip away from them." How soon forgetfulness leads to backsliding! It is not enough that we should have hold of the truth, but we want the truth to have hold of us.

Beloved, we are living in a day when men and women easily slip away from the authority of the words of Christ. To do this is to drift from all the moorings of safety and find yourself afloat at last on the downward tide of ruin. Cling to the Word of God. Believe it, and let it keep you from the perils of Time's last days.

2. Let us take heed. And to what shall we take heed? That we not only hold to the Word, but that we believe it. "Take heed . . . lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." The Bible must not only be understood but believed. It is not given for speculation, but for simple, absolute, implicit faith. The word unbelief is translated in the margin "disobedience," and the connection between faith and obedience is indeed very close. The old Saxon word "believe" originally meant by a simple inversion "to live by," and we will always find that we live by that which we believe. The only secret of a right life is a true faith, and the only proof of a true faith is a life committed to our creed and reflecting it in our conduct. Do we believe the Word of God and are we living by it, putting our whole weight upon it and making it the standard, the safeguard, and the guide of our whole life?

3. Let us hearken. "If ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." As we have seen, it is not only the spoken and the written Word, but it is the living Word in the heart, and His voice is often so still that we will fail to hear it unless we have the hearkening ear. The first condition of hearing is the desire to hear, the readiness to listen to the Master's voice, and to know and to do His will for us in everything. God's covenant with His people was, "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians" (Ex. 15: 26). It was not enough to obey what they knew already, but it was essential that they should be watching and waiting to know His voice in everything and at all times. It was the failure to do this that lost Saul his kingdom, and brought upon him the solemn warning and reproof, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." God will always be ready to speak if we are ready to listen, but if we close our ears and refuse His counsel He may leave us in silence to our ignorance and folly. Let us listen to the Holy Ghost. Let us be in touch with the Shepherd, and we shall know His voice and follow Him in perfect safety through every dangerous path of life.

4. "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." This is founded especially on the typical connection between Joshua, the ancient leader of Israel, and the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Captain of our Salvation. The word "Jesus" here used (4: 8) undoubtedly refers to Joshua, which was the Old Testament name of Jesus. The Land of Promise into

which Joshua brought the people of God was simply the type of the better inheritance into which Christ the great Captain of our salvation is bringing His people. Certainly it did not refer to our future heaven, for in Heaven there will be no Canaanites and no conflicts. It was the type of the present rest into which Christ is bringing His willing people. It is of that He says in this passage, "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God," and we which have believed do enter into rest. There is for us in Christ an inheritance of reality, of victory and of peace as different from the condition of the average Christian as the Land of Promise was different from the weary wanderings of the wilderness. Now there is a promise left us of entering into this rest. That promise is repeated over and over again in God's Word. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee," is the ancient Hebrew form of the promise. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," is Christ's new edition of the promise turned into a great request. "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." This is the bequest divided among the children, and proved in the actual experience of life.

Now, if this is left us it becomes a very serious thing for us to fail to receive it. It would be a very serious thing to allow your father's will to go by default and waste the great inheritance which amid sacrifice and toil he spent his life accumulating for his loved ones. And how much worse is it to waste the purchase of the precious blood of Christ and allow to be of no effect His costly sacrifice and His infinite gift of love! "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" How serious it is even to seem to come short of it! It is not the danger of a life of open wickedness that is here pointed out; it is a life that just barely misses God's best. It only comes short, but loses it just the same. Was there ever a more pathetic story than that of the tribes that marched behind the pillar of cloud and flame, that came right up to the gates of Canaan, and yet right there at the very threshold failed to enter in? Was there ever a sadder spectacle than those ancient millions turning back into the desert day after day and year after year, in that endless round of fruitless wandering, until at last they sank and perished in the sands? They just came short, that was all. They reached the borders of the land. One day more and they would have been across. But they hesitated, they doubted, they feared, they disobeyed, and they failed. They were willing enough next day to go, but God refused to let them. They had missed their opportunity. They had come too late. Well may we fear this coming short of entering into His rest. Well may we "make speed" to enter in.

It marks the difference between two classes of Christians, the one, the wanderers in the wilderness, the other, victors of the Land of Promise; the one ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth, ever seeking and never obtaining, with just enough religion to make them wretched, just enough light to know how much they have lost. But the saddest part of it is not merely its influence upon themselves, but its influence upon others. Not only do they lose, but their work suffers, their testimony for Christ is vain, their prayers are unanswered, and their lives are a reflection upon their Lord as well as a disappointment to themselves and everybody else.

5. "Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest." There is such a thing as laboring for rest. The struggle of war is necessary to bring the victory of peace. The toil of busy years is the prelude to affluence, retirement, and repose. The full surrender in which we die to some strong self-will is the pathway through which we rise to a new and better life. There are some things that we must let go in order to keep. There are crisis moments through which a soul must pass in the throes of a great conflict ere it can find lasting peace. And so there is a moment in every life when we meet God, and by a supreme surrender enter into His sovereign will and His perfect peace.

John Bunyan tells us of his significant dream when his soul was struggling to enter into the better life. He saw a company of happy women dwelling in a region of celestial light, and bearing upon their faces the expression of infinite rest and blessedness. Many of them were faces that he knew among the saints of God. But he was not among them. But a great wall rose between, shutting him out in the cold and cheerless darkness. He wept and struggled to find some entrance, until at last he discovered the secret passage under the wall, but so narrow that he could not get through with all his belongings. But then he heard their voices calling him and telling him that if he was willing to part with all, he, too, could pass within the narrow gate and enter in. At length after a painful struggle he was able to leave his impediments and possessions, and slowly pressing through the narrow passage he awoke to find himself in this Land of Light. "Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest." God has been leading you up to it all your days. There is some decisive act, some supreme surrender, some great letting go or taking hold which He will show you, which probably He has shown you, and in which you will find the problem solved, the die cast, the door opened, and the land possessed. So may He help you to labor to enter into His rest.

But the word translated "labor" has a slightly different literal meaning. "Make speed," is its exact force. It calls to instant action, and thus it harmonizes with the previous message "Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." There are some things which in their very nature must be done quickly or they lose their effect. There are processes that will bear slow, deliberate action, but there are great decisions that must be instantly made, and advance movements that must be carried forward as the walls of the fortress are stormed by swift and sudden assault. When God is calling to some great decision there is no time for Paul to confer with flesh and blood, for Elisha to go home and bid his friends farewell, or for the young disciple to wait until he has buried his father. It is today, "While it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." It is the moment when God is speaking. It is the moment when the resources of grace are waiting to carry you through. That is the time, the only time for action, and God will not brook delay. Beloved, is He so calling you today? The moment to answer is the moment He speaks. Oh, then, "Today if ye will hear his voice" make speed to enter into His rest. Go forward, step out into the Jordan of death to do all His will; step out into the act of obedience which is calling you on; step out to trust Him in the dark and stand waiting for Him to vindicate you and to carry you through.

Therefore, beloved, since God "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son," let us "give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip."

Let us take heed "lest there be in any of [us] an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."

Let us today if we would hear His voice harden not our hearts.

"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of [us] should seem to come short of it."

And, finally, let us make speed to "enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."

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