

**HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part fourteen**

Sunday, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017 - 10 a.m. - Teaching #1965

Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

**THE HEARING OF FAITH - WHY YOU MIGHT NOT BELIEVE WHAT YOU THINK YOU BELIEVE (continued)**

**Hebrews 4:1-2** - "Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. [2] For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened."

The central concern of last week's teaching - the main point of application - was truth from God's Word doesn't function in a life-giving way merely because we acknowledge it as **true** or hear it with **agreement**. God requires a **hearing mixed with faith**.

Then we took quite a while comparing our opening text in the **ESV** with the way the same verse translated in the **NASB** - **Hebrews 4:1-2** - "Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. [2] For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard."

This is the same idea in slightly different wording. It's not enough to **hear what God says**. Hearing must be **mixed with faith**. In fact, our text says hearing is numbing and life-destroying unless it is a **hearing combined with faith**. Though the writer of our text doesn't press this truth home as lightly as I just did when I said hearing without faith is **numbing** and **life-destroying**. He actually calls us to **fear divine judgment** when we hear God's Word and **don't** hear it with the hearing of faith.

This is why he urges all of us here today **not to take this warning lightly** - "...Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it...." (4:1).

**"Let us fear...."** **Fear what?** Bad luck? Perhaps a missed added blessing? No. Our writer reminds us God wiped out a generation wandering in the wilderness - 600,000 people - for their failure to hear God's Word with faith.

Then he clearly says - perhaps more clearly than we'd like - that **we** have had God speak to **us** just as **they** had God speak to **them**. In other words there's a very clear **comparison** being made. Let's not make the same mistake they made. Let's not reap the same judgment. There is simply no making sense of our text if we try to wave some softer interpretive wand over the words and make this message disappear:

**Hebrews 4:1-3** - "Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. [2] For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. [3] For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, They shall not enter my rest...."

As the weight of these words settles on our hearts the pull of the Spirit through this text calls Christians to ask the all-important question - **What is the hearing of faith?** If all of this is riding on how I hear God's Word - day in and day out, all through my Christian walk, in Bible study after Bible study, church service after church service, class after class - how do I **mix faith with my hearing of God's Word?**

We started considering this. Right at the close of last week's teaching we began just peeling back the lid of **Hebrews 11:1** - "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Most of us can pretty much quote the first half of that verse from the old **King James Version** - "...faith is the substance of things hoped for...." Faith gives **substance** to unseen things. There are things of our faith that are long past in history - the **incarnation**, the **cross**, the **resurrection of Jesus**. And there are things still in the **future** - the **Second Coming**, the **resurrection of the dead**, the **establishing of the new creation**, the **rewards for the blessed and the damnation of the unrepentant**.

Things long past and things yet to come - this is where much of our faith is anchored. But we can't materially hold these things right now. We **read** about these things. We **hear** about these things. We **hold these things to be true**. We **agree** with these things. And, for the most part, that's our understanding of what it means to **hear these things with faith**.

But it isn't. James says the **demons** believe everything you believe. But, like those stubborn followers of Moses who rebelled at **Kadesh** and died roaming in the wilderness, they aren't **benefitted** by what they hear - **Hebrews 4:2** - "For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard **did not benefit them....**"

*I said last Sunday many professing Christians do not believe what they think they believe. New Testament faith is not admitting the factuality of some Scriptural statement or event. You don't believe something in the New Testament sense of "faith" just because you agree it is true.*

**Hebrews 11:1** says the hearing of faith **gives substance** to things we can't hold in our hands right now - either things that happened long ago or things still in the future. We can't give **material** substance to those things. So what does the writer of **Hebrews 11:1** mean when he says "...**faith is the substance of things hoped for....**?" What **kind** of substance is this if not a **physical, material** substance?

1) **THE HEARING OF FAITH GIVES MORAL SUBSTANCE - THE APPROPRIATE MORAL APPLICATION - TO WHAT IT ACKNOWLEDGES AS FACTUALLY TRUE**

The first example I mentioned is how faith hears the truth about the death of God the Son on the cross. It happened long ago. I can't take my body back there. And faith isn't some kind of **mental projection**, imagining or picturing the physical event of the cross. Some people can do that kind of imagining better than others and not to be good at it isn't a lack of faith.

a) Paul **tells** us how faith gives appropriate **moral substance** to the event of the cross of Jesus:

**Galatians 2:20** - "I have been **crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**"

**Galatians 5:24** - "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have **crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**"

This is faith giving **moral substance** to the event of the cross. There is a **moral effect** - an **application in the present** - a real, observable **substantial reaction** to the cross of Jesus in my life. The cross isn't just an **idea** when grasped with faith. It becomes a **present moral event with a substantial moral effect**. Without this effect - this **moral fruit** - I don't have **New Testament faith**. And the proof will be I will simply **use** my false faith in divine redemption to justify continuing in cherished sins without appropriate fear.

Without the hearing of faith I will simply concur with certain unseen doctrinal realities. As do Demons(**James 2:19**).

b) A second example of the hearing of faith and the moral substance it gives to presently unseen realities is the **Resurrection of Jesus**. At what point do I have **faith** in the Resurrection rather than just believing it happened? Again, the Bible tells us:

**Philippians 3:10** - "...that I may know him and **the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death....**"

Paul is not a new convert as he writes these words. The Resurrection of Jesus as an actual event he has known for a long time. He was confronted by the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. But that's not what Paul is describing in this text. That kind of factual proof and agreement isn't the issue in these words. By **knowing** Christ's resurrection Paul doesn't mean acknowledging it **happened**.

He's speaking of a **present inward moral reaction** to the event of the Resurrection of Jesus that has a **moral substance** in his life right now - after Jesus has ascended into heaven. He's talking about his **raised appetites unto holiness** as the **substance - the effect** - of the resurrection that happened long before. He's talking about how the Resurrection of Jesus changes his **"To Do" list today**. And he's talking quite specifically about a power to face suffering and persecution and abuse for the cause of Christ with deeper joy and patience. He is describing the **present moral pull of the fact of the resurrection**.

There. That's the **hearing of faith** applied to Christ's resurrection. That's faith **giving substance** to the Resurrection of Jesus. Anything less is mere **intellectual agreement**. Remember, **proofs** for the Resurrection are

valuable to be sure, as far as they go. But you can know and argue *all* of them and still be miles away from *the moral hearing of faith and the Resurrection*.

- c) Let me give one more example of this from the New Testament. God's Word speaks to us about another future event. It is invisible to the physical eye. You can't touch it with your hand. But it's going to happen. The Bible says there is coming a time of future judgment for all mankind. In text after text, parable after parable, chapter after chapter, there is warning of future judgment and moral accountability.

How does *faith* hear God speak about this? What is the *hearing of faith* when it comes to God's message of future judgment? The Apostle Peter gives a good explanation:

**1 Peter 1:14-19** - "As obedient children, ***do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance***, [15] but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, [16] since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." [17] And if you call on him as Father who ***judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile***, [18] knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, [19] but with ***the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.***"

The reason this is such a fascinating text is Peter strings ideas together that don't seem to combine. First there is the reminder of coming *judgment* (17), and the reminder to, "***...conduct yourselves with fear...***" (17). Then strangely, this is immediately followed by those glorious words about being ransomed by the "***...precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot***" (18).

That's the strange part. One would think redemption through Christ Jesus would *remove* any fear of coming judgment. But there is no misreading Peter's intent. He's clearly writing to *believers*. He recognizes they have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus. They call the creator God "***Father***" (17). And they are still commanded to live their entire earthly lives *fearing* the coming judgment.

How shall we explain this? And how does it relate to our text in **Hebrews 4:1**? - "***Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.***"

I think one key is remembering the distinction the Puritans used to make between *legal fear* and *gospel fear*. Legal fear is the fear sinners have of being condemned for *breaking the law of God*. Gospel fear is the protective fear Christians have against *taking the remedy of sin too lightly*.

*Legal fear* is the fear of judgment for breaking the law. But the Bible is clear, Christians don't fear the condemnation of the law. *Gospel fear* is the holy fear of carnally *presuming on grace to continue in sin*. That fear never leaves the Christian. And it's never supposed to leave the Christian.

This is the present *moral momentum* - the *present reaction* - the hearing of faith gives to the yet unseen future judgment.

And so we're back to our original issue. We're back to thinking through the *hearing of faith* as it relates to *giving substance to things yet unseen*. We've considered how faith views the cross of Christ, the Resurrection of Christ, and the coming judgment of God. And in each case the hearing of faith is more than *agreement* or *understanding*. The hearing of faith is the *moral momentum - the present reaction - unseen things are given in the present life*.

## 2) **ONE FINAL PICTURE OF HOW THE HEARING OF FAITH WORKS**

Let me close with a very strange text. It works so clearly at this point because it shows the principle - the principle of *giving substance to invisible things* - but working in a terrible *opposite* direction of our Hebrews text:

**2 Peter 2:12-14** - "But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, [13] suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. [14] ***They have eyes full of adultery***, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady

souls. They ***have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!***

I only have time to pull out one phrase - ***“They have eyes full of adultery....”*** (14). By that Peter doesn't mean they are in the physical ***act*** of adultery every minute of their lives. No one even has the physical stamina for that. No. He means they have ***prepared themselves*** for adultery. He means they ***give momentum to the act of adultery even when they aren't physically committing it.***

He means they ***think about adultery*** - they ***give the kind of mental energy to it that tilts their heart toward it before they physically do it.*** Or, in the language of our Hebrews text, they ***give substance*** to the idea of adultery - they place their ***hope for satisfaction and excitement*** in adultery - in a way that goes beyond just knowing the dictionary definition of ***what adultery is.***

Morally pure people can tell you what adultery ***is***. But that doesn't lead them ***into*** adultery. But ***“having eyes full of adultery”*** is different. This is giving ***moral energy - a momentum*** - to the knowledge of what adultery is.

Here's the important closing point. What ***“eyes full of adultery”*** is to a future in sin ***the hearing of faith*** is to the future in holiness. It's not knowing the doctrines and it's not agreeing they are true. It's giving ***present moral energy - moral substance - to the things we hope for in Christ Jesus:***

**Hebrews 4:1-2** - NASB - “Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. [2] For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, ***because it was not united by faith in those who heard.***”

**Hebrews 11:1** - “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

And next Sunday we're going to look into the steps that help produce that energy into holiness and grace.