

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part fifteen

Sunday, May 14th, 2017 - 10 a.m. - Teaching #1967

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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."

OK, I admit it. I've been stuck in the first two verses of chapter four. This is our third week feeding at the same spot. Either that is caused by the leading of the Holy Spirit or I'm just mentally obtuse. You'll have to be the judge of that. Next Sunday we'll move on to the rest of the chapter.

We've wandered around in a lot of details but the big idea in the last part of chapter three and the first two verses of chapter four is easy to state. **God's Word brings no benefit to the hearer unless that hearing is a hearing mixed with faith:**

Hebrews 4:2 (ESV) - "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."

Hebrews 4:2 (NASB) - "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."

The people being referenced in these verses are the Israelites at Kadesh. God speaks to them about going into the promised land. It is a good land and He will supply their needs. Only Joshua and Caleb hear this word from the Lord with faith. The rest - 600,000 people - an entire unbelieving generation - die under God's judgment in the wilderness. They never enter God's promised land. They didn't **hear God's word with faith**.

Such is the importance of hearing the Word with faith. It is not enough to believe an **event** in God's Word actually happened. It is not enough to believe a **statement** in God's Word is actually **from God**. It is not enough to **agree** that what God has spoken is **true**. **Mental agreement** is not the same as the hearing of faith.

We spent an entire Sunday morning defining what the hearing of faith is. And at the heart of that definition were the words of our writer of Hebrews in **Hebrews 11:1** - "**Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen**." The old **KJV** has that lovely word we're all more familiar with - "**Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen**."

"Substance." That's just perfect. Faith gives present **substance** to things unseen. The **hearing of faith** makes invisible things past and invisible things future **substantial** to my right now life.

Your faith and mine is full of presently **unseen** realities. Some are in the distant **past**. The incarnation, the cross, the resurrection, the ascension - these all happened long ago. I can't give **material - physical - substance to them**. Some invisible things are still in the **future**. The second coming, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, the new creation - none of these has happened yet. I can't make them **materially - physically - present**.

Physicality is not the **kind** of substance the hearing of faith gives. Things long past and things yet to come can't be made to be **materially present**. That's **not** the kind of substance the writer of Hebrews says faith produces. The hearing of faith gives present **moral substance** to invisible things. It gives **moral application** to events and statements from God's Word. The hearing of faith **shapes and conforms** my present life with the Word of God about presently unseen things. We spent all last Sunday looking at specific examples of this from the Scriptures. That's all available on our web site.

Today's emphasis is the logical conclusion. If the hearing of faith is so crucially important - if nothing of God's revelation brings any **benefit** without the hearing of faith - **how can I learn to do this better?** What are the ways in which I **join with the Holy Spirit** in tuning my ears and my heart to the hearing of faith?

- 1) **IN ALL THE DAILY USES OF OUR MIND THERE IS NOTHING MORE DESTINY SHAPING THAN MEDITATING ON SPIRITUAL THINGS**

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 - "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. [18] And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

The third chapter of 2 Corinthians is a very involved chapter centering on the difference between the old covenant of law (that's the repeated reference to *Moses*), and the new covenant of grace and the inward working of the Holy Spirit. If you had to pick out one summarizing phrase it might be the last part of **verse 14** - "But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away."

While not the subject of today's teaching, the idea here is no one can properly grasp the whole picture of God's redemptive plan - no one can help but *misunderstand* the fulfillment of all God's revelation - apart from seeing everything coming to glorious, grace-filled, Holy Spirit fueled completion in *Jesus Christ*. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in revealing Christ human hearts remain bound and blind and confused. They will not see the surpassing, permanent nature of the new covenant over the old. Only in Christ do we come to know and understand the revelation of God. Such is the greatness of Christ.

But there's something else fascinating in our text. Look at it carefully again - **2 Corinthians 3:17-18** - "Now the Lord *is the Spirit*, and where the *Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.* [18] And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

This is fundamentally a *Holy Spirit* text. And it is fundamentally a great *freedom/liberty* text. And it is fundamentally a great *transformation* text. But none of this transformation process is *automated*. The key to opening up these two verses is found - I think significantly - smack-dab in the center - "...beholding the glory of the Lord...." (18). The *NASB* actually translates it "...beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord...."

It's that verb, "*beholding*" that catches my attention. In the middle of this great text on the work of the Spirit and the potential for incremental transformation there's that verb, "*beholding.*" The *Spirit* does the transforming. *We* do the beholding. Or maybe it would be better to say the Spirit does the transforming *as* we do the beholding.

I think that's a better way to understand this text and I want to try to show you why. There is another text about mirrors and beholding in your New Testament. And it makes the very same point - only in the opposite, spiritually destructive direction:

James 1:19-24 - "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; [20] for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. [21] Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. [22] But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like."

There's a lot going on in this text. First James pictures a man or woman with a *bad temper* (20-21). Then James pictures a man or woman all bound up in habitual sin (21). Then James quickly presents God's provision for such poor souls as these. The Word of God is "*able to save your souls*" (21b). Underscore "*able.*" There is no wanting of power in the Word to reconstruct these broken lives.

But there's a problem. Though the Word is sufficient and power-filled in every way these people aren't being *benefitted* by the way they are hearing it. And just in case my use of that word "*benefitted*" doesn't strike any chord in your memory, let me quickly pull you back - just for a second - to our Hebrews text - **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."

This is what the Old Testament example in our Hebrews text is all about - hearing the Word in a way that brings no benefit. In the reference to Israel at Kadesh in our Hebrews text let's ball-park the numbers and say 600,002 people heard the same

word from the Lord. And the word from the Lord didn't benefit 600,000 of them.

So the writer of Hebrews warns his new covenant believers - and also you and me today - *not* to hear God's Word the way those followers of Moses heard it. They didn't mix their hearing with faith.

Now we're trying to understand how we can *incline our hearts to hear God's Word with faith*. And the first point is we must *meditate deeply on spiritual things*. On the positive side we looked at 2 Corinthians 3:18 - "**And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.**"

And on the negative side we're looking at James 1:23-24 - "**For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.**"

So James says our person spinning out of control with a bad temper and our person bound by inward dominating sin and habit need the Word of God. And the Word is powerfully *able* to bring transformation.

But these people *aren't* being changed. Nothing is working right. They get no *benefit* from their reading of their Bibles. There is zero transformation. And here's the don't miss point. James tells us *why* these people are not benefitted from their hearing of the Word. And it's exactly the substance of our first point on *meditating on spiritual things*. That's what these unfaithful Bible readers are missing.

This is not a guess. James *tells us* this is their problem - James 1:23-24 - "**For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.**"

The fact that this person isn't a *doer* of the word is obvious enough from the text. James *tells us* as much. But *why* isn't he a doer? Is he just *intentionally* rebellious? Is he just spitting in God's face? Maybe. We're not told. But I don't think that's quite it. These readers - these *sin-tortured readers* - aren't doers of the word, true enough. But the disobedience may not be an *intentional* disobedience.

I think that's what James is driving at when he says these sin-bound people look into God's Word the same way careless people look into a mirror. They look into the mirror and there is an immediate effect. They do actually see what's wrong. It's not as though that moment in front of the mirror was totally valueless. No. Rather, that moment wasn't *sustained* in its impact - James 1:24 - "**For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.**"

This is the use of a mirror - *sort of*. But it's not the use of a mirror *properly*. And James means for all of us to link up this picture of a physical mirror with a hearing of God's Word - *sort of*, with a hearing of God's Word *properly* - *the hearing of faith*.

And the first point is the hearing of faith isn't *short-term* hearing. The hearing of faith is *prolonged listening*. It's hearing *stretched out*. It's hearing that *never stops*. And there is only one way for this to happen. The Holy Spirit empowers truth that is *meditated on*. That, says Paul is the *hearing of continual beholding* - 2 Corinthians 3:18 - "**And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.**"

So our first point is the *hearing of faith* is greatly deepened as we recognize there is no possibility for transformation by the Holy Spirit apart from continuous meditation on spiritual realities. Spiritual things need more than a *light hearing*. They need *deep embedding* in our minds. Like green tinted sunglasses makes everything you look at appear green, you *see* your entire world through the eyes of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

2) THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL FAITHFULLY GROW OUR LOVE FOR SPIRITUAL REALITIES WE HAVE MADE DWELL CONTINUALLY IN OUR MINDS

Colossians 3:16 - "**Let the word of Christ *dwell in you richly*, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.**"

The activities of the last portion of that verse are just the *means* by which the word of Christ is made to *dwell*. Dwelling is more than *knowing*. And it's more than *reading*. And it's more than *agreeing*. And it's more than *admiring*.

Paul has in mind a kind of *constant inward spiritual intuition*. He's talking about a kind of *inward shaping*. *Worship* grows from this inward dwelling. *Thankfulness* grows from this inward dwelling. *Love* grows from this inward dwelling.

You can't love what you don't set your heart on. This doesn't come just through singing songs in church. Without this meditative inward *dwelling* of spiritual things we will always be limited to *temporary periods of spiritual excitement*. We will be limited to *temporary pangs of conscience*. There will come times of spiritual insight for *brief periods*.

You can't trick your mind into loving spiritual things. This can't be faked before God. Only as the Word *dwells in an embedded fashion* will the Holy Spirit cause inward *love for spiritual realities* to outshine everything else.

This is what the hearing of faith is all about. It is *faith that sets love upon unseen realities*. This is what Paul was describing in Galatians 5:6 - "**For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only *faith working through love*.**"

The love Paul is speaking about isn't just the love of *charity* - acts of love and mercy to others. It includes that but also much more. The hearing of faith sets love upon the things God says and promises and commands. This love for the things of God is not in our power, for sure. But it is worked graciously in our minds by the Holy Spirit *through our continual "beholding"* of the glory of them.

This is the process of the hearing of faith. Faith gives *"substance"* to unseen spiritual realities. That substance is a *moral* substance, not a *physical* one. This hearing of faith requires *constant, prolonged meditation* - what the Apostle Paul calls, *"beholding"* of the glory of Christ. And when this is faithfully done the Holy Spirit sets a *deep, transforming love* at work for the truth we've made to *"dwell richly"* in our lives.

There is no short-cut to this. This is why Paul tells us all to *"...let the word of Christ dwell..." in us richly*. *Richly* is the important word. You can't overdo this. Most hearers will undervalue meditation and concentration of spiritual truths. Plan to *overdo* making spiritual realities *substantial* in the things you give attention to every day.