

TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE

What do you suppose is the greatest danger facing most Christians today? Is it the danger of persecution, or the danger of temptation? What about false teachers and false teaching, do you think that presents a very serious danger facing for most Christians today? Well it would only be a guess on my part, I am sure, but I wonder if the danger that faced the Christians for whom the book of Hebrews was written might be the greatest danger that all of us face.

Week before last, we got into the book of Hebrews in our New Testament Studies, and thus far we have covered the first six chapters. For those of you who are sharing in that study with us, I wonder if you noticed how many times the writer, even thus far, has said something about a hearing problem?

Notice how the writer begins this letter: *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...”* God’s Son has spoken to us, he says, but what if we have a hearing problem? I’m not talking about a hearing problem that can be remedied with a hearing aid, but a problem that is worse, much worse.

As you already know, not all hearing is listening. There are a lot of husbands who hear their wives, but they do not listen to them. There are a lot of teenagers who hear their parents but they do not listen to them. There are a lot of students who hear their teachers, but they do not listen to them. There is a good chance that some of you are hearing me right now but you are not listening to me.

I am reminded of what the Lord said to **Ezekiel in the 33rd chapter, verses 31 & 32**. Speaking about the people listening Ezekiel, God said,

“And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain. 32) And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it.”

The people were hearing Ezekiel but they were not listening to God.

Going back to Hebrews, notice **verse 1 of chapter 2**. He said, *“Therefore we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.”* In light of the fact that it is God’s own son that is speaking to us. We had better pay closer attention! Otherwise, we might drift away from it, and that could be dangerous couldn’t it? The idea of drifting away from the gospel is really scary to me. I haven’t seen just a whole lot of people in my Christian life just out and out rejected Christianity, quit believing in God and in His Son. But I have seen many, many people “drift away.” Didn’t we just recently read in Revelation about some people that had lost their first love? That was the church in Ephesus, wasn’t it, in Revelation the 2nd chapter.

They were still doing some things that were good and right but they had left their first love. I wonder if they were having a hearing problem, or if they were in the process of drifting away?

Look at **Hebrews 3:7**. Quoting from Psalm 95, the writer says, *"Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing me in the wilderness.'" He actually repeats that exhortation in verse 15, and again in 4:7.*

Then in **chapter 5**, the writer makes the problem that he is concerned about very plain. He had been talking about Dean Garrouette's favorite OT character, Melchizedek, and in **verse 11**, he says: *"About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing."*

I wonder if that isn't the greatest danger facing Christians today, the danger of becoming "dull of hearing." In the **13th chapter of Matthew** we read a number of parables that Jesus told. The first one was about the sower, and the four kinds of soil. At the end of telling that parable, Jesus said, *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."* That is **verse 9**, and then in **verse 10**, we read where his disciples came to him and asked him, *"Why do you speak to people in parables?"* Do you remember that? Look at **Matthew 13**, beginning in **verse 11 [thru verse 15]**.

*And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12) For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 13) This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, **and hearing they do not hear**, nor do they understand. 14) Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: "**You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.** 15) **For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.**"*

Jesus said Isaiah said that, referring to Isaiah 6:9, 10. He said the people were hearing but they weren't hearing. He said their hearts had grown dull and they were barely hearing anymore. Now Isaiah said that, but Isaiah wasn't talking about some hardened bunch of Gentiles. He was talking about the people of Israel. Neither was Jesus talking about a bunch of Gentile reprobates. He was talking about His fellow Jews; he was talking about those who had even been following him around from place to place. He was saying that what Isaiah said about the Jews in his day was just as true of the Jews in his day. And I believe the Hebrew writer was seeing the same problem developing among the Christians to whom he was writing.

I have already referenced it, but I was really struck by the words of **Hebrews 3:7-11**.

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, 8) do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, 9) where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. 10) Therefore I was

provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' 11) As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"

Pay close attention here. The Hebrew writer says, “*this is what the Holy Spirit says,*” and then he quotes from Psalm 95:7,8. We don’t know who actually penned the words of Psalm 95, but the Hebrew writer says that the words came from the Holy Spirit.

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

What did he mean, “*Today?*” Well, Isaiah was talking about the present moment, wasn’t he? He wasn’t talking about what they had heard in the past, what they had learned in the past, what they had done in the past. What about now? What are you hearing right now? What are you learning right now? What are you doing with what you are hearing right now? That’s what Isaiah was talking about, and that is what the writer of Hebrews was talking about.

What did Isaiah mean “*...if you hear his voice?*” Obviously, the Lord was not there in person speaking to the Israelites, but he was speaking through Isaiah, right? The Hebrew writer wasn’t saying that God was audibly speaking to the Christians, but He was speaking to them through the apostles and prophets and teachers who were teaching the things of God. God doesn’t have to be visible for us to know that He is here. He doesn’t have to speak audibly for us to hear him. We have His word and we have a wealth of opportunities to hear His voice.

If I or any speaker gets up here and faithfully brings you are message from the scriptures, is that not God speaking to you? Do you not have a recording of God’s Word right here in this volume we call the Holy Bible? But are you listening to it or is it just sitting there on the coffee table or night stand or lying in the seat of your car day after day? Think about the millions and millions of people who do not even have access to the sacred word of God, or have access to one but know nothing about what it says! That shouldn’t be true of those who call themselves Christians, but it is true for so many Christians because they have become dull of hearing?

I think about our many Bible classes, those for our children as well as for adults. There are so many of you who seem to feel no need for attending and being a part of those classes; no need or desire to have your children there. I’m not trying to sit in judgment of you, but is it possible that the reason why you do not attend is because you have become dull or hearing? Are you listening? *Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts!*

Well, what did Isaiah mean by that? How does one harden their heart? Think about that. How does one develop a bad physical heart? No one wakes up one day deciding to do everything they can to develop a bad heart. But over time little things begin to take their toll; things like failing to eat right and getting the right amount of exercise and rest. I know genetics are also involved, but you understand my point. No one wakes up one morning deciding they are going to harden their heart to the voice of God. They don’t have to decide to do that, but for sure it will happen if they do not become intentional about really listening to God.

I thought it was interesting that in **verse 12**, the writer there says, *“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.”* How does one go from having a heart that is full of faith and trust, humbly submissive, and eager to obey; one that hungers and thirsts for righteousness, how does one go from that to having “an evil, unbelieving heart?” I think that is an important question for every Christian to ponder.

One thing, of course, is what he went on to write about in **verse 13**, being *“hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”* Yes, sin is deceitful and it is easy to be deceived about what is right and wrong, what is good and bad, and what is true and false, especially if one is really not hearing and listening to God’s Word. If we willfully choose to be ignorant of what God says, if we are not going to read and study His book, if we are not going to take advantage of the opportunities we have of growing in our knowledge of the Lord, if we are going to come and sit but not really listen, then there is probably no way we are going to be able to keep from being deceived by sin. And once we are deceived by sin, then the hardening process begins. After a time, we get to the point where we not only don’t know, we also don’t care that we don’t know. We become “dull of hearing.”

So **verse 15**, he writes it again. *“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”*

Now notice verses 16-19, the writer raises three questions.

- Number one, *“Who were those who heard and yet rebelled?”* His answer, *“Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?”*
- Number two, *“With whom was he provoked for forty years?”* He also answers that question with a question: *“Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?”*
- And then, question number three: *“To who did he swear that they would not enter his rest?”* He answers that question with a statement: it was *“those who were disobedient.”* And then he concludes with this declaration, *“So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.”*

Did you catch that? Oh, please don’t be dull of hearing. Pay attention now, because this is important. He said, *“...they were unable to enter because of unbelief.”* Do you suppose the Israelites who came out of Egypt would have thought of themselves as unbelievers? No, I’m sure they thought of themselves as believers, and in one sense of the word, they were but because they had become dull of hearing, they spoke and acted more like unbelievers. By inspiration, the writer says, *“they were unable to enter because of unbelief.”*

In chapter 4, the Hebrew writer goes on to talk about entering God’s rest. That is, I believe, a reference to reaching that goal that hopefully all of us have, that of everlasting life with God and his angels and the saints from throughout the ages. Of course there are a lot of people who really do not want to go to heaven, they just don’t want to go to hell. Heaven for some people, strangely enough, is the lesser of two evils. If it wasn’t for hell, they wouldn’t want to

go there at all. Of course that is the result of a massive amount of ignorance, and because sin has deceived them into thinking they have something down here!

But as the writer talks about entering that rest, he says, *“While the promise of entering his rest still stands,”* (in other words, we are not there yet), he says, *“let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.”* I don’t know what people who subscribe to the doctrine, “once saved, always saved” do with all of these passages in Hebrews! If it is impossible to fall from grace, why would this inspired writer warn believers about the possibility of failing to enter that rest? Does that make sense? I think the writer was saying we need this fear to keep us from becoming complacent, from taking things for granted.

And then the writer gives an illustration about what happened to the Jews whose hearts were hardened in the wilderness. He says, they had the good news preached to them, (verse 2). He is not talking about the gospel of Christ, but in effect, it was like the gospel of Christ. It was a message of redemption, of escaping from the slavery they had been in for hundreds of years. It was a message of being God’s people, and a promise of a land that was filled with milk and honey. So, in a sense they had the good news preached to them, but he says, it did not profit them, it did not benefit them because it was not united by faith with those who heard (or listened). In other words, those people heard the good news, but they lacked the faith to obey God. **Verse 6** makes it clear that is what happened. The writer says, *“since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience.”* Interestingly, the KJV renders that *“because of unbelief.”* So, there’s that unbelief again. But what is disobedience? It is unbelief manifesting itself in a failure to do as God says. Actually, the Greek word that is found in that text is the word from which we get the English word apathy.

So in **verse 7**, he says it again: *“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”*

That is what I believe is the greatest danger facing Christians today: the danger of really not listening to God.

- It is the danger that comes from not knowing the Word of God. It is the danger of not even wanting to know; of being satisfied with one’s spiritual and biblical ignorance.
- It is the danger of complacency; of thinking that you know everything you need to know.
- It is the danger of being deceived by sin, and developing a hardened heart, that will eventually, as the writer says, lead to your falling away from the living God.
- It is the danger of thinking that because you escaped from Egypt your ticket to the promised land is guaranteed.
- It is the danger of not understanding that when you do not obey God and when you are apathetic (or lukewarm) about your faith, it is the same thing as unbelief.
- It is the danger of thinking that you really don’t have to change your ways, or your priorities, or your thinking.
- It is the danger of thinking that it is someone else who needed to hear this lesson; that it really didn’t apply to you.

- It is the danger, because you haven't been listening to God, of not even realizing that you are in any danger!

Almost two thousand years ago, the Holy Spirit said, "*Today!*" For two thousand years the message has been the same. "*Today!*" "*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.*"

I sincerely hope you have heard his voice today. And if you have, it is my prayer that you have taken it to heart. And if you know, as you are sitting here today that there is something you need to do besides just sitting here, if you know that you need to make a decision about some things, I pray that you will make that decision and not make the mistake of putting it off to another time. Do not let sin deceive you and make you dull of hearing. If you wish to respond this morning, please come while we stand and sing.