

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

Sermon Title: Be Sensitive to Where God is Moving, Hebrews 2:1-4

Date preached: January 25, 2015

For public use: See non-copyright comments at end of message

INTRODUCTION: I have three points to my message today:

1. Pay attention to warnings.
2. Pay attention to history.
3. Pay attention to theology.

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 2:1-4 ¹*We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.* ²*For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment,* ³*how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.* ⁴*God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*

BACKGROUND: The writer of Hebrews: As I said two weeks ago, we don't know exactly who wrote Hebrews, but we know the author was very familiar with the Jewish faith and culture. While studying for this message, I read one commentator who put it well: *"The entire scaffolding of the letter is Jewish history, theology, and practice."*

So, the author of Hebrews is unknown. But, who was the audience? The audience was made of Jews who had converted to faith in Jesus Christ. They weren't nominal Jews. They were people who had been raised in the Jewish faith.

So, the intended audience was a group of Jews who were old enough to have been taught once—

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 5:12 ¹²*In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!*

And, they were old enough to have outlived those who taught them:

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 13:7 ⁷*Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.*

Also, they had endured suffering. Go to Chapter 10:32-34—

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:32-34 ³²*Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering.* ³³*Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated.* ³⁴*You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.*

So, now I've told you about the author and the intended audience. What we do not know is the location of this group of Christians. It could have been one of many congregations that suffered during this day.

We believe that Hebrews was written before 96 AD because an early Church leader, Clement of Rome, referenced it in his writings. I tell you this detail because this dating is important.

This means the recipients of the letter of Hebrews not only suffered at the hands of accusing Jews but also at the hands of the government—because in 64 AD, Nero declared it a crime to be a Christian. To be pardoned of crime, a Christian had to offer incense to a Roman god. Many who refused were tortured or killed.

APPLICATION: Have you ever received timely communication—the phone call, letter, text, whatever, that encouraged you or kept you from giving up? Probably all of us have such a story. While I was working at a Christian youth camp in Texas during high school, I considered whether God was calling me into the ministry. Then I received a timely letter in the mail suggesting God could be calling me into the ministry.

Hebrews was a timely letter to a people who knew better but who were tempted to give up their faith in Jesus Christ and return to the Jewish faith, because it would have been the path of least resistance.

So, the author is unknown. The recipients were believers who had experienced suffering. The theme is to stay faithful.

In Chapter 2 we have three reminders:

First reminder: PAY ATTENTION TO THE WARNINGS.

The author warns in Verse 1 of drifting away from faith in Jesus. This theme continues through the book:

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 4:1 *¹Let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it [God's promised rest].*

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 6:11 *¹¹We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.*

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:1 *¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,*

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:23 *²³Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.*

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:36 *³⁶You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.*

Chapter 11 is devoted to those who were faithful until the end.

That's a lot of information for just one verse. Russell Jones and I have talked about how deep a person should go when teaching or preaching. I don't know the answer, but there is a fine line between keeping people's interest and providing too much information. And, since I see people are sleeping, I'll move on...

So, Reminder #1 was PAY ATTENTION TO THE WARNINGS.

Second reminder: PAY ATTENTION TO HISTORY.

This faith which these Christians were persecuted for, this faith which they were tempted to leave, this faith which made them wonder if it was worth it all, was not child's play. It was not a fairy tale. It was not a small, insignificant, fleeting idea.

Verses 2, 3, and 4 remind us of the power, imagery, and drama that goes into this faith.

It was created by God. It was birthed of God.

Angels were involved in its delivery, and several scriptures back this up. However, I need to be clear about this: Angels are messengers. They did not create the Law of Moses or the Gospel. They are messengers. I stirred up some discussion when I said angels are created lower than man, which I explained the following Wednesday night.

BACKGROUND: At this particular time in history, angels were a very large part of Jewish myths. Jewish writers wrote about angels with no references to the Torah or the Old Testament. These writings and tales had become part of the conventional thought of the day, and it was important for the Jews to be reminded angels had their role in it all but were inferior to Jesus.

One of the man things I love about the Christian faith is how it is historical! God revealed himself through history, and from the beginning, and the narrative we have explains how God revealed himself through history.

I've taught you the word Germans use for God revealing himself through history. It's *heilsgeschichte*. Can everyone say that? Sure, I knew you could. The English translation is "salvation history."

From the book of Genesis, Chapter 3, God revealed his plan of forthcoming salvation. And, through these ancient people, God pointed all things to a coming Messiah. That's the *heilsgeschichte* or salvation history I am talking about. And, today, the world situation points more and more to the need of a Savior to rescue us

from the complex problems of the day. When Jesus returns again someday, the salvation history will be completely realized.

So reminder #1: PAY ATTENTION TO WARNINGS.

Reminder #2: PAY ATTENTION TO HISTORY.

Third reminder: PAY ATTENTION TO THEOLOGY.

Verse 2 says the message was binding, and all violations of that message were punished. This Old Testament Law, which was so impossible to keep, revealed the righteousness of God and man's inability to be righteous.

Each violation had a penalty, and those penalties were paid through the complex sacrificial system. When Jesus came, he fulfilled the Law and became the ultimate sacrifice for sin. So, Verse 3 asks, "How will we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" I believe the answer is clear. The salvation of Jesus cannot be escaped.

People who have received his salvation know in their hearts the freedom that comes from not ignoring the message. Verse 3 uses the word *confirmed*. This theology or teaching of God, and the salvation he offers through Jesus Christ is very rich and deep and is the conversation of a billion or so people all over the earth every day.

And, this salvation has never been stagnant. God revealed himself through signs and miracles in the Old and New Testaments. We talk of these often in our Bible studies. In the New Testament, he sent the Holy Spirit as the third and final revelation of who he is.

Wouldn't it be pitiful to have a faith with no historical roots and no central character yet provides salvation in a way no one else can? Wouldn't it be pitiful to have a faith which has no revelation of any kind and is nothing more than the words of a man?

ILLUSTRATION: I talked with a man who was in a religious group based on the writings of a man who translated words from tablets, aided by some type of magical glasses. The group spends a great deal of time trying to prove the truth of the claims of these writings, although the tablets and glasses were lost. The first time I heard this, I thought *what in the world?*

APPLICATION: But, people are easily taken in when they are not rooted in the faith. I believe human nature is to stray from God, to stray from his Word, and to allow myths to become mainstream. This is what was going on when Hebrews was written.

What is Hebrews saying to us today? It was originally meant for one group of people whose location we do not know. But, its truth has resonated with Christians throughout the centuries, and here we have it today in the Bible. It has no doubt stood the test of time.

CONCLUSION: Here's my summary for modern believers:

Warning: Don't stray from what you know is true, regardless of the outside pressure.

History: Don't allow myths to creep into your theology. All these books about travels to heaven and back— don't put any of stock in them.

Theology: This "great salvation" is not to be taken lightly and deserves our all.

To preachers, teachers, students, and anyone else reading or using this message: I have posted this for all to use as you see fit. There is no need to cite me as the source. You are free to delete sections, add your own, or do whatever you want. There is no copyright. My request is that you do not copyright or sell my work. I am sharing my preaching notes in good faith with you because I know the challenges of putting together a lesson, especially when your week gets consumed with other things. Use it and enjoy!

I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

Find me at www.thbc.com Click on sermons or YouTube channel: Pastor Paul Gunn
Thanks to Judy Andrews and Nancy Claire Smith for their editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Nashville, Tennessee
USA