

3. Preaching: God's Spoken Word

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[0 : 00] Now, in our Bibles again, if you could turn please to page 1001. As I said, this is the last of this short series and we are looking at God's spoken Word.

We are particularly looking at chapter 2, verses 1 to 4. I want to read the whole passage again, beginning at chapter 1, verse 1, that it all hangs together and every part of it flows from the other.

So, Hebrews chapter 1, verse 1 to Hebrews chapter 2, verse 4. 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, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

[1 : 11] For to which of the angels did God ever say, You are my Son, today I have begotten you, or again, I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, Let all God's angels worship him. Of the angels, he says, he makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.

But of the Son, he says, Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever. Scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.

Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions. And you, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

They will perish, but you remain. They will all wear out like a garment. Like a robe, you will roll them up. Like a garment, they will be changed.

[2 : 18] But you are the same, and your years will have no end. Which of the angels has he ever said, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?

Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, And every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution. How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard. While God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. May he bless it to us and open our hearts and minds to understand it. Now you may well say that you can understand how God spoke in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, how he revealed himself fully in a human life and in a human death.

[3 : 41] You may well say, well, I can understand how the written word actually bears witness to that. But there's still a further stage to go, isn't there?

And the further stage is that living word which took flesh, and that written word which is embodied for us in a book. That word has to be spoken.

That word, in a sense, has to become flesh again, in the flesh of living human beings who take that word, shape it and present it to others. On the other hand, preaching is not most people's favourite activity.

You read books with titles like *Surviving the Sermon*. 101 Things to Do During a Bad Sermon. As a title of a book my son once gave me at Christmas.

And there are many such books which all bear witness to the fact that the contemporary world does not see the value of preaching.

[4 : 47] But you see what our author is doing here in chapter 1. He's saying, if we are going to know the living word, Christ Jesus, if we are going to understand who he is and what he is saying to us, then that word has still to be spoken today.

And it's interesting, chapter 2, verse 1 begins with, Therefore, our author is determined to apply the truth he has spoken. If Jesus is the true and final word, revealed in the written word, the Bible, this has to change our lives, doesn't it?

We can't just walk away. We can't just say, oh, I'll think about this some other time. If the creator has spoken to us, we cannot simply walk away.

There's not so much 101 things to do during a boring sermon. Even after a boring sermon, if that sermon embodies the truth, we really have to say, what are we going to do about it?

How are our lives going to change? How is our thinking going to be altered? What is going to happen as a result of it? So this word is still being spoken. And at the end of the letter, our author urges the community he is writing to, to remember and honour their leaders.

[6 : 03] And who were these leaders? Those who spoke the word of God to you. That's what the author says about leadership in the church, the people who spoke the word of God to you.

So for a few moments, I want us to look at the spoken word of God. And I want to say two things. I want first of all to talk about a danger to be avoided and then a remedy to be applied.

A danger to be avoided and a remedy to be applied. Now the danger is to drift away, verse 1, used of a ship which has been carelessly anchored and drifts away from its moorings.

Now you see, this is a danger for most people who hear sermons, good or bad, who listen to the word. Not too many people commit one appalling, disastrous sin which ruins their lives.

That can happen. But most people, imperceptibly and carelessly, drift further and further away from God. That's why the living word, the written word, have continually to be brought to people's attention.

[7 : 12] And this is developed in two pictures. First of all, verse 2, transgression. Transgression is deliberately rejecting that word.

Hearing the word and saying, I don't like it. Not only do I not like it, I'm deliberately going to disobey it. We do have a childish love of disobeying as human beings, don't we?

If I see a sign that says, keep off the grass, what do I do? I almost inevitably walk on the grass. Now maybe you're not as childish as that, but you know very well that's human nature.

Do not touch what you do, you touch. Because disobedience, wandering away, is something that's deeply rooted in our fallen nature.

And since it's deeply rooted in our fallen nature, we have to be persistently reminded. Well that's one picture. The picture of deliberately turning our back on it.

[8 : 12] But there is another picture, disobedience. This is a word which basically means imperfect hearing, and by extension, unwillingness to hear.

You see, the first word, the transgression word, means hearing, understanding, and walking away, deliberately rejecting. Whereas the other word, the disobedience word, means not hearing properly, half hearing, and not paying much attention.

See, it all hangs together. See, when we ignore God's word, it doesn't even have to disobey it, but when we ignore it, our lives drift slowly at first, further and further away, until we can no longer hear the voice.

And then, with increasing speed, plunging over the waterfall, and being lost at the bottom, to carry on with the metaphor of the boat. So there's a danger to be avoided, and that danger is drift.

And since it's a continual danger, it needs to be the continual proclamation. But now let's look for a little bit longer, at the remedy to that danger, the remedy to be taken.

[9 : 25] We must pay much closer attention, to what we have heard. This is a very interesting word, because this also has a nautical sense.

The original meaning of this word, is a sense of mooring a ship, anchoring a ship, securely. And this appears to be a favourite metaphor, of our author, because later on, he talks about the anchor, of the soul.

If disobeying, the spoken word, which presents the living, and the written word, if disobeying, and imperfect hearing, causes us to drift, then paying close attention, anchors us, to the word, because it helps us, to avoid drift, and disaster.

So, in a way, you could paraphrase, these words, let us, anchor our lives, to words taught, from God, lest we drift away, and be wrecked.

Let us anchor our lives, to the words of God, lest we drift away, and be wrecked. Don't develop that, just a little bit. Why is this remedy, important?

[10 : 32] Why is it going to work? And that's really, what our author is saying here. This message, which is, which is the same thing. There are three reasons, he gives.

First of all, because of the origin, of the message. For since the message, declared by angels, proved to be reliable, and how, so we'll come back to that, in a moment, how shall we escape, we neglect, such a great salvation?

Notice the word neglect, continuing the idea, of drifting away. It was declared, at first, by the Lord. In other words, Christ himself, not only embodied, but taught, that message.

And that's a very important thing. One, one New Testament scholar, of an earlier generation, said, Christ came not so much, to preach the gospel, but that there might be, a gospel to preach.

Now there is truth in that, because Christ himself, is the gospel. But he also, preached the gospel. He declared, the words of life. And when Luke, takes up his second book, the Acts of the Apostles, he said, all that Jesus began, both to do, and to teach.

[11 : 42] And that, is really a perfect way, of summing up, the living word, made, the living word, made flesh. His life, and his action, showed who he was. When people looked, at the earthly life, of Jesus of Nazareth, when they saw, what he did, when they saw, his compassion, when they saw, his miracles, when they saw, his raising of the dead, and such matters, they saw, who he was.

But in order to leave them, in no doubt, he proclaimed, who he was. See, it wasn't, it wasn't evident, to everyone, who he was. Many people rejected him. Many people ignored him.

But not only, did he embody the word, he declared, the word. So that's the first reason, why we must, anchor ourselves, to this message, because of its origin.

It's not, a human word, it is the living word, himself. And Paul, uses similar phrases, in his early letter, to the Galatians. The gospel, was I did not receive, from a man, but received, from the Lord himself.

Second reason, is because of its, what you might call, its transmission. Now, looking back, at verse two, the message declared, by angels, proved to be reliable, every transgression, or disobedience, received a just retribution.

[13 : 00] Now, I said last week, as we were talking, about the words, of scripture, and in particular, the development, of the idea, of angels, that angel mediators, were involved, in the giving of the law, in the, and in many ways, the word, the message, declared by angels, is the equivalent, of the word, through the prophets, as God speaks, through angel mediation, to the prophets, who then, will then pass on, that word.

And that word, was reliable, and that word, was effective. Every transgression, or disobedience, received such a retribution. And if that, is the case, then this message, proclaimed, not through angels, and prophets, but through the Lord, himself, how shall we escape, if we neglect, such a great salvation?

And the word, neglect, is carrying on, the idea of drift. It's obvious enough, how we'll not escape, if we walk away from it, if we reject it, if we deny it. It's less obvious, and therefore, more dangerous, if we simply, drift away from it.

Little steps, little actions, until we no longer listen. Declared by the Lord, and attested to us, by those who heard. Now our author, has been establishing, the absolute authority, of the Old Testament, the words, of the prophets.

And he's shown this, by his, his series of quotations, in chapter one. And now he's going on, to the words of the apostles, attested to us, by those, who heard.

[14 : 33] In other words, the words of the apostles, the prophets, the words of the apostles, together, form this word, which is the word, to be declared. And this is, this is what the, New Testament apostles, consistently see.

I said, Paul says, it's not a man's message, it's a message I receive, from the Lord. John the apostle says, we have seen, we have heard, our hands have handled, the word of life.

And Peter says, we did not follow, cunningly devised fables, but we were eyewitnesses, of his majesty, and we heard the voice, from heaven.

And the interesting thing was, when Peter heard the voice, from heaven, she describes in, 2 Peter chapter one, that voice is speaking, in an Old Testament, accent, so to speak. God the father, as he speaks from heaven, is quoting from the Psalms, and from the prophets, showing, as I said last week, the theologian, Jim Packer says, what the Bible says, God says.

So it's transmission. Now, of course, we don't know, all the details, of how all the books, of the Bible, came together, the process, that went into them. But what we do know, the most important thing, is that that transmission, was the work of God.

[15 : 49] Which means, that what we have, in our hands, the scriptures, is not simply, the words of humans, but the word of God. Nothing about the process, it's the result. And because, it's the word of God, because it's transmitted, through the prophets, and the apostles, it means, that we can confidently, preach it today, and say, this is the word, of the Lord.

So, the remedy, is important, first of all, because of its origin. It was, it's a word from heaven, because of its transmission.

That word from heaven, didn't just drop down, in the language, of the 1611, authorised version. That message, was transmitted, through people, through fallible people, who nevertheless, were so moved, by the Holy Spirit, they spoke the word of God.

But thirdly, it's important, because of its effect, while God also, bore witness, by signs and wonders, and various miracles, and by gifts, of the Holy Spirit, distributed, according, to his will.

Now, let's linger, for a moment, or two, on this verse. What this verse, is saying, is that, when the word of God, is spoken, the work of God, is also active.

[17 : 10] Now, we read about, signs and wonders, in the Acts of the Apostles, we read about, various miracles, and gifts, of the Holy Spirit. Let's never forget this.

God can, if and when, and as and when, he chooses, do whatever he pleases. But the greatest, miracle of all, is the miracle, of a changed life.

What is the, what is the evidence, that the word of God, works? Evidence is, that it changes lives, doesn't it? And that is, the greatest, miracle of all.

The vilest, offender, who truly believes, that moment, from Jesus, a pardon, receives. That is a proof, that the living word, who appears to us, in the written word, is the word, which changes, which transforms, lives.

Now, come back to the point, I made at the beginning. The reason why, so many sermons, are so bad, and so dull, the reason why, you get books, like that, is because, people have ceased, to believe, that when, the living word, is preached, that things happen.

[18 : 23] And things always happen. No one can, ever simply, walk away, and say, it wasn't for me. Because even by doing that, we're making, a decision. And yet, the point, that's surely being made, by the author here, is the same point, that Paul makes, in his letter to the Romans.

I'm not ashamed, of the gospel, but it's the power of God, for the salvation, of those who believe. The gospel, the gospel word, the word, of the cross, the word, which declares, the word made flesh, is not something, accompanied, by the power of God, it is, the word of, it is the power of God, itself.

But think about it, for a moment. The word of God, is the, at the very beginning, of our Bibles, as the agent, of creation, God said, let there be light, and there was light.

And when the apostles, in the New Testament, speak, of what happens, when a person, listens, and responds, to that word, what pictures, do they use? They use the picture, of light, shining into darkness.

They use the picture, of life, coming out of death. They use the picture, of transformation, and for change. In other words, what God does, on a gigantic scale, on the canvas, of the universe, he does, on an individual scale, when that word, speaks, into someone's heart.

[19 : 48] That's why, against all its detractors, and against all the sneering, we have to, commit ourselves, to the preaching, and teaching, and sharing, of this word.

Because, if we don't, the result, will be drift. We will not escape, if we neglect, such a great salvation. There's no accident, that towards, the end of his letter, the author returns, to this again.

See, he says, that you do not, refuse him, who speaks. And once again, the same comparison, as he has here. If the word, spoken through Moses, at Sinai, had such a profound effect, then surely, the word, spoken by the Lord, and his apostles, and those who, those who preach, that apostolic gospel, must be treated, with great, and eternal seriousness.

God, has spoken, God, is speaking. The question, that leaves us with, surely is, are we listening? Not just listening, in the sense of being present, when the words are spoken, but listening, in the sense, that these are words of life, and my life needs to change, as a result of them.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord God, we pray, that as the word of God, is proclaimed, whether it's proclaimed, in large gatherings, or in small groups, or from one individual, to another, that those who proclaim it, may have confidence, that these words, are spirit, that they are life, and that the result, may be seen, in transformed lives, in changed people, in people who, give praise, to the one, who called us, out of darkness, into his marvelous light.

[21 : 40] Amen. Amen.