

The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Commentary on Hebrews 4:1-13

29th Tuesday after Pentecost

Heb 4:1-2 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. ² For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Hebrews is among the most difficult of all the books in the entire bible, but within its intricate layers of theology are certain things that anyone with “ears to hear” can understand. These verses are such an example.

The Gospel is very simple: **hear, believe, do, and be saved**. We are such fickle, lazy creatures that we often delude ourselves into believing that hearing is enough, as if knowledge concerning holiness makes one holy. It just so happens that yesterday the Prophet Haggai was commemorated, and I read his short book of prophesy. It contains startling moral teaching that very much applies to St Paul’s words. Haggai was rebuking the faithless Jews who were not obeying the will of God to rebuild the temple, and asked them a series of questions.

^(2:11) In the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius the king, the word of the Lord came to Aggeus the prophet, saying: ⁽¹¹⁾ ^(2:12) Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Ask the priests the law, saying: ⁽¹²⁾ ^(2:13) If a man carry sanctified flesh in the skirt of his garment, and touch with his skirt, bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat: shall it be sanctified? And the priests answered, and said: No. ⁽¹³⁾ ^(2:14) And Aggeus said: If one that is unclean by occasion of a soul touch any of all these things, shall it be defiled? And the priests answered, and said: It shall be defiled. ⁽¹⁴⁾ ^(2:15) And Aggeus answered, and said: So is this people, and so is this nation before my face, saith the Lord, and so is all the work of their hands: and all that they have offered there, shall be defiled. (Hag 2:10-14 DRB)

The jist of the holy prophet’s discourse, in so many words, is this: **being around holiness does not make one holy. Hearing about holiness** (hearing the gospel preached) **does not make one holy. Only hearing and doing**, with the heart changing, **can make one holy**.

The Gospel preached is just like a sanctified item wrapped in a garment. The Gospel contains the words of life, and when it touches the ears, they are holy, but if these words of life are not unwrapped and allowed to penetrate into the “joints and marrow”, then the soul does not become holy.

How much holiness is all around us? We attend the liturgy every Sunday, and perhaps even commune the Holy Mysteries, but do we change? Why do we not change? St Paul tells us plainly: because the things we heard were not “mixed with faith”.

Faith is to do what we hear; and in time, to be what we hear. The Apostle gives us the example of the Jews in the wilderness, who heard but did not do, and then asks us to compare ourselves to them. He tells us we should be afraid, lest we end up in the same state.

As a Christian, I am acutely aware of how little I have become holy, even though I am surrounded by holiness. I wonder if I have done enough, changed enough. St Paul's words are a ringing rebuke to my ears.

Do they sting your ears too? What can you do about this?

I am always available to give constructive suggestions in every personal case. Talk to me. Let's work together to become holy.

Hebrews 4:1-13 1 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. 2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. 3 For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. 5 And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. 6 Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: 7 Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. 8 For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. 9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. 10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. 11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. 12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Luke 21:12-19 12 But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. 13 And it shall turn to you for a testimony. 14 Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: 15 For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. 16 And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. 17 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. 18 But there shall not an hair of your head perish. 19 In your patience possess ye your souls.

Bibliography

The Explanation of the Holy Gospel according to St Luke, by Blessed Theophylact, published by Chrysostom Press - <http://www.chrysostompress.org/>. ALL FOUR BOOKS ARE HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!

http://www.orthodox.net/scripture/pentecost-tuesday-29_2008_hebrews4:1-13+luke21:12-19.pdf

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