

Not Letting Slip the Things We Have Heard

*“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.”
—Hebrews 2:1*

MANY ADMONITIONS ARE given in the Bible to encourage continued zeal and patient endurance on the part of the Lord’s dedicated people. Our first love, or initial enthusiasm when first beginning our Christian way, needs to be maintained. This is not to be merely for a few months or years, but to the end of our earthly sojourn. It is only those who endure to the end of life’s way, those who are “faithful unto death,” who will receive the “crown of life,” and will be “priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”—Rev. 2:10; 20:6

Our opening text indicates that holding fast consists in not letting “slip” the things we have heard. It is God’s Word of truth that is being referred to, the purpose of which is to guide us into knowing

and doing God's will. (John 17:17; I Thess. 2:13; II Tim. 2:15) Only through studying the instructions clearly outlined in the Scriptures do we know what our Heavenly Father wants us to do and to be. To let the things we have heard and learned from God's Word "slip," would be like a builder neglecting to consult his blueprints. As he continued to build, he could not be sure that the building erected would be at all in harmony with the architect's plans.

Our text opens with a word which has a deep meaning to us—"Therefore." This signals us that the preceding context has an important bearing on what is to follow. When we turn back to the first chapter of Hebrews, the connection at once becomes apparent. "The things which we have heard," spoken of in our text, are of vital importance because of their source. That source is mentioned in the very first verse of the epistle. It is God, our Heavenly Father. Here Paul reminds us that God had previously spoken to his people through his holy prophets, but that now he was speaking through his Son.—Heb. 1:1,2

What a high position of authority the Heavenly Father had given to his Son! He appointed him "heir of all things," exalted him to the "express image" of his own person, and seated him "on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Jesus was made "so much better than the angels," and "by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." He had perfectly "loved righteousness and hated iniquity," therefore God anointed him with the "oil of gladness" above all others.—vss. 3-9

It is through this divinely appointed channel, his "only begotten son," that our Heavenly Father spoke

to his called-out ones at the beginning of the Christian age, and has continued to speak to them for the past two thousand years. In a very special sense this is true during the present time in which we are living, Jesus' second presence, during which he promised to appoint a "faithful and wise servant." This servant would be used, Jesus prophesied, to give spiritual "meat in due season" to those "whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching."—Matt. 24:45,46; Luke 12:37; Rev. 3:20

"Therefore," as Paul said, it is important that we take earnest heed to "the things which we have heard," for they have not reached us by any ordinary means, but have come from the glorified Jesus, who has been exalted to the right hand of God. This means that every aspect of God's plans and purposes are of vital concern to each dedicated follower of the Master. To let any part of these things "slip" through lack of interest or zeal would be as though we refused him who has spoken to us.—Heb. 12:25

LAXNESS IN SACRIFICE

The epistle to the Hebrews indicates that it was written to a group of Jewish believers in Christ who were not fully living up to their privileges as followers of the Master. They had not given heed to all the things which they had heard, being "dull of hearing," and thus were unable to properly apply the message of truth in their lives as they should have done. For this reason they needed to be taught again the "first principles" of the Word of God.—Heb. 5:11-14

The lack of a clear understanding of the Truth subjected the Hebrews, as well as all others who

would fall into this category, to discouragement. This, in turn, would lead to a lack of patient endurance and perseverance in meeting the experiences which inevitably would be theirs as Christ's disciples. In Hebrews 2:9-12, we are told of Jesus' death as man's Redeemer, and of the fact that his brethren had the privilege of being associated with him as a "sanctified," or holy, class, just as he was holy. Additionally, as the "captain of their salvation" was made "perfect through sufferings"—that is, complete, consummate in character—they also should expect to suffer. Thus, by both sanctification and suffering, they "are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren."

In the life of a Christian, sanctification and suffering are vitally connected. True holiness of character, which sanctification denotes, will lead one to sacrifice his own will in the interest of God's plans and purposes, thus producing suffering in various ways. Suffering is not pleasant to the flesh, and ordinarily it tends to discourage those who are subject to it. In the early days of their Christian walk, the Hebrew brethren to whom this epistle was addressed, did not become disheartened due to their sacrifice and suffering. Paul explains that they had taken "joyfully the spoiling" of their goods, and had "endured a great fight of afflictions." Sometimes they were made a "gazing-stock ... by reproaches and afflictions," and other times they were the "companions of them that were so used." (Heb. 10:32-34) Apparently, however, this had been their attitude only in the beginning, in the "former days." Now they were admonished to call that time to remembrance, with the implication that they were to return

to their former position of zeal and joy, which they had evidently lost in the face of persecution.

It could be that their laxity in holding fast to the Word of truth which they had heard resulted in their overlooking the real purpose of Christian suffering. Perhaps they were now looking upon their sufferings as evidences that God's blessing was no longer with them. If they were failing to correctly understand the Word of truth, they may have wondered why the Lord did not take away the "rebuke of his people," as he had promised to do.—Isa. 25:8

Whatever the reason, they were not living up to their privileges of sacrifice and suffering with Christ as courageously as they had in the beginning. To remind these brethren afresh of their privilege of suffering with Jesus, Paul admonished them to look unto Jesus as their example, explaining that they had not yet resisted "unto blood, striving against sin." (Heb. 12:2-4) To resist "unto blood" does not necessarily mean that a follower of Christ must literally suffer and die as a martyr, shedding actual blood. Rather, it denotes a life of sacrifice, in which day by day earthly desires and ambitions are given up in the service of Christ and his cause, regardless of when and how death may come.

The Hebrew brethren had suffered much in the past. Their goods had been spoiled, and they had endured a great fight of afflictions, but they had not as yet fully sacrificed their lives as Jesus had done. They had not been faithful even unto death. Though they had done the will of God in consecrating themselves to him and to the divine cause, they had "need of patience" that would enable them to endure unto the end. (Heb. 10:36) The word "patience" as

translated from the Greek in this passage goes beyond mere forbearance or longsuffering in its meaning. In addition, it signifies cheerful endurance, perseverance and steadfastness.

In order to persevere and cheerfully endure in tribulation, it is essential to be keenly aware that the trials which come to us are a vitally important facet of the divine will. The reason for Christian suffering is clearly revealed in the Book of Hebrews, and elsewhere in the Scriptures. It is the divine purpose to develop a merciful and sympathetic spiritual priesthood, which will reconcile mankind back into harmony with God in the coming Messianic kingdom. (Heb. 2:17; 4:15; 5:1,2; II Cor. 5:18,19) If, through neglect, worldliness, or lack of faith we let our appreciation of this great privilege “slip,” we will become discouraged by our difficult experiences. Thus, we may lose our steadfastness and the ability to endure unto the end of the way. Paul, however, encourages us along this line, saying, “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.”—Heb. 10:35

INCENTIVE TO FAITHFULNESS

Hebrews 3:1,2 reads, “Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.” Here we are reminded that the consecrated followers of the Master in the present age are partakers of the same heavenly calling to which Jesus was called. Much is implied by this. In another place, Paul referred to the “mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ

Jesus.” (Phil. 3:14) A prize is something for which a person is willing to strive, and to make sacrifices to attain. This is especially true of the prize of the high or heavenly calling. The apostle indicates that we should never lose sight of the “mark,” or goal, set before us to attain. Rather, it should be an incentive to daily faithfulness, so that we might be victorious and, by God’s grace, receive the glorious “prize of the high calling.”

As noted in the foregoing paragraphs, Paul associates the heavenly calling with the fact that the called ones of this age are a priestly class over which Jesus is the Head—our High Priest. The Apostle Peter likewise wrote of this “holy” and “royal” priesthood, pointing out that its present mission is to offer sacrifices, “acceptable to God by Jesus Christ,” and to show forth “the praises of him who hath called” us to this marvelous privilege.—I Pet. 2:5,9

Members of this higher priesthood do not offer animals in sacrifice. Instead they offer their own bodies, or their lives. (Rom. 12:1) Paul explains that Jesus was “faithful to him that appointed him.” He was faithful in offering himself in sacrifice for the “sin of the world.” (John 1:29) We, too, must be faithful in the offering of our sacrifice to God if we are to remain a part of this priesthood. Though our sacrificial offering does not have any redemptive merit, as Jesus’ did, we are, nevertheless, invited to be “planted together” in the likeness of Jesus’ sacrificial death.—Rom. 6:3-5

To endure the shame, ignominy and suffering which came to him as he was laying down his life, Jesus had the “joy that was set before him,” which

motivated him to endure the cross and to despise the shame. Because Jesus was faithful, he is now “set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:2) The Apostle Peter explained a prophecy in which Jesus is represented as saying, “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” (Ps. 16:10,11; Acts 2:25-28) Clearly the great joy which was set before Jesus of returning to the presence of his Heavenly Father was one of his great incentives to faithfulness.

In addition to the great joy of returning to his Heavenly Father’s personal presence, Jesus was also inspired by the hope of accomplishing the divine purpose of restoring mankind to life. This is referred to by Isaiah in these prophetic words: “It pleased the LORD to bruise him [Jesus]; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.”—Isa. 53:10,11

HIS BRETHREN ALSO

The brethren of Christ, his dedicated followers, have these same joys set before them as an encouragement to faithfulness. In Hebrews 12:22-24, some of the details of these joys are beautifully set forth in symbolic language. By faith we have come to “mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God.” Thus the hope of rulership with Christ in his kingdom is set before us.—Rev. 14:1,4; 20:6

By faith we also approach unto “an innumerable company of angels.” These are described as “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation,” and they “always behold the face” of our Father in heaven. (Heb. 1:14; Matt. 18:10) While these angels are invisible to us now, we know of their interest in us, and of how, as the servants of our Heavenly Father, they watch over all our affairs. One of the joys set before us will be the great blessing of meeting and knowing these honored servants of our Heavenly Father. How very sweet and wonderful that will be!

By faith we are also looking forward to “the general assembly” of the “church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.” Even now, it is a joy to assemble with our brethren in local gatherings and in conventions, but how much greater will be the joy of assembling with the entire church of the firstborn beyond the veil! This blessed future assembly will never end. In that gathering will be Jesus, Peter, Paul, John and all the apostles, the faithful all down through the entire Gospel Age, including those with whom we have been personally acquainted and have loved, but lost for a while through death.

As with Paul, so with us, we are looking forward to meeting and being with “God the Judge of all.” It is impossible even to approximate what a great joy this will be. In the case of Jesus it is described as fullness of joy, meaning that there could be no greater joy than that experienced by those whose inestimable privilege it will be to abide in the presence of our loving Heavenly Father as members of his immediate and divine family.

We are also looking forward to association with those described by Paul as “just men made perfect.” These are the heroes of faith who lived prior to our Lord’s death as man’s Redeemer, some of whom Paul mentions in Hebrews chapter 11. These “Ancient Worthies” will be restored to life as the human representatives of the divine, invisible Christ. Though they will be on the human plane of life, and the Christ class will be on the divine plane, there will be, in ways now unknown to us, a close association. It will be a great joy indeed to work together in the kingdom with these who were willing to suffer and die in their loyalty to God and to his Messianic cause.

One of the superlative joys to which we look forward is to meet and forever be associated with Jesus, “the mediator of the new covenant.” Throughout our earthly sojourn Jesus has ministered to us as our advocate, brother, and friend. (I John 2:1; Matt. 12:50; John 15:15) His example of faithfulness is a constant inspiration as we endeavor to walk in his steps of sacrifice. However, in heavenly “mount Sion” we will meet him face to face, and as “ministers of the new covenant” we will be associated with him in reconciling the world back to harmony with our Heavenly Father.—II Cor. 3:6

This will be made possible through the merit of the blood which will then speak “better things than that of Abel.” Abel’s blood cried out to God to accuse Cain of the sin of taking a human life, and thus a curse was placed upon him. (Gen. 4:10-12) The blood of Jesus, however, does not cry out for punishment, but for the deliverance of the condemned world from sin and death. (I Pet. 1:18,19; Col. 1:19,20; Rev. 5:9,12) What a joyful experience

it will be to participate in the work of extending to the people the life which has been provided by the blood of the “Lamb that was slain.”

DO NOT LET THEM SLIP

These glorious prospects of future joys in the kingdom are promised to us if we give “earnest heed to the things which we have heard.” If, on the other hand, we let these truths “slip” from us for any reason, the inspiration to patient continuance in the way of sacrifice and suffering will also be lost.

To the Hebrew brethren Paul wrote that it would be only a “little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” (Heb. 10:37) Today the fulfillment of many prophetic signs indicate that Christ Jesus has returned, and therefore the fruition of all our hopes is very near at hand. Nothing in God’s loving plan has tarried. Every detail is being carried out exactly in accord with his “due time.” (Rom. 5:6; Eph. 1:10; I Tim. 2:5,6) The Word of truth which we have heard, and its “vision,” which we have seen written “upon tables,” may seem to tarry long, but “it will surely come, it will not tarry.” (Hab. 2:2,3) Thus, we are assured that God’s “plan of the ages” will be completed and have a most glorious outcome.—Eph. 3:9-11, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

Let us “hold fast the confession of our hope that it waver not.” (Heb. 10:23, *Revised Version*) We know that God has been faithful to his people in every age, and that now he will give us strength for our every time of need. Through his beloved Son he has fed us at his bountiful table of spiritual food, and in this

glorious feast of truth we have rejoiced and will continue to be glad.

The only way we can attain the heavenly goal set before us is by faithfulness in laying down our lives sacrificially as Jesus did. (Matt. 16:24) To only half-heartedly do this is a clear danger sign to the Christian, and would be one of the first indicators of letting slip the things which we have heard. Let us, rather, continue to press on, faithful even unto death, knowing that only in this way will we receive “the crown of life.” (Rev. 2:10) Let us hold fast to the Lord, to his promises, and to his people, as together we press toward the mark of the glorious prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus. ■