

Sermon Series: *Hebrews: The Supremacy of Christ*



## How's Your Hearing?

Palm Sunday

### **Hebrews 5:11-14 (ESV)**

*<sup>11</sup> About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. <sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, <sup>13</sup> for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*

## Introduction

A couple of years ago I went for my annual check-up. After the exam the doctor asked, "Do you have any questions?" "Yes," I said, "I do, but not about me, about my wife." The doctor looked a little puzzled but said, "Okay. What is it?" "Well, I think my wife is hard of hearing, but I don't know how to look into this without embarrassing or insulting her. What can I do?" He said, "Well, when you get home, slowly walk up behind your wife, speaking in a normal tone of voice, and ask her what's for dinner and then see how close you have to get to her before she hears you. Then you'll discover the problem."

So that's what I did. When I got home, I walked in the front door, and my wife was standing at the sink washing dishes. I said, "Honey, what's for dinner?" No response. So I walked about halfway to her and asked again. "Honey, what's for dinner?" Nothing. So I walked right up behind her and asked again, "Honey, what's for dinner?" And she turned around with this frustrated look on her face and said, "For the third time, chicken and rice!"

It seemed my wife's hearing was just fine, while mine needed some help. *I thought the problem was in someone else, when actually the problem was in me.* This is the larger point of the text this morning. The author of Hebrews is pointing out to his readers that they have a problem. It's a subtle problem that has snuck up on them.

**Main point:** to call us to pursue spiritual maturity through consistent discernment of good from evil.

If you want to grow in the Lord, then there are some things you can do. If you want to understand God's words and the truth revealed in it more fully, then you must put into practice what you know. Verse 11 explains the issue.

### **Hebrews 5:11 (ESV)**

*<sup>11</sup> About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.*

## Much To Be Said

The author **has much to say** about the Great High Priesthood of Jesus and its similarity to Melchizedek's priesthood. He admits **it is hard to explain**, but only because there is a problem in the people. He yearns to explain and make clear these similarities between this ancient biblical character, who is mentioned only twice in the whole Bible (Gn. 14:17-20; Ps. 110:4), and the Great High Priest, Jesus.

He has much to explain about Jesus his Melchizedekian priesthood, but he pauses for a moment to introduce a new thought. Basically all of chapter six is a warning against failing to receive and believe this truth about Jesus. He will then spend all of chapter seven teaching on Melchizedek. However, at this point, he pauses to proclaim the problem.

There is a call this morning for each of us to stop and evaluate our own lives. We need to stop everything and listen to what he says, for this is the word of the Lord.

What's the problem?

## You Have Become Dull of Hearing

The problem is that they **have become dull of hearing**. The word translated 'dull' (*nōthros*) means "slow; sluggish; slothful."<sup>1</sup> This means they once were not dull, but now they are dull. They have grown lazy and sluggish. They have not progressed forward, but rather they relaxed and slipped backward. He is here echoing a theme he introduced in chapter two.

### Hebrews 2:1 (ESV)

*Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.*

They have failed to "pay closer attention to what they had heard" and so they had "drifted away" from the truth. Notice the connection with hearing. This is their problem. They had moved away from being diligent hearers and sluggishly slipped into a place of dull hearing. They moved from being sharp listeners to being sluggish hearers. At one time they paid close attention to what they were taught, but somewhere along the way they got lazy and slipped into slothful state of spiritual dullness.

## Slow Spiritual Hearing, Not Physical Hearing

This does not refer to physical hearing, but rather spiritual hearing. Their problem has to do with how they have been handling the word of God.

### Hebrews 5:12 (ESV)

*<sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.*

The central issue is how they've been handling, or not handling **the oracles of God**. This is simply another way of referring to God's word. They have God's word, but they're not paying attention to it. The problem does not arise because they don't have access to God's word, but because they're too lazy to **act** on God's word. They've been taught, but they have failed to become teachers. They have the truth, but they are not treasuring the truth. They have their Bibles, but they are not opening reading them.

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, "[Hebrews](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 51.

## The Most Purchased, Never Read Book

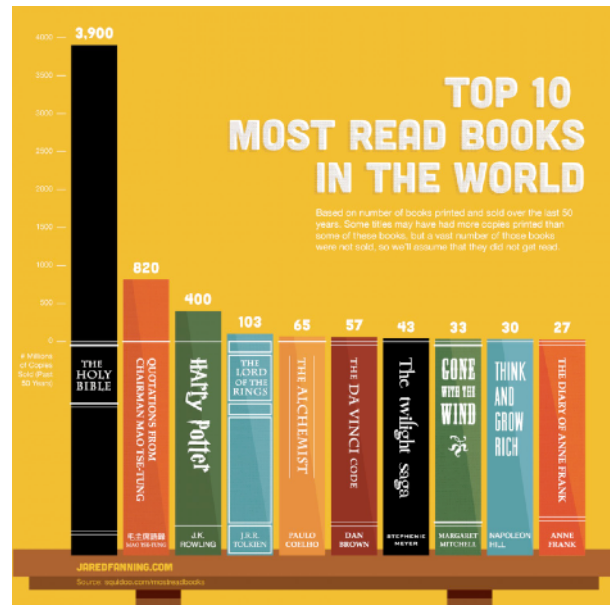
This is still the problem today. There is greater access to the Bible today than there ever has been, yet most people still refuse to put forth the effort required to lay hold of its truth.

The Bible is the best-selling book of all time and yet most people have never read it.

The Bible has sold almost 4 billion copies, while the second best selling book is *Quotations of Chairman Mao*, which has sold only 820 million.<sup>2</sup>

Christianity Today<sup>3</sup> reports that one out of five American adults (20%) have read the Bible from cover to cover and only 61% of Christians have read it start to finish.

We can all get our hands on the Bible, but it's much more difficult to get our hearts into it.



## Again You Need to be Taught

These Hebrews are unable to understand the deeper spiritual truths because they had not properly dealt with the basic ones. They have become dull to deeper truth because they did not attend to the basic truths. They had already been taught the truth, but the author writes that they “needed someone to teach them **again**.” They had been taught once, but it didn’t sink in. They need a review of the basics—back to Bible 101. They needed to retake the course.

By this time they **ought to have been teachers**, but now they were in need of someone to teach them. The reference here is not to a particular office of teacher. This is a general letter to the whole church. What he is saying is that by this time they all ought to have been sharing the gospel with the people around them. They should have been well acquainted with basics of the Christian faith such that they could teach it to their coworkers and family who asked questions. They’d had plenty of time with God’s word but they didn’t use that time well. They did not press on in their walk with God. They started out well, but then they got lazy and drifted into spiritual sleep.

<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://hubpages.com/literature/mostreadbooks> accessed 24 March 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Source: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2013/june/surprising-stats-on-who-reads-bible-from-start-to-finish.html> accessed 24 March 2018.

What is status of your spiritual condition today? How's your heart toward God? Are you enflamed, indifferent, or encased in ice? Are you on fire for the Lord, spiritually asleep, or as cold as ice?

Where are you? Are you a Christian? How long have you been a Christian? How long have you had a Bible? Have you read it? Have you spent enough time reading it that you know enough to explain the gospel to a coworker? Or to your children when they ask?

### Hey, Where's That Verse...

I know a man whose been a Christian for more than 30 years who still sends me text messages that say something like, "Hey, where's that verse that talks about the span of a man's life being seventy years?" I love him, but this drives me crazy. I type back, "You remember that Bible app I installed on your phone? Open it, go to the search field, and type in 'seventy years' and you'll find it."

These Hebrews ought to have been further along in the faith than they were. They ought to have been eating meat, but instead they had chosen to remain on milk.

#### **Hebrews 5:12-13 (ESV)**

*You need milk, not solid food, <sup>13</sup> for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.*

It was time for meat, but they were content with milk. They were living as if they were spiritual children. There's nothing wrong with milk, but milk is only intended for a certain season. After a certain point in development, meat is to be preferred. Milk is great until you cut your teeth. When you cut your teeth, then you should start cutting your steak. If you want to grow and mature, then you need more than milk. This life we are called to live requires endurance. No one training for a marathon eats only milk. A marathoner needs meat.

If you were planning to run 26 miles, which would you prefer to have, milk or meat?

We're called to run to spiritual marathon. To finish this spiritual race you need spiritual meat, you need spiritual maturity.



### Unskilled in the Word of Righteousness

Once again the author draws our attention back to the word of God. The underdeveloped person is **unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is like a child**. Spiritual immaturity comes from being *unskilled in the word of righteousness*. The word 'unskilled' means "the act

of doing what God requires—'righteousness.'"<sup>4</sup> This helps us be specific about where the problem lies. Immature spirituality is a disobedient spirituality. Being "unskilled in the word of righteousness" means *not* acting in a way that God requires. It means being *un*-righteous. Immature Christians know what God requires, but they just don't want to do it. They chose to rebel against God's revealed will. This is not a problem of intellect. This is a problem of the will. They are choosing to disobey rather than to obey.

Is it any wonder that they cannot comprehend the deeper things of God's word? Should we be surprised if we find the more refined biblical truth unpalatable if we cannot digest the most simple? Should we expect God to reveal the deeper truths of his word and his nature to us if we refuse to accept the most obvious?

**John 3:12 (ESV)**

*<sup>12</sup> If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?*

If at work you are entrusted with a small account, and you fail to handle it well, then should you be surprised when your manager refuses to give you a larger one?

When we refuse to obey the clear teaching of God's word, should we be surprised when our lives begin to lack spiritual vitality? When we as a nation take the truth of God's word and cast it behind our backs, should we be surprised when we see the spiritual fabric of our country begin to unravel. When we choose not to act in accord with God's word of righteousness, we're acting like stubborn little children who demand our way rather than submitting to his.

When we refuse to act according to God's revealed plan for our sexuality and gender, should we be surprised when the stability of our families begins to fail? When we refuse to cherish and nurture life, as God's word commands—at every stage of development, from conception to natural death, should we be surprised when death pops up in our schools, malls, nursing homes, and work spaces?

If God feels distant to you, then you need to ask yourself, "Could it be because I'm disobedient?" Sit down in prayer and ask the Lord to show you if there is any place in your life where you are consistently walking in disobedience. When he reveals it to you, then act upon it. Fix it. Confess it. Repent of it. Forsake the sin in the strength that only he can provide and then things will change. In order to grow in our relationship with the Lord we need to stop acting like "selfish little self-sovereign toddlers"<sup>5</sup> demanding our own way and start believing that the way of the Creator is a much better way of living. Nothing will change unless you begin to believe that.

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<sup>4</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 743.

<sup>5</sup> I heard this phrase from Paul Tripp.

How do you learn this? You learn it by practice.

**Hebrews 5:14 (ESV)**

*14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*

Mature Christians are those who've had their **powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil**. There's no day off in the fight against evil. Advancing in spiritual maturity requires "constant practice." The devil and his demons<sup>6</sup> are constantly busying themselves with pushing evil into your path, therefore Christians must be constantly discerning.

Don't despair. You can **train** your powers of discernment. If you feel spiritually sluggish this morning, then by the grace of God and the power of the indwelling Spirit of Jesus, resolve right now to begin training. If you work hard at training your body, then make up your mind to train your soul. If you habitually give in to the power of sin, then begin practicing today to distinguish good from evil. Constant practice of discerning good from evil will train your soul to start choosing good and stop choosing evil. How?

## Be Truthful About Good & Evil

First, decide to call evil, evil and good, good. Language is massively important. When we linguistically soften the words we use to refer to sin, we are on our way to spiritual immaturity and sluggish spirituality. For example, to make illicit sex between married persons with someone other than their spouse more acceptable, we stopped calling it adultery and started calling it an affair, as if nothing more significant was happening than a sequence of innocuous events.

It's not infidelity, it's just a fling. I'm not lying, I'm just "stretching the truth" a little. I'm not being deceitful, I'm just sharing "alternative facts." It's not murder, it's "euthanasia," or "abortion," or "physician assisted dying." It's not pornography, it's "adult entertainment." It's not divorce, it's "conscious uncoupling." It's not fornication, it's "premarital cohabitation." It's not outbursts of anger, it's "intermittent explosive disorder." It's not profanity, it's "socially offensive language."

**Isaiah 5:20 (ESV)**

*20 Woe to those who call evil good  
and good evil,  
who put darkness for light  
and light for darkness,  
who put bitter for sweet*

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<sup>6</sup> Demons are fallen angels.



*and sweet for bitter!*

Don't play spiritual games with God. If it's sinful, call it a sin, not a mistake. This is this first step to training your soul to discern good from evil.

## Obey What You Know

Second, start obeying what you already know. Begin being a doer of the word and not a hearer only. Stop listening to twelve sermon podcasts and not obeying a single one. Start practicing what you preach.

### **Psalms 81:13-16 (ESV)**

*"Oh, that my people would listen to me,  
that Israel would walk in my ways!  
I would soon subdue their enemies  
and turn my hand against their foes.  
I would feed you with the finest of the wheat,  
and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."*

Oh the blessings that would be ours if only we would obey. Our God has satisfaction to give us from sources that we cannot even imagine, like honey coming from a rock, if only we would walk in his ways.

## Habitually Read Your Bible & Meditate on What You Read

Third, start habitually reading your Bible. You won't learn to discern good from evil if Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and Facebook are the first things you read in the morning. Running first to the Boston Globe will not help you train to discern good from evil.

You can't get your morality from the media and expect to train your powers of discernment. Read your Bible every day. Mediate on what you read. Slow down with smaller portions and let it sink into your soul and saturate your spirit. Meditate on the Scripture you read.

## Water Some Things & Starve Others

Fourth, water what you want to grow while starving what needs to die. Feed good habits while starving evil ones. Foster faith while strangling sin. Kill sin while raising righteousness. Cherish Christ while denying the devil.

## Conclusion

How's your hearing, your spiritual hearing? How sensitive are you to the leading of the Lord? Are you quick to obey his word and his will or do you like to argue with him and explain why you're right and his word is wrong?



Have you become a teacher yet? How long have you been walking with the Lord? Have you been handling well the truth that you've been given? Are you growing in your faith? Are you ready for spiritual meat or are you content with spiritual milk? Are you skilled or unskilled in the word of God?

How are your powers of discernment? Are you able to discern good from evil and then do you act on it? Do you do good and turn away from evil? You can train and strengthen your powers of discernment. Start TODAY, practicing doing good and avoiding evil.

The real question is whose the king of your life. Have you welcomed Jesus as king in your heart or is Self king? For whom do you wave palm branches, Jesus or Self?