



Let Us Fear



Twelve Steps to a Good Year (Part 3) by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again sharing with you precious truths from Scripture that can raise you to a higher plane of Christian living in this new year.

The title of my talks this week is "Twelve Steps to a Good Year." They're specially designed to help you find God's highest will for you in this new year. My talks are based on the epistle to the Hebrews. Twelve times in this epistle the writer says "let us." These words indicate a resolution, a decision, but they also indicate one that we have to make together with our fellow believers. Taken together, they constitute twelve New Year's resolutions that we all need to make.

In my talk yesterday, I pointed out that the Hebrews had a different background from all other New Testament believers. They enjoyed certain privileges. First, they were free from idolatry and false cults. That freedom they had by inheritance through the law of Moses. Second, they had a knowledge of

all the Old Testament Scriptures, the Law, the Psalms, the Proverbs, the Prophets, and the Historical Books. Thirdly, they were familiar with the temple, with its sacrifices, with its worship. All things that spoke to the various ways of the nature of the true God and how to worship Him. But, in many cases, the Hebrew believers had not benefited from these privileges. On the contrary, they had been lulled into a false sense of security which was not justified by their spiritual condition. As a result the epistle to the Hebrews contains more solemn warnings against the danger of falling away than any other book in the New Testament, warnings against drifting, unbelief, negligence, laziness, and so on.

I suggested yesterday that the situation of many professing non-Jewish Christians today corresponds to that of the Hebrew believers at the time of the New Testament. We have long enjoyed many special privileges and benefits, but all too often these have not produced in our lives the fruit that God requires. Today we are the ones who need to be warned against such things as drifting, unbelief, negligence, and laziness.

Today I'm going to speak about the first "let us" resolution in Hebrews. If we did not understand the background of the spiritual condition of the Hebrew believers, this first resolution could really take us aback, but in the light of that background we can see that it's very appropriate; in fact,

absolutely necessary. This first resolution is found in Hebrews 4:1:

“Therefore, let us fear [That’s the first of these twelve resolutions. ‘Let us fear.’ The verse goes on like this:] ...let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it.” (NAS)

So that’s the first resolution, “Let us fear.” You see why? Because of their presumption, because of their false security, because of their laziness, because they hadn’t availed themselves of all the privileges and blessings that they’d enjoyed in a special degree.

The writer to the Hebrews also gives them a specific example of why they should fear and this example is taken from the past history of the people of Israel. It’s based on the experience of the Israelites in their journey through the wilderness from Egypt to the Promised Land, and it’s what God says to them there. It’s quoted from one of the psalms but it’s what God said to Israel in connection with their attitude and their conduct at this time of wilderness wandering. These are the words in Hebrews 3:7-15:

“So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert [or the wilderness], where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’ [That’s a remarkable fact, God brought that whole generation out of Egypt by many miraculous wonders; but nevertheless, because of their subsequent conduct, He was angry with them. Then the Scripture goes on, and it’s God speaking:] So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’” [Now the application:] See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. As has just been said: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.’” (NIV)

So that’s the essence of the warning: “Do not harden your heart.”

In what, exactly, did that generation fail? I think that passage makes it clear. There was one basic failure, they did not hear God’s voice. They were content to get things second-hand through Moses. They had a form of religion. They had a tabernacle, the Ten Commandments, the priesthood, the sacrifices, and the various laws of ceremonial cleanliness, but in all that, they missed the one essential. They were just satisfied with externals and so they missed the one thing that could have saved them from disaster. The one thing that could have carried them through to God’s rest for them. What was that one thing? They failed to hear God’s voice.

That first resolution that we’ve looked at in Hebrews 4:1 says “Let us hear.” In other words, it’s not restricted to the Israelites in the wilderness. They’re merely put forward as an example and a warning to us and it applies still to us today. “Let us fear.” Why should we fear? I think the reason is clear in the context. We need to be fearful, we need to be very much on our guard, we need to be very careful that we do not make the same mistake as the Israelites made in the wilderness. The mistake of focusing on externals and missing the real inner essential. That inner essential, as I’ve said, was hearing God’s voice. You see, this principle runs all through the Bible. The one basic essential for a right relationship with God is to hear His voice. Jesus said the same to us as His disciples in the New Testament. In John 10:27 He says this:

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me...” (NAS)

I believe perhaps that’s the clearest and simplest description of true Christians found anywhere in the New Testament. When Jesus says “My sheep,” He’s speaking about those who truly believe in Him, those whom He acknowledges, accepts, being Himself the Good Shepherd. He says two things about them. Very simple. The first is “My sheep hear My voice”; second, “they follow Me.”

That is true of all of all real Christians. They hear the Lord’s voice and they follow Him. It isn’t possible to follow the Lord if you don’t hear His voice. The pattern of the Oriental shepherd and his sheep is very clear. They followed the shepherd because they heard his voice. If they didn’t hear his voice, they couldn’t follow him. So the essential, then, is to hear the voice of Jesus and to follow Him. And the danger is that we make the same mistake that Israel made in the wilderness, that we’re preoccupied with external, with religion, with ceremony, with law, but we miss that basic, inner essential: hearing the voice of the Lord.

I want to urge upon you today the importance of learning to hear the Lord's voice. You see, that's not just a set of religious rules. It's not even just reading the Bible, though that's good. It's not even saying prayers. It's having that intimate, personal relationship with the Lord where He can speak to you directly and personally, whether it's through the Bible or some other way. Jesus didn't say, "My sheep read the Bible." It's a good thing to read the Bible if you hear the Lord's voice, but, believe me, many, many people read the Bible but don't hear the Lord's voice. The essential thing is that you hear the Lord's voice.

I want to promise you this: that if you will make this your first step in this new year, you will be a better person by the end of it. So please accept this as the first resolution. Let's fear that we don't make the same mistake that Israel made. Let's cultivate hearing the Lord's voice.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll continue with this theme, "Twelve Steps to a Good Year." Tomorrow I'll be explaining the second step.

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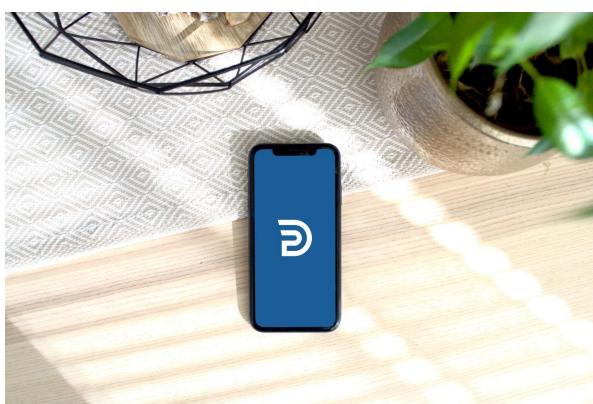
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