



LAST WORDS OF WARNING

“Don’t Defy God’s Word”

Hebrews 12:25 – 29

Dr. Deane J. Woods

Did you ever think about (or maybe even done a little research on) people’s ‘last words’? Have you ever considered their significance? Chances are, you probably haven’t and you won’t start right at this time!

In reality, however, these alleged ‘last words’ statements tell us much about the person’s orientation and outlook on life. They provide clues as to the person’s primary interests and concerns. Jesus described it this way: “*where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Mt. 6:21).

Three quick examples illustrate the point:

- Australia’s notorious, oft-heralded iconic bushranger, Ned Kelly, opined “Such is life!” as he prepared for the gallows at Melbourne’s Pentridge Prison.
- “What were today’s receipts?” questioned America’s business entrepreneur, entertainer and raconteur, P.T. Barnham, as he lay dying.
- Karl Marx, having left his wife and children destitute to pursue the socio-political agendas of his Hegelian based ‘dialectic materialism’ philosophy, is recorded as snapping this retort to his housekeeper/secretary who came to him asking whether he had “any last words”: “Go on, get out! Last words are only for fools who have not said enough!”.

In stark contrast, consider three alternative lives which heralded a totally different focus. First, William Carey (the ‘Father of Modern Missions’) said just prior to his decease, “When I’m gone, speak not of William Carey, but of William Carey’s Saviour”. Second, the preacher, theologian and pastor, John Wesley reportedly whispered as he lay dying: “Best of all, God is with us!”. And finally, what tomes could we write of our blessed Lord Jesus, Israel’s Messiah,

and His ‘last words’? First, recall those at His crucifixion (the ‘Seven Sayings from the Cross’ recorded in the Gospels); second, remember His post-resurrection, pre-ascension ‘Great Commission’ mandate to His disciples to “*make disciples of all nations*” (Matthew 28:19-20ff). Third, we would do well to revisit His final words to the ‘Seven Churches of Asia Minor’ (and to the Church today) as He sovereignly rules, enthroned in glory (as detailed in Revelation chapters 2-3).

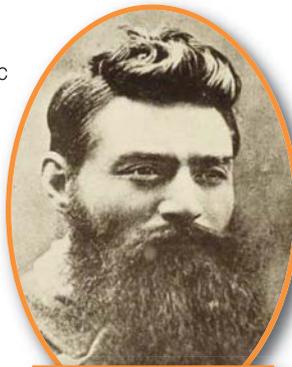
shown to be “God’s ‘last Word’ to man” (1:1-4) and who is now speaking as the King-Son (1:5-14) enthroned in heaven and destined to rule over His inheritance “in the age to come” (cf. 2:5), together with His “co-heirs” or “companions” (3:1, 14). They must not “refuse” Him who has spoken (cf. 1:1-4) and who now continues to speak from heaven with all God-given authority!

Warnings Revisited

The four prior ‘words of warning’ were written with an exhortatory purpose (13:22). They built inexorably on one another and led to an inevitable, climatic conclusion in this, the fifth and last warning. Let us recall them again by way of quick review. Believers must not:

- “Drift” from the Word (2:1-4). The author had first of all warned in these verses that “neglect (the word used is ‘neglect’, not ‘reject’) of one’s ‘salvation hope’ is perilous indeed!”. The point he stressed is simple to understand. He used “salvation” (here and in all subsequent places in Hebrews) with a significant **future** connotation (1:14; 2:3,10; 5:9; 6:9; 9:28)

relative to the basic meaning of the term - *deliverance*. His concern for his readers was that they appreciate a simple spiritual truth: This **future** aspect of God’s gracious redemption in Jesus, The Messiah, should cause life-changing worship and lifestyle changes in their present lives! Put simply, he stressed the point that future, eternal verities **must** impact present spiritual practices. They needed a radical refocus and redirection, spiritually. This, he urged, would arise when they appropriated his emphasis of “salvation”. ‘Salvation’ in Hebrews, may be defined as “*that future, gracious deliverance from conflict in which faithful, persevering believers will share in Messiah’s glorious Kingly reign*”.



Ned Kelly



William Carey

This latter reference to Jesus’ ‘last words’, is also highlighted in Hebrews 12:25. They are words with which we conclude our present series on the ‘Words of Warning’ in Hebrews:

See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven.

These challenging ‘last words’ spoken to Hebrew believers just before the fall of the Second Temple in A.D. 70, climax the author’s five exhortations in his epistle. The point is perfectly clear: He urged his readership not to “defy” God’s Word Incarnate whom he had



- **“Doubt” God’s Word (3:6-4:11ff).** To do so would mean missing God’s ‘rest’ – both presently (in reference to the assurance of Christ’s finished work on the Cross), and in the future (relative to being rewarded by sharing His inheritance and administration in the Kingdom). This is clearly discernable in the author’s unique word for ‘rest’ in 4:9: [Greek, *sabbatismos*]. He again emphasized the point in verse 11, though he returned to the use of his regular term for ‘rest’ (as in verses 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10): *Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.*
- **Become “dull” to God’s Word (5:11-6:21).** Interestingly, the readership must have “listened to” the Word repeatedly (over a long period of time, since they were “second generation” believers [2:3-4]), but in reality they hadn’t really “heard” it so as to personalize and obey it. Certainly the backward slide toward Judaism and the Temple rituals had begun. The original text literally reads “hearings” (plural). The only antidote to their spiritual inertia was to “go on to maturity” in Christ (6:1-4ff) and appropriate God’s “living and powerful word” (4:12), daily (3:12-13).
- **Be “Disobedient” to God’s Word (10:26-39).** By applying our author’s exhortatory words of warning, they would be obedient to the “will of God and endurance” and “afterwards receive the promise” (vs. 36). How apropos to the words expressed just a few verses earlier: *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for*

He who promised is faithful (10:23). Therein lay ‘the key’ to the whole epistle! ‘Persevering faith (11:1-40) was and is needed throughout their spiritual pilgrimage as they “(ran) their race” (12:1-2).

- **Be “Defiant” towards God’s Word (12:29-25),** noting the immediate context, 1-24). The author next climaxes his ‘words of warning’ with one final “word”! Having revisited his former warnings – and in particular his initial warning and introductory theme in 2:1-4 – he emphasized it in the strongest terms. This is discerned in two ways: First, by the strong expressions he used (vss. 26-27); second, by the deliberate literary form he employed. Technically, it is a grammatical ‘inclusio’ [Compare the analogy of two “book ends” to “hold the contents together”]. The culmination is recorded in the incisive words of verses 28 and 29:

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.

The most telling point of the author’s message had been reached. How exactly?

Warnings Reviewed

Based on what he has said (“*Therefore ...*”), our author next cited certain observations and instructions (“... *let us have grace, ... serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear*”) and finally a reason for these dutiful applications in the believer’s way of life and Christian service.

Herein is another return to the *future* aspect of ‘salvation’. Again, the point is not that of believers’ eternal salvation. That has been demonstrated and assured in Christ, the Messiah. Rather, it is that they will participate as His “*companions*” (3:1,14) in the coming Kingdom. To share in some way in the administration of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords will be based solely on His grace. That’s why they need to “*have*” it (vs. 28). Previously, he had written that they should look “*carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God*” (vs. 15a; ch 13:9). That believers will participate with Him in His administrative rule over the earth (and eternally in the new heavens and the new earth – see Heb. 1:10-12) will be realized only through His grace and faithfulness to His promise (10:23; cf. 11:39). Yet, it behoves them to “*serve (Him) acceptably* (that is: with His approval, indicating His being well pleased) *with reverence* (that is: acknowledging Him with

dutiful, reverential awe and respect) *and godly fear* (that is: recognizing their total dependence on Him for everything, and their accountability to Him in everything!)”.

Since it is impossible to please God “*without faith*” (11:6), and it is only by persevering faith that believers will share with the King in His kingdom, He will go on to exhort them to “*run the race with endurance*” (12:1-3). He has noted that some of God’s people in previous generations “*escaped*” (“... *the edge of the sword*” – 11:34) while “*others*” endured the trials of “*mockings and scourgings ... chains and imprisonment ...*” (vs. 36). Significantly, **all** obtained a good testimony through faith, but did not receive the promise (11:39), viz., participation in the Kingdom! Therefore, they were to “*consider Jesus*” (12:1-3) and His example of “*endurance*” and “*run the race before (them)*”, faithfully. Furthermore, believers are to contemplate the assurance of God’s love in the midst of chastening (12:5-13) and count on the enablement of God’s grace in their personal pilgrimage by:

- First, taking a brief *look backwards*. They should recall the bad example of Esau. He was the one who “*sold his birthright for a morsel of food*” (12:16-17). Sadly, temporal delights took precedence over eternal, spiritual verities!
- Second, they should *gaze upwards*. They must “keep seeing the invisible”: that is, the glory of the heavenly city – the New Jerusalem (12:18-24).
- Third, they should *keep looking ahead steadfastly*. With eyes fixed on the reality of a future, unshakeable Kingdom (12:29), they will participate in it, if they pursue it wholeheartedly with a life of faithful, God-pleasing worship and service!

Warnings Reinforced

Having established that “*we shall not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven*”, the author gave five reasons why this horrendous thought could be avoided:

- They must remember *the requirement that God made*, and the consequences the Children of Israel would suffer if they

disobeyed the divine commands as the Law was given at Mt. Sinai (vs. 26 and vss. 18-21; see Ex. 19:16-25). God's voice spoke His words to Moses on the "holy mount" and the earth shook (verse 26).

- Now *God confirms His future activity*: He will shake not only the earth but also heaven (verse 26b; Cf. Hag. 2:6-7 in reference to the first Advent of the Messiah, now pointing to His Second Advent).
- His ways are said to be *purposive*: the things that will be shaken are to be removed so that *"things that cannot be shaken may remain"* (verse 27).
- This is then *identified* as being *"a kingdom which cannot be shaken"* (verse 28). Moreover, the author is clear in his application: *"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and with godly fear"*.
 - A *final reason* is then added: *"for our God is a consuming fire"*. In context, this has nothing to do with one's eternal salvation status; it has everything to do with divine retribution for service done (that is, "works") for the Lord. Faithfulness will be rewarded; unfaithful "works" will be recompensed with loss of rewards. These truths are explained more fully in 1 Corinthians 3:10-16, esp. verse 14, 2 Corinthians 5:9-10ff and (to a lesser degree) in Romans 14:12 where all believers' works are said to be tried and rewarded – one way or another.

Warnings Reapplied

Hebrews closed with wide-ranging, practical applications. Chapter 13 gives the details. Believers are to reapply the principles that have been expounded in his exhortation for them to "go on to maturity" in the Lord. They must shun their penchant to resort to going back to the religio-sacrificial systems of Judaism and the Temple in Jerusalem. Their Messiah, God's "last word" to man has come. He is "better than the prophets", "Angels", "Moses and Aaron". He brings believers a "better hope" (7:19), because

He is the Mediator of a "better covenant" (8:6) which was established on "better promises" (8:6-7). No wonder our author is specific as to moral directions in their every day lives:

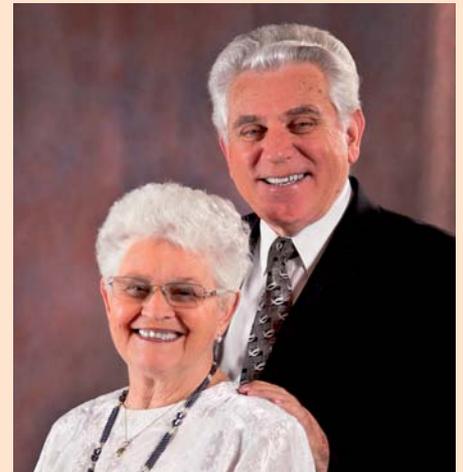
- *Socially & Relationally* – They must continue to exhibit brotherly love towards one another (13:1). They should be given to hospitality (verse 2a), and remember to "identify" with other members of the Body of Christ who are incarcerated (verse 2b; Cf. 12:2 and 10:32-34).
- *Maritally & Sexually* – They don't have to remain celibate. Marital relations are condoned and encouraged, but sexual infidelity will reap the judgement of God (verse 4).
- *Personally and Materially* – They must not be covetous, but rather content with what God provides, at all times, for He is faithful to His word! (verses 5-6)
- *Religiously and Spiritually* – They are to remember those who are (or who were) their spiritual leaders, whose faith they should emulate (verse 7). They must "obey" them because of their accountability to God (verse 17). These stalwarts of the faith have themselves followed the Messiah in all ways and He never changes (vs. 8). There is to be no departure into false doctrines perpetrated by false teachers (vs 9), including certain dietary laws (vs. 10). They are to remember their "altar" is a spiritual One, and they must worship Him "outside the Camp" ... even to the point of "bearing His reproach" through ostracism and rejection (vss. 10 through 13). Moreover, the New City is coming and its Object of worship, Jesus, is worthy to receive the "sacrifice of praise continually" (verse 14). They must join the author in prayer, specifically that he and his colleagues may live "honourably" and that he might be "restored to them sooner" (vss. 18-19) – an obvious reference to his incarceration for being a believer.
- **A final Exhortation** – Having given his prayer of benediction, our author appeals to his readership to "bear with the word of exhortation" he has written in "few words" (vs. 22), then concluded with a personal reference to Timothy's release and greetings from "those from Italy" (verses 22-23) and a prayer of grace for all (verse 25).

Has the writer to the Hebrews proven to you that "last words" are significant and demand our response of faith and obedience to God's "Last Word", Jesus Christ? Tragically, neither Kelly's,



nor Barnham's nor Marx' interests or orientation had the focus our author urged. In life, they had their chance to respond, but apparently, they "refused Him who spoke ... and still speaks"! They "defied" His Word.

What about you? Are you trusting Jesus, the Messiah, as your Saviour? Are you serving Him acceptably, with reverence and godly fear? What will be your 'last words'?



Deane & Margaret Woods
Ministry Representatives

The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry (Australia) Inc.

P0 Box 171 Melrose Park SA
5039 Australia

Office and Books:

c/o EBC Community Centre
Suite 406 (Upstairs)
Cnr. Rothesay Ave and Dorene St
St Marys SA 5042 AUSTRALIA

Phone/Fax: (+ 618) 08 8276 1333
Email: australianoffice@foi.org

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