

Sermon series: *Hebrews: The Supremacy of Christ*

Do Not Neglect Such a Great Salvation

Hebrews 2:1-9 (ESV)

1 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. 2 For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, 4 while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

5 For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. 6 It has been testified somewhere,

*"What is man, that you are mindful of him,
or the son of man, that you care for him?*

*7 You made him for a little while lower than the angels;
you have crowned him with glory and honor,*

8 putting everything in subjection under his feet."

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. 9 But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Main Idea: If God justly punished those who neglected his word sent to them by angels, then how much more will the punishment be for those who neglect his word sent to them by his Son.

Therefore, we must pay attention to this great salvation? Why?

- I. Because failing to pay attention to this great salvation will lead to spiritual drifting (2:1-3a)
- II. Because there are reliable witnesses who testify that it is true (2:3b-4)
- III. Because Jesus, who tasted death for you, rejoice in his reign or else be punished by his power (5-9)

Introduction

We live in a culture that fights for your attention. News and media outlets push notifications to your phone to get your attention. Advertisers pay an unbelievable amount of money to get your attention. This year, during the Super Bowl, companies will pay out \$5 million for every 30 second time slot just to get your attention. Your attention is in high demand and there is a battle for your attention in both significant and in significant ways.

May I Have Your Attention Please?

When I was in high school, me and a group of friends were out eating a popular pizza chain on a Friday evening. As we were eating this guy stands up on a chair in the middle of the restaurant and in a firm but calm voice said, "Excuse me, but may I have your attention please?" He calmly repeated this about two other times as he turned in all direction. Suddenly, everyone stopped talking and listened to him. He paused and stood there silently, looking around at everyone for about 10 seconds, and then just as calmly as before said, "Thank you. I love attention." Then he sat down and returned to his pizza. Everyone just started laughing.

What Has Your Attention?

There's a battle for your attention, but are you giving your attention to the right things. What has your attention? Are you paying attention to the most important things or are you paying attention to unimportant things?

God: May I Have Your Attention Please?

As we move into chapter two of Hebrews, God, through the author of Hebrews is asking, "May I have your attention please?" He is pleading with us to pay attention to what he has said to the world through his Son. In fact, he goes beyond pleading. He issues a stern warning, which is the **main idea** of this passage. The warning is this:

If God justly punished those who neglected his word sent to them by angels, then how much more severely will he punish those who neglect his word sent to them by his Son.

We do not want to be punished by God. We do not want to dishonor him by neglecting what he has spoken to us. God, in his great grace, has spoken to us. In times past he spoke to us by his prophets, but now he has spoken to us in a superior way. In times past he spoke to us by his angels, but now he has spoken to us by a more excellent way—*he has spoken to us by his one and only Son whom he loves and cherishes. Jesus is his Son and he is vastly superior to all prophets and all angels.*

There were three times¹ during Jesus's lifetime that God the Father spoke out loud from heaven to focus our attention on Jesus. This is what he said,

¹ Mt. 3:16-17; 17:5; Jn. 12:27-29.

Matthew 17:5 (ESV)

"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

In the past God sent prophets and angels to send us his word, but now, in the last days, God has sent his one and only Son, whom he loves and who is equal with God, to speak to us all that God wants us to know. The Son is more loved by the Father than any prophet or any angel. The Son is one with the Father.² He spoke only what the Father told him and so we must pay attention to what he has said. Since God has spoken by his Son, not a mere prophet or an angel—both of which are created beings, while the Son is uncreated—then we must pay closer attention to what he has said or else dreadful things will happen.

Lets read verses 1-3 one more time.

Hebrews 2:1-3a (ESV)

¹ Therefore **we** must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

The "**we**" means those to whom this letter was written. This is "The Letter to the Hebrews," who are God's chosen people. This warning is for everyone in this room. These words are for you and me this morning. This message is not for someone else. It's for you.

I. Pay Close Attention or You'll Drift Into Destruction

The author's first point is this, "**if you don't pay close attention to such a great salvation, then you will drift away into destruction.**" The author knows his Bible (i.e. our Old Testament [OT]). He knows that in the OT God often spoke to his people through angels and anyone who failed to obey what God spoke through angels received a just punishment for their transgression and disobedience.³

Sodom & Gomorrah

If you're following a Bible reading plan and you began in Genesis, then you've likely just read about the destruction of the cities Sodom & Gomorrah (Gn. 19). God sent two angels to the city. The angles first rescued Lot, his wife, and their two daughters, by literally dragging them out of the city. Then the angels warned them commanding them to flee to the mountains and not to look back when the city began to be destroyed. Lot's wife failed to pay attention to their warning. She did not pay attention to what the angels said. When the city began to be

² Jn. 10:30.

³ Ex. 23:20-23; Dt. 33:2; Jud. 2:1-5; Acts 7:53.

destroyed, she looked back to see and she died as a result. She was turned into a pillar of salt.⁴ If you fail to pay close attention to this message of salvation, then you will drift into destruction.

Isn't Sodom & Gomorrah a Myth?

You may be thinking, "Isn't that story just a myth?" No, it isn't. I don't believe any of the stories in the Bible are myth. The longer we live the more evidence is graciously given to us to confirm the truthfulness of the Bible.

In 2015 the Washington Post published an article explaining the work of archeologist Dr. Stephen Collins of Trinity Southwest University who for the previous 10 years had been excavating a site in the Jordan valley called Tall al-Hammam, which he says fits the description of Sodom found in the Bible.⁵



As they excavated the site they discovered a buried city which dates precisely to the time of Sodom. Excavations at the site continue to this day.⁶



The apostle Peter believed that account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was an actual historical event.⁷ He also believed that it was written down for us as a warning for those who would chose to live ungodly lives, disbelieving, and disobeying the gospel of grace.⁸ The events recorded in the OT are not myth and neither is the good gospel of this great Salvation which comes through Jesus. Peter says it like this,

2 Peter 1:16 (ESV)

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

The Ease of Spiritual Drifting

Just a few sentences after this Peter uses the same language as does the author of Hebrews. Peter says, "**You will do well to pay attention**" (2 Peter 1:19) to God's message of salvation. Why would Peter offer the same instruction, to pay attention to this great message of

⁴ Gn. 19:26.

⁵ Source: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/10/16/the-long-quest-to-find-the-biblical-cities-of-sodom-and-gomorrah/?utm_term=.622dd751929e accessed 25 Jan. 2018.

⁶ For more information visit <http://www.tallelhammam.com>.

⁷ 2 Peter 2:6.

⁸ 2 Peter 2:8.

Salvation? Probably because he knows how *easy it is to drift away from God* if we don't. How much easier is it to pick up your phone rather than your Bible? How much easier is it to tap on the weather app than the Bible app? How much easier is it to watch TV than it is to watch over your own heart? How much easier is it to talk to a stranger than it is to talk to God? How much easier is it to find anything to do than it is to make time for prayer? How much easier is it to give in to sin rather than expend the energy to fight against it?

Both Peter and the author of Hebrews understand something about the nature of this world in which we live and it is this;

Life in this world is so broken and dominated by sin, that if you aren't actively pursuing God, then you will be pulled from him.

This world is not spiritually neutral. The spiritual polarity of our existence is weighted towards sin and disobedience. There is a much stronger pull towards what is negative than to what is positive. This is why we need the great mercy and grace of God to overcome our innate sinful propensities.

If we are not consciously moving nearer to God, then we will unconsciously drift away from him. We are all like boats in the ocean. If we are not rowing towards the Great Shepherd of our soul, then the current of this wicked world will pull us away from him. You can't stop rowing and expect to arrive safely in heaven. If you take your oars out of the water, then you'll start drifting backwards and you'll go way off course. You must set your mind on where you want to be and then get yourself in motion to get there. Paul tells us,

"Set your mind on things above, not on things on earth" (Col. 3:2).

James tells us,

"Draw near to God and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8).

If you neglect him, then you will drift from him. If you do not pay attention to this great message of salvation then there will be 10,000 other voices that will immediately draw away your attention. Spiritual passivity will take no one to heaven. If you want to go to heaven then get your oars in the water and start rowing for this one truth is certain, no one coasts into heaven. If you're not spiritually engaged, then you're drifting away from Jesus. If you're not spiritually engaged, then the cultural current of this wicked world will draw you away from Jesus.

Drifting is easy. All you have to do is nothing. The ship on the ocean that has no direction will be driven into the rocks and destroyed. ***Therefore, we must pay closer attention to this great salvation or else we will drift into destruction.*** For we will not escape God's wrath if we neglect what he has said through his Son.

II. Pay Close Attention Because There Are Reliable Witnesses Who Testify to the Truth of This Great Salvation

Why should we pay attention to Jesus? Because God has sent reliable witnesses to confirm the truth of his message.

Hebrews 2:3b-4 (ESV)

It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

God knows we need reasons to believe in him. Therefore he has provided plenty of evidence so that we can confidently trust him. He does not expect a leap of blind faith into the dark. He expects us to trust the evidence that is all around us. God does not get angry when we ask for reasons to believe him. He gets angry when we choose not to believe the reasons he has already provided to us. These two verses point out that there are three kinds of witnesses that testify to the truth of this great salvation.

What is this Great Salvation?

What is this great salvation? It is the great miracle that God has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. God is holy and we are the opposite; we are sin-full and he is sin-less. We are full of sin and he knows nothing of sin. In order for us to live happily with him we must have our sin removed. This is what Jesus came to do.

First he lived a perfectly obedient life, never disobeying God the Father even once. Jesus never sinned, this he is perfectly righteous. Second, he then offered himself up to die. He did not die for his own sins. He died for those who would put their faith and trust in him. And this great gift is not just for the Jews. It is for *any* person who will receive Jesus and follow in his footsteps. And God has proved that Jesus is the only way to come to him by raising him from the dead and exalting him to his right hand to reign the world and pray for his people.

He has now delivered us from sin and he will deliver us safely into heaven after we die. Those who trust in him now will begin to taste how good it is follow him and then later after we die we will receive the fullness of all of God's goodness which he is keeping in store for us. This is this great salvation: abundant blessings now and great goodness yet more to come.

Three Reliable Witnesses to the Truth of this Great Salvation

This great salvation has been attested to as being true by three witnesses.

The First Witness is Jesus

First, it was proclaimed by Jesus. *"It was declared first by the Lord..."* (2:3). Jesus taught us more about God, his will, and his plan than anyone ever had before. Jesus came preaching and teaching. He came speaking truth and explaining the kingdom of God. He was the first to proclaim this great salvation.

The Second Witness is the Apostles

Then, *"it was attested to us by those who heard"* (2:3). As Jesus ascended up into heaven, he commissioned the disciples and sent them out as apostles, as eyewitnesses, to continue preaching and teaching everything that he had commanded. Those few men went throughout all Jerusalem and preached that Jesus had risen. They filled Jerusalem with this teaching⁹ and then went on to Judea, and Samaria, and eventually they kept preaching until they had "turned the world upside down."¹⁰

The Third Witness God

And then *"God himself confirmed the truthfulness of what they were preaching by giving signs, wonders, miracles, and by gifts given by the Holy Spirit"* (2:4). God granted miracles as a sign that the message being proclaimed by the apostles was a true message. For example, Peter and John were preaching that salvation is found only in Jesus¹¹ and God confirmed the truth of this gospel by healing through Peter and John a man lame from birth.¹² God affirmed the gospel message by giving a sign of his approval, namely, that there is power for salvation only through the great name of Jesus.

Does God Still Bear Witness Like This Today?

Does God still affirm the truthfulness of the gospel and the power of the name of Jesus in such ways today? Indeed he does.

Alex & Joy

I want to invite Joy and Alex to come share with you how God revealed himself to them two weeks ago while away at our winter retreat, Deep Freeze, at Camp Berea.

Zeng & His Parents

Two weeks ago I received an email from one of our mission partners in China. Many of you probably received it too. Our partner told the story of a man and his wife who are believers in Jesus but were unable to have a child. They were praying to God for a baby for seven years.

The parents of this man sent him an amulet in the mail which they had taken to a "Buddhist witch" for a special blessing to help his wife get pregnant. Because this man is a follower of

⁹ Acts 5:28.

¹⁰ Acts 17:6.

¹¹ See Acts 2.

¹² See Acts 3.

Jesus he wanted nothing to do with the amulet so it stomped on it, broke it, and threw it out the window.

He then called his father and told him that this was against his convictions, to never go to a witch on his behalf again, and if he wanted to be okay with God he needed to repent. His father explained that he did not know what it meant to repent. He then explained that to repent he needed to go into an inner room in his house, shut the door so that no one could hear him, and say, "Dear God, I am sorry. I believe what I did was wrong. Please forgive me."

His father obeyed him and did this. Then one night his wife had a dream and in the dream a member of her family told her that God was going to give them a granddaughter as a sign that they should believe in Jesus. When she awoke she told her husband about the dream. They decided that if their daughter-in-law got pregnant this year then they would believe in Jesus.

Within two months their daughter-in-law did get pregnant. This miracle confirmed to them that God truly had spoken to them by telling them in advance what he was about to do and that the pregnancy was a sign for them to believe in Jesus and so they did. They are now believers in God through Jesus.

God bore witness to the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus through a sign to couple of old Buddhists who live in unnamed village in China. They paid very close attention what God had said through his Son. They were drifting away from God, but now they are walking with him. They did not neglect this great salvation, but rather they paid attention to it by listening to the testimony of the witnesses; their son, the gospel of going to God through Jesus, and the confirming miracle that this is indeed true. Do you believe these witnesses?

III. Pay Close Attention Because Jesus Is the Reigning King Who Became a Suffering Servant to Taste Death For You

The third reason to pay more attention to this great salvation and not neglect it is because Jesus tasted death for you. Will the God of this universe be so unjust toward his Son as to allow to go unpunished those who ignored the fact that he experienced death on their behalf?

Jesus is the reigning king of the universe, yet he left his eternal kingdom and became a *suffering servant* in order to taste death for you so that you would not have to. How will you escape punishment if you neglect such a great salvation?

Hebrews 2:5-9 (ESV)

5 For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.

6 It has been testified somewhere,

*"What is man, that you are mindful of him,
or the son of man, that you care for him?
7 You made him for a little while lower than the angels;
you have crowned him with glory and honor,
8 putting everything in subjection under his feet."*

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. 9 But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

The notion that Jesus is superior to angels is still on the mind of the author. In verse five he references the one who reigns over "**the world to come**." The one who reigns over the world to come—the kingdom of God when it comes in all its fullness—is this man named Jesus. The one who is equal with God. The God-man. The one whose "years have no end" (1:12). He is the one who now possesses "all authority in heaven and on earth."¹³ He is the one whom angels worship. He's no angel, but he is the exalted "son of man" (5:6).

But how did he become so exalted? He became so exalted because he humbled himself so lowly. The one who now reigns over all is not an angel, but a man who succeeded where Adam—and every man since—failed. He is the second Adam. God gave Adam the authority to rule this world, and he blew it.

The author's mind then goes back to Genesis 1:26, 28 where we are told that God grants dominion to Adam over all the things on earth. The author of Hebrews quotes from Psalm 8:4-6, which is an exposition of Genesis 1:26 & 28. The psalmist, David, is amazed as he considers the wonder of the heavens, the stars, the sun, and the moon and all the glory of God's created order. He says the great celestial wonders are "**the work of God's fingers**" (Ps. 8:3). As he thinks about all these high and wonderful things he is then stunned that God, who created the universe would even take time to think about something as small and as a simple man.

"What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" (2:6)

And yet it is to Adam and his descendants that God has granted authority over all of this earth. There so many more magnificent things for God to think about than man and yet he chooses not only to think about us, but to care for us. And not only to care for us but to invite us to rule with him. God is clearly the reigning sovereign of the universe and yet he grants man the authority to exercise dominion over all the earth, all animals, birds, and fish. God transfers some of his divine authority to mankind in order to rule the earth. The psalmist is amazed that

¹³ Mt. 28:20.

God would grant such authority to us. Humanity is made just "**a little lower than the angels.**" We have been granted amazing authority over this earth. God entrusted into our care the stewardship of all of creation. This is amazing. It's like being "**crowned with glory and honor.**"

God has given the ability to build cities, buildings that reach to the heavens, to find the cure to hundreds of diseases, we travel the seas and explore it's depths, we fly in the sky and explore the stars. God has given us incredible authority and dominion over the elements of this world.

And yet, there are many areas of this earth that we do not exercise dominion over because we sinned and fell from his presence and as a result we now suffer under the curse of sin. Apparently the dominant idea that is on his mind is **death**. Mankind has been granted that all the earth is in subjection under our feet, but death is one of the things that we are subject to and that clearly is not subject to us. We all die and no matter what we do we cannot avoid it. No matter how many surgeries we have or how many vitamins we take or how regularly we exercise, we will eventually all die. Death is one ruler to which we all must submit. Yet this is very thing that Jesus conquered on our behalf.

"At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him..." (2:8)

Death certain qualifies. However, what we do see is,

Hebrews 2:9 (ESV)

"him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."

This is the first time the author names Jesus. Up to this point he has only referred to him as Son. Calling his name moves us away from thinking only of him in his office of "Son." Using his name reminds us that this great Son of God is a man, named Jesus of Nazareth. The Son who is eternal with the Father left all his glory in heaven and came to earth to dwell among us. His name is Jesus.

He has always been and will always be ruler over all angels. And yet this is this Sovereign Son is the man who humbled himself and took on flesh, gave up all his wealth and become poor, emptied himself of the use of all his divine power, this is the one who by his great **grace tasted death** for us.

The one who is life itself offered himself up to death, for us! This great person is the one who suffered for us. He is the one who entered death on our behalf. He who owns all authority gave up his rightful claim to that authority and submitted himself to the brutal authority of ungodly, weak but wicked men. He who is the author of life willingly gave up his life so that he

might taste death for all who would trust in him. He who has all rights gave up his right to life, so that all who will trust in him might live.

Jesus is the fulfillment of Psalm 8. He is the one man whom God has now crowned with glory and honor and exalted to his right hand. He is the one before whom every person must stand and give account of our lives. *"We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ"* (2 Cor. 5:10).

God has given great authority and dominion to man on this earth. We've conquered many things, we've climbed high mountains, we've conquered the depths of the, we've built high towers, split the atom, etc. but we still haven't conquered death. But Jesus has. He has conquered what we can not, could not, and will not. And because of this great victory, he has been crowned with glory and honor by God the Father by seating him at his right hand, therefore Jesus is worthy of our deepest worship, highest praise, and most devout adoration. So we should respond to this great gracious suffering and death and praise him for he has conquered an enemy that we humans cannot defeat. By his great grace he defeated our worst enemy, death. So let us celebrate this great, powerful, humble yet mighty conquering Savior!

If we neglect such a great salvation, we will not go unpunished.

An Unforgettable Run Around Horn Pond

Use your imagination for a moment. Imagine for a moment that one day I'm running around Horn Pond I come to that place at the lower end where the dam is, that place where the snow is piled so high that it nearly covers the sidewalk and there's only a narrow space of about 12 inches of sidewalk that then drops off into the road. I see a man running toward me. I think I can time it so that I make it past the mound of snow before he will get there. However, I don't time it well and my right foot hits the frozen snow and which pitches me off balance throwing me in the direction of the street. What I don't see, but the man coming toward me does, is that I'm heading right into the path of an oncoming bus. The man leaps toward me, grabs my arm, and with great effort swings me back up onto the sidewalk, but the counter balance of his weight sends him into the path of the oncoming bus rather than me. I'm safe, but this man is seriously injured and near death. He will have facial scars that will mar his appearance from that day onward.

He is in hospital for days recovering, but I do not go to visit him because I'm too busy. As he is weeks in rehabilitation hospital learning to walk again, I do not go and sit with him. I have better things to do. When he returns home for months of getting back to normal I do not take him any meals or help him in any way. Then one day I'm walking happily and uninjured around Horn Pond and I see a man laboriously coming toward me hobbling on crutches. As he passes me a friend and I laugh at him because of his hideous scars and his less than agile gait. He calls out to me and says, "Hey, you're the guy I pulled out of the way of the bus." I say, "I'm sorry I don't recognize you." Then I walk on with my friend enjoying the sunny day.

When I stand before God and give an account for my life will God excuse me for my unkind, unthinking, cruel, ungrateful, hideously selfish behavior toward this man who nearly lost his life saving mine? No. He will strike me down for my horrible behavior. Will God wink at my callous lack of gratitude toward this man who bore the scars that should have been mine? No. He will unleash the fury of his righteous anger towards my selfish soul. He will justly and severely punish me for neglecting the man who nearly died for me.

If this is true, then how much more will God the Father punish those who neglect and ignore his only Son who actually did die to save our lives? Jesus tasted death for us. He partook of death to save our souls. Will God then hold us guiltless if we fail to honor him for his great act of grace? No he will not. He will condemn all to the eternal torments of hell who reject his only Son, who tasted death for everyone.

Conclusion

May I have your attention please? Do not neglect such a great salvation. This is a message for me and you. Pay attention to this great salvation or your will drift from it into destruction. Pay attention to the many witnesses who testify to it's truth. Pay attention because this great King suffered and died for you.

Will you neglect him or will you worship him?

Reflection Questions

1. What keeps you from hearing God? What things in your life are presently causing you to drift?
2. What spiritual strategies keep you from drifting?
3. What about your church or LIFE group helps you avoid drifting?
4. What elements of our culture may be causing the church to drift?
5. According to Hebrews 2:3-4, what is the purpose of signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Spirit? Have you lately seen any of these manifested in your life? If so, what was the effect on your spiritual life?
6. What aspect of "this great salvation" that Jesus has provided are you most grateful for today? If a coworker asked you, "What so great about salvation?" How would you answer?
7. What about the sermon brought you the greatest joy, goodness, or blessing?
8. What about the sermon did you find most challenging?