

Neglecting So Great a Salvation

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[0 : 00] Would you turn with me please to the passage that we read in Hebrews chapter 2, Hebrews chapter 2, and reading verses 1 down to 4. Hebrews 2, verses 1 to 4, we read, Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard, lest we drift away.

For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great the salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard him?

God also bearing witness, both with signs and wonders, with various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will. The epistle to the Hebrews is a sermon written to Jewish Christians who were in great danger of leaving Christ behind, abandoning the faith altogether because of pressure and persecution from outside.

And it's a letter calling on all those who read it and all those who hear it, to be preoccupied with Christ.

That's the whole emphasis of this letter, this epistle, this sermon, a call to be preoccupied with Christ. Tonight I want to look at verses 1 to 4 of chapter 2 with you, and we're looking at it under two headings.

[1 : 41] We're looking at the command in verse 1, and then we're looking at the consideration in verses 2 down to 4. The command, verse 1, then the consideration, verses 2 down to 4.

First we have the command, that's in verse 1. And here the author calls on his readers to take the gospel seriously. A call to take the gospel seriously. The author begins with this command to pay attention to the gospel.

You read it in verse 1. We read, therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard. The author speaks here to his readers about the things that we have heard.

And that draws our attention really back to Hebrews 1, where the author speaks about the supremacy of Christ. In these verses the author speaks about Christ being the supreme prophet. He is God's definitive revelation. He is the one through whom God speaks. The one who radiates the very glory of God. The author goes on and speaks about Christ being the supreme priest.

[2 : 48] He is the one sufficient to save. He is the one who has made purification for sins, or has purged sins, and then sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

His work finished. His work complete. The author goes further as he speaks about Christ being the supreme king. He is the one who reigns as God. He is the son of God who upholds the entire universe, the entire cosmos, by his powerful word.

And finally the author speaks about Christ being supreme over the angels. He has been given a superior name. He receives a superior worship. He sits on a superior throne.

He executes a superior rule. Up until now, the author has given no appeal. He has given no application. He has said nothing of any practical relevance. He has only given this glorious portrait, this glorious panorama of the perfections of Christ.

The author has been caught up with declaring Christ to be all sufficient and all satisfying. He is saying Jesus is supreme, and he is supreme in all things.

[3 : 58] And he isn't simply supreme in all things. He is supreme over all things. And it's at this point that we move into Hebrews 2, where the author says we must pay much closer attention to this message concerning Christ that we have heard.

That is the author's first command. That is his first word of application, his first word of appeal. And he doesn't say, labor for Jesus. No.

He says, look at Jesus. Listen to Jesus. Contemplate Jesus. Pay attention to Jesus. He'll get the same command in Hebrews 3, where he says, let us consider him.

He'll get the similar command in Hebrews 12, where he says, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. The author is saying here, if you want to live the Christian life, if you want to grow as a Christian, if you want to go on as a Christian, then you need to take the gospel, you need to take this message concerning Jesus, concerning his salvation seriously. The author is exhorting his readers, encouraging his readers, commanding his readers to be focused and fixated on Jesus. And the author continues by warning them about the danger of drifting from this gospel.

[5 : 26] We read in verse 1, lest we drift away. The author uses this word drift. It's a nautical term. It refers to a boat that's slipped from its moorings and begun to slowly but surely drift away.

And here the author speaks about drifting from the gospel, drifting from the message concerning Christ and his salvation. The author is telling his Hebrew Christians that a great danger facing them isn't that they publicly betrayed Jesus and renounced the faith.

No, he says the great danger facing them is that they become so preoccupied with the world, the sights of the world, the sounds of the world, that they find themselves losing sight of Jesus, losing sight of the sound of the voice of Jesus.

And they find themselves simply drifting further and further from him, bobbing further and further from him. And so he says to them, let us pay much closer attention to the message concerning Christ that we have heard, lest we drift away.

Now as we listen to verse 1, friends, I hope we can hear the author's urgent warning and his strong appeal as he commands his readers to take the gospel seriously.

[6 : 50] In this verse, the author is warning each and every one of us about the danger of drifting away. And it can happen so easily, so silently, so secretly, so subtly.

It can happen during a season of peace and prosperity. Everything seems to be going well in your life. Your health is flourishing. Your work is flourishing. Your relationships are flourishing. Your family is flourishing. It's all flourishing. But you're no longer preoccupied with Jesus. And suddenly it hits you just how far you've drifted from him.

Or it can happen during a season of pressure and perplexity and persecution where everything seems to be going wrong in your life. Everything is falling in around you.

And you're no longer preoccupied with Jesus. You're caught up with all these other painful issues. And suddenly it hits you just how far you've drifted from him.

[7 : 52] You know, friends, I've never met anyone who went to bed passionate about the Lord, passionate about his word, passionate about his work, and they got up the next day with absolutely no interest in Christ or his cause.

But I've met people, and you've met people, I'm sure, who began to drift. People who began to withdraw from fellowship with the Lord's people.

The people who began to slacken off when it came to attending the means of grace. It started with the prayer meeting. Then it was the evening service. Finally it became the morning service.

They weren't there. And people who were careless about spending time in the Lord's word and in prayer. They drifted and they drifted and they drifted until they found themselves all at sea away from Jesus.

C.S. Lewis writes, If you examined a hundred people who had lost their faith, I wonder how many of them would turn out to have been reasoned out of it by honest argument.

[9 : 03] Do not most people simply drift away? If you were to take a poll today of a hundred people, friends, who had walked away from the faith, or seemed to walk away from the faith, most of them, friends, wouldn't have been reasoned out by logical argument.

No, they would have been reasoned out simply through drifting away. I can't help thinking of a man called Charles Templeton. He was a close friend of Billy Graham and worked on many of his evangelistic crusades.

But doubts began to creep into his heart. And after a decade of resting with those doubts, he began to call himself an agnostic. Fifty years later, shortly before he died, he was interviewed about his life and this is what he said.

Jesus is the most important human being who has ever existed. And if I may put it this way, I miss him.

I miss him. He had slowly but progressively drifted away from Jesus so that he was once an evangelist along with Billy Graham, then an agnostic, and finally was left sane as he prepared to

face eternity, I miss Jesus.

[10:24] He had drifted. Tonight I want to ask the question, are you drifting? Are you drifting? If you're drifting, one of the signs that you're born again is that you're pricked by this and you want to know Jesus and you want to know his closeness once more.

You're not content with being at sea. You're not content with being far from him. And one of the signs, friend, that you may not be born again, that you are not safe, is that you hear what I'm saying and you feel absolutely no desire to do anything about it.

And you think, well, he can just drone on for another twenty minutes and in good riddance to him, he can go back to store and away from whence he came. Here is the warning about the danger of drifting away.

But we also hear the author bringing this strong appeal to pay attention. You see, friends, it doesn't take much effort to drift. In fact, you don't need to do anything to drift. But it takes a great deal of effort, a great deal of diligence to stay the course when it comes to living a Christian life.

As we read the New Testament, we see the Christian life being described as a race. It's described as a fight. We hear the Apostle Paul saying, I press on, I strive. And throughout this letter and in this particular verse, we hear the author saying, pay attention to Jesus.

[11:52] Fix your eyes on Jesus. Consider Jesus. In other words, friends, we never move on from the Gospel. We keep going back to the Gospel.

We keep returning to the well of salvation and drinking deeply from it. We keep feeding on the bread of life, feasting on Christ and his fullness. We say to him, Lord, where else can we go? You have the words of eternal life. Tim Keller is famous for saying, the Gospel isn't just the A, B, and C of the Christian life.

The Gospel is the A to Z of the Christian life. In a sermon entitled, God Strengthens Us by the Gospel, John Piper said, the heart of the Gospel is that Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, died for our sins and rose again, eternally triumphant over all his enemies so that there is now no condemnation but everlasting joy for those who trust him.

You never, never, never outgrow your need for this Gospel. You don't begin the Christian life with the Gospel and then leave it behind and get stronger with something else.

[13:05] God strengthens us with the Gospel to the day that we die. Friend, are you going back to this book? Are you going back to this Bible?

Are you going back to this Word of God time and time again? Not simply to learn some historical facts. Not simply to learn about real people and their stories.

Not simply to learn some theological and doctrinal concepts. Not simply to learn about how to live life but rather to see more of Jesus, the glory of his person, the glory of his work as it is revealed to us as it is brought to us in this glorious Gospel.

Today, friends, let's listen to the command that we are given by this inspired author. Let's listen to this command that we are given in the living Word of the living God to pay attention to what we have heard lest we drift from it.

That's the command. This brings us second, though, to the consideration in verses 2 down to 4. And here the author calls on his readers to reflect on, to consider why they should take this Gospel so seriously.

[14:29] And the author begins by calling on his readers to consider the consequences of neglecting this Gospel. Look at verses 2 and 3. For if the Word, spoken through angels, proved steadfast in every transgression and disobedience, received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

The author speaks here about neglecting or rejecting the message declared by angels. This refers to the giving of God's law at Mount Sinai. In Acts chapter 7, Stephen makes this claim when on trial before the religious leaders and he says to them that God gave Moses the law through angels. It's the same claim that Paul makes in Galatians 3 when he's speaking about the relationship between the law and the Gospel and he tells the Galatians that God gave Moses his law through the angels at Mount Sinai.

And because of where it came from, because it was mediated by angels, this message was seen as being reliable or as the version here has it, steadfast.

And every transgression, every act of disobedience he received is just retribution. You know, as we go through Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy, we see the Lord warning his people again

and again and again that if they reject his word, if they reject his law, he will punish them.

[16:01] And the Lord keeps his promise. He keeps his word. We see his people wandering for 40 years in the wilderness. Why? Because of their disobedience.

We see them spending 70 years in exile in Babylon. Why? Because of their disobedience. Every transgression of this law brought a just retribution.

salvation. And now the author speaks here about rejecting the message from gospel that has been declared not by angels but by God's son.

And the author speaks about it as being a so great salvation. And to be saved is to be delivered from a dire circumstance. It can mean deliverance from illness.

Deliverance from military defeat. Deliverance even from death. But in Hebrews it means deliverance from the coming judgment. The coming wrath of God.

[17:01] And this salvation has been secured by Christ, the one who made purification for the sins of his people and is now sitting at the right hand of God.

And the author asks, how can we escape this coming wrath? How can we escape this coming judgment if we neglect such a great salvation that has been found in Christ?

And the answer is we can't escape. If a person neglects the gospel, if they treat the gospel as a light and trivial thing, then there is no escape for them at the coming judgment.

The author is saying here, don't neglect the removal of God's wrath and his reconciled smile through the sacrificial atoning blood of Christ on the cross.

Don't neglect the free access to the throne of grace and adoption into the family of God that you have through Christ and his cross. Don't neglect the inexhaustible treasures of being heirs of all God's promises in Christ and through Christ and his death on the cross.

[18:10] Don't neglect the fellowship and friendship of the living Christ who is sufficient to save. Don't neglect the so great salvation. But the author carries on and calls in his readers to consider the authenticity of this gospel in verses 3 and 4.

He says, The first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also bading witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to his own will.

The author begins by saying here that the gospel, this message of salvation was declared at first by the Lord. He preached this message of salvation through his word.

He came proclaiming the kingdom, the sovereign standing reign of God. He came offering life, eternal life, fullness of life, abundance of life to whoever, whoever, whoever receives him.

And he proclaimed this salvation not only through his word, but through his work. His death on the cross declared this salvation. His resurrection from the grave declared this salvation.

[19:29] His ascension to the Father's right hand declared this salvation. But furthermore, this gospel, this message of salvation was also delivered, it was attested, by those who heard it from Jesus.

You remember in Mark 3, the apostles are called by Jesus to be with him, to look at him, to watch him, to see what he does and hear what he says.

In Acts 1, we then see Jesus commanding them to be his witnesses to Jerusalem and to Judea and to Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And by Acts 2, we find Peter, and he's such a transformed man, and he's standing up and he's proclaiming, this Jesus God raised up.

And he doesn't stop there because he goes on and says, and of that we are all witnesses. We have seen this, we have heard this, and we testify to this.

And finally, the author says that God himself bore witness to this gospel, this message of salvation through signs, through wonders, through various miracles and gifts or distributions of the Holy Spirit.

[20:47] You know, friends, as we go through Scripture, we see that miracles don't exist in and of themselves. Instead, miracles attest to the power of God and the truthfulness of his message.

Miracles edify the church and declare the lordship and salvation of the Christ who is head of his church. Quite simply, the truthfulness of Jesus' message was certified, verified by supernatural displays of power.

And Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the miracles point to the arrival of Jesus' kingdom and foreshadow what he is going to accomplish when his kingdom comes in all its power and glory.

And John, the miracles point to Jesus' glorious identity as the incarnate word of God in whom there is life. And the truthfulness of the apostles' message concerning Christ and his salvation was also certified and verified by supernatural displays of power.

When the apostles performed these miracles, they were powerful indicators that God had put his seal of approval on them. When the apostles performed these miracles, they were powerful visuals of the final day of salvation that they were actually proclaiming.

[22 : 12] And so in these verses, the author is saying the gospel is a message of salvation that has been declared by Christ, that has been delivered by the apostles, and that has been supernaturally verified by God himself.

That's some message. And yet so many people think they can thumb their nose at this message, and they think they can laugh at this message, and they think they can treat this message as a light and trivial thing.

Well, friends, as we look at verses 2 down to 4, the author is answering the question, why should I pay attention to the gospel? Why should I ensure that I don't drift from the gospel?

Why should I take the gospel so seriously? And there's really two reasons. First, the author calls on us to consider the consequences of rejecting this gospel.

The gospel offers us a so great salvation. Great because it offers removal of condemnation, and restoration of communion with God himself.

[23 : 29] Great because it offers hope to the disdaining, and freedom to the enslaved. Great because it offers cleansing to the ashamed, and joy to the downcast. Great because it offers purpose to those who feel useless, and value to those who say, I'm worthless.

It is such a great salvation. There is no better news to hear. But if you neglect this salvation, friend, there will be no escape at the last day. I love films.

I'm weird. I feel I'm weird. I love films about prison escapes. Think *The Great Escape* or *Bridge Over the River Quay* or *Shawshank Redemption*.

One of my favourites right now is called *Escape Plan* with Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone. It's a great film. I love these kind of prison escape films. There is one prison from which there is no escape.

And that is the prison of God's eternal hell. You cannot dig a tunnel under it. You cannot find a ladder to climb over it.

[24 : 39] You cannot bribe the guards to get you out of it. You cannot plead with God and appeal to his sympathies to change your sentence and somehow release you from it.

Once the sentence has been passed and you're thrown into the cell and the door is shut and locked, there is no reverse, there is no release, there is no rescue, it is an eternal, irreversible, irrevocable sentence.

And that is why I stand before you tonight urging you not to neglect the so great salvation. Urging you not to let this Christ and his gospel pass you by.

And that is why Andrew wait by week preaches this gospel in this place. Because he longs that every person who comes through the doors of this building would find Christ and find him to be their hope of glory.

Friend, are you rejecting this message? Are you shrugging your shoulders at this message? Are you letting this message and this Christ pass you by, friend?

[25 : 54] Now is the time of salvation. Now is the time to close in with Christ. But the author doesn't simply call on us to consider the consequences of rejecting this gospel.

He calls on us to consider the authenticity of this gospel. When it comes to believing this gospel, you're not asked to take a leap into the dark. You're not asked to believe a little fairy tale.

This is a message that has been declared by Jesus. It is a message that has been delivered by the apostles. And these apostles are men, witnesses who gave their lives as witnesses, martyrs to the truths of what they had seen, what they had heard.

Why would they lay down their lives to remain at fable? Why? Why would they go to the lines? Why would they go to the crosses? Why would they allow themselves to be beheaded? get up so much for a fairy tale?

And it's a message that has been certified and verified by God himself through supernatural signs, wonders, miracles, gifts, distributions of the Holy Spirit.

[27 : 02] Ligon Duncan writes, when I stand up on Sunday morning and preach the word of God, I am not preaching a revelation that I got in my closet this week and that I, only I, among all immortal beings on earth have ever heard.

I am preaching the same Bible that thousands of other gospel preaching ministers are preaching around the world, and at 2,000 years of Christians based on the apostles, based on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit have been preaching, and that ought to encourage you.

God even gave the word to the world in such a way that its message could be attested. Why? Because he is concerned about the truth.

He doesn't want us to live our lives believing fairy tales. He wants us to live our lives believing the truth. So why take the gospel seriously?

because there are consequences if we don't, and because it's such an authentic message. Hence, the gospel is a glorious message.

[28 : 15] It is God's message of such a great salvation. God's message about rescue from death and hell. God's message about the renewal and restoration of the cosmos.

God's message about the bringing together of all things in Christ for his glory and the blessing of his people. It is a message that far exceeds any other word you will ever hear.

Others may preach this gospel in a far better fashion than I can preach it, than Andrew can preach it, but you will never hear a more glorious message. And it is a message that carries far more weight, far more value, far more substance than any other word you will ever hear.

I was in London this weekend, you listen in, I weird and I'm nosy, and I listen into people's conversations when they're having coffee, when they're having breakfast and I think what trivial lies you have.

That you're so focused on the present and here is this gospel and it's got far more weight and far more value and far more substance than the things that you're talking about.

[29 : 23] God's love. And so the crucial question I have to ask, friend, is are you paying attention to this message and ensuring that you're not drifting from it?

Two weeks before he died, R.C. Sproul preached on this passage and he closed with this appeal. I pray with all my heart that God will awaken each one of us today to the sweetness, the loveliness, the glory of the gospel declared by Christ.

And that is my prayer for every person in this congregation tonight. If you came here tonight full of joy in the Lord and a desire to know him more, then I pray that the Lord would continue to awaken you to the sweetness, the loveliness, the glory of the gospel declared by Christ and centred on Christ.

And if you came here tonight and you've begun to drift, and no one else knows you're drifting, the minister doesn't know, the elders don't know, your family don't know, but you know, you know you're not in the place where you once were, then I pray that the Lord would awaken you once more to the sweetness, the loveliness, the glory of the gospel declared by Christ and centred on Christ.

You could be frog marched to the prayer meeting, you could be frog marched to an evening service, frog marched to a communion but friend, what you need is that change of heart, that warmed heart.

[31 : 11] and if you came here tonight, friend, and up until now you have been neglecting this so great salvation, you've wanted nothing to do with it, and you're even sitting here tonight at the beginning of the service thinking, why am I even here?

And I pray that the Lord will awaken you to the sweetness, the loveliness, the glory of the gospel that has been declared by Christ and centred on Christ.

Friends, let us pay much closer attention to the message that we have heard. Bless the drift of.