

† The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

Compromising Faith (Part 3)

Hebrews 2:1-4

1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, 3 how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

We have been spending some time looking carefully at this first warning passage found in the book of Hebrews, a warning against spiritually drifting away from the person and message of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. We have been reminding ourselves that the first step toward a compromising faith, a faith that will one day prove to be empty, hallow and soul-damning, begins so subtly, so easily as we fail to be faithful to the simple means of grace, including an active devotional life, spending time with God in His word and in prayer as well as including an active involvement with the only institution now promised to receive His blessings, that is the church. We have been reminded that no one intentionally seeks to drift away, but rather it is a slow moving away from the presence and pleasures of God. No professing Christian wakes up one morning and says, “I love the Lord and I want to serve Him, but I think I will see how far I can move away from Him.”

Yet, because of the tendency of the human heart to waiver, to drift and to fail, the author of Hebrews gives his readers a remedy to this potential – namely **“to pay much closer attention to what we have heard...”** (v. 1). We must pay closer attention to the gospel – to the message of the person and work of Jesus Christ. We must allow our minds to be engaged in devout meditation on Christ, so that the affections of our hearts may be drawn always closer to Him.

We followed this call to REFLECT and to RESPOND to the person of Christ, along with heeding the RESULT if we fail to do so with examining the stated REASONS why such efforts are important and imperative to our soul. So these are the four points of Hebrews 2:1-4;

- I. The REFLECTION upon the truth of Christ (2:1a)
- II. The RESPONSE to the truth of CHRIST (2:1b)
- III. The RESULT of an improper reflection and response to the truth (2:1c)
- IV. The REASONS to be concerned about the truth of Christ (2:2-4)

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Now, with regard to the REASONS we are to be concerned about the truth of Christ, there are two, the first of which we looked at last week. The first is the “gravity” of the word spoken through angels; and the second is the “greatness” of the word spoken by the Son.

1. **The GRAVITY of the Word Spoken Through Angels (2:2-3)**

As we considered the gravity of the word spoken through angels, we learned that their message was vital and bearing upon the believers. Their message was found in the Law of the Old Testament, as we learned that God utilized the angels to impart some aspects the Law to Moses. And as history well confirms, when God’s people obeyed the Law of God, they were blessed with peace and prosperity. But when the people disobeyed, be it as a nation or as individuals, “*every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty.*” The point made was this, if the word spoken by angels proved unalterable and everything God said came to pass, how much more ought we to consider and obey the word spoken by God’s Son, Jesus Christ?

You might remember that you all became Hebrew linguists last week for we learned that that author of Hebrews used a common Hebrew literary device called *qal wa homer* which is an argument that says if a lesser or light concept or idea is true or binding, then how much more true is a greater or heavier idea to be counted true or binding. The *qal wa homer* in Hebrews 2:1-4 is this – if the Law of Moses, the word spoken through God’s angels (light), was unalterable (meaning that it was sure, steadfast and unchangeable); then how much more binding would be the word spoken by God’s Son (heavy), who has already been shown to be superior to the angels. The word spoken by angels (the light or lesser) was unalterable. Therefore the word spoken by the Son (the heavier or greater) must be of more value and greater importance to follow.

So then, herein lies the gravity of the word spoken through angels – that in everything they proclaimed and every command of God they relayed, transgression and disobedience, that is sin, resulted in a just penalty and the ultimate penalty of sin is what – death, as Ezekiel 18:4 so simply puts it, “*The soul who sins will die.*” This is the unalterable message spoken by the angels. This is the full weight and gravity of their word. So now the argument is taken to its final conclusion in verse 3, “*how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?*”

Hebrews 2:3 begins with the word “how” which is used to set up a rhetorical question, a question in which the answer is already known. When we read the phrase, “***how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation***” we are to

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understand it as meaning, “how is it possible to escape...” There are several thoughts to consider here.

First, let us learn as from Acts 4:12, that *“there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”* How is it possible to escape, that is to flee from in order to find refuge or salvation, in any other place or person. In the Son is salvation. In fact the Son is salvation. The name Jesus means “He saves.” Man seeks to save himself or to find salvation through some means other than in Christ, yet here we read the unalterable truth, that it is impossible to escape somewhere else or to someone else, for salvation is from the Lord (Jonah 2:9).

Second, let us learn then that salvation is not so much about forgiveness of sins, although it includes it, but rather about fellowship with Jesus. Why did Jesus come to this earth and die on a cross? Was it simply “for sins”? Or rather was it to, as it is said in Ephesians 2:16, to reconcile us to God? We must never forget that we were created for fellowship with God. Sin, that is selfish disobedience to God’s word and ways, destroys fellowship, communion, and companionship with God. I am sure that a number of us in here this morning have or have had relationships that were destroyed because of the sinful actions of one of the parties. Often we long for ways in which that relationship might be restored, but perhaps we can think of no way for reconciliation. Well, we must remember that our sin broke our relationship with God and humanly speaking, there is nothing we can do to appease God’s righteous wrath and indignation toward our sin. We deserve to die – not a cessation of existence mind you, but to die, to be in a place and in a process of eternal torment, of eternal pain, where there is nothing but weeping and gnashing of teeth. Nothing of earthly origin can atone. But, thanks be to God, that even *“while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son”* (Romans 5:10).

How shall we escape - how shall we find some mean of eternal peace and happiness apart from paying much closer attention to the word of the Son of God? Beloved, we were enemies of God. Our thoughts were hostile and antagonistic toward God. Yet, according to Colossians 1:21-22 we read,

21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach —

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This is the good news! This is the gospel! This is true salvation, a salvation not to be neglected or taken for granted. This is the word and message of the Son. But it is not enough to hear the word, we must pay close attention to it and by faith, pray that it will change us, it will affect the way we think, the way we talk, the way we act – that our lives would reflect the person of Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 4:2 we read of this truth that just hearing alone is not enough, but it must be united with faith to effect real change in our lives –

For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

Salvation is to affect us – but affect us how? It is to bring us into conformity with the person of Jesus Christ. What is the basis upon which you find and keep friends? By and large the basis is that you have something in common, something that you both find pleasure and joy in. Beloved, there is nothing in this sinful flesh that Christ finds pleasure and joy in. Apart from Christ and His salvation, I have nothing in common, I have no communion or fellowship with Christ. Rather than escaping or fleeing from Christ, be it willfully through rejection or unintentionally through neglect of Christ, His word and His people, run to Christ; seek refuge in the shadow of His wings; long for fellowship and communion with Him. And how does a sinful creature like man have fellowship and union with the most holy Lord Jesus Christ – again, not by what we do, but, taking by faith that it was and is His purpose to make *you* holy, to make *you* blameless. What a thought! Why does God want you to be holy and blameless? Again, so that you might fellowship with Him? Why does God offer forgiveness of sins? So that you might fellowship with Him. This purpose is revealed to us in 1 John 1:3 which says,

what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

This is the gravity of the situation, that there is no fellowship with God, there is no salvation from sin, apart from the person and work of Jesus Christ. The angelic message of the Old Testament pointed to this person and work. And now, in the New Testament, we have the very person of God in the flesh speaking such a word of salvation; such a word of fellowship and such a word of

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hope to our souls. Do not disregard it! Do not consider it of second importance. All other endeavors, all other activities, all other persons must fall behind this relationship – is Jesus your Savior and Lord - or do you only know Him as the one other call Savior and Lord? This is the gravity of the word spoken through angels.

2. The GREATNESS of the Word Spoken by the Son (2:4)

So now we come to the second REASON given as to why we ought to be concerned about the truth of Christ. For not only ought we to consider the GRAVITY of the word spoken by angels, but we must also consider then the GREATNESS of the word spoken by the Son.

As we consider the greatness of the word spoken by the Son, we will come to see three things stated as to why this message is so great. Let me read verses 3-4 again and then we will look at each of these three things;

...how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

Three things we must make note of:

1. This salvation was first “spoken through the Lord.”

To better understand the greatness of the Lord, our author begins by reminding us that this word of salvation had its beginning not with angelic creatures, but was in fact “first” spoken to us by the Lord Jesus Himself. The word “first” in the Greek is actually “archen” which more literally means “beginning.” The word of complete and ultimate salvation was not spoken by the prophets of old. They could only speak in anticipation of such a message. Their message was only partial and predictive. Now, in Jesus, God Himself, Emmanuel, God with us, has come, has dwelt among us and has brought the final and full message of salvation.

But Jesus did not come merely to speak of such a salvation, rather Christ’s words were backed up with action. For Jesus not only said,

Luke 19:10

For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

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And,

Matthew 20:28

...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

But we also read,

1 John 2:2

and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

And,

1 Peter 3:18a

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God...

From this we are to be reminded that what the Lord says will always come to pass. Just as the LORD God spoke and creation came into existence, so the word spoken by Jesus regarding salvation has and will come to pass in completeness. As the Hebrews so wonderfully declares – do you truly believe this word –

Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost [completely, fully] those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (NKJV)

Remember the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:24, “*Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.*” What the Lord has spoken is assured of fulfillment – have you received the word of salvation, which is deliverance from sin and restored fellowship with God? Do not neglect this word, this great salvation first spoken through the Lord.

2. Confirmed by the Apostles

In addition to this salvation being first spoken through the Lord, God, in His wisdom and providence, had this message “*confirmed to us by those who heard.*” It is not as though God needed human confirmation for His message, yet the

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Lord chose to have this message corroborated by the testimony of those who were with Him. This then is a reference to the disciples and apostles of Jesus Christ. While such confirmation was not needed on God's part, God knows that people need the testimony of others to help prove the validity and vitality of the message. Such is the situation still today – people often buy things, go places and do things based upon the testimony of others. When speaking to our pastoral intern about going through the internship program, part of his reason for going ahead and doing something that he did not fully comprehend or understand, was twofold, outside of the initial call of God; first, he submitted himself to the program because of his pastor's testimony. He took my confirming word that the program would be a spiritual benefit. Second, he submitted himself because of what he heard and saw in the other men who were part of the program. So, in a sense, our intern became an intern because the Lord first spoke to Him through prayer and study and secondly because it was confirmed, that is shown to be sure, steadfast and stable, by others who have heard and participated in it.

My point is, part of being human is looking to the examples of others and where their examples follow the Word of God, to so follow in their steps. That is the testimony of the author of Hebrews here. He is in effect saying, *"The Lord Jesus Christ brought God's final word of salvation to men, and there are many eyewitnesses who have confirmed what the Lord has said and did."* So, although we are not to take the confirmation or word of men alone, apart from the Word, we are to take such confirmation in conjunction with the word. Hebrews 13:7 also reveals this truth;

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

Do you have people who lead you in spiritual matters? Do you seek to imitate the faith of someone who seeks to live their life after the manner of the Lord and His Word? I know it can be a frightful and vulnerable position to be in, but do not be content unless you have spiritual leaders whom you confide in and seek to be accountable to, for such is the plan and wisdom of God.

3. Testified to by God

Finally then, we read in verse four, *"God also testifying with them..."* The message first spoken through the Lord was not only corroborated by human testimony, but now we also learn that it has divine authentication as well. And

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just what is this divine testimony? To begin with, understand that all that men could do is testify of the truthfulness, accuracy and supernatural appearance of the works and word of Jesus. God Himself proves the authenticity of the message of the Lord with supernatural activities. The word “testifying” means “to bear witness by bringing evidence.” And what are the evidences God brings to authenticate His Son’s word? There are four such supernatural evidences offered.

1. Signs – (supernatural occurrences that reveal and point to the power of God over the power of man).

One such example of a sign that points people to the power of God over the power of man is found in Mark 2 and healing of the paralytic. The religious leaders thought Jesus was a blasphemer, that claiming to be from God when he was not, but beginning in verse 9 we read;

9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk'? 10 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins — He said to the paralytic, 11 "I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home."

Here the sign was to point the people to God and reveal that Jesus was in fact from God as was God.

2. Wonders – (supernatural acts designed to inspire awe among the people).

To be sure, a sign might also be a wonder and a wonder might also be a sign, but a wonder tends to be those acts of God that really take the people a back in awe. In Acts 3 we have the account of the lame beggar who is healed by God through Peter and John. After commanding the man to walk in the name of Jesus Christ we read beginning in verse 8;

8 With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God; 10 and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

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3. Various Miracles (simply a variety of supernatural acts revealing the power of God)

Such as Peter's supernatural release from prison in Acts 5:18-20.

4. Gifts of the Holy Spirit (supernatural evidence produced by the Spirit in men indicating salvation)

I take this last expression to refer to the supernatural proofs of genuine regeneration, that is being made a new creature in Christ; and conversion, that is living life for the Lord rather than self. Such gifts or signs of salvation, including a ever-changing life lived for the Lord, an increasing desire for God's glory to be manifested; an ever-increasing hunger and thirsting for righteousness, are bestowed upon God's people "according to His own will." Although the ultimate result of salvation in Christ is complete conformity to the very image of Christ, God brings us all along in various ways and stages according to His own purpose. But whether you have come along quickly in your walk with Christ or you have been seemingly plodding along, the point being made is that such evidences of God, including what is being changed in your life, are to be motivators and encouragers not to neglect so great a salvation.

To summarize then the greatness of the Word spoken through Christ, it is great because it has been spoken to us by our Lord and it is complete and final. It is great because it has been recorded and confirmed to us by those who saw and heard Christ. And finally it is great because God has testified to it not only in the signs, wonders and various miracles recorded in the Bible, but also by the changed lives of His people, lives changed as the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in their hearts and as they submit themselves to the will and way of the Spirit to the glory of God.

This is our great salvation – a great word spoken to us by our Lord. May it not be neglected in any way by any here in this place. Let us pray that we may Ephesians 5:10 and learn what is pleasing to the Lord, always. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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