

Heb. 2:1-4 Warning Against Neglecting Salvation

In our text today the author gives his first warning. It is a warning not to “neglect such a great salvation” that comes through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I do believe the original audience was the Hebrew community, particularly those who professed Christ and those were considering the Gospel. And many were on the verge of “falling away” from the message which they had heard and were returning to the ways of the old covenant, particularly Mosaic Law. Look at 5:6: **“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.”** And then in 6:4: **“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and 6 and then have FALLEN AWAY, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God . . .”** And then in 10:26-27: **“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.”**

Now, though the context is different for us as we are not Hebrews considering the old ways of Mosaic Law. But, the principle of this text still stands. All of us alike will not “escape” the judgment of God if we neglect the gospel which we have heard. With this in mind, we need this text; it is good for us to consider in more detail today. I have 3 applications. But before getting to these I want to summarize vv. 2-4. This text still comes in the middle of the author’s argument that the Son is superior to the angels. And he is merely expanding on what he has already said in 1:1-2: **“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”** In vv. 2-4 we see a comparison of the word brought by angels with that of the Son. Let’s read them again: **“For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, 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.”**

Now, the angelic mediation of the Law of Moses is not recorded directly in the OT. However, Deut. 33:2 says, **“He said, “The LORD came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran; he came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand.”** So, it was implied and was understood that God used angels to deliver the message to Moses. And this message was reliable. And those who obeyed this message were blessed, while those who disobeyed were judged. We see this first with the people who received this message at Mt. Sinai, after their deliverance from Egypt. When Moses delivered the message, they said, *“This is good. We will obey.”* But we know the story. They do not obey, and that particular generation is judged with 40 years in the desert and no passage into the promised land. And many years later, the greatest example in the OT is the fall of Israel to the Assyrians, and ultimately to Judah and Jerusalem itself to the Babylonians. God is a holy God and never takes sin lightly. Since the fall of man (and before) God has revealed himself through Words and He always does what He says. V. 2 **“every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution.”** The author is saying, *“Folks, look at the great message of God’s grace in the Law of Moses delivered by angels. And look what happened.”* Now, some listened to the message and

were blessed greatly as they trusted God by faith. But, the majority did not listen to the message and were judged.

Then the author turns to the message of the Son; and the final revelation found in Him. He says in v. 3 **“It was declared by the Lord . . .”** And who is this Lord? He is the Son of God, the heir of all things, the creator of the world, the radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of his nature. He upholds the universe. He made purification for sins, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven where He now sits as Lord and ruler of all. And as we saw last week, He is eternal and unchanging (vv. 8-14). And what message did he preach? He preached the good news of the kingdom of God. And he preached repentance and the forgiveness of sins. And he told the people about himself. He said to the woman at the well, **“I am the Messiah”** (John 4). He told the religious leaders He was sent by the Father to do his will (John 4:34). After his resurrection he told the two men on the road to Emmaus that ALL the Scriptures speak of him (Luke 24). He often showed that all the prophets of the OT spoke of his day. And in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, he fulfilled exactly what the Father desired, the plan before the foundation of the world. This is the simple message we preach today.

And then the author says in v.3 that it was **“attested to us by those who heard.”** In other words this was the message everyone heard and it was preached to others. As they knew God’s message that was proclaimed by angels in the OT was reliable, so now in the new covenant, HOW MUCH MORE reliable. In 1 Cor. 1:4-6 Paul tells the Corinthians: **“I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you . . .”** John says in one of his letters: **“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you . . .”** (1 John 1:1–3)

And there is more to the reliability to the message of the gospel. Look at V. 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.”** Do you remember when John was wondering if Jesus was really the Messiah? And he sent one of his disciples to Jesus to find out. What did Jesus say? **“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them”** (Matt.11:4–5). The message of Jesus’ message was accompanied with great signs and wonders. He healed the sick. He cast out demons. He raised the dead. He performed many miracles. And then, through the Holy Spirit, the Apostles and his disciples continued to perform signs and wonders and miracles that accompanied this great message of salvation! (This has only happened on such a scale a few times in the Bible. Do you remember when? When God delivered Israel from Egypt and formed the Jewish nation. There were always miracles with the prophets and in various times as God delivered his people, but these times do not compare with the miracles of Moses’ time. In the same way we see this with the coming of the gospel. And this continued for a time in the early church as the gospel spread through the apostles.) Here, I believe the author’s point is to show that the message of the gospel was similar

to the message of Moses and the miracles of that day. And it happened again with the coming of the Son. Therefore, PAY ATTENTION all the more!

To summarize: In the old covenant, the message of salvation was reliable. It was declared by angels. It was heard by the people. And those who neglected it received sure judgment. In the new covenant, the message of salvation is reliable. It was declared by the Son. It was heard by the people. And those who neglect it will receive sure judgment. If the Law of Moses was mediated by angels in all of their glory and majesty and the people disobeyed that message, how much more serious will it be if we neglect the message of the Son, who is infinitely superior to the angels. With this in mind, I have three applications: Here they are: 1) Pay close attention to what we have heard in the gospel; 2) If we do not, we are in danger of falling away; and 3) There is no escape for those who neglect so great a salvation.

1. Pay close attention to what we have heard in the gospel. Actually, verse 1 says, “**pay much closer attention**” to what we have heard. I must admit, if there is anyone in this who has to work hard at paying attention, it is me. Kids, do you ever daydream in class when you should be paying attention? This is our picture. And it is merely paying attention to math concepts. We are to pay attention to the gospel.

Let me begin this first application by saying that the gospel must be our FIRST priority. We cannot live without it. For in it is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16). 2 Pet. 1:3 says, “**His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness . . .**” We must pay attention because it is the great power that works in our lives. Many folks give lip service to the gospel, many people say, “*I’m a Christian.*” But, they deny its power, and in effect are not paying attention to the gospel. Paul says to Timothy there are those among you who “**have the appearance of godliness, but deny its power**” (2 Tim. 3:5). May this not be the case for any who hear my voice this morning. May it not be the case for me! In Matt. 7 Jesus says, “**Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness**” (Matt. 7:21-23). I must say I’ve had these thoughts, and many of you, especially if you have been making a profession for many years, do the same thing. So what is the key? It is the heart. As yourself, Is the gospel my treasure. Would I sell everything to go and buy a field where there is a treasure. And this treasure is not material wealth. It is not prosperity. It is not good health. . . . It is Christ. And Him, you will love above all earthly treasures. As Luther says, “*Let goods and kindreds go! This mortal life also!*” This means “guard your heart.” Always ask questions of the heart. For where you treasure is there your heart will also be!

Let me give a couple more quick applications as to how we pay close attention. 2) Give diligent study to the gospel. Search the scriptures. Know the mind of God on such things. Paul says the gospel is the “wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). In Col. 2, Paul prays for the Colossians, that “**their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**” Brothers and sisters, if your heart’s

love is the gospel, what will you do? You will, as Prov 2:4 says, “*search out this wisdom as you would silver or gold or hidden treasures.*” In the gospel lies the treasure of heaven. How is it with you? If you will know the gospel, read, meditate, memorize, make the Word of God your treasure for the wisdom of God, which is the Gospel! Without it, you will not hold fast to your profession. And if this is not you, over a period of time, you are not “paying close attention.”

One more quick note on paying attention to the gospel. Make sure the word is mixed with faith. Believing is the end of hearing. Rom. 10:17: “**Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.**” Heb. 4:2 says “**For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.**” At the end of the day, true saving faith will result in a love for the gospel. And, it will result in works as we believe to do what He says. This is the power of the Gospel!

2. If we do not pay more attention to the gospel we are in danger of “drifting” away. The ESV says “*lest we drift away.*” I remember years ago going to visit my uncle in Hawaii (college days). He was in the navy was staying with a friend in a small apartment. Well, guess where I got to stay? On his sailboat, which was anchored about a half a mile from shore in an inlet, protected by a reef. And I remember rowing out at the end of each day and sleeping by myself on this boat. And I was scared every night that the anchor would not hold, and I would drift out to sea without knowing, and I be in great danger. The literal meaning of the word is to “slip by” or “run by” something and miss it altogether. In both cases, the result is to “fall away.” And the context is to “fall away” from the gospel, which with the Hebrews, was “right in front of them.” The author is saying, “*Do not fall away. Do not neglect this great salvation!*”

For us, it would be like running at the base of Mt. Everest on a clear day, not even realizing it is there. The recipients of this letter were in this danger. Instead of a mountain of gold and silver, they were settling for pennies and nickels. Instead of the great power of the gospel and the great message of salvation found in the SON, who is infinitely superior to the angels, they were settling for the pictures and shadows, and not the reality. Such was the case of the generation in Jesus’ day. And the principle still stands. Are you in danger of drifting away, missing the mountain of all mountains, the pinnacle of all wisdom and truth found in the Gospel of the SON?

Let me give some occasions for drifting. Drifting may come in a time of prosperity and peace. I’m afraid this is where we’ve been in the church for many years in this country. Evidence: Most profess health, wealth, and prosperity. May it not be so with us! Drifting may come during a time of persecution. Jesus says when persecution comes “*many fall away.*” We will see how this goes in our country in the coming days. Drifting happens during times of temptation. 1 John 2:16 says, “**For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.**” Beloved, is this you? If so, I exhort you and beg you to “not neglect such a great salvation!” The Son of God took on flesh, came and lived among us without sin. He demonstrated with perfect humility and perfect love, the gospel. And He preached the gospel of himself. He laid down his life on the cross as a sacrifice for sinners. And God was satisfied. His just wrath was poured out on the Son. And three days later he rose again. He appeared to the apostles, the disciples, and many others. Then, He ascended to heaven, where He sits on his throne, above all. This is the gospel. This is what we

believe! Do not drift away! Do not run by such a beautiful mountain and miss its beauty! And finally

3. There is no escape for those who neglect this great salvation. This is the judgment of God. If you do not “pay close attention,” if you “drift away,” judgment will come! V. 3 **“How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?”** As with the reliable message of the OT, how much MORE RELIABLE in the NT: **“Every transgression or disobedience will receive a just retribution.”** Now, the great disobedience is for those who have heard the message of the Son who brings with him the great salvation of God! And there will be no escape. It is not like playing capture the flag where your teammates come and rescue you. There will be no escape!

Heb. 10:29: **“How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace . . .”** The principle is still the same for us! It is a fact that those who are in danger of apostasy and “falling away” are those who have the message near them, those who hear the word OFTEN. May it not be so with us!

Beloved, do not neglect such a great salvation.