

So Great A Salvation

Hebrews 2:1-4

Introduction

The writer of Hebrews has been arguing that Jesus is superior to all other prophets in his person and in his message (1:1-3); Jesus is better than angels (vv.4-14) and now the author will pause in his argument and give an exhortation (2:1-4); the first of five. The writer warns the reader not to (1) drift from the Word (2:1-4); and later the writer will exhort the reader not to (2) doubt the Word (chapters 3:7-4:13) or (3) lose our enthusiasm or grow dull toward the Word (chapter 5:11-6:20). That includes exhortations not to (4) despise the Word (10:26-39) or (5) disobey the Word (12:14-19).

Over and over again people have been troubled by God's silence. The Word of God breaks God's silence.

We must not neglect God's Word. The writer is speaking to Christians—to Jewish people who have embraced the Jewish Messiah. The writer is pleading with them to not stop short of God's best in life; a life of holiness, service and fruit bearing! Jesus has provided everything for us by His grace and expects full spiritual maturity.

A Strong Warning: Don't Drift Away From God's Word (v.1)

Hebrews 2:1 (NKJV) Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

Our passage begins with a strong command. Don't drift from's God's message of truth. Don't drift from Jesus. The writer has already told us (chapter 1) that God has spoken to us by the Lord Jesus Christ (v.1). This Jesus made the universe (v.2) and maintains the universe (v.3). This Jesus is the exact representation of God's being (v.3); and this Jesus died to cleanse us from our sins (v.3c).

“...*the things we have heard*” is the message of the gospel, the truth about salvation!

The writer will argue; consider how great the Giver; consider how great the gift (William MacDonald p.2161).

The word “heed” translates the Greek word *prosechein*—which means to pay close attention or particular attention. We must pay close attention to the gospel of salvation (imperative). The Lord God has spoken to us through Jesus Christ. Salvation has been offered. We have been chosen, adopted, accepted in the Beloved. We can live peacefully, soberly with all joy. We are free to live a godly life and a holy life in Christ. We can conquer trial, face temptation, experience liberation from bondage; live triumphantly and abundantly!

What does it mean to drift away or slip away from the Gospel? The word drift is *pararuomen*—*to flow past; to glide by*—in the ancient world you would use this word to describe the act whereby you would remove a ring from your finger; or allow some memory to fade—or allow something to be forgotten; it would also describe the contents of a container that slowing leaks out. William Barclay says; “It is regularly used of something which has carelessly or thoughtlessly been allowed to slip and become lost” (Barclay's Commentary on Hebrews p.13).

So Great A Salvation

Hebrews 2:1-4

The picture is the picture of a ship in a harbor which is allowed to drift, or slip past. I never really surfed. But I did spend some time out on the water. It's easy to allow the ocean's currents to lull you into a place where you simply allow the current to take you where it wants to go. The same is true of our Christian walk. It does not always begin with outright rebellion or disobedience but rather a willingness to allow the currents of contemporary life to drift from our fixed location in Christ.

We are in danger when lethargy or apathy, or carelessness, or inattentiveness allows us to slip past or drift away from the gospel truths. We must anchor our lives to the truths found in Jesus and His gospel.

Barclay writes; "For most of us the threat of life is not so much that we should plunge into disaster, but that we should drift into sin. There are few people who deliberately and in a moment turn their backs on God; there are many who day by day drift farther and farther away from Him. There are not many who in a moment of time commit some disastrous sin; there are many who bit, by bit and almost imperceptibly, involve themselves in some situation, and suddenly awake to find that they have ruined life for themselves and broken someone else's heart. We would do well to be continually on the alert against the peril of the drifting life" (The Letter to the Hebrews p. 13).

Jeremiah 15:6; "You have forsaken Me," says the LORD, "You have gone backward. Therefore I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you; I am weary of relenting! 7 And I will winnow them with a winnowing fan in the gates of the land; I will bereave them of children; I will destroy My people Since they do not return from their ways".

In the Old Testament the Lord did not simply say; "You haven't done what I told you to do; but rather "You have forsaken Me"! We are in danger of drifting away from Jesus! And where will those currents take you? What is the shore furthest away from Christ?

Our neglect can become depraved indifference. Criminal negligence. We have enormous privileges in Jesus. To simply float past them is to incur God's judgment.

Pay attention. Stay alert. John Phillips recounts his adventures as a young officer in the British Army and serving in the Royal Engineer Corps during WWII. He tells of a training exercise of learning to diffuse booby-trapped mines. They were given field exercises; and some of those were fitted with small blank charges—set to detonate if instructions were not followed. In the real world—mistake was not an option. If you came across a live booby trap—it was a matter of life or death. He wrote; "We watched every move the instructor made, studied every illustration, mastered the mechanics of every known type of booby trap, asked urgent questions about aspects of the training we did not understand. Our lives depended on it. Indolence and carelessness would have been the height of folly" (see John Phillips p. 27).

So Great A Salvation

Hebrews 2:1-4

A Strong Reason: Judgment Under the Law Was Strict (v.2)

2For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward,

The expression ‘the word spoken through angels’ is a reference to the messengers who delivered God’s Word; that is the Law of God given to Moses on Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19:11). Angelic beings served as the mediators between God and man. The Old Testament speaks of myriads of angels were present at the giving of the law (Deut.33:2; Ps. 68:17); the testimony and instruction were valid—true—and every infraction punished.

Judgment under the Law was strict; every transgression and disobedience had its appropriate punishment. If a person broke the law; that person was judged, condemned and bore the punishment laid out by the law.

The word transgression (parabasis) means to step aside or cross the line; it means to go against what the law says; or knowingly and willfully violate the laws command;

disobedience (parakoe) means to neglect, refuse or fail to obey God’s law; if a person deliberately rejected God’s law, he was sentenced to die and the punishment was irrevocable.

“But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the Lord, and he shall be cut off from among his people” (Numbers 15:30). What does that mean? No propitiatory offering, only judgment—awaited the presumptuous sinner (lit. with a high hand—or a raised clenched fist in defiance of God and His commands).

Jeremiah 21:14; “But I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, saith the Lord: and I will kindle a fire in the forest thereof, and it shall devour all things round about it”.

The history of the Jews is really a history of neglect and disobedience; rebellion and sin. The Hebrew people often felt the crushing weight of sometimes slow and sometimes swift judgement. But make no mistake about it—whether slow or swift—it came.

A Stronger Reason: Judgment Under Salvation More Severe (vv.3-4)

3How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him,

The writer has given us a strong reason to stay anchored. The consequences are catastrophic. Now he adds another stronger reason; judgment under Jesus is much more severe than judgment under the law! Why?

So Great A Salvation

Hebrews 2:1-4

He provides three reasons.

1. Salvation is great. Salvation is deliverance. Salvation is our way of escape from sin.
2. The message was delivered by Jesus Himself.
3. The message has been experienced and attested to by so many witnesses.

The salvation was at first preached by Jesus and was confirmed by His apostles.

Paul the Apostle in Romans 2:3 wrote; “And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?” (4) Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”

“and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him”. The writer testifies that Jesus spoke to the Apostles and those Apostles told the truth about Jesus. For three and one half years the followers of Jesus watched and remembered. The Apostles ate with Jesus—walked the roads of the Galilee and Judea; they heard his words; saw His signs; watched Him die; and were eye-witnesses of His real resurrection! Peter referred to these things as “infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3) and wrote “We have not followed cunningly devised fables” (2 Peter 1:16). John wrote; “That which was from the beginning. . .we have heard. . .we have seen (i.e. with real eyes). . .we looked upon (i.e. that is a good long hard look until the full significance was really understood); our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us),” (1 John 1:1-2).

What is the fate for those who neglect the gospel?

William MacDonald: “The law tells men what they must do; the gospel tells men what God has done. By the law is the knowledge of sin; by the gospel is the knowledge of salvation” (p.2161).

Neglecting that salvation is far greater than the transgression and disobedience to the Law. The Law was given by God through angels to Moses. Salvation is given by God through Jesus Himself.

We are in danger of neglecting so great a salvation when we fail to appreciate or believe just how lost we are—apart from Christ and His gospel. Millions perhaps billions of people who are lost. Why are they lost? Because of sin. Because they have rejected the Biblical revelation and the Bible’s description of man’s rebellion. “The heaven’s declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork” (Ps. 19:1). “Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with

So Great A Salvation

Hebrews 2:1-4

food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). In Romans 1:19-20; “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse”.

But we continue to excuse our sin. We pretend it doesn't exist or if it does exist it can't be so bad that it would sentence us to judgment and hell. The Bible says we are lost because our own conscience bears witness that we have rebelled against God. We are lost because we walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of air, the spirit that works in the children of disobedience (Eph. 2:2). Jesus said to the religious leaders in John 8:42-44; “If God were your Father, you would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why don't you understand my speech? even because you cannot hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and he abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” 2 Cor. 4:4; “In whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them”. Human beings are lost because of sin; “who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one (Job 14:4). For there is not a just man on the earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Ec.7:20). “Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph. 4:18).

The simple answer to the question; ‘how shall we escape if we disregard so great a salvation’ is we shall not escape. The writer includes himself. The person who has heard the gospel and neglects the gospel is without excuse. The picture is of a person who rudely and willfully ignores a gracious invitation to a feast (Matt. 22:5). It is used of Timothy's obligation not to neglect the exercise of his spiritual gift (1 Tim. 4:4).

The message of the gospel offers the only escape from God's righteous and certain judgment. The open door is the only door. And there's the rub.

John Dyer wrote; “A person may go to heaven without health, without riches, without honors, without learning, without friends, but he can never go there without Christ.”

Sin
Alienation
Lifelessness
Vileness
Aversion
Thoughtlessness
Independence
Obstinacy

So Great A Salvation Hebrews 2:1-4

Neglectfulness

What are we saved to?

Sanctification

Adoption

Life Eternal

Virtue

Acceptance

Thoughtfulness

In-ness (we are in Christ)

Obedience

Nobleness

4God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

The command: don't drift from God's message (v.1); do not disobey God's message of truth (v. 2); the message of salvation is both contained in Jesus and conveyed by Jesus (v.3); God's message was confirmed; the gospel message authenticated through signs and wonders, various miracles and the gifts of the Holy Spirit (note according to His own will!).

Signs are those miracles given by God through Jesus or the other apostles that confirm the message of the Gospel. Wonders were those miracles which were intended to arouse amazement from those watching; like the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-44).

The signs and wonders were to convince the Jew (who largely remained unconvinced). Paul wrote; "the Jews require a sign" (1 Cor. 1:22). The miracles were to convince the Gentiles and the gifts of the Holy Spirit were to confirm the message to the Christian.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit were those special unctions, enablements given to men and women to speak and act in a manner beyond their human abilities.

William MacDonald: "They are sovereign gifts of God. They cannot be demanded by men, or claimed in answer to prayer, because God has never promised them to all" (see p. 2161).

Conclusion

We can slip (but don't slip).

Appreciate the gospel.

So Great A Salvation

Hebrews 2:1-4

Imagine a person has Ebola—or something less severe but still fatal. Imagine a cure is offered and refused.

D.L. Moody;

“Looking at the wound of sin will never save anyone. What we must do is look at the remedy”

Jesus has brought us Himself; the Gospel; Salvation

Paul in 2 Timothy 1:10; “But has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”.