

Such A Great Salvation!

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Sermon Title: *“Such A Great Salvation!”*

The Book of Hebrews

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23; 7:21-27

Scripture Text: Hebrews 2:1-4

Theme of Worship Service: Greater New Covenant privileges demand greater responsibilities for God’s people to hear and believe.

“Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you, when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices. For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.” - **Proverbs 1:24-33**

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?- unless indeed you fail to meet the test! I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test.” - **2 Corinthians 13:5-6**

“Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” - **2 Peter 1:10-11**

“And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” - **Matthew 24:10-13**

“We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened

to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.” - **1 Corinthians 10:9-11**

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.” - **1 John 2:18-19**

Such a Great Salvation!

Are we giving heed and hearing the words of salvation brought by Christ? The author of Hebrews begins a section of exhortation in light of the theology he has taught in his exposition (1:1-14). Notice that proper biblical application for preaching comes out of sound theology. Doctrine and the objective revelation of God's truth is taught to lead us to action. Theology is to promote service to Christ and His Church by faith. All theology should be applied, and lead God's people to specific action to Christ. Christ is king, let us serve Him. Amen.

Hebrews 2:1-4 ^{ESV} 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.

Let us focus this morning on three things:

- 1. Pay attention!**
- 2. Presumption leads to punishment.**
- 3. Perseverance by God's grace in Christ to the end.**

Setting of passage: the Covenant Community is in the wilderness, and pressured to conform to the world--especially being tempted to give in to persecution and deny Christ in order to preserve their lives!

The angels may have been attentive to the exaltation of the Son as enthroned King (1:5-14), but the hearers on earth, specifically God's covenant people, are in danger of failing to listen.

1. Pay attention!

Neglect: "*If we neglect...*" (2:1-2). What is in view here is a gradual neglect, and drifting away from the promises of God that every believer must watch. From subtle pressures, there is a constant temptation to give up on our confession. The Christians to whom the author writes is being tempted to succumb to these pressures because of the threat of loss of life (see Bruce; O'Brien commentaries).

"Those who do not heed divine warnings will be overtaken by God's judgment" is a summary of this passage (2:1-4; O'Brien). The truth and the teaching of the Gospel must not be held lightly.

The imagery of drifting is to illustrate that Christians are in peril of being carried downstream past a fixed landing place and so failing to gain its security (Bruce).

There is a great urgency to the author/preacher's message: "Urgent!!

Listen!! Don't abandon your profession in Christ Jesus. This is the first of five exhortation warnings found in Hebrews. We are to take it very seriously. Just as when we as parents use urgent warnings to warn our children, so the author of Hebrews is showing urgent care and great concern for God's people.

This should be a common demonstration of all of God's servant-leaders: Urgent concern for God's people; a great desire for them to know the Gospel and to be making progress in the Gospel (2 Peter 1:3-11; John 15:5, 16).

"Why so serious?!" There is a kind of disinterested, sarcastic mindset that scoffs at anyone who would use urgency in their writings or sermons. COME ON, WHY BE SO SERIOUS--YOU SHOULD BE ALWAYS GLAD AND JOYFUL! But there is a reason to take this message seriously, and being serious can be a very good and godly and spiritually healthy mindset.

Why take the message so seriously? What Moses taught was important, and those who refused to listen were punished (cf. Numbers 16). How much more must we make sure we hear Christ speaking! God's people must persevere by faith in Christ and His promises to the end. If the ground opened up and swallowed those in the covenant community for their not listening and paying attention to God's Word, how much greater, more catastrophic will be God's wrath upon those in the covenant community since the coming of Christ!? (this is an *a fortiori* argument, or from the "lesser to the greater" or in Hebrew a Qal Vahomer argument used by rabbis in their teaching as well).

Who is speaking?

God in Christ is the one speaking (1:2); let us hear him. God's message is the objective Gospel that cannot be changed; we must believe the one and only gospel (2:2: "...to what we have heard"; cf. Gal. 1:6-9). Notice that the author urgently warns the people, but includes himself in the admonition-warning. "We" (the first person plural pronoun should be emphasized, 2:1). In including himself "we" the preacher is a true minister submitting himself to the message of God's Word as he makes that message known to others. He himself has known the urgency of searching his own heart. He is the "chief repenter" in the community, including himself in a need for grace.

Are you living carelessly? Are you careless about your profession to know and serve Jesus?

We must remember that we are privileged to live in the last days, and to live on this glorious side of the cross, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, but New Covenant privileges demand greater responsibilities to believe and obey the Gospel.

We have the complete Word of God in written form. Shall we not hear and heed God's Word? With all of these riches and privileges in Christ shall we suffer a greater condemnation?

John Owen wrote: "The true and only way of honoring the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, is by diligent attendance and obedience unto His Word...Diligent attendance is indispensably necessary unto perseverance in the profession of it."

2. Presumption leads to punishment.

If you presume upon God's grace, and think that you are saved merely because you are in the covenant, you could be storing up wrath upon yourself. We are not to presume upon God's grace, but to believe and obey the Gospel of Christ in order for us to endure (Romans 2:4-5; Rev. 14:12).

Remember that we live in the wilderness, and we have yet to make it to the Blessed Promised Land! Let us live by faith, focusing our faith on Jesus (12:1-2), walking faithfully and powerfully by the Spirit in union with our ascended-enthroned Lord! Jesus is Lord of all, let us submit obediently to His commands (1:13). Let us kiss the Son lest He be angry and we perish in our way; blessed is the person who takes refuge in Him (Psalm 2:10ff; cf. 1:5-13).

Remember John the Baptist's address to the presuming Pharisees? Who warned you [brood of vipers] to flee the wrath to come. John preached repentance and faith in Christ alone, warning against presumption.

Matthew 3:8-9 ⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

"How shall we escape?" the author asks us to consider. In Christ we have all we need for life and godliness. We are united with Jesus Christ in His life, death, resurrection and ascension (Rom. 6:1ff; Col. 3:1-4). Why would we not live for Him. We must become who we already are in Him, not neglecting this important, unchangeable, Spirit-empowered Gospel message. We grow as we know who we are in Him.

This great salvation should encourage us to growth! Hearing in Scripture is not merely hearing with the ear, but obeying as a response to what we hear. The Bible teaches us that the focus of our faith is on Jesus Christ and His work alone, but the response of our faith is on obedience. We are to be not merely hearers, but doers of God's Word (James 1:19ff). Not everyone who calls Jesus 'Lord' will be accepted in God's Kingdom, but only He who calls Him Lord and does His will (Matt. 7:21ff).

Three important truths to remember our complete salvation in Christ:

*** Christ Has Set Us Free to Serve Him- We are freed from sin to serve Christ (Gal. 5:1ff).**

*** Faith and Obedience (“the obedience of faith”- Rom. 6:17)- Faith’s focus is Christ alone and His accomplishment of salvation for us, but faith’s response (duty!) is willing and joyful obedience.**

*** Justification and Sanctification- Penalty and power of sin broken in Christ’s work for us. We must never separate justification and sanctification; God has provided both of them for us in the completed work of Christ (Rom. 8:29-31).**

We are to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith, and make our calling and election sure. To be sure, no true believer can ever lose their salvation; we can never be separated from the love of God in Christ, nor can we be snatched out of Christ's hand; we can only bear fruit if we are in the vine.

But the question the author of Hebrews is asking is: "How shall we escape if we neglect these great and awesome things?" Are you truly in the vine? Are you truly united to Christ? Are you obedient by faith? Do you manifest some good works and fruitfulness in your union with Him? Are you truly a Christian, though you may be in the covenant community? (2 Pet. 1:3-11; 2 Cor. 13:5; Rom. 8:31-39; Rom. 6:17-22; John 15:1-6; John 10:28-30).

Objections:

Isn't it true “once saved always saved”? A good saying perhaps that one that can be dangerous if you are meaning to look upon a particular date, occasion such as baptism, joining a church, “going forward”, or “praying a prayer” or a decision made, etc. we must always be looking to Christ, and believing and obeying. Paul said he did not look back, but continually strove forward with all of his might and strength to take hold of Christ because Christ had taken hold of him (Phi. 3:8-15).

What about Jesus as Savior, but not Lord? (Lordship controversy)? We must have Jesus as a complete Savior: Jesus is Lord and He is Savior. We must take Him as a LORD, he has clearly taught us this (Matt. 7:21ff). We are saved to be Christ’s glorious servants (read Rom. 6:17-22).

Is apostasy a real threat for everyone, even the elect? “All those who endure to the end shall be saved,” our Lord Jesus taught (Matt. 24:10-13). Obviously in Scripture, the potential threat of apostasy prevents us from being overly presumptuous of God’s grace in Christ, seeking to bear fruit in Jesus, and a means of making us pay close attention (e.g. Judas was in Jesus’ inner circle, and wasn’t noticeably different; Demas forsook Paul, but was not easily noticed; both drifted away and became apostate).

Is this just a warning for unbelievers? No! This is a real warning for all in the covenant community. Notice the use of “we” in the author: “We must be careful to pay attention...” etc.

How are you doing at reflecting and meditating daily upon the Gospel?

How are you doing with getting the truth inside you? (cf. Psalm 119:11)?

How are you using the means of grace, worship and fellowship, opportunities on Sunday for growth?

3. Perseverance by God's grace in Christ to the end.

We want to persevere by God's grace to the end. Let us look to Jesus (Heb. 12:1-2).

Remember that we are sanctified by the truth (John 17:17), and we are kept by the intercessory ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ (the subject to which the author will focus soon). In Christ, we should be becoming more like Him through the truth of the Gospel.

Although you are not an apostate from God's church, do you feel the power of corruption still remaining in you? Do you feel the temptation to apostasy in every "small" denial of the Lordship of Christ when witnessing for Him but feeling deeply a fear of man? Do you feel the temptation toward apostasy in the almost imperceptible cold response of your heart to God's love and His truth? Can you honestly say with the hymn writer of your own heart: "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it; prone to leave the God I love?"

We are to pay attention to what we have heard and not neglect it. Let us believe it and submissively and joyfully obey our Risen and Gracious King!

Let us attend to the Word, especially in times of preaching, remembering the wise admonition of John Owen:

"To attend...unto the Word preached is to consider the author of it (authority from God's glorious Son), the matter (what God has said in the Gospel), and the weight of the matter, including the consequences for both belief and unbelief."

Watch particularly for proneness to wander in times of prosperity and ease; in times of difficult persecution; times of trial or temptations. Watch your love for the world (2 Tim. 4:10); love of sin, especially a lust cherished in the heart; watch out for false doctrines and errors that are out of step and alignment with the Gospel (cf. Col. 1:23; Gal. 2:14).

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on Him" (John 3:36).

Beloved: Faith's focus is always on the unchanging and completed work of of Jesus Christ for you; faith's response is obedient submission to the Risen and Enthroned King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Who has said it? Christ Jesus the Glorious Son of God?

What has He said: Believe and obey the Gospel!

What are the consequences for belief and unbelief? Glorious life in union with Christ, eternal wrath for those who would refuse to listen and believe.

There is no escape for them.

Do you believe?

In Christ's love,

Pastor Biggs