

HEBREWS 2:1-4 "WAKE UP! DON'T TAKE YOUR SALVATION FOR GRANTED"

Last week we ended with the verse at the end of chapter one. HEB 1:14 "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

And we talked about the role of angels in the lives of people, especially the people of God, who have placed their faith in Christ as Lord and Savior. One of the things I pointed out was that most of chapter one was dedicated to contrasting Jesus Christ, who is God, with the angels who are the handiwork of His Creation.

One of the reasons this is important to understand is because it's very easy for people to relegate Jesus to a mere man. And though God has revealed Himself to us through Jesus who was born of a woman, He is still high and exalted above all, being very God. Paul brings this out clearly in Col.2:9: "For in Him (Christ) all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,..."

Jesus Christ is the One identified specifically in REV 19:5-6 "Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our **God**, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!" 6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our **Lord God Almighty** reigns."

This is the Almighty Jesus, King of kings, that the writer of Hebrews wants us to see and experience in our daily lives as we go out in this world to be His chosen servant in His power.

Now as we come to chapter two we must keep in mind that when this letter was written in approximately the sixties of the first century there were no chapter divisions, any more than you would include chapter divisions in a letter you wrote. And so what has preceded in chapter one is connected to chapter two. Though the thought may shift a little the substance of the message remains the same; that is, Jesus rules over all and He alone is worthy of our allegiance and worship.

Now, before I get into verse one of chapter two let me point out that verses 1-4 are somewhat a parenthesis from the main thought which picks back up in verse 5. It would be like you or me relaying a story and in the middle of our story we take a moment to describe another story related to what we're talking about.

In fact when we take verse 14 of chapter one and connect it to verse 5 of chapter two we see the association a little clearer.

HEB 1:14 "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

HEB 2:5 It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking."

And so angels are still a part of the discussion, but as we move forward we will see that, once again, angels are not the central focus, but rather Jesus Christ. As we come to verse 6 the question will be raised, but what about man? How does he fit into all of this?

Hopefully, you'll begin to see some of the rhyme and reason for this letter to the Hebrews and how it should affect our lives as unto the Lord. Let's begin with verse one.

HEB 2:1 "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away."

In the original Greek the emphasis is put on what has preceded in chapter one as it would be literally translated, "For this reason we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things heard, that we should not slip away."

"For this reason". For what reason? For the reasons mentioned before. The fact that God has revealed Himself in these last days in His Son and not angels. As important as these angels are in God's economy they are infinitely inferior to their Creator who is Jesus Christ. And though they played a role in delivering messages about the Redeemer to God's people, the Redeemer Himself has now come into our midst to speak for Himself.

Because of this, or for this reason, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it."

When God the Holy Spirit says, "we must", then what we are seeing is not a request but a command which deals with something of grave importance. We must what? Pay closer attention to what we have heard. What have we heard? We have heard that God the Son has spoken in these last days and has given us an eternal message of hope that we are to personally embrace by faith and

which we are to give to the rest of the world as it was delivered to us according to His word.

Andrew Murray in his commentary on Hebrews puts it this way. "It is the lack of this taking more earnest heed, the lack of intense earnestness, giving God the first place and the best powers of our life, which is at the root of the feebleness and sickliness of the Christian life. God is speaking to us in His Son, therefore we ought to take more abundant heed."

And by the way, let me add, what that includes is that there is no room for changing the message, adding to the message, sugar-coating the message or altering the nature of the One who has given us the message, (and that is Jesus Himself), by making Him something less than who He is, God Almighty.

This is exactly what many in the church-at-large have done today. They have made the message and the object of that message so palatable to the world that there seems to be no distinction between an eternal message of hope and a worldly message of "feel good" while you continue to pick and choose what you like about this message.

And so you've got the Schuller's of the world preaching what they call the Gospel when in fact it's simply another message, not given by the Son of God, but devised in the minds of men. Schuller's message would have you believe that you shouldn't see yourself as a sinner but one who has the potential to be all you can be for God and you only need to let God tap into that potential and set you free to accomplish great things.

Or you've got the message coming from one of the largest religious organizations in the world which says that Jesus Christ truly died and rose from the dead, but it wasn't sufficient in and of itself to accomplish our salvation. And so they teach that we must accompany Christ's redemption with our good works, added to that redemption, to make it effectual. But even with that there is still no guarantee you will be allowed to enter heaven. You may have to spend some time being purged of some sin in a place called Purgatory.

Do you see the importance of paying close attention to what God has clearly laid out in His word and why we must be vigilant to not only pay close attention to it, but to pay close attention to following it. Any divergence from the truth has eternal ramifications. This is life and death and the writer of Hebrews

wants us to understand that we can't tamper with what God Himself has given us in His Son. The wrong message kills.

The problem is that when we take liberties with the truth of God's word and compromise in certain areas of the Gospel, there is the possibility of "drifting away from the truth". Now this is an interesting term in the Greek. It denotes something which flows by or glides by, as if being swept along by a river.

This is what is happening in the popular culture where someone does it because everyone else is doing it. They're swept along by their peers. This is also what is happening in the church. Popular movements in the church which compromise the truth of God's word and His gospel are being slowly introduced and accepted by more and more Christians.

And the picture is the lazy days of summer as we all float down the stream in our rafts enjoying each other and creating an environment where our Christianity is convenient, when all the while the rapids and the falls are just around the corner. There are those on the bank warning these merry travelers of the truth that the dangers are there, but it isn't heeded because it would break into their fun.

The writer of Hebrews says, 'wake up and listen to your God' who tells us what our attitude should be concerning His truth. It's the same attitude Jesus gave us when He was in the wilderness being tempted by Satan.

MAT 4:3-4 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Deut. 8:3)

Jesus Christ is that God who has spoken and it is His life we are to live in by faith as we hang on His every word and live according to it by the power of His Spirit who indwells us.

There are many movements out there today which encourage you to get on the raft and drift down stream with everyone else. There are many streams and many roads, but one thing is sure.

MAT 7:13-15 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. 15 "Watch out for false prophets.

They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."

This is the concern of the writer of Hebrews. He knows that it is essential that we remain true to our Lord and Savior and true to His word. The idea of drifting away carries with it a couple of things we should be aware of. #1) it speaks of deception. Being tossed here and there by the waves is not meant as a positive thing. It only adds to our confusion and frustration as we walk with Christ.

But #2) it speaks of being lost. There is the danger that someone who is seeking and who may even have made a "Profession of faith" may in fact be like that seed sown on stony ground when the dew of the morning makes it sprout up quickly, but by the afternoon the sun dries it up and chokes it out.

There are many people who claim to be Christians and who are inside the church, but in their heart of hearts have not truly embraced their Savior by faith and have not surrendered their lives to God. Many of these people want the best of both worlds and God says you can't have it both ways.

Now, I don't mean to suggest that a true believer can drift away from the faith and lose his or her salvation. All throughout the word of God, both the O.T. and N.T. we see God's faithfulness to hold us and to bring us through to the end. This is made quite clear in the gospel of John.

JOH 6:39-40 "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Paul also tells us that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ and Jesus says, "I will never leave you or desert you." What the writer of Hebrews wants us to understand is that there will be those who will drift away from the faith who were never truly one of Christ's.

Does this mean that everyone who has ever backslidden is lost? If that were the case I dare say most of us here would be lost. No! What Scripture tells us is that despite the weakness of our flesh, if we are in Christ He will bring us through to the end and we will remain faithful to Him ultimately by His grace working in our lives.

But, again, what our writer wants us to keep in mind is that whether we're true believers or not, Jesus' attitude toward the truth is one which none of us should take for granted and to which we are all held accountable before Him.

This is a warning to the church not to place ourselves in the boat whose destination is nowhere but downstream toward the falls.

A.W. Pink makes this comment on the phrase "so that we do not drift away".... "Understood thus, these words sound the first warning-note of this epistle against apostasy, and this verse is parallel with 3:14; 4:1; and 12:25. Perseverance in the faith, continuance in the Word, is a prime pre-requisite of discipleship. Many who heard, and once seemed really interested in spiritual things, concerning the faith have "rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith." (1Ti.1:19)

This is where the writer of Hebrews is going in this epistle as he continues to lift up the one thing which should always cause us to go forward in faith and persevere and that is Jesus Christ Himself, who has given us life eternal and His Spirit as the down-payment for the inheritance we have in Christ. No turning back from the truth or from the One who delivered it, personally sent from heaven. To drive this point home we continue.

HEB 2:2-4 "For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, 3 how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him." 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."

The idea here is that if the message which was given to men through the agency of angels was binding, how much more the message brought to us by the Son Himself? Our text says that this "message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment..."

What is being spoken of here is the Law given on Mt. Sinai. This was God's law, albeit given through angelic ministrations, but it was still God's law and the people understood this and accepted the terms if they violated it.

The comparison our writer makes is that if the law was binding, even if delivered by angels, how much more should we be humbled and desiring to obey the truth when it's delivered personally by God Himself. Is it any less binding if God delivers it? Of course not.

Normally, when we think of salvation we have in mind deliverance and safety and great comfort as we embrace Christ by faith. And that's certainly what makes the Gospel such good news. But there's another side of the coin to this great salvation. If rejected, the penalty of sin will still have to be paid for. The catch is that the one rejecting Christ will pay his own penalty, eternally separated from God, in hell.

Keep in mind too that the Gospel message as A.W. Pink puts it is "more than a publication of good news, more than an invitation for burdened souls to come to Christ for relief and peace. In its first address to those who hear, it is a Divine mandate, and authoritative command, which is disregarded at the sinner's imminent peril."

That it does issue a command is clear from ACT 17:30-31 "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

Unbelievers need to realize that God has commanded all men to come unto Him for salvation because sin must be paid for. But if you choose to disobey this command you must pay the price with your life. This must be part of the message we give to people. And it can be done without feeling that we'll scare them away from God.

As I've said before the reason the Gospel is such good news is because the rejection of the Gospel is such bad news. And we owe it to people to show them both sides of the issue as God wants them to see it so that their decision will be made on the facts, not purely on some emotional appeal which may be promoting a wrong reason for making a hasty decision, which may not even be the Gospel message.

And so the point here in Hebrews is not to scare believers into thinking that we will reject Christ and pay the penalty of sin which Christ paid on our behalf, but to sound the warning that those outside of Christ cannot depend on His grace if they reject so great a salvation.

However, there is still a message for believers here as well. And part of it has to do with complacency in our walk with Christ. These verses address this Jesus who is the same yesterday, today and forever, who is also described in the Scriptures as having all authority and judgment given to Him by the Father.

The One who came to condemn sin in the flesh and to set the captives free, as they trust in His grace of salvation, is also the same One who is Judge and in front of whom all will one day stand.

Who will escape in that day? No one. You will either be covered in the blood of the Lamb in whom you trusted or you will be naked in your own righteousness and suffer the consequences.

What this is intended to do for the believer is to humble him or her and cause us all to come humbly before our King and desire to please Him in all things because we have been bought at a great price. "How can we show our love to you Lord?", should be our attitude.

And so part of what the writer of Hebrews is doing is trying to wake us out of our complacency and trying to help us realize what a great salvation we do have and that if any one were to neglect it the judgment of God will be there.

The question is can a true believer really neglect it to the degree that we turn completely away from this salvation found in Christ alone? I believe with all my heart that the word of God says quite plainly that we cannot ultimately reject the One who has placed His seal in us by the Holy Spirit. But I firmly believe also that having a healthy fear of God will keep us from turning away and only a true believer can have such a reverence for God as he considers his lost state without Christ.

I liken this language here in our text to a situation an employer might have with a faithful employee who has been slacking off. The employer lovingly comes to this person and reminds him how important it is to have a proper perspective of his job, along with his duties, and also reminds him that as much as he would hate to do so, if the job is neglected there are others who could take his place.

In that situation the last thing the employer wants to do is get rid of his faithful employee, but under certain conditions it's proper to

wake that person up to his responsibilities. Some may call that a scare tactic and for the one receiving such news it may be, but it's simply the truth.

Now, we are not employees of Jesus Christ, nor does He come to us and tell us He'll give our position to someone else if we don't straighten up. But when our Lord reminds us that this is not a game we're in, that there are real eternal consequences regarding the Gospel that He has delivered, it should get our attention and re-focus our attention on those things that have eternal value.

This is part of what this letter is trying to accomplish and will accomplish for those who have ears to hear. The apostle Peter put it this way.

2PE 1:5-12 "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. 10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 12 So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have."

Peter isn't saying that you must fear losing your salvation, but he is saying, take stock of how you're walking with Christ because as you see Him working in your life, as His fruit is being made manifest, as you submit to Him, you can be assured that your calling and election are quite sure.

Why? Because He is at work in and through you for His good pleasure. You are demonstrating signs of life because He has given you life. Peter's point, as well as the writer of Hebrews is, if you're not demonstrating signs of life one of two things is possible: #1) You've forgotten your first love and it should compel you to rush into the arms of a loving and gracious God who forgives or #2) You don't have life in Christ because you never truly trusted Him, in which case it should compel you to rush into the arms of a loving and gracious God who forgives.

The answer is always the same for both scenarios: Jesus Christ, our King who loves us and desires for us to come to Him for life and comfort and strength. The writer of Hebrews then continues and we'll end here shortly.

HEB 2:3-4 ... This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

This message was delivered personally by Jesus Christ. And the beauty of this is that there were eye witnesses. Our faith rests on truth and those who gave their lives giving others this truth. It's not based on conjecture. Jesus really did come into this world and really did perform miracles to testify of His Divinity and that He was sent from the Father to accomplish our salvation.

You never need to worry if what you believe about Jesus Christ, found in His word, is reliable, or if you can really place your eternal destiny in His hands. Never do you need to worry about that for He is who He says He is and He came into this world and demonstrated it with power.

He fulfilled over 300 prophecies found in the O.T. which clearly identifies Jesus as the One who would be born of a virgin, who would fulfill His earthly ministry with a message of hope and who showed Himself to be God as He accomplished miraculous deeds with the express purpose of showing men that He was more than a man.

He is the God-man who came to bring them home as He died in their place and rose victoriously from the dead. This is what the writer of Hebrews wants to drive home. Never take this great salvation for granted.

Never feel that what we have in our possession is some placebo to help us get through this present life. No, this is the real thing with the living God who loves us and will never let us go. Like Paul may we say of this salvation....

ROM 1:16-17 "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to

last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (Hab. 2:4)

It is the power of God to bring you and me back into a right relationship with our Lord and it is the power of God as we take this message of hope out into the world. May we love our Lord Jesus ever more and live in the reality of His salvation and desire it for all men as we are faithful to Christ to be His witnesses both in word and deed.