

Neglecting a Great Salvation

19th Sun. after Pent. – 10/03/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Hebrews 2:1-18 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 1, 3 “**Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ...For...how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?**”

Introduction

⌘ This text today begins with a crucially important word, “Therefore...”. That means that the author’s message for you and me today; the critical warning that he is giving us here is completely dependent upon the truth that he went to so such great lengths in the previous chapter to put before us.

➔ And what is that truth? The letter began with these words, “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” (1:1–2).

⌘ God’s Son of course is Jesus. And the author wants to be sure that there is no doubt; no question that Jesus is more than just a prophet. Jesus is both Savior and God! Chapter 1:3, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the Word of His power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”. Jesus is our Creator; our Redeemer and our God!

➔ And wonder of wonders, He is among us now in these last days where we await His glorious return. Do you believe that folks? ... I mean, not just because your parents and your pastors have taught you to say, “Yes”, but do you really, truly believe that down into the deepest depths of your soul? ... Keep that answer in mind for a minute.

⌘ The additional truth that chapter one works hard to make us understand is the distinction between Jesus and angels and us as human beings. As the Son of God, Jesus is above angels. That’s pretty easy to accept.

➔ But 1:14 teaches that angels are nonhuman created beings; they are God’s servants – past, present and future. They are not human beings and never have been human beings. So when you or I or someone we love dies with faith in Jesus and goes to heaven we/they do not become angels, even though they are “with the angels”.

➔ 1 Peter 1:12 even says that angels “long to look” into and see the saving relationship that we human believers have with our Lord Jesus, because ours is a relationship unmatched by any others.

⌘ All of this is assumed and understood by the first word of our text, “Therefore”. There is no greater message than the one of Jesus and His saving work for us as sinners. And a moment ago you said that you believe it, right?

➔ Well, the greatness of this salvation gift is now what our text today is referring to when it asks in verse three, “How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” For it is our greatest treasure. And to neglect that treasure is the worst possible thing that can happen to any of us.

I. Neglecting Salvation is Worse than Lethal

⌘ The idea of the Greek word that is translated as “neglect” (ἀμελέω) is alluded to in verse one when it says we must not “drift away” from the gift that we’ve been given.

- It's the picture of us observing water in a river as it flows by. But as we watch it, we "care nothing about it". We don't seek to quench our thirst; wash our skin; or fill a jug for later. It's as if we don't even see the water there in front of us. It drifts away from us without a care.
- ⊗ Verse one says, "we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it". And yet the warning is that we put ourselves in peril when we do the exact opposite.
 - Occasionally it is actually good for us to neglect certain things or people. If someone brushes your elbow in a crowded supermarket as they pass by, you think of it for a minute, but then let it go. Or when you get back home, and notice that a banana has a small bruise, do you throw it all away? No, you simply cut it out, and enjoy the banana, forgetting about the bruise by the time it's finished. This kind of "neglect" helps us get through the day with fewer worries, because we know that there are far more important things in life.
 - In fact, our world is so busy and so filled with things for us to do; things for us to consider whether or not we should place them on our schedules or consider them worthy of our attention and concern. So, we must decide what it is that we will intentionally "neglect" in order to give our proper attention and concern to those things and relationships and people that we believe should be our highest priorities.
 - ⊗ Is it political issues, health concerns, recreational groups or teams or time away from the daily grind? Or do things like education or work or family time or down time in front of the TV or social activities or volunteering to help others or exercise or hobbies or something else that wins the prize of top place in our list of priorities?
 - And where on that list is the reality of the relationship between our old sinful nature and its battle against the new redeemed person Jesus has made us to be? Is that relationship something that is a priority or is it something that we "neglect" so that more and more it just sort of "drifts away from" us?
 - I can't answer that question for anyone but myself. But as you consider it, I urge you not just to say the great gift of salvation in Jesus is a top priority for you. Instead I encourage you to actually review your schedule and your activities and your words and thoughts and see how those all match up with what you say.
 - ⊗ "Neglect is a reality". We all do it! But consider this: the magnitude of neglect is determined by the importance of the thing that we choose to neglect. Ignoring a snide remark is wise neglect. Neglecting your body's health may be lethal. Neglecting your home and family will damage more than just you, and it will be hard to repair.
 - But above all of those things, in verse three God asks us to consider, "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"

II. There is escape from sinful neglect.

- ⊗ God's Word really cuts to the point when it uses the word "escape" there in verse three. Just to be clear, what it's talking about is escaping eternal judgment from God. And the fact that it asks the question means that the possibility is there; it's real. To have no concern for the seriousness of our sinful neglect of Jesus and His great gift of salvation; to habitually neglect His call to turn from sin; to put the things of this world higher on the priority list than Jesus and His Word and love is to put oneself in the position of "no escape" from eternal judgement in hell.
 - Verse two puts the reliability of the truth in front of us. It says, "Since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution." A "just retribution" speaks to what is fair-and-square. All of us in our sins and

sinfulness deserve the punishment that God has promised for all sin – death and eternity apart from Him.

→ He is the perfect and righteous Judge who plays no favorites and pulls no punches. All sin must be punished. To make exceptions would be to ruin His integrity as God.

✘ Angels though have declared this message to God's people throughout history as we hear it in the pages of Scripture. But their message is not only one of Law and judgement, but also of promise and escape from judgement through the coming of God's Son.

→ That promise was first proclaimed to Adam and Eve before they were expelled from the Garden because of their sinful neglect. It was proclaimed to Abraham and Sarah as well as Mary and Joseph and the shepherds at Jesus' birth.

✘ Yes, the angels as God's servant messengers have consistently proclaimed the message that the person of Jesus Christ is far greater than His created beings – angel and human alike.

→ His work alone is what takes the punishment that God demands and also provides the escape from punishment that our souls deserve. Ours is a great salvation indeed! So great that nothing...nothing at all could ever come close in importance; so great that it must hold first priority in our hearts, minds and entire lives.

III. It's Great because God made it Personal

✘ Why is God's gift of salvation so great? Well, just as great neglect is tied to the importance of what is neglected, so the greatness of salvation is tied to the magnitude of the escape.

→ So think about the "escape" you and I have in Jesus. It's based of course in God's love for us; His continued love in spite of our continued neglect! And how do we see His love expressed? He sent His only Son to become "lower than the angels" (v.7); that is to take on human flesh and blood, so that He could pay the price for sins committed by shedding that blood unto death.

→ That means that salvation's greatness does not lie in you and your abilities, but in Jesus and His supreme abilities; in His perfect sacrifice for you.

✘ Our salvation is so great because Jesus refused to neglect us and our inborn sinfulness and our daily pile of sins. He couldn't just let it pass Him by. He was compelled to engage the horror of our sin; to take it up upon Himself; into Himself as He hung on the cross.

→ The greatness of salvation is that God took note of our sorry situation; our hapless attempts at holiness; our careless Christianity, and He simply loved you and me. He saw doubt, fear, and worry in your soul, and He pitied you with a Father's unfathomable love. He saw you stray; He felt your neglect of Him, and He truly wanted better for you.

→ The greatness of salvation is God in majesty; loving you in misery, and becoming your great salvation. And He did it all with one person, two intersected beams of wood, three nails, and four Gospel writers who declare your salvation a reality.

✘ Verse four says that "God also bore witness" to our salvation "by signs and wonders and various miracles". In the Old Testament, for example, there are the signs and wonders of God calling Moses from a burning bush to the parted sea; to manna and quail, and water from the rock, as He cared for and led His people into the Promised Land.

→ Then in the New Testament, with each of His miracles, Jesus shows Himself to be the living water, the true bread, the healer, life-giver, and Lord over nature. And no miracle before or after was greater than the cross and resurrection, to which He connects us all with His Spirit in the waters of Baptism, and feeds us His very body and blood in and with the bread and wine.

- ⊗ As verse five says, our salvation is greater than angels' works, "For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come". No, God made it His personal business. Salvation is the work of His only begotten Son; the second person in the One Triune God.
 - ➔ Yes, so great is our salvation gift that astonishingly, God tasted death in the person of His Son, Jesus for every single one of us!
- ⊗ But one day this great salvation will no longer be available; one day there will be no more escape through Jesus. It could be at our death or on the day when Jesus surprises us at his majestic return to judge all souls, living and dead. And either one of those can come at any moment, we've already been warned.
 - ➔ There is nothing greater than this salvation in Jesus! It is greater than your sin and your sinfulness; greater than all that you face in this life; greater than every last charge the devil could lay against you on the Last Day; greater than doubts; greater than fears; greater than cancer or cardiac arrest; yes, even COVID.

Conclusion

- ⊗ All of this must but be taken seriously. You may say that you don't or won't neglect your salvation, but those words will not stop Satan, the great tempter. Although he's already judged he remains busy, seeking souls to deceive and take into eternity at his side. And one of his trickiest tricks is sucking you and me into a gradual, ever-increasing neglect of God's great salvation.
 - ➔ Yet God has built His great salvation to withstand sin, Satan and all of his tricks. How? by building it not upon you or me or any worldly power, but only upon Jesus, upon our great high priest and Savior. This is our greatest treasure and priority, today and forever. Amen.