

Hebrews 2:1-18

So Great Salvation

How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? – v. 3

The Apostle makes the argument throughout this epistle to the Hebrews that we should give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard. The entire first chapter contributes mightily to the argument by emphasizing the greatness of the One who has communicated to us the things we have heard. *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son (1:1,2).*

No one can speak to us with higher authority than the Son of God. Nobody can be regarded as more trustworthy in the things communicated than the Son of God. Men may and do deceive us; or men may and do tend to speak of matters that are beyond their knowledge. Christ does not speak to us speculatively about matters that He hopes are true. Christ, rather, can speak plainly and can speak fully about whatever subject He addresses because He is the brightness of His Father's glory and the express image of His person.

It's no wonder that even His detractors were compelled to say *never man spake like this man*. They had gone to arrest Him but found themselves instead arrested by what He spoke. Who better to speak of heaven than one who has come from heaven? Or who better to speak of hell than One who has authority to condemn men to hell? Who better to speak of salvation than the One who entered into a covenant with His Father in order to accomplish salvation and make it available for sinners?

So the person who has spoken to us in these last days adds great weight to the argument that He should be heard and heeded. Indeed we should feel strongly compelled to give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard. But if the One speaking adds great weight to the argument that He should be heard so also the content of what He communicates adds even more weight to the argument that He should be heard and heeded.

What has Christ spoken to us that calls for such earnest hearing and heeding? The answer, simply put, is the gospel. Christ has spoken to us in these last days the gospel. So we have the prophetic statement regarding Christ, a statement Christ Himself quoted in Isa 61:1 *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;*

The phrase that is used in our text to describe the gospel is found in v. 3 *so great salvation. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?* And so the argument for hearing and heeding becomes all the more weighty by considering the person who has spoken and the content of what He has spoken. Christ has taught us about salvation – and not just salvation, but as the text puts it *so great salvation*. I believe this is a phrase that we will spend all eternity exploring – *so great salvation*. We'll marvel at the reality when

we're united with all the saints in glory. We'll ever strive to know the length and breadth and depth and height of it and it will be forever beyond what we can fully grasp.

The angels marvel at it, even though it doesn't directly apply to them. They see the glory of God in it. They marvel at the grace and love of God in it. How much more should we marvel at it. And yet the Jewish believers addressed in this epistle were not marveling at it – they were tempted instead to question it and they were being pressured to abandon it. They were reminded day by day that there was a price to be paid for it as they found themselves being ostracized by their countrymen and as a result they were neglecting so great salvation.

In our day and age it's not yet the outward afflictions of men that challenge us to make sure we earnestly hear and heed what Christ has spoken and estimate our salvation aright. It's the ease with which we live that leads us to neglect it or it's the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches that choke the word, according to the parable, and make us unfruitful. And if we're going to persevere in our faith and overcome the forces of affliction or the forces of affluence then it becomes necessary for us to know anew and afresh and in increasing measure the greatness of our salvation. And so this is what I want to focus on this morning in the remaining minutes –

The Greatness of Our Salvation

There is a sense, of course, in which a preacher's entire ministry should be devoted to preaching on this subject. It's a very broad topic and we need never fear exhausting it. But what I will attempt to do today is to limit our consideration of the topic by restricting myself to what we find in this section of Hebrews that shows us something of the greatness of our salvation. Consider with me first of all that the greatness of our salvation is perceived by:

I. The Depths of Christ's Condescension

We see a progression in these verses in chp. 2 that serves to magnify the depths to which Christ condescended in order to accomplish salvation. Notice what we read in beginning of v. 7 *Thou madest him a little lower than the angels.* And in the beginning of v. 9 *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels.* These statements stand in contrast to what the Apostle has been arguing which is that Christ is greater than the angels. *Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? (1:5). But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? (1:13).*

After emphasizing the truth that Christ is greater than the angels the Apostle now begins this progression of Christ's condescension by pointing out that Christ was made a little lower than the angels. It should be noted that Christ was made lower than the angels not in the sense that He was a created being – He is the only begotten Son of His Father, but by becoming our mediator He was assigned and voluntarily assumed this position of being

made a little lower than the angels. His condescension would take Him much further than simply being made a little lower than these glorious heavenly beings.

So we read in the beginning of v. 14 *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same*; This is condescending to be made lower than the angels indeed. He took upon Himself our nature. He took to Himself flesh and blood. When you think of the truth in Gen. 2:7 that God formed man of the dust of the ground and then think upon Christ becoming man you begin to perceive how great His condescension was. It's as if to say that Christ took to His very Divine nature the dust of the ground and made it a part of His being.

Note also what we read in v. 17 *Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people*. Underscore that word *behoved*. That's a term that speaks of obligation. We recognize, of course, our obligation to Christ – *we ought to give the more earnest heed*. And when we consider the fact that we appreciate how much Christ has obligated Himself to for our salvation it adds to the weight of our obligation to Him. So it behoved Christ to be made like unto his brethren. In this case the word *behoved* is a term that often times carries the meaning of owing someone money.

And you can see with greater clarity how condescending Christ was to bind Himself to such an obligation. This was not an essential obligation to Christ. There was nothing that by the nature of the case could obligate Him to become a man. Just because man fell into the hopeless and helpless estate of sin, that circumstance didn't bind Christ to become a man. It was only when the plan of salvation was in place – only when Christ voluntarily agreed to become the mediator between God and men that He became obligated to the terms of the covenant of grace and hence was bound to become a man. He condescended, in other words, to become a man. He condescended in taking to Himself the obligation to become a man.

But His condescension would go deeper still. Note what we read in v. 18 *For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted*. Here is greater condescension still – the Son of God becoming man and then subjecting Himself to all the trials that sinful men are subjected to. One commentator notes with regard to the meaning of the word *tempted* – *The Greek word here used is more general in its meaning than the English word tempted. It means to put to the proof; to try the nature or character of; and this may be done either: (1) by subjecting a person to afflictions or sufferings, that his true character may be tried—that it may be seen whether he has sincere piety and love to God; or (2) by allowing one to fall into temptation—properly so called—where some strong inducement to evil is presented to the mind, and where it becomes thus a trial of virtue. The Saviour was subjected to both these in as severe a form as was ever presented to men*.

What gracious condescension for the Lord to subject Himself to – the very Creator and Sustainer of the universe willingly undergoing trials and temptations on our behalf not

only so He could accomplish salvation for us but as v. 18 suggests that He may succour or help or empathize with those that are tempted. Your Savior knows about your trials – He has subjected Himself to the same that He may be a merciful and faithful high priest. This is why we can take our burdens to Him. We’re not bringing to Him anything that He’s not familiar with except our sins – and He even knows them in the sense that He’s borne the burden of them in His death. He knows all about life’s challenges. He knows all about rejection. He knows all about having little or nothing and having to depend on God.

He knows our trials and yet it couldn’t be said that we know His trials. For His condescension would take Him to depths that we could never know. Note what we read in verse 9 *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.*

Here is His condescension in its entirety – not merely being made lower than angels but being made lower for a specific purpose – the purpose of suffering and tasting death for every man. And Christ’s taste of death would find Him being cut off from His Father, enduring His Father’s wrath, having His soul severed from His body and His body laid in a tomb. We tend to think of a taste of something as a very small sampling of that something – like the little sample cups of some grocery product that you might receive at the Super Market. Christ’s taste of death amounted to knowing death in its full extent – to the extent that He could say *it is finished* and as a result there would no longer be condemnation to those that believe in Him.

Surely the greatness of our salvation is magnified, then, by our consideration of His condescension. How such a consideration should stir our hearts when we think we have it rough. And such a consideration should stir our affections when we dwell on the truth that His condescension was a manifestation of the depths to which He would go in order to show us His love. *Greater love hath no man than this*, Christ says in Jn. 15:13 *that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

And I should say before leaving this point that chapter 2 of Hebrews must be seen in the contrast that exists between this chapter and chapter 1. Only by knowing the greatness of Christ as the brightness of His Father’s glory and the express image of His person can we appreciate the depth of His condescension from heaven’s glory to Calvary’s cross. We must, in other words, know the glory of His height to appreciate the depths to which He plunged.

So the depth of His condescension shows the greatness of His salvation and the greatness of the love that prompted so great salvation. Would you consider next that the greatness of salvation is seen by:

II. The Fullness of Our Deliverance

Notice what we read in vv. 14,15 *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might*

destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

There is found in these verses a two-fold purpose behind Christ taking our nature in order to die. There is a purpose of destruction and a purpose of deliverance. The purpose of destruction applies to the devil and leads to our deliverance. Christ was manifested to destroy the devil. John brings out the same truth in his first epistle. So we read in 1Jn. 3:8 *He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*

Today the carnal eye sees most plainly the devil's destructive work. And it would be easy to conclude if we only saw through carnal eyes that the devil has succeeded in destroying the works of God. When a man falls into sin and defiles himself and destroys his family – this is the work of the devil.

And when a church is divided or a denomination splits over minor issues, this is the devil's work. Or when an entire culture become characterized by perverse sin and immorality it's as if you can see the devil planting his flag with glee over the whole sordid mess. I remember when a very popular pop-musician died some time ago and it amazed me to see the news coverage that was devoted to covering his death. In the course of that coverage we were exposed to excerpts of his songs and videos and they looked like they were straight from the pit of hell.

The same man had been accused of being a pedophile and in spite of all he had in terms of fame and fortune he died young and he died in debt and I think it would be safe to say that he died in misery. It's the devil's work to make such a wreck out of a man's life and then to give that man influence to the point where he's hailed as the king of pop.

We could go on and on describing the devil's destructive work. It's not hard to find. We see it every day. What a blessing to note, then, by way of contrast that Christ was manifested to destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. And Christ has dealt the crushing blow to the devil's head through His atoning work. So that the devil no longer holds the power of death – Christ has made death subservient to Him. And the devil no longer holds the power to keep a sinner in bondage or in the fear that springs from bondage – Christ has delivered the believer from that bondage.

The devil, you see, gains his leverage through the law. He's called *the accuser of the brethren* in Rev. 12:10 *which accused them before God night and day*. But he's lost his leverage because the blood of Christ answers his every accusation. The devil's leverage was guilt but Christ has taken our guilt to Himself. The devil's leverage was the law but Christ has fulfilled the law in its precept and its penalty.

The only leverage the devil can gain over a believer today comes through that believer's negligence of salvation. This is why the Apostle asks in v. 3 *how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?* If we fail to appropriate it by faith on a daily basis then we become vulnerable to the devil's devices.

So the greatness of our salvation is seen by what Christ has destroyed. He's destroyed the devil. The greatness of our salvation is also seen by what we escape. Our text asks the question *how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?* The implication behind the question is that there are things that we will escape if we don't neglect it. If we attend to it by faith in Christ then there are a number of things we escape.

We escape sin's guilt and we escape sin's dominion. We escape God's wrath and enter instead into the realm of His favor. We escape being alienated from God and instead become reconciled to God. And we escape the sentence of condemnation and instead enjoy the sentence of justification. We escape the fear of death and hell and anticipate the joy of heaven.

You begin to see, then, why our salvation is called *so great salvation?* It's great in terms of all that Christ went through to accomplish it and it's great in terms of what it enables us to escape. Would you consider with me finally and briefly that the greatness of our salvation is perceived by:

III. The Height of Our Exaltation

Heb 2:10,11 *For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren,*

Our salvation exalts us to union with Christ. We are viewed as being one with Him. We're joined to Him in His life – we're joined to Him in His death and our lives this moment are hidden in Him and we enjoy what Ian Paisley use to refer to as throne-union with our Savior. We are positionally joined to Him now at the right hand of God.

And because Christ, who sanctifies us and we who are sanctified by Christ are all of one, the text tells us that Christ is not ashamed to call us His brethren. Do you see how high your salvation exalts you? Christ is not ashamed of you. How often do we feel cause to feel ashamed of ourselves? How often do we allow our sins and our shortcomings to pull us down to the point that we wonder how Christ could ever really love us?

This text tells us that Christ is pleased to take you to Himself and He's pleased to own you as one of His own – one of His brethren. This is the kind of exaltation that should set your soul soaring. The King of all Creation and the Ruler of the Universe condescends to call you His and exalts you to be with Him. The next verse, v. 12 tells us of Christ's joy over us. Heb 2:12 *Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.* There's an even more graphic description of Christ's praise given to us in Zep 3:17 *The LORD thy God in the midst of thee [is] mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.*

At the very time the devil would tempt us to beat ourselves up for our sins and our shortcomings we learn that Christ sets a better example for us – He rests in His love. And

while we should be contrite and humble because of our sins we should not stew in our guilt but should instead follow Christ's example by resting in His love. We don't yet see all things put under Him, v. 8 tells us *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man* (v. 9). His love has made provision for our sins. His love has led Him to be One of us in order to die for us. And having accomplished so great salvation Christ is able to rest in His love and rejoice in His people to the point that He joys over us with singing.

How can we fail, with the knowledge of such love and joy and rejoicing on the part of Christ over us – how can we fail to joy and rejoice in Him? His salvation lifts us up from the pit of guilt and despair and sets us on high. And while we don't see yet all things put under Him – we are taught to anticipate that all things will be brought into subjection to Him.

Note what we read in v. 5 *For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak*. Underscore that phrase *the world to come*. This is an important concept to keep in mind later in Hebrews when you see how plainly that the hope of Old Testament saints, like the hope of New Testament saints, is for this world to come – this world that will be in complete subjection to Christ.

And even though we don't see it yet – we're told that all things have been put in subjection under His feet *For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him* (v. 8). And so our salvation exalts us to the realm of triumph and victory. We have been translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son and that Kingdom will be the thing that prevails in the end.

I hope you are able to see, in some measure, then – the greatness of your salvation. It's great in terms of Christ's condescension and it's great in terms of the deliverance it brings and it's great in terms of how high it lifts you up. It lifts you to heaven and the sure hope of everlasting life. It lifts you to the realm of strong assurance that Christ is with you and you with Him – and it lifts you to the expect the triumph of Christ's cause.

Shouldn't such salvation be tended to with earnest care? Shouldn't we give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard? Shouldn't we guard ourselves from careless negligence when it comes to spiritual things? It's only by letting these things slip that we find ourselves vulnerable to guilt and despair. May the Lord continue to impress upon you, then, the greatness of His salvation and may you with joy draw water out of the wells of salvation to the renewing and refreshment of your soul.