

The first chapter of Hebrews showed us that Jesus is the glorious instrument of creation and that everything is held together by Him (Hebrews 1:3). He is the exact imprint of the Father, the radiance of His glory. He is greater than the mighty angelic beings. He is the One who gives them their instructions to assist those who will be heirs of salvation. The second portion of chapter two returns to the theme of Jesus' exalted position as compared to that of angels, but first there is a brief exhortation to the readers to consider how important it is to pay much closer attention to what they had heard, which was the words of Jesus passed on to them in the Apostle's Doctrine (Hebrews 12:25-26).

¹ Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. Hebrews 2:1 Since Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God, since all creation is about Him and for Him, since He is so much greater than even angelic beings who serve God night and day, we must pay *much closer* attention to what He said. There are so many voices in this world that compete for our attention. Probably the most distracting voice is our own sinful nature (1 Peter 2:11). Every time we hear a confirmation of our fleshly desires from a worldly voice that claims some authority, whether political, academic, or artistic, we are pulled in that direction. Our own prejudices and desires can refute clear logic and past experience in order to agree with any voice that says our carnal desires are actually beneficial (Galatians 6:8).

The author is saying, "You better pay much closer attention to what you have heard, or you will drift from the truth." The perspective of Jesus is so opposite that of the world (see 1 Corinthians 2:14). Look at the beatitudes. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the merciful, the peacemakers, those who mourn, and the persecuted (Matthew 5:3-11). That is not what our fallen nature would say. It's not what the world teaches or affirms. Oh, we admire those who do it, the Mother Teresas and missionaries in tough fields, and the martyrs we read about, but we don't naturally think of that as the blessed life. That is because our hearts are set on this world. Jesus' life and teachings tell us the view of heaven, and that is what matters. We must allow the words of Jesus to change the way we think. We need to set our hearts on things above (Colossians 3:1-2).

The Apostle Paul paid close attention to what He heard of Christ. That's why he could write, *¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* 2 Corinthians 12:10 Let me translate that in a slightly different way from the same Greek words. "So I am pleased when I am in sickly weak conditions, reproached by others, go without necessities of life, persecuted, and in anguish, for it is in these conditions of weakness that I am mighty." What kind of nonsense is that? It is the only lasting viewpoint, that of heaven. The words and Spirit of Jesus had corrected Paul's perspective. He was

Commented [PW1]: Hebrews 1:3 (ESV)
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,

Commented [PW2]: Hebrews 12:25 (ESV)
²⁵ See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

Commented [PW3]: 1 Peter 2:11 (ESV)
¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

Commented [PW4]: Galatians 6:8 (ESV)
⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Commented [PW5]: 1 Corinthians 2:14 (ESV)
¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Commented [PW6]: Matthew 5:3-10 (ESV)
³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Commented [PW7]: Colossians 3:1-2 (ESV)
¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

secured to that mindset so he would not drift back into thinking from his fallen nature. He was speaking as a new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17).

When I am insulted and lied about, I tend to wallow in my own pity party. Can you relate to that? But this verse tells me that when I do that I am drifting away. It is a slap in the face to wake me up and remind me that I am experiencing a blessing and I should be grateful. The words of Jesus in the beatitudes help me secure myself to the truth when I allow them to change my perspective. I can make myself even more secure by memorizing the verses that confront my worldly mindset.

Throughout the letter to the Hebrews there are some fascinating nautical expressions that we would miss without some commentators with the knowledge of first century Greek usage pointing them out to us. The phrases "pay much closer attention" and "lest we drift" are used for sailors who secure their vessel to a dock or anchor. That description helps us get a visual image of what the author was trying to convey. If you improperly secure your boat to a dock, the steady rocking of the waves will pull your ropes loose and the boat will drift off and be smashed into rocks along the shore.

When I first took a boat out on Lake Powell, I pulled into a marina on the lake and looped the rope on the tie downs fixed to the dock. No one ever taught me how to do it, and I'm not the handiest person with knots. I looked back a short time later and the boat had almost pulled free from the dock. I ran back just in time to keep the boat from drifting off. After a big helping of humble pie, someone showed me how to tie it so that every pull of the waves would tighten the rope instead of pulling it free.

The winds and waves are the repetitive voices of the world encouraging carnal desires which try to pull us away from the fixed truth of the words of Scripture. If we don't make the effort to properly secure ourselves to those words, we'll be pulled away. If our minds are renewed by the Word of God (Romans 12:2), every wave of life's temptations and tragedies only cause us to tighten our grip on the unmovable Word of God (Psalm 119:89). That is why we should memorize Scripture. That is why we should take time each day to read our Bible and meditate on what we have read (Psalm 1:2). The boat is your life. You've seen many boats smashed to pieces by the waves. You've also witnessed those secured tightly to the dock of God's Word. The choice is yours. While God graciously helps us, He also leaves us free to make the effort or refuse to do so. The waves are getting higher and will be pounding harder. Will you be ready?

The author of Hebrews now gives us another reason to be secured to Jesus' words. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ^{3a} how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? Hebrews 2:2-3b Angels were involved in delivering the message to Moses (Acts 7:53; Deuteronomy 33:2). There were penalties prescribed in the Law for disobedience. Some disobediences were punishable by death (Numbers 15:30-31). Justice was prescribed for each crime. Our culture is rapidly turning away

Commented [PW8]: 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Commented [PW9]: Romans 12:2 (ESV)

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Commented [PW10]: Psalm 119:89 (ESV)

⁸⁹ Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.

Commented [PW11]: Psalm 1:2 (ESV)

² but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Commented [PW12]: Acts 7:53 (ESV)

⁵³ you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."

Commented [PW13]: Deuteronomy 33:2 (ESV)

² He said, "The LORD came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran; he came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand.

Commented [PW14]: Numbers 15:30-31 (ESV)

³⁰ But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from among his people. ³¹ Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken his commandment, that person shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be on him."

from this idea. The trend is to justify the criminal's behavior by pointing to difficulties they had experienced in life, their upbringing, parents' behavior, genetic disposition, etc. Why is this justification on the increase? Because we don't want to be accountable for our sins. But when there is no accountability, our behavior never changes. The world says to live and let live and do as you please. But doing as we please often results in harming others. That's the libertarians' dilemma.

The author is telling us that if the words the angels delivered to Moses demanded justice for every failure to uphold them, what then is the penalty for neglecting the Word delivered through the incarnate Son who sits at the right hand of God? There are practical reasons in this life for paying attention to God's Word, but the author is warning of eternal consequences (John 3:36; Psalm 19:8). Ignoring the Word of Jesus is to ignore the salvation God has so graciously offered us. We can't escape the justice of God unless we receive the salvation Jesus offers us (John 5:24).

This is the beginning of the contrast of the two covenants, the one delivered to Moses on Sinai and the one Jesus made with His own blood. The first had blood sacrifices that never made the one who offered them perfect (Hebrews 10:1), but merely pointed forward to the Lamb of God. The second was the reality to which the first pointed, which is Jesus own blood as payment for our sins (Hebrews 9:12). We are offered the exchange of our sin and righteousness ledgers. We are in the red so deep there is no hope of ever paying off our sin debt short of our execution. Jesus' perfect life was all in the black, all righteousness added to more righteousness. At the cross, Jesus freely offers us an exchange of ledgers, to put our name on His and His name on ours (2 Corinthians 5:21). This is undeserved grace to the extent of which we cannot fathom. That is what the author means by "so great a salvation."

So what is the justice we deserve if we ignore so great a salvation that has simply to be received by faith? What should be the justice we reap if we thrust away from ourselves the nail pierced hand held out to us in loving compassion? If a man on a cliff is about to fall but refuses the hand held out to him, what will happen? If we demand to keep our own ledger, then we will have to pay our debt. But we also have to answer for refusing the gift so graciously offered to us. If the readers of the letter returned to Judaism, they would be walking away from "so great a salvation" and declaring it unnecessary.

Our neglect can gradually grow through busyness or just a growing apathy from familiarity with the message. I can understand busyness overtaking our time with the Lord. It is a battle to keep your daily time with Him. It is harder for me to understand the apathy that some have. I think it issues from laziness or selfishness. When one thinks they know enough to be saved but have no desire to dig deeper into the treasures of God's Word, it makes me wonder if they were ever truly born again. The more the Word meets us in our times of crisis, the more we see Jesus reveal Himself and His love for us through the pages, the more we should desire to continue to do so.

Commented [PW15]: John 3:36 (ESV)

³⁶ 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.

Commented [PW16]: Psalm 19:8 (ESV)

⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;

Commented [PW17]: John 5:24 (ESV)

²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Commented [PW18]: Hebrews 10:1 (ESV)

¹ For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

Commented [PW19]: Hebrews 9:12 (ESV)

¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

Commented [PW20]: 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{3b} *It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,* Hebrews 2:3b The word we have heard was first declared by the Lord, meaning the Lord Jesus. It was hinted at throughout the Old Testament, and Jesus explained that to His disciples (Luke 22:44). He made the real meaning behind the old covenant clear. Then the disciples taught what Jesus had taught them to 8000 plus souls who were converted at Pentecost and the days that followed. That was what I was portraying in the *Simon of Cyrene* drama. Those first believers from the various parts of the world speaking various languages stayed in Jerusalem to be taught the Apostles' Doctrine (Acts 2:42; 2:5). That is what the author meant when he wrote, "attested to us by those who heard" Jesus' teachings, including His explanation of the meaning of the entire old covenant. Those first believers then went back to their communities around the known world and shared the truth they were taught.

Until Jesus' life and teaching brought to pass all that the Scriptures were pointing to, so much was a mystery. The mystery of the kingdom that was hidden for ages was that God so loved the world that He would send His only Son that whosoever, Jew or Gentile, who believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (Romans 16:25-26; John 3:16). The disciples went out and taught others this wonderful fact that Jesus died for our sins and rose again. Their witness of His resurrection verified the message was trustworthy.

Why is this message increasingly hated in the modern world? Who could hate the offer of our sins being exchanged for the righteousness of Jesus? I don't think it is because of the hypocrites who fail to live the message, or genuine disbelief that it ever happened, or that it is too good to be true. I think that for most it is the understanding that to receive such a great gift will transform one's life. I think we instinctively know that it will turn our world upside down (Acts 17:6). When our lives challenge others simply by the way we live, we aren't accepted in many circles.

That reminds me of a story of a man who was invited to golf with Billy Graham. The man was an unbeliever and was a little concerned about any conversations that would take place. After the game, his friend asked him how it went. He said it was miserable. He felt judged the whole game. His friend asked what Dr. Graham had said. He responded, "He didn't say anything about Jesus or religion or my behavior; it's what he didn't say." People realize that our life will proclaim a message if Jesus is our Lord, a message the world does not want to hear. It's a message that says it's better to give than receive (Acts 20:35). It's that different way of seeing the world. It's the transformation the Word makes in our minds and hearts.

Not only did the disciples attest to the life and words of Jesus, 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.* Hebrews 2:4 For the skeptic, for those who thought the message was too good to be true, or that possibly the disciples made up a story, a

Commented [PW21]: Luke 22:44 (ESV)
⁴⁴ And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Commented [PW22]: Acts 2:42 (ESV)
⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Commented [PW23]: Acts 2:5 (ESV)
⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.

Commented [PW24]: Romans 16:25-26 (ESV)
²⁵ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages
²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—

Commented [PW25]: John 3:16 (ESV)
¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Commented [PW26]: Acts 17:6 (ESV)
⁶ And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also,

Commented [PW27]: Acts 20:35 (ESV)
³⁵ In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

story, by the way, for which they would later be martyred, miracles also attested to the veracity of the message. There were the miracles of Jesus. The earliest portions discovered of Mark's gospel show that it was written while eyewitnesses were still alive (before A.D. 50). If they made up the story of the feeding of the 5000 and the 4000, or the healing miracles, or walking on the water, or any of the public displays of the miraculous, the eyewitnesses were still around to testify to the truth of it or deny it happened. The 500 who at the same time witnessed Jesus alive after his death could not possibly have been convinced to tell the same lie (1 Corinthians 15:6).

But if you dismiss all the evidence and writing outside the Bible that affirms the miracles and resurrection of Jesus, you still have to explain the miracles of the disciples. The Holy Spirit gave the same gifts of healing to the Apostles to affirm the message they were proclaiming. The fact was so well known that the sick would lay in the street just hoping the shadow of Peter would heal them as he passed by (Acts 5:15). To this day, the Holy Spirit distributes gifts as He wills to build up the church and convince those who doubt.

Jesus used this same reasoning to tell people they would be held accountable to what they had seen and heard from Him. *²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ Whoever hates me hates my Father also. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. ²⁵ But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.' ²⁶ "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.* John 15:22-26 The Holy Spirit bears witness in our hearts that Jesus' words are true. He is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). He is the only provision for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 4:12).

Have you secured yourself to the unmovable truth of God's Word? Are the waves tightening your connection with Him, or are they causing your life to begin to drift? *We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.* Hebrews 2:1 Difficult times are ahead. Make certain your ropes are firmly secured.

Questions

- 1 Review the first chapter.
- 2 What is the warning of verse 1?
- 3 What is the nautical parallel?
- 4 What are the waves?
- 5 What is the warning of verse 2?
- 6 What is the great salvation offered to us?
- 7 What is the contrast of the two covenants?
- 8 How do we know the message is true?
- 9 How did the message spread?
- 10 How can we heed these warnings?

Commented [PW28]: 1 Corinthians 15:6 (ESV)

⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

Commented [PW29]: Acts 5:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them.

Commented [PW30]: John 14:6 (ESV)

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Commented [PW31]: Acts 4:12 (ESV)

¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."