

Pay attention to your salvation

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 July 2021

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 0 0] and to pay attention. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, let's read together just a short section from Hebrews chapter 2. It's the first four verses.

Let's hear the Word of God. Hebrews 2 verse 1, We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders, and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. So, as we continue in our study of the book of Hebrews today, we're listening to the author say to us, pay attention to your salvation. Now, I wonder how often and in what circumstances we hear someone say to us, pay attention. I imagine children, you probably hear that fairly regularly. Certainly from parents, perhaps, if you can remember back to when school was on, perhaps in the classroom. We might hear, pay attention if we are using some safety equipment and we need a demonstration. If we're being invited to follow instructions, or to follow government guidelines. We are encouraged in many ways to pay attention. Now, why do we say that? Why do we need to hear that? Well, sometimes it's because there's an important message coming.

Sometimes it's to fight the distraction that somebody else faces, so we tell them to pay attention. Sometimes those words give a warning. Sometimes it's just so that we make sure that we communicate, here is the one thing I don't want you to miss. So, Hebrews, the book of Hebrews, many people see it as a sermon. So, if Hebrews is a sermon, then chapter 2, verses 1 to 4, is the point where the preacher has been demonstrating to us some of the what question. The what question, who is Jesus? And we've seen in chapter 1, Jesus is God's full and final word to us. What else have we learned in the what? Who is Jesus compared to the angels? Jesus is greater in glory and majesty than the angels. And now, as it were, there's a pause. We can almost imagine the preacher, sometimes preachers leaned over pulpits, didn't they? I never really do that. But sometimes preachers will lean over the pulpit so that they were making sure that people were paying attention to what was coming. He wants us to pay attention because here in this short section, he's answering the so what? Jesus is God's final revelation to us. So what?

[3 : 20] Jesus is greater than the angels. So what? Now, what does this mean for us? And it comes with this warning to pay attention. Pay attention to the word of salvation. Pay attention to our salvation. So three things to recognize from this short section. First of all, pay attention, verse 1, watch that you don't drift away. Let me read it again. We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. Up there is a historical picture of when the Sky Ferry was still operating. I remember as a child, one October holiday, coming back from shopping in Inverness, going back home to Sky. And it was a particularly stormy night, and it was the one time where the ferry had to kill the engine and just drift in that little sound because the wind was too strong for them to get the boat safely into harbor. Folks from islands will have far more dramatic and more frequent stories, I have no doubt. But that's the one time I can remember drifting in the sea, unable to get to harbor. Well, if in the book of Hebrews, Jesus is the safe harbor. Then the danger is drifting away from Him, drifting away from His good news, drifting away from that message of grace that He has come to bring. That's one of the things we see as a theme behind the book of Hebrews. Here was a people tempted to drift away, to return to the Old Testament forms of religion instead of sticking with Jesus, to go back to trusting in their law and their law-keeping, to trust in those ceremonies and sacrifices, to go back, as it were, to the shadows rather than the substance who is Jesus. Now, what caused their drift was most likely opposition, persecution, leading to fear. It's more comfortable to stay within the confines of Judaism. So, they were tempted to leave Jesus behind. But drift doesn't just happen back then. Drift can happen now. There are many things that come as temptations to us and they're individual to us that might tempt us and draw us away from

Jesus. What might that look like? Sometimes what causes us to drift is suffering. Suffering that we did not expect and that we struggle with that perhaps leads to bitterness and can cause drift. Sometimes that might be opposition from family members, friends, colleagues, and the going seems tough and so we are tempted to leave Jesus. Perhaps it might be busyness. Life is just so full of various responsibilities, so Jesus gets squeezed and left behind in favor of responsibility. On the other hand, it might be pleasures. We might be so distracted by all the opportunities that we have, the wealth that we have, creates so much freedom and choice, and perhaps that distracts us away from keeping Jesus central.

Perhaps it's a particular sin in our lives that causes our hearts to be hardened to Jesus and His Word. There are many reasons that cause people to drift. And the author of the Hebrews knows it, and He wants to help us to avoid drift. And what's the answer that He gives to avoiding drift?

In verse 1, it's to pay most careful attention to what they heard, to stay focused on the message of salvation which centers on Jesus the Savior. So far already, in just one chapter, we've seen that Jesus is God in the flesh. We've seen Jesus as the creator and the sustainer of the universe, that it's Jesus who washes clean from sin, Jesus who is ruling as king, Jesus who is superior to the angels. So the message to listen to is that Jesus is better, that Jesus and Jesus alone is good news.

There's no other way to be saved. So He says to them and to us, pay attention to Jesus, the Word of God, Jesus and the Word of salvation that He brings. And if He tells us to pay attention, then that leads us to respond, doesn't it? Or it should lead us, if we are sensible, to respond, to think in terms of self-examination. What are the dangers for you? What are the dangers for me?

[8 : 43] What are those waves that come into our lives that are likely to pull us away from that safe harbor who is Jesus? Perhaps one of the most important ways we can respond to this text is in a reflection and repentance and praying for renewal, to have that joy of our salvation restored to us.

So it calls us to self-examination, but it also calls us to active attention, to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. He is the harbor, He is the safe place, He is the anchor we are to trust in. And so we cannot drift in our imagination, we cannot drift in our attention from Jesus, the Savior. So He calls us to pay attention, to watch that we don't drift away. But then He gives us another reason to pay attention, pay attention because God holds us accountable. Let's read again verse 2 and into verse 3.

For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?

So he's using one of those lesser to greater arguments here. In effect, what he's saying is that since the old covenant message that came through the angels was binding, it required obedience and faith from the people of God, and since every violation and disobedience was punished, that overstepping the mark falling short of God's standard was punished, how much more in the New Testament era, since the coming of Jesus, should we pay attention to Him and His message?

Because God holds people accountable. We read in Numbers 11, one example, Israel grumble, God's just given us bread from heaven, we'd rather like some meat to eat also. And so God promised to provide, and the quail came and the quail fell, but so too did the judgment of God. We were in Joshua not that long ago as a church, and perhaps you remember the famous battle of Jericho, wonderful victory for the people of God in Joshua chapter 6, but chapter 7, we read of humiliating defeat, and we discover it's because one man, one man, Achan, disobeyed and took some of those things that were to be devoted to God.

[11 : 33] So the people face defeat, and Achan is judged. And we can go through the Old Testament, and we can discover that God holds people accountable for how we respond to Him and to His Word. And that's the negative motivation behind this call to pay attention. The author's point is that the holy God speaks with authority, and we are held accountable for disobedience or rejection of His Word. And as he says, if that was true in the Old Testament, in the Old Covenant era, how much more is that true in the New Testament, New Covenant, coming of Jesus' era? How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? Because he's been at pains to point out that Jesus is a greater messenger, bringing God's Word than anything they had, anyone they had in the Old Testament. The Old Testament had prophets and angels, but we have Jesus, the Word who became flesh and made His dwelling among us. He is God's ultimate Word, so we have a greater messenger. What becomes clear, too, is that we have a greater light. There's a greater revelation.

How do we know God's love? How do we know God's desire to save? Well, we look to Jesus, and we look to the cross, don't we? God's Word of salvation is more clearly heard. The cross stands as a great billboard to God's love and God's grace with greater clarity than they had even in the Old Testament. So, there's a greater light in the coming of Jesus as we see how that plan would climax. God's redemptive plan would climax in the sending of Jesus. Even in terms of the focus of salvation, in the Old Testament, there was very much a primary focus on the promised land. Yes, they were looking for beyond that, but so much of their hope rested in the promised land and that life there and then. But since Jesus, we see we have a greater hope with greater clarity. Eternal life with God is our ultimate hope. The new heaven and the new earth is our lasting home. So, in all these ways, we discover we have such a great salvation.

So, what's the point the preacher is trying to drive home? He is saying it is a great tragedy to neglect or to reject your great Savior. We know that sometimes when we hear someone say to us, pay attention, we know that with that comes an accountability for our response.

And so, sometimes as parents, we might say to our kids, you know, here are the rules. Here is what you need to do. If you don't listen, if you don't obey, there will be consequences. Sometimes we use that negative motivation for right response. I don't know why, but I was thinking of go-karting at camp, obviously feeling the sense of loss of another year of no camps. But when camps would go to the go-kart track and you have a whole bunch of excited kids and leaders ready to race and get really serious, you always had the safety talk. And towards the end of the safety talk, as they began to explain all the different flags that you might see, there was one flag that you never wanted to see, and that was the black flag. If you disobeyed and ignored all the safety rules, eventually you would get black flagged and you'd be pulled off the court. And here, the author to the Hebrews is wanting us to recognize and motivating us towards the goodness of salvation by warning that we'll be held accountable if we don't listen. So, in that sense, he's saying to us, look, for the sake of your own self-preservation, to avoid the judgment of God, pay attention. Now, as people who have heard the gospel, we are without excuse. Therefore, we should pay attention and respond.

And connected to that, to borrow from the title of a book by David Gibson, we should endeavor to live backwards. We should live aware of the reality that we will die, live aware of the reality of judgment day, and we should aim every day to have the right verdict on that day.

[16 : 12] Recognizing the good news of the gospel, that when we're trusting in Jesus, the verdict on our life is already in, that we are welcomed, accepted, we are loved, we're forgiven in Christ. And so, he's saying, pay attention. God holds us accountable so that we would come to faith or we would stay trusting in Jesus. But he's not finished with giving this warning to pay attention.

The last thing to notice, in verses 3 and 4, he says, pay attention because you can trust God's Word. Verse 3 and 4, this salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders, and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. We know, don't we, that reliable sources are important.

For those of us who are at school or university who have been through that, we know with our essays, it's important to find the right sources. We don't quote extensively from Mr. Wikipedia. That doesn't typically go down well. We want to get information from subject experts. We want to find the key texts. We want articles that are peer-reviewed. We need to find reliable sources of information.

And our author's point here is that we are to pay attention to the message of salvation because we have the most reliable sources to back up what he is saying. How can we trust that this message well, imagine with me a courtroom scene? And the court case is along the lines of following Jesus versus returning to the old ways. You know, which is better? Is Jesus better? Is he worth persisting with? And so the author is going to marshal his evidence and his witnesses to say, yes, Jesus is better. He wants to give confidence to Christians who'd grown weak and fearful. So the key statement in this defense is where the message of salvation was first announced. And what do we discover in verse 3?

This salvation was first announced by the Lord. So again, the aim of faith is that we would listen we would obey God's Word. We would listen to, we would obey the Lord Jesus. This Jesus who came to announce salvation. If you think about what we know about Jesus' life and ministry, Mark chapter 1, it records as Jesus begins his preaching ministry. What does he say? He says, the time has come, the kingdom of God is near.

[19 : 21] Repent and believe the good news. God's appointed hour of salvation when he would send the Savior is here. The kingdom is near because the King has come. And that call to believe the good news.

Or what we read in Luke chapter 4, the Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. So from the beginning, Jesus declares that he is God's chosen King. He has come with power and authority from God.

He's bringing good news and that good news and he requires response. The response of repentance, belief, faith.

And then as his ministry progresses, what we discover that central to his message would be anticipating his death on the cross. So Mark 10, 45, the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom. John chapter 10, verse 11, I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Jesus, through his ministry, is also showing that he fulfills all the great promises and hopes of the Old Testament. As the people were longing for the King who would come and rescue, Jesus says, I'm that King. As the people were waiting for that prophet who would announce God's Word of salvation, Jesus would say, I'm that prophet and the Word is all about me. As they were looking for a priest who would offer sacrifices to atone for sin, Jesus says, I'm that priest and I give myself as that once for all sacrifice for sin. And again, our author is saying, don't go back. Why would you look elsewhere?

[21 : 20] Jesus is God's final complete Word for us and that Word is salvation. That Word is grace to be found in him. So we're in the court case. We're thinking about, is Jesus better? Should we stick with him or should we go back to something else? The author has said, remember salvation came first. This announcement came from Jesus, but he's got further witnesses to bring in to confirm where salvation is really found. So the first witnesses that are brought in are the apostles. So this is at verse 3 again, the salvation which was first announced by the Lord was confirmed to us by those who heard him. Those who heard him were the apostles, those who spent time with Jesus during his life and ministry. Just as an aside, this verse probably makes the case that the author of the Hebrews wasn't one of the apostles, since he says we heard the message from the apostles rather than saying, I am an apostle. But remember the words of

Jesus to the apostles, you will be my witnesses. And isn't that what we see the disciples, the apostles doing in the rest of the New Testament, the book of Acts, as they taught the words of Jesus, as they teach the significance of his life and death and resurrection. And then they wrote, didn't they?

They wrote the New Testament as that permanent record of the work of Jesus and the significance of that work. And so the apostles are brought in as witnesses to say salvation is found in Jesus, stick with him. Further confirmation that salvation comes from Jesus, verse 4, God also testified to it by signs, wonders, and various miracles.

We know from Jesus' baptism that he was baptized with the power of the Spirit, that Jesus was the one who was filled with the Spirit, and he did miracles. And then he gave the power to the apostles to also do miracles by the power of the Spirit. And those miracles stand to give testimony, testimony to confirm who Jesus is, to confirm that he came to bring salvation. The miracles in that regard act as signposts for us. And where do they point us towards? Well, they point us towards his identity as the Son of God. They point us towards an anticipation of what God's kingdom will be like as Jesus provides. As Jesus provides a feast, as Jesus takes away pain and tears and death, he is giving us a glimpse into what eternity is going to be like. And there are also signposts that Jesus has come to remove shame and to give honor. Think of how many miracles Jesus does to make the unclean clean, to bring the outsider back into community. And so, the miracles speak, and they testify to the Savior. But he's not finished there as he brings in witnesses so that people would stick with

Jesus. He also draws attention to the church. So, verse 4 again, God also testified to it by signs, wonders, and various miracles, and by gift of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

[25 : 00] So, we look to the church, the people of God, as evidence to the reality of salvation. Now, why do I say that when the church isn't mentioned? Because the Holy Spirit gives gifts to his people. We see God's salvation in the lives of God's people. We recognize that trusting in Jesus brings salvation, which brings transformed lives by the power of the Spirit. And maybe for some of us here, we were turned towards Christianity for the first time because we saw the change that Jesus brought in a friend or a family member. We are encouraged in our faith when we see the faith that another person has in the Lord Jesus. Those gifts are real, and they point to a real Savior and real salvation.

So, when we're in the courtroom here, the author to the Hebrews would have us understand that the verdict is never in doubt that Jesus most certainly is better, that we can trust God's Word, and we should pay attention. It reminds us in the way that he brings out the evidence that our faith, it is built on eyewitness testimony. It is built on historical events, historical person who is Jesus. There is reliability. It can be tested and examined, and indeed Christianity has always encouraged examination.

I think this is also a reminder to us of the importance of the church family. That if seeing God's Spirit at work in the lives of His people is evidence of salvation, then we should never underestimate the power of the church. Yeah, often we feel small, we feel weak, we feel powerless, and we wonder if people are watching or listening, but God is in us, and God is with us.

And God has always been pleased to use His people, weak as we are, to help people see the glory of Jesus through us, through our lives, through our words.

And we see again from our author how important it is for us to focus on Jesus. There are many times that we will hear in our lives, pay attention, family, school, and work, and leisure, but it will never matter more than this, pay attention.

[27 : 38] Pay attention to your salvation. Pay attention to the question, am I right with God? Am I trusting in Jesus? Am I walking with Jesus? Am I staying close, or am I drifting?

What do you and I need to do today? We must pay. We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

Let's pray together. Lord, our God, we thank you that in your kindness, you have not left us to guess how we are to be right with you.

You have not left us in the dark and without hope of ever being at home with you, but rather you have sent Jesus, your word, your Son, into this world in order to live a perfect life, to die a sacrificial day, and rise as a victorious Savior, so that whoever believes in Jesus might not perish but have eternal life.

We thank you for the good news of salvation. We thank you for the Bible that we have in which we can read it. Lord, we ask that you'd help each one of us to pay attention, to pay attention to our own hearts, to pay attention to how we are responding to Jesus and his salvation.

[29 : 16] of us to pay attention so that we would increasingly worship and love him and live for him, so that others too might come to see and enjoy Jesus as your Son and our Savior.

We pray it in his name. Amen. Now we'll conclude standing to sing together Christ the sure and steady anchor.

Amen. Christ the sure and steady anchor in the fury of the storm, when the winds of doubt blow through me and my sails have all been torn, in the suffering, in the sorrow, when my sinking hopes are few.

I will hold fast to the anchor, it shall never be removed. Christ the sure and steady anchor, while the tempest rages on, when temptation claims the battle, and it seems the night has won.

Deeper still then goes the anchor, though I justly stand accused. I will hold fast to the anchor, it shall never be removed.

[31 : 32] Christ the sure and steady anchor through the floods of unbelief.

Hopeless somehow, O my soul, now lift your eyes to Calvary. This my ballast of assurance, see his love forever proved.

I will hold fast to the anchor, it shall never be removed. Christ the sure and steady anchor, as we face the wave of death.

When these trials give way to glory, and we draw our final breath, We will cross that great horizon, clouds behind and life secured.

And the calm will be the better, for the storms that we endured.

[33 : 03] Christ the sure of our salvation, ever faithful, ever true. We will hold fast to the anchor, it shall never be removed.

Close with these words from the book of Jude.

Amen. To him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy. To the only God our Saviour, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.