

Pay closer attention

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[0 : 0 0] chapter 2. I've often said that Hebrews is in the wrong part of the New Testament. You've heard me say that before. It's probably because of my difficulty of always trying to find it. But it comes after 1, 2 Timothy, Philemon. If you got to James, you've gone too far. So Hebrews chapter 2.

I'm going to be reading the first few verses from Hebrews chapter 2. We'll be taking into consideration the whole chapter, but it's these first few verses that I really want to draw your attention to. So now hear God's word. Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received its just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard. While God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his word.

Now it was not the angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere. What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels. You have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet. Now in putting everything in subjection under him, he left nothing outside of his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him, but we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God, he might taste death for everyone. Well, may God bless his word. We'll come back to that after we have sung this next hymn together. Well, if you have your Bibles open there at Hebrews chapter two, then you'll know that what I'm saying is what the text is saying. If you don't, I'm going to believe that you've got a tremendous memory and not that you've forgotten your Bible.

Hebrews chapter two reminds me of the mother who says to her son, no walk. Normally happens, you know, around about the end of school. The child is tired. Can you pick me up? And the mother has to say, no, you can walk. You can walk. There is a temptation, I feel, or Hebrews is putting across this truth of believers starting off with a lot of energy and then get to a point where they can't be bothered to walk. And they say to God the Father, can you carry me? Can you carry me? And the message that God the Father has for you is, no, you must walk. Now, God does, I understand that there's a poem about footprints in the sand where God carries a person and you look back and there's only one set of footprints, which gives the indication that there's only one set of footprints because God carries you. Well, that's true metaphorically in the sense of God's care for you, but it's not true of the Christian walk. God tells us to walk. And the reason he tells us to walk is because it demonstrates our commitment to the walk rather than just being carried along in the faith. Now, this is crucial because chapter two opens up with the call for you to pay attention, but not just to pay attention, but for you to pay much closer attention. Now, back in the day when we were, this is going back a long time, looking at the idea of future men, of boys growing up and becoming men, the idea of paying attention seemed a strange thing for me. And I thought that the phrase needed changing. I'm not going to argue with scripture, but we must understand that this is an English interpretation of a Greek text. But you don't actually pay attention in the sense that you buy it, you spend it. Time is one of those things that once you spend, you can never get it back.

So what you spend your attention on, as in here, pay attention on, is incredibly important because it's something that you can never redeem. Once it's gone, it's gone. And the same way that, you know, the child spends more time playing football in the park than doing their homework, then the time's gone.

[5 : 32] And it's Wednesday already, and it's supposed to be in on Thursday morning. Now, those kind of issues for the Christian, we just think that one day rolls into the next, and therefore, I can pay attention to God. Perhaps on Sunday, I can turn my attention to God, you know, in a few short prayers, perhaps.

Daily reading programs are only good if you read the Bible verses and not just the little bit somebody else has written. And that's why I think they should be thrown away, for the simple reason that most people, when they read their daily bread little booklets, don't actually get to read the Bible parts, they just read the part that somebody else has written. You're not paying attention to God, you're actually paying attention to other things. Now, don't get me wrong, it's not saying that daily reading programs are wrong, but it's to get you to understand, and for me to understand also, what are we to pay attention to? And Hebrew says here that you're to pay attention effectively to the message of salvation, because there is no escape for someone who doesn't pay any attention to the message of salvation. The person who neglects the great salvation, there is no escape for that person. So what Hebrews is saying is point your feet in the right direction and don't drag them.

Okay? Point your feet in the right direction and don't drag them. You have to walk. Now, you can walk slowly, but you have to walk. You have to demonstrate a commitment to the message and not turn back. And the reason why the message is that striking is because the writer of Hebrews is speaking to second generation Christians. You can see that here in verse 3. How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him.

Okay? So these are second generation Christians. These are people who are in the same way you heard the message not from Jesus, you heard it from another Christian. This is exactly what's happening here.

The trouble is, is these second generation Christians are like, is it really that important? And you know that even in family life, that when something is started, the first generation are really committed to it. Three generations down the line, it's gone. It's completely disappeared.

[8 : 03] And the writer of Hebrews understands that temptation. That as time progresses, it doesn't necessarily always strengthen a commitment. In fact, some people even rely on the commitment of their parents, which is something that you cannot do. You know, like someone saying, well, I must be a Christian. I was born in Scotland. Right? All right. I understand how you got to that.

Not, you know, there's great difficulty. So the issue here is a message of great assurance, but the actual assurance that you feel, assurance is a feeling, by the way, as well as it is a positional reality. And I'll get to that in a moment. But in order to feel assured, then your feet have to be pointed in the right direction. You have to be walking. You have to be following Jesus. There is no assurance for the Christian who looks to their mom, you know, as such and says, can you carry me?

In other words, when a person says, can you carry me? They're effectively saying, I don't want to walk. Okay. They're not saying, I don't want to go in the same direction, but they are saying, I can't commit to it. I don't want to commit to this. Just please take me wherever you're going.

But the message here is that you must walk. You must walk. The other message here is to point out something that is addressed throughout the whole of Hebrews. And that is that Jesus lived a life of flesh and blood. Okay. He walked the walk. He talked the talk. He suffered and he was tempted.

And what this is to convince us of is the God who lived a life of suffering is with you in your sufferings. That the God who lived a life of temptations is with you in your temptations.

[9 : 55] That the God who lived a life of flesh and blood is with you as you live your life in flesh and blood. In other words, the life of Jesus is incredibly important even before you get to his death.

His death is ultimately of key importance, but his life, his perfect life is the thing that accredits you with a perfect life. So when it says that Christ gives us his life, and then it says that God looks at us to see whether or not we're qualified for heaven. He doesn't see our life. He sees the life of Christ. So the life of Christ, the perfect life is really important for you to remember and to consider because that's what God sees when he looks at you. He doesn't see your sin.

He doesn't see your failings. He sees his perfect son. That's what it means for Christ to give his life to us. He had to come as a man to live as a man. Okay. He had to obey God as a man because men disobeyed God as men and women. He had to live that life perfectly because that was the life that was lived imperfectly by all of us. So when you look at a substitution, it has to be of like kind. It has to be the same. And that's what Jesus has done. So the issue here is that Jesus who lived a life of suffering and temptation is with you in your life of flesh and blood, suffering and temptation.

Never forget that. Never, ever forget that. So we have three headings to help us through this short passage or Hebrews 2. Here's the first one, the warning. The second is the accomplishment and the third is the assurance. So here's the warning. Here's the warning. There is no good news without bad news. Okay. Good news by definition is good because it is an answer to the bad news that is around.

Okay. The good news is good in contrast and comparison to the bad news that precedes it. The message here is that you will not escape God's judgment if you reject Jesus.

[12 : 09] You will not escape if you neglect a great salvation found in Jesus. There is nowhere else to go. Jesus is the harbor. Jesus is the rock on which we are safe. He is the safe place. There is no other place in the world or all eternity where you can find security. Nowhere. You cannot find security in money. You cannot find security in health. You cannot find security in beauty. You cannot find security in your own strength because all of those things over time disappear. Okay. So, you know, as we get older, you know, we're not as pretty as what we were when we were younger. No, not, you know. As we get older, we're not as strong as what we were when we're younger. Okay. We may have accumulated a bit more wealth, but we die and that's it. It's all left behind. There's no security in any of those things.

And we know it deep down in our heart, but they're the things that we often run to. We often run to these protective hedges because we think that's where it is, but it really isn't.

In terms of salvation, there is no other way to be right with God other than Jesus. And so there is no other way to escape the judgment of God than to belong to Jesus. If we neglect such a great salvation, we will not escape. He says, verse one, that's the way it is. Verse two, God's word has always proven true. Therefore, verse three, think about this when you try to run away from God. There is no escape.

There is no escape. And the way that you would neglect salvation is by neglecting to pay attention to the message. So verse one, pay attention. Why? So that you don't end up, verse three, neglecting the message. Okay. Verse one, pay attention. Verse two, God's word is always proven true.

So verse three, don't even think for a moment that you will escape if you don't pay attention. Okay. You will not escape. Nothing, it says here, is outside of the control of Jesus. In fact, we even heard in the testimony that Sibi gave that when God has a plan, he's going to execute that plan. Okay.

[14 : 34] God is always going to do it his way. Now, this is a cause of great frustration for me because being a pastor of 17 years, you'd think I would have learned my lesson. But every now and then I still think maybe God will be, treat me differently. No, if God's word says something and God has a plan, then God will execute it. Job had to learn that lesson and he was a lot older and wiser than me.

And at the end, he heard these words from God, Job, you need to understand that not a single plan of mind can be thwarted. Not one. So with that kind of wealth of wisdom in mind in the scripture, it should make perfect sense that when you come to the only one of salvation, that there is no other escape other than Jesus. In other words, what it's saying is this, to put it positively, Jesus is the way you escape the judgment of God. And nobody, nobody ever wants to meet God without belonging to Jesus. That's what it's saying. You cannot afford to meet God without belonging to Jesus. God is a just God and therefore he has to do everything justly. Nothing can be put under the carpet, nothing can be forgotten. Every sin must reap its just reward.

What God is giving us in Christ Jesus is someone who will take that judgment on your behalf. Or someone who will receive the just judgment for sin on your behalf. That's why there's no escape other than in Christ Jesus. So you need to pay close attention. Now you say, well, I know this, I'm saved. Okay. But is this the message that you're telling people who are not saved? Well, no, I tend to water it down a bit and say, God's got a wonderful plan for your life. Well, I'm sure he has, but he hasn't got any plan for your life other than judgment if you don't belong to Jesus. That's how crucial Jesus is. You know, I want to, we want to see Jesus high and lifted up, but this is what it means. It is to proclaim a message to say that Jesus is the only safe place.

And that's the warning. The warning is there is no escape other than Jesus. Okay. The warning is that there is no escape. Here's the accomplishment. It tells us here that Jesus is the founder of our salvation. Again, this is spout throughout the whole book of Hebrews. It keeps coming back to this idea of Jesus being the founder. In other words, Jesus goes on the rescue mission of God to save many women, boys and girls from the judgment of God to come. In other words, what is the biggest problem in the world? Or what is the biggest problem people face in the world? And most people say, well, it's sin, but it's, it's clearly not sin because people enjoy it. Even some Christians enjoy it. Sin is not the problem. Sin is not the problem that anybody faces because a lot of people enjoy sin. The problem that people face, which is what they're blind to is the judgment upon that sin. That's the problem.

That's the real problem that we face in this world. And the way to escape it, as I said, is in Christ. So what did Christ do in order for him to set us free from the judgment? Well, we're told in verse nine that he, he alone is crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of his death. So that by the grace of God, he might taste death for everyone. Verse 14, that through the death of Jesus, the one who has the power of death might be destroyed. And what that means is this, I want you to think about this, that when Jesus died, death died. That's why eternal life is possible. Okay. When Jesus died upon the cross, he killed death. When Jesus died, death died. And that is why eternal life is possible for everyone who belongs to him. In fact, John Owens put it, John Owen put it this way, that what we see in the death of Jesus is the death of death in the death of Jesus. That when you look at the cross and see

[19 : 15] Jesus die, what you actually are witnessing is the death of death in the death of Jesus. Now, if that is the case, and there's only one conclusion that can come from that, that if death died in the death of Jesus, you should be expecting someone to rise from the dead because there is no more death. And that is the very thing that we see happen. The reason why Jesus rose from the death, rose from the dead, is because he killed death. Death has no power over Jesus because death died in the death of Jesus.

And death has died for everyone who belongs to Jesus. That's the message. That's the accomplishment. That's the escape. I can remember seeing a t-shirt once. I think it was, I forget where it was, but it was obviously Christian, of Christian content. And it said, tongue in cheek, you will never escape this world alive. And I thought to myself, well, it's partly true. It's not completely true. But it is true that you will escape death. You will escape death as a believer. Now, this is difficult for some people to believe. It says here in verse 8, because we don't see everything in subjection to Jesus. We look at a world. It's still full of sin. People still die. It doesn't look like people have eternal life. But then that's what you get if you look at the world without looking at the Bible. If you look at the world through your own eyes and not through the lens of scripture, then what you're going to see is nothing but death, destruction, immorality, that things are just getting worse. But that's clearly not the case. There has been a decisive change. A decisive change for men and women, boys and girls found in Christ Jesus. Death has died. This means that when you die, death will not get the better of you. It can never get the better of you. Death does not win, ever. And we will all die unless Christ returns beforehand.

But the day we die, we live. Because death is dead. It died in Christ. So when we think of eternal life, as in life after life after death, which is the way to put it, that's why it's possible.

Because when Jesus died, the only thing possible after that is resurrection. In Christ, of course. Imagine it like this. You're watching a big championship game or whatever the game is. I don't know. Think of a game that you like. Rugby, football, ice hockey, basketball, whatever. It doesn't really matter what game it is or even if it's an individual sport like golf or something like that. And as you're watching the game, you're less than halfway through. But because of what's happened already, it's obvious who the winner is. Okay? The other man or woman or team is so far ahead that it's impossible for the other team to make that ground up before the final whistle goes, before the final bell goes. Well, you need to understand that the world has that final whistle. And God is going to blow it one day. Okay? It has a time limit.

And the time, the period of time is called the day of grace. Okay? We live in the day of grace. And so what you have in this illustration is the engraver is looked at the match. There's still over half to play, but he's already put in the winner on the trophy. He's halfway through engraving the name on the trophy. And the reason he does that, because of everything that has happened, it's impossible now for the other team to win, even though there is still plenty of time left to play. And that's exactly the same position that we find ourself in as Christians.

[23 : 14] We live in a world where the victory's already been won, but we have to finish up the time of play. Where's Christ? Why hasn't he returned? Well, because there's a time limit. Yeah, but he's already won.

Yeah, I understand that, but there's a time limit that we need to stick to. And so what we do as Christians now is we live in this period of time of grace so that people can turn to Jesus before the time is up, so that people can turn to God before the time is up. Now the world, the flesh, and the devil will want to convince you, no, we've still got time to win. We've still got time to escape.

No, there's still plenty of time in the day we can turn this thing around and beat God. No, you can't beat God. To think that you can is to miss just how decisive the victory of Christ was. Okay? He's already crowned with glory. He's already received the trophy as it were. Okay? He already has that position of authority. It's game over. And so you need to understand you live in that time where you're already on the winning side. But you live in a world where the game still has to be played out until it's over. And the reason for that period of time is so that more people, men and women, boys and girls, can come to Jesus. There's still time. And that's the accomplishment of Christ. So finally, the assurance. Now assurance is a difficult one for the simple reason that there's a mistake here that

Christians can make that's easy to be made. It's not that you make it because you don't know what you're doing. It's actually easy to make because there's a difference between truth and feeling. Okay? In the same way, I gave you the illustration several years ago of taking my children down to see my mom. And we went down onto the beach. And the waves were, they were pretty rough. They were fairly big. But they, because I understood the beach, I'd swum in the water since I was their age. And I knew that it was safe. It's not the type of beach you'd get dragged in and under with. That I was holding their hands and we went down, but they wouldn't go any further. Now even though I knew that they would be safe by taking them further, I stayed where I was because they didn't know that they would be safe, even though they were holding my hands. And that's the difference between feeling and belief.

that I understood that they would be safe further towards the water. But they didn't feel that they would be safe further towards the water. Now what does this mean when it comes to your assurance? Well, you could be sat here thinking, do you not? I have no doubt whatsoever that God is possible of accomplishing all these things. And I have no doubt that he has. But I just don't feel it.

[26 : 10] I just, I'm sure that God has done it for you. But I fail to, I fail to believe that God has done it for me. And this is where Christians, and I want to emphasize Christians, can go wrong in this area.

So I want you to think about it like this. The chair that you sit on, are you holding the chair or is the chair holding you? Are you holding the chair or is the chair holding you? Now when you sat on that chair, you must have believed, or at least had a little bit of faith, to believe that the chair would hold you.

Now whether it was the first time or the hundredth time you sat here, you still believe that these chairs hold me. But it's not your faith in the chair that's holding you, it's the chair that's holding you.

Do you understand the difference? Faith causes you to sit down in the chair, causes you to believe that the chair will hold you. But it's not your belief that holds you, it's the chair that holds you. And that's the distinction here. You need to understand that when we have faith in God, it's not our faith in God that holds us, it's God that holds us. Okay? So when we have a panic attack, and we're, we're mind and heart is filled with doubt, and we're lacking in faith, and we're wavering all over the place, and we're completely unstable and lacking assurance, we need to understand that that's the way we're feeling, that's not the way that God is. Okay? If we're sat here panicking whether or not the chair is holding you, why don't you pay attention to the fact that the chair is still holding you? So as you walk this Christian life, as you begin to understand what God has actually done, that when you waver, you need to understand that you have the feeling of wavering, not God who's wavering. Your faith in God is not what holds you, God holds you. And that's the distinction here.

So the assurance that you have can come and go depending on what you feel. But the God who holds you doesn't come and go depending on what you feel. And that's the distinction to be made here. You know, doubt can cause you to lose your assurance in God holding you, but it cannot cause you to lose God who holds you. Does that make sense? That doubt can cause you to lose the assurance of God holding you, but it cannot cause you to lose God who's holding you.

[28 : 37] In the same way, you may not believe that the chair will hold your weight, other than the fact that it is actually holding you to lose God holding you. Your faith in God doesn't hold you. God holds you.

So the accomplishment of Christ, when thought about carefully, should lead to the assurance in Christ rather than of what you feel. And that is super important. And here's why. Because most people live by what they feel rather than by what they know. But what we feel should be dictated by what we know. And what we know is the accomplishment of Christ means that God holds us and can never drop us.

Never drop us. So here's the conclusion. We need to understand all the time, this means paying attention to the Word of God, we need to understand all the time the difference between what we feel and what God has said. We need to understand the difference between what we believe and what the Word of God actually says. Because the disconnect of a lack of assurance turns up when we are often believing something different to what God's Word has actually said. This is why the accomplishment of Jesus, whether people believe it or not, makes no difference. It's a bit like facts. Facts out of a five-year-old, okay, are just as impressive as facts out of a professor's mouth. Because it doesn't rely on who's saying it. It's the truth behind it that makes it impressive. And that's what we have here.

Yes, it's more impressive because it comes from God. But God is truth. That's why the two can never be separated. So pay much closer attention to the message. Jesus lived a life of flesh and blood, of suffering and temptations, so that he can be with you in your suffering and temptations. To put it as someone else's once put it, the God of battles is with you in your battles. Okay, the God of battles is with you in your battles. So here's the exhortation. You're old enough to walk.

You're old enough to walk and don't drag your feet. The accomplishment of Christ teaches us that we're old enough to walk. And it's not just about being pointed in the right direction. It is about you moving your feet. And the way you begin to move your feet again is by paying attention, much closer attention, to the message that God has spoken. Okay? The way to walk is to pay close attention to the God who speaks. Now, God does encourage you to walk and want you to walk. But God doesn't think that you're too old for him to hold your hand. Okay? That's what Hebrews finishes. Yes, you're old enough to walk, but you're not too old to go without having your hand held by him. So pay attention and understand that God is holding you, not your faith in him holding you. Amen.

[31 : 56] Amen. Well, may the Lord bless you and may you know that he will keep you until that great day. Amen.