

October 6, 2024
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Hebrews 2:1–13 (Mark 10:2–16)

NEGLECTING A GREAT SALVATION.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The epistle to the Hebrews is a written sermon to proclaim a *word of encouragement* and exhortation: (cf: Hebrews 13:22) first, to encourage those strong in the faith to hold fast to Christ and His Word as they run the race of life in this sinful world of tribulation – looking forward to the glorious reward laid up for them in heaven; secondly, the sermon is to appeal to those who are at risk of *drifting* from faith and warn them of the great cost and loss of faithlessness.

The writer testifies that the Old Testament is the prophetic Word of God which finds its fulfillment in His Son, Christ Jesus. He begins his sermon by distinguishing Jesus from the prophets of old, saying:

"¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son..." (Hebrews 1:1–2)

We have a God who speaks. In early chapters of the world's story, He spoke of His will and salvation in different ways through different prophets. But now in this, the last and final chapter of the world's story, God speaks His Word and delivers His salvation to you and all mankind personally through the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of His Son, Christ Jesus.

His Word is a Word of God's power because it speaks with His life-giving and sustaining Spirit. It's a Word that came from heaven to fulfill the old covenant and usher in the new. He's the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. He upholds the universe by the word of His power. He alone has made the complete and perfect blood offering for the purification for sins. Seated at the right hand of God the Father, He's far superior to the angels. (cf: Hebrews 1:3–4)

Having laid the scriptural foundation for the confession of faith in Christ Jesus who is the most precious gift given to us by God and source of our salvation, the writer begins our text this morning with the word "*therefore.*" *Therefore* – everything he's about to write in the rest of his sermon is grounded on the foundation of everything he said in chapter 1. It's built on God's story of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation in Christ Jesus.

On this foundation, the writer exhorts all who believe to pay close attention to the proclamation of God's Word lest we *neglect* it and *drift* away from such a great salvation. Listen to the first three verses of our text again.

"1 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. 2 For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:1-4)

The words ***"drift"*** and ***"neglect"*** should grab your attention. Imagine that you own a really nice boat or a yacht on the ocean coast. You have it tied up to the dock or at the beach – and you're going to lay out on the deck and work on your suntan. As you close your eyes, the wind and the waves gently rock you to sleep – while at the same time – they loosen the rope anchoring the boat to the dock. You have ***neglected*** the rope and when the rope slips from its mooring, you and the boat will ***drift*** out to sea and be at risk of crashing into the rocks or another boat – perhaps killing everyone on board.

That is what it's like when the Christian and/or the entire Christian congregation no longer pays close attention to God's Word, loses its moorings and ***drifts*** away into unbelief. St. Paul called this being:

"... tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes." (Ephesians 4:14)

You and I and all who believe in Christ, depend on, and cling to Him and His Word for forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation. The writer to the Hebrews urges all God's people, not to just ***hear*** God's Word, but to ***"pay much closer attention to what we have heard."*** How do you do it? By reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting His Word that by patience and comfort of the Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life. (cf: Collect for Grace to receive the Word)

There are many times when ***neglect*** is a good thing – like when you ***neglect*** to give in to temptation. You ***neglect*** to react to the little inconveniences of your day. Someone bumps into you... gives you a scowling glance... or wags their finger at you on the highway. You think of it for a minute, then let it go. Maybe they were having a bad day or were in a hurry. It doesn't matter. You'll ***neglect*** it because you have greater things that need your attention.

The world is an awfully busy world: wars, rumors of wars, political games, disease, and places where crime seems to be out of control. But you dear Christian must not ***neglect*** but first ***attend*** to God's Word and your great salvation. And then, you must not neglect but attend to your vocation – wherever God has placed you in the life of this congregation, in the civic community, and the neighborhood. He has placed you in these places among real people at this specific place in time for His purpose. They're the ordinary everyday places of life where you serve and love God by serving and loving these people by living according to His commandments for the well-being of the people that He has placed into your life.

Attend to your household, your marriage and family. God's Word is clear on His plan for the human family. He designed it and He instituted it. It belongs to Him, so mankind doesn't get to redefine marriage and family however it wishes. Jesus validates Old Testament testimony saying that marriage was instituted in the Garden of Eden. (cf: Genesis 2:18-25) It wasn't Adam's idea. It was God's creation and His gift to mankind. Woman was built out of man's rib to be his help-

mate, to do those things that the man could not do – like growing and birthing babies – an also so man would not be alone. Jesus says:

*"... from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'⁷
'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,⁸
and the two shall become one flesh.'⁹ So they are no longer two but one flesh.⁹
What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."* (Mark 10:6–9)

But much like the Pharisees in our Gospel text, you and I are always looking for loopholes... lawful ways to get around God's original intent when He laid the foundations of the world. You look for lawful ways to do whatever you want to do, whenever you want to do it, even though it goes against God's commands. There is only one God – and you're not Him. But in your selfish quest to be God, so you *neglect* God's Word and your great salvation so that you *drift* away and divorce yourselves from your Creator and all that He has joined you with: spouse, your family, and your brothers and sisters in Christ's Church.

The magnitude of *neglect* is determined by the importance of a thing you may choose to *neglect*. Ignoring a snide remark is wise *neglect*. *Neglecting* your body may be harmful or physically deadly. *Neglecting* your marriage and family may cause emotional and spiritual damage to you, your spouse, and your children. The damage of *neglecting* to bring your children to the Divine Service to hear God's Word proclaimed and receive His gifts is spiritually deadly. And that's what the writer to the Hebrews is getting at when He says:

"How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3)

The word *"escape"* in verse 3 cuts to the heart of the matter. He's talking of *escaping* God's just retribution – which is judgment. And His retribution is important to understanding the great salvation many *neglect*. In verse 2 we hear:

"² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution," (Hebrews 2:2)

Just retribution according to God's Law tells all mankind that you are sinful and destined for eternal death and punishment in hell. Your sins and your sinfulness require just retribution because God is a just God. And because He is a just God, He must punish sin. He plays no favorites. He pulls no punches. He's dependable in punishment, so you and I know where we stand. Condemned! His truth of right and wrong never changes. Unless there is a purification, a salvation, a just *escape* from the just retribution, you and I will spend eternity in hell.

But God's message has been declared by angels has proved to be reliable all the way back to the Garden of Eden. He promised Adam and Eve that One would be born to crush the devil. (cf: Genesis 3:15) As He drove them out of the Garden, He placed His cherubim angel with a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life. (cf: Genesis 3:24)

Angels brought God promise of the birth of a son to elderly Abraham and his baren wife Sarah. (cf: Genesis 18) This son of promise would bear sons until the promised Messiah was born from Abraham's line. As Jesus was born to be Savior of the world, angels would announce to Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds of His incarnation and birth. (cf: Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 1:26–38, 2:8–14) Throughout the Old Testament and the New, angels proclaimed the message and person

of the Lord Jesus Christ, as His ministering spirits, showing Him to be greater than His created angels. They would hail His resurrection on Easter morning, declaring the message to all who sought the living among the dead. (cf: Luke 24:5) It's the message of being saved from God's just retribution and *escaping* His just punishment.

Since there is an *escape* from receiving God just retribution, you have a great salvation to celebrate. Just as great *neglect* is tied to the importance of what is *neglected*, the greatness of salvation is tied to the magnitude of the *escape*, as well as from what you have *escaped*. What makes this salvation "*such a great salvation*" is a God who loves you, who gave his only Son for you, whose blood paid your price for sins committed, whose blood cleanses you from all sin, whose blood set you free to be people of God. Salvation's greatness does not lie in you. It lies in Christ Jesus and Him crucified for you.

When the mirror of God's Law shows you that you are guilty of failing to pay attention to, and *neglecting* God's precious gifts to you – repent of your sins and receive our Lord's forgiveness and Holy Absolution. On Calvary's cross He died to forgive you of all your sins, including your sin of not *attending* to His holy Word and *neglecting* your great salvation... your sin of not *attending* to your vocation and neighbor, your marriage and family as you ought.

To be sure, the devil will continue to tempt you to *neglect* God's great gifts of His Word and salvation in good times or in difficulty. But God has built joy into His great salvation. You have the joy of forgiveness and salvation in Christ's work on your behalf on the cross. He has saved you from God's just retribution by suffering His retribution in your stead so that He could grant to you such a great salvation: forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation with Christ Jesus who is your greatest treasure.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.