

## [Hebrews 2:1-4](#)

### The Most Important Warning

#### **Introduction**

For nearly three decades, I was a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in La Crosse. The most important job in all of those years was to issue severe weather warnings, whether it be for tornadoes, flash floods or snow storms. Some warnings were heeded; some were not. So, why are warnings so important?

Warnings get our attention; they're meant for our good; they're to be taken seriously. Most importantly, warnings can mean the difference between life and death. God's warnings are always reliable. That's because God is always trustworthy. What God says matters! That's especially true when He gives a warning against neglecting salvation. Why is this the most important warning?

Here's three (3) main points I'd like to draw out of the text today, which should assist us in answering that question. Listen closely to what God has to say on this. Neglecting the message of salvation points us to the fact that:

1. We will drift away from it ([vs 1](#)).
2. How will we escape just retribution for sin ([vs 2-3a](#))?
3. God bears witness to the message of salvation ([vs 3b-4](#)).

#### **Background**

God inspired the writer of the book of Hebrews to emphasize to the church, then and now, that the Lord Jesus Christ is better than anything. Nothing or no one is greater than Him. He is preeminent over any angel, priest or old covenant institution. That's the theme of Hebrews. In fact, Pastor Dan preached on those truths last week from Hebrews chapter 1. To tie into today's text, the author of Hebrews specifically alludes to angels ministering to those who will inherit salvation in Christ. Remember, Christ Jesus is the author of salvation; worship Him, not angels. Here's [Hebrews 1:14](#).

Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

[Heb 1:14](#) (ESV)

What is salvation? Why is it important? Salvation is inherited; it's a gracious gift of God in Christ to those whom He chooses to be His very own sons and daughters ([Ephesians 1:4-5](#) and [Ephesians 2:8-9](#)). Salvation is obtained only through the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other way to be made right with God except in Christ. Jesus substituted His perfection for man's imperfection; He substituted His sinlessness for man's sinfulness. That's the good news message of the cross.

John Stott, British theologian, pastor and author said it best: "For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God ([Genesis 3:1-7](#)), while the essence of salvation is God substituting

Himself for man ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)). For those who receive the gospel message through trusting Jesus through faith alone by God's grace alone, there is salvation. For those who don't, there awaits a horrifying, eternal, conscious punishment in hell ([Luke 16:23-24](#)).

So, in the text for today ([Hebrews 2:1-4](#)), we are warned not to neglect so great a salvation that Jesus accomplished. Let's take a look at why it's so important not to neglect this warning.

### **1) We will drift away from it.**

That's right; unless we pay close attention to what we have heard, the gospel, the good news message of the cross, we will drift away from it. Now, this doesn't mean that a person who is in Christ and drifts away from the gospel loses their salvation. If you're saved, you're saved. Nothing or no one can change that. Here's [John 10:28](#).

**I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.**  
[John 10:28](#) (ESV)

Adrian Rogers, pastor and author, had this to say about paying close attention to the gospel: "Tune in; slow down; sweeten up". In other words, listen to Jesus; take time with Him; He is reason for joy. When Jesus says come and find rest in Him, believe in His name; taste and see that the He is good; He means it. Pay attention to Him, lest we drift away.

Let's face it, we're more prone to drift *away* from the Lord than to drift *toward* Him. The imagery of drifting is a slow, almost imperceptible, but definitely a directional drift away from Christ. It's like walking up a down-moving escalator. With continued effort and determination we can make it to the top. But when we stop, we don't simply stay where we were, we drift back to where we had been.

In the fast-paced life of the 21st century, our tendency to drift can be exacerbated by being overwhelmed by too many things. Between our jobs, families and hobbies, little time remains for anything else. This can cause a drop-off in spiritual disciplines such as prayer and worship. Moreover, the bustle of everyday life can cause a cover-up of dangerous trends in our hearts.

For example, if the prayer life of a Christian is neglected, it's a breeding ground in our heart for apathy and arrogance. Apathy because it's a "who cares" attitude that says prayer and worship can be put off until another time. Arrogance because it's an "I've got this" sort of mentality. However, Scripture warns against this. Take a look at [Proverbs 16:18](#).

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.  
[Prov 16:18](#) (ESV)

How do we protect against drifting away? I believe a three-fold defense is involved. First of all, prayer is necessary, whether it be individually or with other brothers and sisters in Christ. Prayer is important. Prayer is powerful. Prayer is like air; we need it or we die. An excellent venue for praying together with others is during the first and third Wednesday of the month prayer meetings at La Crescent Evangelical Free Church (LEFC).

Secondly, worship with other believers, which is the church, is a key to protecting against drifting away. Following Jesus means worshiping and praising God together as the faith-family. This lends to stirring up one another to love and good works ([Hebrews 10:24](#)). As much as ever, the church is the gathering where messed up people living in a messed up world can make much of Christ.

And third, establish accountability and prayer partners. For example, at the LEFC men's ministry, we encourage each man to have another guy in the group we can partner with in prayer and accountability. Praying with and for one another, as well as holding each other accountable, builds honesty, integrity and transparency. It promotes a deeper love for each other, our families, the church, and our neighbors. But more importantly, it fosters a deeper love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Would you say that we who gather at LEFC have a deep love for each other? Is there a love that binds everything together in perfect harmony ([Colossians 3:14](#)), so much so that it's contagious? If the doors were to close at LEFC, would our community miss us because there is a genuine love for one another and for the Lord Jesus Christ?

If not, we need a reminder. The reminder is this: the Holy Spirit, who indwells all believers, is our Helper and Guide. He brings to mind and bears witness to all things in Jesus. He not only leads the church, but convicts us of sin. For example, if we say we love one another, but don't really mean it, we're liars; we're sinning. The apostle John writes in [1 John 3:18](#):

Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.  
[1 John 3:18](#) (ESV)

Remember, sin is anything that separates us from God. So how does sin fit into this warning by God against neglecting salvation?

## **2) How Will We Escape Just Retribution for Sin?**

When we receive a warning about something, we usually determine the trustworthiness of the source. Remember, at the beginning of this message it was stated that God's warnings are always reliable because He is always trustworthy. When angels announced to the shepherds near Bethlehem the Christ child's coming, the message was reliable because God said it. If we could get our act together and solve the problem of sin, which we can't, Jesus wouldn't have come. There would be no need for Jesus to die on the cross. There would be no need for punishment for sin.

But because of our sin and the inability to do anything about it, we are due just retribution if salvation in Christ is neglected. Retribution is defined as a punishment inflicted on someone for a wrong or criminal act. Now remember, the writer of Hebrews is writing to the church, who are believers in Christ. And he says, "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" Consider [1 Peter 4:17-18](#).

<sup>17</sup> For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? <sup>18</sup> And

“If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

[1 Peter 4:17-18](#) (ESV)

Listen to that! The apostle Peter is writing in effect that those in Christ, the church, the household of God, should be judged. Now judgment for those in Christ is never punitive. Jesus took the punishment of God for us. He satisfied God's wrath when He bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; by His wounds we are healed ([1 Peter 2:24](#)). So it's worth repeating, if you're in Christ, judgment is never punitive; it's for refining, purifying or discipline, all of which usually come through trials.

But what about this statement: "If believers in Christ are scarcely saved, what's going to become of the unbelievers?" What does it mean to be scarcely saved? No, it's not because God is weak and barely able to save people. It's we who are weak in our flesh and rebellious in spirit. Yet, Abba Father, Daddy, saves rebels like you and me. Even if He has to drag us kicking and screaming, He saves us because He is the faithful, good, good Father whose love is steadfast and endures forever. So, the answer to "How shall we escape just retribution, if we neglect such a great salvation?" is only through God's grace and mercy in Christ. There is no other way. John Piper, author, pastor and founder of Desiring God Ministries says it this way: "If you don't have Christ, nothing else matters. Once you have Christ, nothing else compares."

There's an account in the Bible of a man named Barabbas, whose life was exchanged for Jesus' life. Barabbas was a prisoner. He was guilty of robbery and murder ([Mark 15:6-15](#)). Jesus was a prisoner. He was accused of blasphemy. According to a custom at the Passover, the governor would release a prisoner of the crowd's choice. In this case, the chief priests and elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas' release and Jesus' execution. The guilty man went free; the innocent man was condemned to die. In what was the most unjust exchange in history, the justice of God was served. God exchanged perfect love, grace and mercy of Jesus for the hideous and vile sin of Barabbas.

God wants us to see ourselves as Barabbas. While prisoners to sin, we were set free from the penalty of sin and death, even though we didn't deserve it. That's grace! You and me deserving of a certain death, yet not receiving it. That's mercy! But how can that be? Jon Bloom, author and co-founder of Desiring God states "Our freedom isn't achieved by anything we do; it is achieved by Jesus dying in our place."

What about you? If you haven't trusted Christ, you have no freedom. You're still in prison with the door locked. Jesus is your only hope of freedom. When the guards came for Barabbas, did he stay? No! Why would anyone stay? My plea is that God would open your eyes to see that Jesus holds the key to your freedom. This could be your "Barabbas moment". Right now, you can receive God's gift of love, grace and mercy through simply trusting Jesus. What will your response be?

So, we can see why God's warning against neglecting such a great salvation is terribly important. It's a warning that saves lives today, tomorrow and for eternity. And it's not just a warning so we can have a "get out of hell free card." No, it's a warning that says God cares about you and me. Scripture states that God would have no one perish, but desires that all would come to repentance

([Ezekiel 33:11](#)). This is a reliable message because God said it. And if God Himself bears witness to this message of salvation, why would anyone neglect it?

### **3) God Bears Witness To The Message of Salvation**

Yes, we must pay close attention to this message of salvation that we have heard. In our text, Scripture states that it was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard ([Hebrews 2:3b-4](#)). Here's what Jesus says in [Mark 1:15](#).

**“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”**  
[Mark 1:15](#) (ESV)

Jesus' whole ministry then, when He was walking this earth, and now through the Holy Spirit, isn't just *about* salvation. He Himself *is* salvation. In fact, Scripture states that there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we much be saved ([Acts 4:12](#)).

Consider this too. His first advent in the flesh, Immanuel - God with us - was proclaimed by angels and shepherds. He came to save sinners ([Matthew 1:21](#) and [Luke 19:10](#)). His interactions were convicting yet compassionate with the woman at the well ([John 4](#)), the feeding of the five thousand ([John 6](#)), and the woman caught in adultery ([John 8](#)). All of these point to Jesus as the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father for salvation except through Him ([John 14:6](#)).

Among others, John was one of the apostles who walked, talked, laughed, cried and followed Jesus. John witnessed Jesus' ministering to the least, the lost and the lonely. He attested to the truth that Jesus is the Word of Life. Here's [1 John 1:2](#).

...the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us...  
[1 John 1:2](#) (ESV)

If that isn't enough, God Himself bore witness to salvation through signs, wonders and miracles. In the Old Testament, remember, the ten plagues that God brought upon Pharaoh and the people of Egypt. There was the crossing of the Red Sea. There was manna and quail in the wilderness. There was water from the rock. Even so, some like Korah and a group of 250 malcontents grumbled against God. The result was their death, which was a warning sign. However, in God's judgment there is mercy, as evidenced by the fact that the sons of Korah did not die ([Numbers 26:10-11](#)).

In the New Testament, gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit according to His will attested to God's salvation. For example, the apostle Paul in [1 Corinthians 12](#) cites one of the gifts of the Spirit as healing and working of miracles. One such account in the book of Acts is the healing of the lame beggar by Peter and John. After the healed man leaped up and walked into the temple, Scripture states that the people were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him ([Acts 3:1-10](#)).

Is God still doing signs, wonders and miracles today to remind us not to neglect His salvation? Absolutely, positively yes! Our culture is in the process of collapsing morally, economically and socially. We have drifted away from God. It is my belief that the coronavirus (COVID-19) is a severe example of God's warning that we as individuals, the church, the nation and the world have neglected such a great salvation in Christ. COVID-19 is a "shot across the bow" to get our attention.

Unless God's warnings are heeded with a humble and contrite heart, the fruit of obedience, which is repentance and revival, cannot be realized. Listen to Jesus. He is trustworthy. He is the intersection of mercy, grace, love and kindness. Whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life. For He came not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him ([John 3:16-17](#)).

### **Conclusion**

God wants us to pay close attention to the reliable message of the gospel of hope that we have heard, lest we drift away from it. How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation in Christ? What excuse do we have, especially with God bearing witness through signs, wonders, and miracles, as well as gifts given by the Holy Spirit?

Here's a final thought. Are we drifting away? Are our lives anchored to the Lord Jesus or something else? Remember, Christ is the solid rock. He alone is the sure foundation that stands through the fiercest of storms. And when the storms of life hit us, if our lives aren't anchored to the solid rock, who is Jesus, everything else is sinking sand. That's an important warning. Why would we neglect such a great salvation in Him? Amen.