

flight plan

hebrews 2.1-18

We are in Hebrews chapter 2 this morning. After the opening chapter submerged us in the greatness and sufficiency of Christ, the author gives us the first of 5 warnings in the letter to pay careful attention to our salvation, past, present and future.

Let's look at our text and see what we see.

Hebrews 2.1-18 - Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying:

“What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the son of man that You take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet.”

For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying:

“I will declare Your name to My brethren;

In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.”

And again:

“I will put My trust in Him.”

And again:

“Here am I and the children whom God has given Me.”

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

I'd like to read a story that I encountered this week.

In November of 1979 a large passenger jet with 257 people on board left New Zealand for a sightseeing flight to Antarctica and back. Unknown to the pilots, however, someone had modified the flight coordinates by a mere two degrees. This error placed the aircraft 28 miles to the east of where the pilots assumed they were. As they approached Antarctica, despite safety regulations, the pilots descended to a lower altitude to give the passengers a better look at the landscape. Although both were experienced pilots, neither had made this particular flight before, and they had no way of knowing that the incorrect coordinates had placed them directly in the path of Mount Erebus, an active volcano that rises from the frozen landscape to a height of more than 12,000 feet.

As the pilots flew onward, the white of the snow and ice covering the volcano blended with the white of the clouds above, making it appear as though they were flying over flat ground. By the time the instruments sounded the warning that the ground was rising fast toward them, it was too late. The airplane crashed into the side of the volcano, killing everyone on board.

In the wake of the disaster analysts have cited a number of issues which culminated in the tragic loss of life: The inconsistency in the destination coordinates. The unexpected whiteout in the path of the plane. The fact that the pilots allowed their experience to give a false sense of security on a trip they had never taken. And the fact that they were flying well under the legally allowed altitude. A few small errors and choices led to incredible disaster.

According to the Holy Spirit, our spiritual lives can mimic Air New Zealand Flight 910 if we don't pay attention to our salvation.

William Barclay, in his commentary, says:

“For most of us the threat of life is not so much that we should plunge into disaster, but that we should drift into sin. There are few people who deliberately and in a moment turn their backs on God; there are many who day by day drift farther and farther away from Him. There are not many who in one moment of time commit some disastrous sin; there are many who, bit by bit and almost imperceptibly, involve themselves in some situation, and suddenly awake to find that they have ruined life for themselves and broken someone else's heart.

We would do well to be continually on the alert against the peril of the drifting life.”

And that's exactly what the author of Hebrews is saying to us in this chapter. As he continues centering his discussion on the Person and work of Jesus, he reminds us to not neglect our salvation.

As we know, there are 3 parts to salvation. We reference them theologically as justification, the moment when you become a child of God, sanctification, the ongoing process of the Lord saving and transforming us in this life, and glorification, the future completion where God fully saves us from our own mortality and sin and we are made perfect in His eternal presence.

As Christians we can think of those 3 stages as salvation in its past, present and future contexts.

Here in our passage, the author addresses all 3 stages and challenges the hearers to not neglect it. And scholars point out that the words he uses in verse 1 suggest a nautical analogy. The words for 'give earnest heed' and 'drift away' in the original language are sailing terms which should cause us to think about how we're sailing in our salvation. Or, using our analogy from earlier, how are we flying? Are we on track? Are we on course? Are we flying with purpose according to the regulations that we've been given?

That's what's explored in these verses.

First, in verses 1 through 4, the author directs our attention to salvation in the justification sense. Now, as I look around I'm confident that all of us have surrendered our lives to Christ and that we've each experienced that past salvation. We've been made children of God. So these 4 verses are not necessarily for ourselves as much as they are a reminder of the great need that the unsaved people around us have.

The wages of sin is death. Every transgression will receive a just reward verse 2 says, unless those sins are purged by Christ on behalf of an individual. So, knowing what's coming, we can't afford to have a casual attitude toward evangelism. We've got to remember to preach the Gospel so that people can have their sins forgiven before it's too late.

For us this morning's sunrise is a reminder of God's faithfulness, but for the unbeliever it is a sign that they are one day nearer to judgment. Let's not drift in our evangelism, but move forward with purpose in that regard.

In verses 5 through 9 the author directs our attention to the future and we're reminded of our ultimate salvation when we are removed from this temporal life and fully glorified in eternity.

Specifically he talks about God putting all things under the subjection of Jesus and how we will also be a part of His rule and reign in His Kingdom.

This is an incredible part of the Christian life that I know I forget pretty often. That God, in His power, is going to assign me some corner of His Kingdom to serve and rule in. We learn from the New Testament that our actions and faithfulness on this side of eternity will determine the reward and responsibility that we will receive on the other side. Some of the parables most clearly illustrate that arrangement. As I serve here, as I show myself faithful in small things, the Lord translates that into great reward and responsibility in His future Kingdom.

That's a little bit scary on one level, but it's also really an incredible thing to motivate us and look forward to. As I live my life, I should be flying toward that specific destination. This life on earth isn't a pleasure cruise. We're headed to the New World, in search of incredible treasures that have been promised to us. It's like Columbus, but knowing where we're actually going and knowing that there really is treasure waiting for us there.

As far as I know, Columbus didn't say, "Well, it'd be great to find the New World, but I hear the beaches in France are great this time of year. Let's stop there first and if we eventually make it across the Atlantic, even better!" Columbus was thinking, "Ok, I've only got so much time to get there...we're gonna get there!"

So, as I'm reminded about God's Kingdom and my part to play as one of His people, the question is: Am I full steam ahead? Am I moving forward toward that ultimate destination, or am I neglecting my faithfulness as a servant and investor in the Kingdom of God?

If we find ourselves thinking, "Well, I'll just be a file clerk in the Kingdom. What does it matter how much I'm rewarded? After all, it's already heaven!" Hopefully we'll read God's Word and snap out of that. Because the Lord doesn't respond really well to a servant like that in the passages that we're given.

And we understand why. If someone is going to the police academy, we don't want him to go up to the Sergeant and say, "What is the *bare minimum* I can do to still be accepted? What's the least amount of effort I have to put in?" Because that's not what we're looking for. And in the spiritual realm the same is true. A real man doesn't shoot for the minimum. A real man runs to win. A real man wants to be a profitable servant, not a worthless one. We've got to remember the future glorification that we're headed toward.

The chapter closes out in verses 10 through 18 and it highlights our present salvation, that period of sanctification we find ourselves in.

Let's look at verse 10 again:

Hebrews 2.10-11 - For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.

God is bringing us to glory and as we live this life we don't want to miss out on His sanctification. Because the sanctified life is the better life. Jesus is faithful and merciful and gracious to us. And here in these closing verses we see that as we allow sanctification to happen in our lives the Lord is able to bring us freedom from the bondage of sin. Freedom from the fear of death. Freedom from condemnation. He says, "What I'm doing is sanctifying your life, setting you apart so that you don't have to feel that fear. You don't have to be trapped by those addictions. You don't have to be terrified of death any longer." Because Christ wrested the power of death away from the Devil and gives us victory over it.

On top of that, as we pay attention to our sanctification, the Lord is able to aid us as spiritual descendants of Abraham. He can help us in our struggles and in our temptations. When life becomes cloudy and we can't see ahead, the Lord comes to our aid. When we're hit with an onslaught of temptation, the Lord empowers us to overcome and flee that temptation. And as we pay attention to our present salvation, that sanctification process, the Lord is able to introduce victory and aid and mercy into our lives in profound ways.

The human reasoning and mindset approaches God and says, "God, if You'll save me, then I'll serve You! If You get me out of this jam, then I'll go to church every week!" We see that depicted in movies and sitcoms and the popular culture.

But that mentality is backwards. The Lord says, "surrender your ways and your days to Me and I will do this work in your life. I'll justify you, sanctify you and glorify you."

He partook of our humanity so that we can partake of His eternity. But if we're not on course, if we're drifting, unmoored, slipping farther from God, then that work that He wants to do is going to come to a halt in our lives.

So this morning, I'd invite all of us to partake of Christ. Taste and see that He is good. Don't neglect the future we're looking forward to and working toward and don't neglect the present sanctification that God wants to bring into your life.

Pay attention. Move directly forward toward that New World. We can't afford to ease back. We can't afford to take our salvation for granted. We've got to moor ourselves to the Lord so that we can receive what we need for the trip we're taking today.