

The Tragedy of Neglecting Salvation

Scripture: Hebrews 2:1-4

Code: 1604

We come tonight to Hebrews chapter 2 verses 1 to 4, passage of Scripture, portions of which are undoubtedly familiar to many of you who have studied the Word of God in days past. Perhaps brand new to others of you who are new Christians, but very important verses they are.

Hell is undoubtedly full of people who were not actively opposed to Jesus Christ but who simply drifted into damnation by neglecting to respond to the gospel. Such people are really here in view in these four verses. These are people who know the truth, who even believe the truth, who are well aware of the good news of salvation provided in Jesus Christ but who never are willing to commit their lives to Jesus Christ. And so they drift on past the call of God into eternal disaster. Because that is the theme of these verses, it thus makes them extremely urgent and important verses.

Now as we approach this text, I want to give you a little bit of a background so that you'll understand where we are in the mind of the writer of the book of Hebrews. This is an epistle addressed to Jews as is obvious from the title. We do not know who the human author is. We do know that the Holy Spirit is the real author. And we know that it was written to three different groups of Jews, all residing in a particular community.

First of all, included in this Jewish community were Jewish non Christians who didn't believe anything about the gospel, who maybe never even heard it. Strictly Judaistic oriented. Secondly, there were also some Jewish Christians who had received Jesus Christ, who had believed the gospel, but who were still hanging on to the ritual of Judaism, who were going through some of the forms which were no longer necessary because once the reality had come, the ritual needed no longer to exist. The third group then, were Jewish non Christians who were convinced intellectually but had never committed their lives to Christ. They were the ones who heard the good news of salvation. They'd heard of the forgiveness of sin in Christ. They'd heard the message but they'd never been willing to commit themselves to it. Maybe even many of them believed it. Many of them undoubtedly were attending the community of believers with some sort of a profession that they were really believers when in fact they were not. And so, the epistle of the Hebrews takes into view all three of these three groups.

And so, in the epistle, the writer really has one purpose and that is to show all of them that Jesus Christ has brought a marvelous new covenant called the New Testament. He has died on a cross, shed His blood for the forgiveness of sins. And in this new covenant, men can have forgiveness.

And the new one is better by far than the old one, the rituals of Judaism. And so, the writer of Hebrews from the beginning of the book to the end of the book proves the new covenant better than the old and the new Mediator, Jesus Christ, better than anybody connected with the old covenant. He is attempting to show Jews not that the old covenant was wrong, but that it was incomplete, but that the old covenant is only complete in Jesus Christ who fulfills it all and that they needed to accept the new covenant of His shed blood in final sacrifice for their sins and accept Him as the mediator of a better covenant.

So the whole theme of Hebrews, then, is that the new covenant is better, that Christ is better than everything and everybody. And to receive Jesus Christ is what it's all about.

Now in order to prove this, the writer of Hebrews then goes through all of the characters of the old covenant: Moses, Aaron, the priesthood, angels who were mediators of the old covenant. And in every case he proves Christ to be better than all of those. Now if Christ is a better mediator than any of the Old Testament, then His covenant is a better covenant. And so, as we've begun to study Hebrews, we saw in verses 1 to 3 of chapter 1 that Christ is better than everybody and everything. And then in verses 4 to 14, concluding chapter 1, we saw that Christ is superior to what? To angels.

You say,. "Well, why is that important?" Because to the Jewish mind, angels were extremely important. Angels mediated the old covenant. And so, the Holy Spirit wants to show us that the new covenant is better because Christ is better than angels. A better mediator means a better covenant. And we've been into all that in detail. If you want to catch up on it, why you can get those tapes and do that,

But as we come to our point, we come to what really amounts to an invitation thrown into the middle of this treatise on angels. He's still talking about angels clear over far into chapter 2 and he's not done yet with the angels in terms of their relationship. And so, at this point he is sort of stopping with the talk about angels for a minute to interject an invitation. He is applying directly to the hearers what he has been saying about Christ. All along he's been saying, Christ is the greatest one. Christ is the one who alone can purge your sin. Christ is God. Christ is the creator. Christ is worthy of your worship. Jesus Christ is the exalted one." All the way along he's been saying this. And now he stops all of a sudden and he gives a personal invitation for those readers and those hearer to respond to what he's been saying.

You might say that doctrine breaks into invitation. You see, the Word of God always demands a response. That's the point. The Word of God always demands that somebody react to it. And may I add, too, that any effective teacher must do a lot more than just dispose of facts, dumping them on his hearers. Any really effective teacher knows that he must warn, that he must exhort and that he must invite.

And the writer, by the time he gets to chapter 2 verse 1, is impassioned and he really cares about the salvation of his hearers.

He's not so egocentric that all he cares about is spewing out doctrine then shutting his mouth and walking away, he cares about response. He cares that people respond to what he's been saying. He not only cares to exalt Christ, but he cares that they respond to Christ.

And I'll tell you something. A man may know a lot of truth and he may know a lot of doctrine, but if he doesn't have a passionate concern for how people react to it, he's not worth a nickel as a teacher. There must be a concern for response.

The Apostle Paul was like this. As great a theologian as he was, as masterful a mind and a grasp of philosophy and logic as he had, he was still an impassioned individual. And in Romans chapter 9 verse 1, after this great eight chapters of treatise on the tremendous character of the gospel, Paul all of a sudden bursts into an invitation. And he says, "I say. the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart." You say, "Why, Paul?" "For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen." Paul had such a cry in his heart that people respond to the gospel and that his own Jewish kinsmen come to Christ that it ate away at him.

In chapter 10 of the same epistle in verse 1, he says, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved." Now there is the character of a true teacher. It's not just academics. It's not just pedantics. It's not just cranking out the information. It's having a passionate concern with how people respond.

In 1 Corinthians 9 and chapter 9 and verse 19, Paul says, "For though I am free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all that I may gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew that I might gain the Jews, to them that are under the law as under the law, not being myself unto the law, that I might gain them that are under the law. To them that are without law is without law, being not without law to God but unto the law to Christ that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak that I might gain the weak. I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some and this I do for the gospel's sake." Now there's a guy who really had it right. There's a guy who not only could turn out the academics, but he had the passion.

In John chapter 5 verse 39 and 40, Jesus said this, "Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life and they. are they which testify of Me." Now listen to what the next verse says, "And ye will not come to Me that you might have life." Jesus had a passionate concern that His hearers respond. Always teaching that is true teaching demands a response.

In fact, in chapter 13 of Hebrews, I think it's verse 22, the whole book of Hebrews is called a word of exhortation. The whole book is a word of exhortation. It demands a response. And so right in the middle of this treatise on the superiority of Christ to angels, the writer just jabs in there this tremendous invitation. And it's an invitation that includes really two things that all invitations must include and that is an exhortation and a warning. In other words, what to do and what happens if you don't.

And may I add that this is the first of five great warnings in the book of Hebrews? And you must understand this. Interjected throughout the book of Hebrews are warnings. They're slapped at intervals in the middle of great treatises on the superiority of Christ. And it's as if he can only go so far and finally he has to stop and say, "Now what are you going to do about this," see? I mean, you can know all the truth about Jesus Christ and go to hell if you never do anything about it, if you never make it your own. And so here we come to the first of five warnings.

Now you say, "To whom is the warning directed?" This warning is directed to Hebrew non Christians who are intellectually convinced.

We've only got three groups to choose from. This warning here is directed to those Hebrew non Christians who are intellectually convinced but they've never committed their life to Christ. Now you've met a lot of people like that who say, "Oh yeah, I believe all that stuff, I'm just not ready to make that commitment." Right? "Oh yeah, I go to church." Some of you are married to people like that.

Maybe your husband comes with you very frequently, women. Or maybe, men, your wife or your brother or somebody, they come to church and they sit here and they hear the Word of God and they hear the Word of God and they hear the Word of God, they know it's true but they are not willing to commit themselves to that belief and to personally appropriate Jesus Christ. They've got all the facts but they've never made the commitment. It's like the man who believes the boat can hold him but he never gets in.

Now this warning cannot be to Christians, first of all, because Christians could never be in danger of neglecting salvation since they've already got it. Secondly, it can't be directed at people who've never heard the gospel because they can't neglect what they don't know exists. So the only group left is these Christians, these non Christians who are intellectually convinced but not committed. And I believe clearly that's whom he's referring to.

Now you say, "What about the 'us' when he says 'we' and 'us', is he including himself with these intellectually convinced? Is that the author saying that I'm not a Christian either?" No. The "us" is an "us" of nationality or an "us" of those who have heard the truth. We cannot build a theological

case on the use of a pronoun.

What I'm saying by that is, it says in verse 1, "We ought to give them more earnest heed?" and collectively the author's including himself with the readers, so does that mean they're in the same boat he is spiritually? Not necessarily at all. He could be using it in a Jewish context if he's a Jewish author. Or he could be saying all of us who have heard ought to respond. He already has, but he could be using it in that collective sense. So we can't build a case on the word "us" or the word "we."

And we do not believe that he can be referring to Christians because there's no way that Christians could ever neglect salvation.

That is a fact that has occurred in time, that is done, that is sealed that is settled, that is forever. They could neglect growth, they could neglect discipleship, they could not neglect salvation.

And so, we believe it is a warning to the intellectually convinced, those who have heard the gospel, know the facts about Jesus Christ, know that He died for them, know that He desires to forgive their sin, know that He can come into their life and change their life but are not willing to receive Christ as Savior. And may I hasten to add that's the most tragic category of people in existence. And I've told you a story once before that points it up as graphically as anything. I'll never forget on one occasion when a lady came into my office and informed me that she was a prostitute. And she said, "I need help" And I said, "I guess you do." And she said, "Please, I'm desperate."

And so I presented the claims of Christ to her from beginning to end and I said, "Would you like to invite Jesus Christ into your life?" And she said yes. She said, "I've had it." She was at the bottom to say the least through the dope scene, the whole bit. So she prayed a prayer and evidently she invited Christ into her life. And I said, "Now," I said, "I want to ask you to do something." I said, "Do you have your little book that you have all your contacts in with you?" And she said yes. I said, "Well, let's just take a match here and we'll burn it." And she looked at me and she said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Just what I said. I mean, if you're really going to live for Jesus Christ and you've really accepted His forgiveness and you really met Him as your Savior, let's burn that book and we'll just have a little party here and just praise the Lord." And she said to me, "That's worth a lot of money." She said, "That's worth an awful lot of money." I said, "Well, good."

Then she said to me, "I don't want to burn my book." Put it in her purse and looked at me right in the eye and said, "I guess I don't really want Jesus, do I?" And she left.

Now you see, there was somebody who when the..when it really came down to the nitty gritty and counted the cost, she wasn't ready.

I don't know what the story of that dear girl is. My heart has often ached for her and I've often thought about her. But I do know that she knows the facts and she believes them, but she's not willing to make the sacrifice. And it's a bad bargain, for what she kept wasn't worth anything compared to what she could have had in Jesus Christ forever.

And so, here are these kind of people. They know the truth. They're standing, kind of hanging on the edge of decision and they don't ever make that decision. They. just kind of drift, do you see.

They are the ones in view and the idea of these four verses is to give those people a big shove toward Jesus Christ.

Now may I add that this is not only a Jewish passage, but it also fits any man who's on the edge of decision for Christ and because of self will, because of fear, because of sin, because of sin of the persecution of his family and his friends says no to Christ and just continues to neglect, you see. It could be true of any man who does that.

And may I hasten to add that there are some of you like that here tonight? That's right, bless your hearts, you're here and just hanging on the fence about Jesus Christ. You know the truth. You may even believe the truth but you're not willing to make a commitment of your whole life to Jesus Christ and you're just hanging on the edge.

I'm talking to you tonight and the Holy Spirit is giving you one more warning. And may I add that a man is a fool, he is a fool beyond fools, he is an eternal tragedy when he neglects to make the right decision.

You say, "Why?" There are three reasons and I'll point them out to you in the text. There are three great reasons to receive this salvation: the character of Christ, the certainty of judgment, and the confirmation of God. The character of Christ, the certainty of judgment and the confirmation of God. Three great reasons not to neglect salvation.

First of all, the character of Christ in verse 1. A man is a fool to neglect salvation offered in Christ because of who Christ is, look at verse 1. "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard lest at any time we should let slip."

And it's not "let them slip," it's that we should slip. The word goes nowhere, you're the one that slips. Read it again. "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip."

You say, "What does that have to do with the character of Christ?" One word in there keys the whole thing, it's the first word, what is it? "Therefore." What do you mean therefore, where does therefore

take us? Back, right? And who has he been presenting in all the verses of chapter 1? Jesus Christ. And so what he's saying is this, because of who Christ is therefore you ought to give more earnest heed to the things which you have heard lest at any time you slip. Now it goes back to Christ.

Have you seen who Christ is? He just started in chapter 1 and you see it in verse 2, He's called "the Son." In verse 2 He's called "the heir of all things, the one who made the world." In verse 3, "the brightness of the glory of God, the exact image of His person."

He's the one who upholds all things by the word of His power. He's the one who purged our sins. He's the one who's seated on the right hand of the majesty. He's the one in verse 4, better than angels. He's the one in verse 5 who is the Son. He's the one in verse 6 who is the protokos, the chief of all. He's the one in verse 6 of whom the angels worship. He's the one in verse 7 whose angels are His servants. He's the one in verse 8 called God who is forever and ever. He's the one in verse 9, anointed above all others. He's the one in verse 10 who is the Lord of creation. This is who He is.

What kind of a fool would reject Christ? What kind of a fool would reject that kind of Christ who came into the world, God incarnate, to die on a cross to forgive your sin, to pay your penalty, to show you love, to introduce you to God, to give you blessing and joy beyond imagination? This Christ by His own character makes rejection the most idiotic and foolish act that a man could ever commit in his whole life, Jesus was God's voice. Jesus was God in the world and to reject Jesus Christ is to reject God. And to reject God is to reject the reason for your existence.

And so, because of the magnificence of the person of Christ, a man is a fool to reject the salvation that Christ offers. A person who understands who Jesus Christ is and rejects Him is a fool above all fools. And I don't understand how people can come and they can know who Christ is and they can believe it and yet they can never commit their lives to Him. What a tragedy.

Now I want to take this verse apart a little bit and show you how the words are used in the Greek and show you the meaning of the verse.

There are two key words in this verse: prosiko which is a very important word. Prosiko means to give attention to. And it's translated here, "We ought to give the more earnest heed." Now that's just one verse to give the more earnest heed, prosiko. The other one is pararuomen, get it right. And it translates into several meanings. But it really means to let slip in the simplest sense. So one of them means to give attention to, and the other means to kind of let slip.

Now let me take it apart a little bit and show you how these words have significance. The word prosiko, which is translated "We ought to give the more earnest heed," is a word that is very emphatic and it means we must give attention to. And the writer is saying on the basis of who Christ is, we

must give attention to the things we've heard about Him. We can't just hear these things and let them just slide through our brains. We've got to give attention to what we're listening to.

Then the word *pararuomen* translates into several meanings. It can be used of something flowing, or slipping past. It can be used of a ring slipping off a finger. It could even be used of something slipping down the wrong whatever down here and getting it caught in the wrong place. It's used in many, many meanings both in classical and biblical use. And it is regularly used of something which has carelessly or thoughtlessly been allowed to slip away.

But both of these words also have a very different significance.

They both, now watch this one, have a nautical significance. Having to do with ships and sailing and are used in that regard. And this is the significance here. The first one, *prosiko* means to moor a ship, to tie it up. The second one, *pararuomen* can be used of a ship which has carelessly been allowed to drift past the harbor because the sailor has forgotten to attend to the steering or he has forgotten to chart the wind, the tides and the current.

And so these words have that kind of meaning and the verse could be translated this way, "Therefore must we the more eagerly anchor our lives to the things which we have been taught lest the ship of life drift past the harbor of salvation and be lost forever." That's exactly the picture of a ship sliding past the harbor while the sailor isn't paying attention and then it's lost.

And you see, that is so graphic and that is just how it is. It's not that men go headlong diving and plunging into hell, you know. It's that they drift into it. Most people don't deliberately and in a moment turn their backs on God, curse God. Most people slowly, almost imperceptibly slip past the harbor of salvation and are broken on the rocks of destruction.

One writer put it this way, "There is a tide in the affairs of men. Taken at its ebb, leads to victory. Neglected, the shores and strands of time are strewn with the wreckage." And that's right.

This is not an ignorant sailor. This is not an unbelieving sailor.

This is just a careless sailor. And so you better take heed, lest slowly and imperceptibly you find yourself having slipped past the harbor of salvation and being destroyed on the rocks.

Now you'll notice that he says we need to take heed to the things which we have heard, in verse 1. You see, many of these Jews, like you, had heard the gospel. They had heard it from missionaries, apostolic missionaries, but they hadn't made personal application, you see. They had just heard it. I love what Jesus said in Luke 9:44, He said this, "Let these sayings sink down into your ears." Isn't that good? I mean, let it get inside of you and make a change in your life, it's not enough just to hear

it. That's only the beginning.

Back in Proverbs, I believe it's chapter 4 verse 20, it says, "My son attend to My words, incline thine ear unto My sayings, let them not depart from thine eyes, keep them in the midst of thine heart for they are life unto those that find them and health to all their flesh." When you hear the Word of God, make it yours. It's not enough to just let it drift past your ears, that's the most dangerous thing you can do. And so they had heard the Word but they hadn't made the commitment. They had heard the voice of God for Hebrews 1:1 and 2 says, "God at sundry times and diverse manners in time past spake unto the fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." And they had heard the voice of God both in the Old Testament and in the person of Jesus Christ and they had heard it from apostolic missionaries, but they'd done nothing about it.

And what a fool it is who rejects the Word of God, the thing that he has heard. And you know, the ultimate tragedy and it keeps coming back to this same point, is for people to come in the hearing of the gospel and sit in the hearing of the gospel and have it told to them and preached to them and shared with them, and they just keep slipping carelessly almost imperceptibly and sometime they wake up destroyed.

Now I want you to notice very carefully that this verse gives the indication that the Word of God slips. That's not the indication at all. The original Greek would indicate that it's not the Word that slips, it's men. "Lest we should slip." We slip away, the Word never drifts, men drift from it. The harbor of salvation is static, it's in one spot. It's in Jesus Christ. It never moves, it never changes, it's always available until the time that a man slips past the harbor of grace and it's over. And you wonder sometimes how many thousands of people in hell were so close to salvation? How many thousands were close to being safely moored and anchored only to drift away from their moorings forever through a failure to receive what they heard and in many cases what they actually believed?

Drifting, you see, is so quiet...so easy and so damning. All you need to do to go to hell is do nothing. I don't understand, really, how anyone who knows the character of Jesus Christ can ever reject Him. As a Christian who lives every day with Jesus Christ and experiences Him in my life, it is the greatest mystery in the world to me that people wouldn't rush to Jesus and want everything that He has for them. I mean, just knowing Him and loving Him is so fantastic.

And so, the hearer is urged to respond because of the character of the incomparable divine Jesus Christ.

I often think of a story I read about explorer Edward Perry who took a crew to the Arctic Ocean. And they were endeavoring to move further north in some of their chartings, and so they charted their location by the stars and they started a very difficult and very treacherous march north. They walked; and they walked hour upon hour upon hour upon hour for multiple hours. And finally in weariness,

being totally exhausted, they stopped after all the walking north and they took their bearings again from the stars and they found out when they checked the stars that they were farther south than they were when they started. And then they discovered that they had been walking on an ice flow going south faster than they were walking north.

I wonder how many people who think their good deeds and their merits and their religiousness is taking them step by step to God when in fact they're on an ice flow moving south infinitely faster than any steps would ever take them north? And that's the tragedy of it. And they, wake one day to find, like Edward Perry's crew did, that they're in the midst of a disaster and all the life time have been going backwards.

My friend, don't you be satisfied with your religious feelings.

Don't you be satisfied with coming to church. Don't you be satisfied with being married to a Christian spouse. Don't you be satisfied with church activity. You'll be drifting into a Christless hell unless you've made that personal commitment to Him. And so, a man is a fool to reject salvation because of the character of Christ.

Secondly, he's a fool to reject salvation because of the certainty of judgment, verse 2 and 3. And this tells us about the inevitability of punishment if you neglect. Look at verse 2: "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast," now what was that? What was the covenant mediated by angels? The old covenant. If the old covenant, or the word that's the Old Testament spoken by angels was steadfast and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord?

You see that? I mean, if nobody got away with breaking the covenant brought by angels, you don't think you're going to get away with breaking the covenant brought by our Lord Himself, do you?

Pretty heavy point, isn't it? Here the Holy Spirit is arguing from the lesser to the greater and He has in mind two testaments. The one testament was the revelation of the law which came by angels and any breach of that law, the Old Testament law, or any disobedience to it was followed by a strict severe and just punishment. The other revelation was that which came through Christ and because it was through a greater Son, I should say a greater mediator, the Son of God, it was a greater covenant and consequently it bore with it equal or greater punishment. And a man is a fool to think that he's going to escape from the punishment of the new covenant if in fact no man ever escaped the punishment of breaking the old because this is even a greater covenant.

Some people have the idea that because God loves them and because God is a God of grace that He's not a God of justice. My friend, if you do not receive Jesus Christ, God's justice can't even do anything in your behalf but condemn you. For you by your own choice have chosen that. And as you

go back to the Old Testament, you find that any transgression of the Old Testament, it says in verse 2, every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, every one. Did you get the word "every" there? There was no escape from the law of the old covenant. Likewise there is no escape from the law of the new covenant. And that's a simple law. You don't have to keep a lot of laws in the new covenant, just one and that is to believe on Jesus Christ and receive Him as your Lord.

That secures to you the new covenant and freedom from punishment.

Isn't that what Paul said in Romans 8:1 when he said, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, there is no what? Condemnation," right? There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. Any man that's in Christ, no judgment is his. And so there's only one law in the new covenant, that's the law of receiving Jesus Christ by faith and all others will follow that.

So, what's he saying? If a man couldn't neglect the revelation that came through angels, how much can he neglect the revelation that came through the Lord Himself?

Now I want you to notice the word "if." "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast," and this is what we call in Greek a fulfilled condition. In view of the fact that the word spoken by angels was steadfast. It's not an if maybe, it's an if absolutely. It's a sense, or in view of the fact that.

Now let me look at specifics with you for a minute. You'll notice that it says "the word spoken by angels." Now why is it that the Old Testament commandments, particularly the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue, and Moses' tablets there. Why is that so connected with the angels? Why does it say that the angels mediated the old covenant?

Well, because the angels were instrumental in bringing the Ten Commandments. And I'll show you that from several passages. Psalm 68:17. Now Psalm 68:17 just kind of barely scratches the surface of this. 68:17, "The chariots of God are twenty thousand even thousands of angels. The Lord is among them as in Sinai in the holy place." Now where did Moses get the law? What mount? Sinai. This verse says the Lord is in Sinai with twenty thousand even thousands of angels. So the angels evidently were there at Sinai, which was the mount upon which Moses received the law, the Ten Commandments.

Now in Deuteronomy 33:2, I read you this. This is Moses and he said, "The Lord came from Sinai and rose up from Seir unto them, He shined forth from Mount Paran and He came with ten thousands of holy ones," angels. "From His right hand went a fiery law for them."

Now we believe that this is an indication that angels were involved in the bringing of the law. Now in the New Testament, Acts, for example, chapter 7, gives us the same indication, verse 38. "This is he

that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him in Mount Sinai." Now here is a specific designation that when Moses was in Sinai, an angel spoke to him. In verse 53 of the same chapter, it says, "Who have received the law by the disposition of angels." So angels were at Sinai both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, we are told that. They were very instrumental in the bringing of the law. That's what is indicated here in what the writer of Hebrews is saying. Angels had a place in bringing the law.

The law which they brought, the word spoken by angels, and we believe this refers primarily to the Ten Commandments, was steadfast.

Now what it means there is if you broke that law, that law broke you, right? I mean, there wasn't any out. That was it. I mean, if a person committed adultery, what happened to him? They stoned him, and so forth and so on. If a person worshiped false gods and blasphemed God, they stoned him. There was . . . that was it! The law was inviolable, it was sure and it was certain. And it says in verse 2, "Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward." That means the law punished every sin.

Now there are only two kinds of sin and they're indicated by those two words: transgression, parabasis. It means to step across a line. That's a willful act of sin. That's an overt sin of commission. You know, that's just going right out there and sinning, stepping . . . God says, here's a line, and over there is a no no. And you say, no, over there is a yes yes. See, and you go. That is a sin that is active, overt, a sin of commission.

The word disobedience is a different word. This word means imperfect hearing, like a deaf man. This is the deliberate shutting of the ears to the commands, warnings, and invitations of God. This is the sin of neglect or omission. This is standing there doing nothing when you should do something. There's only two kinds of sin: what you do and what you don't do. They're covered by those two words. And so, every sin whether it was a do it sin or a don't do it sin was covered by the law. And both types and categories of sin were breaches of the Old Testament law and they received a just punishment. And I mean the punishments were severe.

In Leviticus, for example, chapter 24, I'll illustrate some fantastic things here to you and you'll see how severe punishment was.

Leviticus 24:14, "Bring forth him who hath cursed outside the camp and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head and let all the congregation stone him. And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin and he who blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death and all the congregation shall certainly stone him as well the sojourner as he who is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord he shall be put to death. Now that's pretty severe law. God wanted to make sure that Israel's purity was maintained

and all false prophets and blasphemers were dealt with immediately to maintain the purity of His people.

Now in Numbers chapter 15 verse 30, "But the soul that doeth anything presumptuously, whether he is born in the land or a sojourner, the same reproacheth the Lord and that soul shall be cut off from among his people because he hath despised the Word of the Lord and hath broken His commandment, that soul shall be utterly cut off, his iniquity shall be upon him. And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man who gathered sticks upon the Sabbath day." You say, "Big deal." "And they found him who gathered sticks, brought him unto Moses and Aaron and unto all the congregation, they put him in prison because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the Lord said unto Moses, "The man shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp and all the congregation brought him outside the camp, stoned him with stones and he died as the Lord commanded Moses." You say, "Died for picking up sticks on the sabbath?" It's the principle of the issue; he was defying the law of God. God set the law and the punishment was inviolable.

Numbers chapter 25, verse, at the beginning of the chapter, "Israel abode in Shittim and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab." Here they are getting involved with Moabites sexually. "And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods." They began to worship false gods. "And the people did eat and bow down to their gods and Israel joined himself unto Baal peor and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and the Lord said to Moses, Take all the heads of the people and hang them up before the Lord against the sun that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baal peor. And behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brother a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, took a javelin in his hand, and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the woman of Israel and the man, or the man of Israel and the woman through her abdomen" Just stuck them both. "So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel and those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand. See, God didn't like it when they broke His law.

In Deuteronomy chapter 17, you see, God had to do this to maintain purity in Israel. He defended them and He kept them from these false people. The ones that were being slain here were those who were not of God, but of Satan. And God dealt strictly with them.

Deuteronomy chapter 17, verse 2, "If there be found among you within any of the gates which the Lord thy God giveth thee, man or woman, who hath wrought wickedness in the sight of the Lord thy God in transgressing His covenant, and hath gone and served other gods and worshiped them, either

the sun or moon or any of the host of heaven which I have not commanded, and it be told thee and thou hast heard of it and inquired diligently and behold it is true and the thing certain that such abomination is wrought in Israel, then thou shalt bring forth that man and that woman who hath committed that wicked thing unto thy gates, even that man or that woman and shalt stone them with stones till they die. At the mouth of two witnesses or three witnesses shall he that is worthy of death be put to death but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death." This was protecting them. "The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death and afterward, the hands of all the people. So shalt thou put the evil away from among you."

Well why did God do all this? Verse 13 said, "And all the people shall hear and fear and do no more presumptuously." If you make the consequence strict enough, maybe the people will obey.

In Deuteronomy 27, and this is the last one we're going to read in the Old Testament, 27:26, the sum up is this, "Cursed be he who confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them, and all the people shall say, Amen." Now that's inviolable law that God set. And it was strong.

In Jude in the New Testament, verse 5, "I will therefore put you in remembrance thou once knew this that the Lord having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not." That's strong judgment on unbelievers. Even under the old economy there was tremendous judgment on unbelievers. Now you don't think for a minute that if such unbelief was punished in such a way under the old covenant that it will not be punished in such a way under the new covenant for indeed it will. And that's the whole point of verses 2 and 3 here in Hebrews. If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, inviolable and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?

Now you'll notice in verse 2, and I must point it out, the word "just." People like to accuse God of not being just. God is just.

God's never done anything unjust in His existence. In every punishment in everything that He ever did was a deterrent to the sin that He wanted to stop and He only punished those that were already determined to abide without Him and to defy Him. And He removed them for the sake of those who were pure and holy and wanted to live for Him.

And may I add this? God is always just. And a question always comes up about the justice of God. His judgment on Israel was severe and it was severe because they knew better. Do you see? Let me give you a principle, don't ever forget it. Punishment is always related to light. The more light you have, the more severe your punishment.

In Matthew, for example, chapter 11 and verse 20, this principle is indicated to us because it says there in no uncertain terms, mind you, "Then began He to upbraid the cities in which most of His

mighty works were done because they repented not." Most of the cities where Jesus did most of His works didn't repent. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to Hades, for if the mighty works which had been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee."

And here the principle is just this, the more you know, the greater the punishment. Sodom and Gomorrah got it, didn't they? So did Tyre and Sidon. But in no way like Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin, who not only had known the truths of the Old Testament, but the revelation of God's Messiah Himself.

And Mark puts it another way in Mark 12:38, and you know it. Listen to it. "And He said unto them, in His doctrine, Beware of the scribes who love to go in long clothing and love salutations in the marketplaces and the chief seats in the synagogues and the upper most places at feasts who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers, these shall receive greater condemnation." Did you know there are degrees of punishment in hell? Did you know that? Indeed there are, my friend, indeed there are. And the hottest hell belongs to those who rejected the most light.

In Luke 12, listen to the words of Jesus. "And that servant who knew his lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will," did you notice it? That servant who knew his lord's will and didn't do it, "shall be beaten with many stripes, but he that knew not and did commit things worthy of stripes shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required." Did you get that? It's talking about judgment there.

The point is simple, my friends. If such a law brought by angels had such stern and severe judgment, how much more severe judgment on those who not only have that old law but that new covenant in Christ and willfully rejected? And the truth of it is pointed out as clearly and explicitly as ever you will hear it, right in our own book of Hebrews, listen to these words, "He that despised Moses' law," 10:28, "He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy." Did you get that? He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy." Verse 29, "But of how much sorer punishment suppose ye shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God and hath counted the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified an unholy thing and done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

You think it was bad for those under Moses' law, of how much sorer punishment will be that one who knows the truth of Jesus Christ, makes a mental assent to it and then treads the blood of Jesus Christ under his feet? The man who knows the gospel, who has intellectually understood it, even believed it, and drifts away will experience the severest punishment there is.

It's a tragic thing to listen to but it's true. And many people in hell are experiencing such. And hell is a very real place. In the New Testament, hell is called a place of ever lasting fire where the worm dies not and the fire is not quenched. It's called a lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. It's called a bottomless pit. It's called outer darkness. It's called a furnace of fire. It's called fire unquenchable. It's called blackness of darkness. It's said that people there are weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth. And you say, "How can a man escape judgment if he rejects the new covenant in Christ?" And the answer is, he can't, he can't. There is no way to escape if we neglect so great salvation.

Romans 2:3, "And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them who do such things and doest the same that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" No way.

So, you see, to treat the gospel of Jesus Christ with neglect is foolish first of all because of the character of Christ and secondly because of the certainty of judgment. Thirdly, it's foolish because of the confirmation of God. Verses 3 and 4, we'll just look at this quickly.

The gospel was first spoken by Christ but it was confirmed by God. And you'll notice that it says in verse 3, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord?" The word "Lord" there in the Septuagint is just the translation of the word Jehovah. And here you have an indication that Jesus is God, an indication of His deity. He is Jehovah God of the Old Testament.

All right, so it says, "It was first spoken by the Lord, and the Lord was the first preacher of the gospel, wasn't He? He's the first one that preached repentance. Jesus Christ was the first preacher of the gospel. The word was first preached by Him and I shared with you must have been an exciting day for Him, not so much for those who heard Him. In Luke, I love this, chapter 4, verse 16, He came to Nazareth where He had been brought up and as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. and stood up to read. Here's the first preacher of the gospel. "And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Isaiah and when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written," and here He's speaking about Himself. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me," and He's fulfilling this prophecy right in their midst. "Because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor." He was the first preacher of the gospel, Jesus was Himself. "He hath sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives." Isn't that wonderful? "Recovering of the sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." Oh, this is good. "To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And He closed the book and gave it to the minister and sat down." The next verse says, "And He began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." And they went crazy cause He was claiming to be the Messiah. He was the first preacher of the gospel. So verse 3 says, our Lord was the first one who spoke the gospel.

But then I want you to catch this, and here's our point. "And it was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him." Now you remember, don't you, that these Jews who are believing Jews and who have heard the gospel, that the letter is written to, didn't hear it from Christ Himself, they were second generation along, right? They had heard it from apostolic missionaries. That's what they're saying, The Lord preached it first, but it was confirmed to us by them that heard Him. We got it second hand. They were second generation in terms of hearing the message.

But watch this. "God," verse 4, and here's a real key, "God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders and with diverse miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." Now this brings up a very important point. When Jesus preached the gospel, He also did some things that made it believable, didn't He?

He said if you can't believe what I say in any other way, believe it for the very what? Works' sake. Now Jesus went along, did miracles and then preached and thus He was confirming His Word, right? He claimed to be from God and then He did things that made it obvious He was from God. He said, "I, m from God, I'm speaking God's truth," and then He went over and healed somebody that was blind, and they said, "You're right."

And Nicodemus came to Him by night and said, "Lord, we know one thing, nobody can do the things that You do except" what? "God be with Him." So you see, Jesus confirmed His own ministry by His own miracles. And, of course, that was the message of Peter on the day of Pentecost. I think it's Acts 2:22, "Ye men of Israel," here goes Peter, "Hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs." Do you see? Jesus was approved, or His Word confirmed by signs, wonders and miracles. Do you know that the very same things that Peter talks about there are talked about here as the same confirming signs for the second generation preachers? Did you know that? Look at it again.

You say, "Well, how you going to believe these guys? They're so many false apostles running around, I mean, it's easy to believe Jesus cause you could see Him do a miracle. How you going to believe these guys.? You've got Peter, you've got Paul and you've got all these other guys running around and you've got Joe Blow over here and somebody else over here and they're shooting off their mouth like they're true prophets. I mean, who's what? How do you know? We don't have any Bible yet, who knows who's true?" And so, God bore them witness by giving them the ability to do the same things that Jesus had done, right? Signs, wonders, miracles and Jesus Himself even made the statement to His own disciples that greater works than these shall what?...ye do because I go to My Father. And they performed astounding miracles. They performed the raising of the dead, the healing of people, all kinds of miracles. And so it was that God confirmed them.

Now when you're arguing with the gospel of Jesus Christ, coming from the mouths of these Apostles, then you're arguing with the confirmation of God. This is not human philosophy right here in the New Testament. This is not some little guys little brain storm rolling out of his little pea brain, that isn't what it is. This is divine truth substantiated by signs and wonders and miracles. And if you don't think so, just start in chapter 5 of Acts and just read right straight through chapter 19 and you'll just read about one after the other of miracles that attended the ministry of these men.

You say, "Why the miracles?" God was saying believe them; they're from Me and it's proven by the ability they have to do miracles. Now the word "signs, wonders and miracles" are really synonyms. They're referring to all these marvelous supernatural things that these Apostles did. But then one other thing, not only did they confirm the Word with signs and wonders and miracles, and we'll make mention of that again in a moment, but also by gifts of the Holy Spirit. Do you see it there in verse 4? Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Now watch this gentle but powerful conclusion, "According to His own will." Now the question mark doesn't belong in that statement, the question mark belongs with the "How shall we escape?" What is it saying? It's saying gifts of the Holy Spirit come according to whose will? His will. Now that's almost shoved in there just to keep some people from getting messed up about how to get certain gifts. Subtle, isn't it?

I was talking to Dr. Earl Radmacher, the president of Western Seminary, and he said he got in the mail a pamphlet that gave the steps to be able to get the Holy Spirit. And first, you said two phrases, "Praise the Lord?" and "Hallelujah" three times faster than normal for a period of ten minutes. And that's . . . if you did it long enough, you'd lapse into a strange language and you'd get the Holy Spirit.

Well, that's about as ridiculous as anything you'll ever hear.

But anyway, the point is here that they had not only signs and wonders and miracles but gifts of the Holy Spirit that were given by God's will. Now, you say, "What were the gifts of the Holy Spirit?" Well, there were many of them. First Corinthians chapter 12 and Romans chapter 12 lists all the gifts. But these were miraculous gifts for the sake of confirmation.

A prophet comes to town, or an Apostle. He says, "Thus saith the ' Lord, thus saith the Lord, thus saith the Lord." Somebody says, "Oh yeah? I mean, how do we know?" And then he did some miracles. He exercised his gifts and they said, "You're right because what you do is obviously from God." They had supernatural power. Now what were these gifts? Let me show you a couple of passages very quickly. Second Corinthians 12:12, they not only had gifts specifically for them, but look at 12:12, "Truly the signs of an Apostle were wrought among you in all patience in signs, wonders and mighty deeds." These belong to the apostolic age, do you understand this? These signs, wonders, miracles and certain special gifts were for the apostolic age, they were not forever,

they're not for today, they were for confirming the Word.

In fact you have it in Romans 15 where Paul says, "Through mighty signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God so that from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ." Paul was an Apostle, he had these gifts. He had these abilities to do miracles.

In Acts chapter 14 and verse 3, "A long time, therefore, abode they speaking boldly in the Lord who gave testimony unto the Word of His grace and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands."

And here you see, you have the Apostles, again this being Barnabas and Paul, doing miracles.

You say, "Now why? Why did they do miracles?" As I just said, to confirm the Word. Over in 15:32 of Acts, it says, "And Judas and Silas being prophets also themselves exhorted the brethren with many words," listen to this, "and confirmed them." Now, they exhorted them and confirmed them. How did they confirm their words? With what? Signs, miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Now you say, "What were the gifts?" I believe there were four. I believe the gifts were healing, miracles, tongues and interpretation of tongues. These were the four special confirming gifts to prove to people by supernatural acts that these men spoke from God. And I also believe that these gifts, all, have ceased with the apostolic era. They have no need to exist today because there is no need to confirm the Word.

If a guy comes along and says, "Thus saith the Lord, thus saith the Lord, thus saith the Lord," and you say, "Hey, how do we know he's for real?" You don't need a miracle, what do you need? You match him up with the Word, right? When that which is perfect has come, then that which is partial is passed away. We don't need anymore confirming signs. Warfield, the great scholar of the Bible, said, "These miraculous gifts were part of the credentials of the Apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the church. Their function thus confined them to distinctively the apostolic church and they necessarily passed away with it."

For example, in 1 Corinthians 14:22, the Bible simply says, "And tongues are not for a sign to them that believe, but for a sign to them that believe not." They never had any relationship to believers.

They were purely and simply confirming miracles to unbelievers to show them these men spoke of God. And when the Word came, they ceased.

Do you see it? Three classic reasons that a man is a fool to neglect salvation: the character of Christ, the certainty of judgment and the confirmation of God. This gospel is a gospel that God has attested to with signs, wonders, miracles, gifts and now He attests to it in the miracle of His written Word. My friend, let it not be said of you that you neglected Jesus Christ.

History tells us that three hours neglect cost Napoleon Waterloo, and the neglect of Christ' salvation will cost you eternal blessing, eternal joy, and bring you damning judgment. Don't be so foolish as to drift past God's grace.

Let's pray, and while your heads are bowed, I want you to really search your heart as we close tonight. You're so patient as we present the Word of God and we so appreciate that. But I want you now to respond to what was said. Some of you I know personally have never received Jesus Christ, although I know you believe this and you come, but you've never received Him. And you're on that knife edge, that thin ice of slipping past the possibility of salvation into disaster. And it's not because you hate God and hate Christ, it's just because you neglect, it's just because you're careless, you're heedless. May it not be so tonight, O I pray, God, that right now you'll open your heart and invite Jesus Christ to come in. Just whisper a prayer in your heart and say, "Lord Jesus, I don't want to drift anymore, I believe it and right now I give You my life. You make it what You want me to be. I'm willing to count the cost." And do it. Don't neglect one more night. This may be it for you, I don't know that.

But don't let another night go by when you say no to Jesus when you know of His character, you know of His judgment, and you know that God has confirmed the gospel with signs, and wonders and mighty deeds.

Father, we pray as we close our service tonight, that You'll indeed speak to our hearts, that no one would leave without Jesus Christ, without a personal knowledge of Him that brings him into a glorious union with You and the forgiveness of all their sins and joy and love that You have to give. God, may no one be such a fool, duped by Satan as to walk away from grace and salvation and forgiveness. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

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