

Bible Study February 8, 2023

HEBREWS 2 (AMPLIFIED VERSION)

Give Heed

¹For this reason [that is, because of God's final revelation in His Son Jesus and because of Jesus' superiority to the angels] we must pay much closer attention than ever to the things that we have heard, so that we do not [in any way] drift away from truth.

These early believers were in danger of falling away from following Jesus. They had heard the gospel, but it had not sunk in. People raised in believing families and churches risk the same danger today. They hear the words and more or less agree, but intellectual assent to Christ's leadership does not make a person a disciple of Christ. Are you a Sunday school teacher, a small group leader, or a youth leader? Don't assume that people who comply and conform are truly committed to Christ. Get to know each person who attends your group, and challenge each one with the truth and implications of commitment to Christ. Don't surrender anyone to casual belief.

²For if the message given through angels [the Law given to Moses] was authentic and unalterable, and every violation and disobedient act received an appropriate penalty, ³how will we escape [the penalty] if we ignore such a great salvation [the gospel, the new covenant]? For it was spoken at first by the Lord, and it was confirmed to us and proved authentic by those who personally heard [Him speak],

The author challenged the original readers to pay attention to the truth they had heard so that they wouldn't drift away into false teachings. We are called to do the same. Paying careful attention requires hard work. It involves focusing our minds, bodies, and senses. Listening to God means not just hearing his words but also finding ways to put them into practice (see James 1:22-25). Listen to him more carefully than you do news reports. Follow him more consistently than you do your favorite media personalities. And be ready to carry out his instructions.

"The message God delivered through angels" reflects the teaching that angels, as messengers for God, had brought the law to Moses (see Galatians 3:19). A central theme of Hebrews is that Christ is infinitely greater than all other proposed ways to God (and, in fact, the only way). Just as Christ is greater than the angels, Christ's message exceeds what the angels had brought to Moses. No one will escape God's punishment if they disregard the salvation offered by Christ.

Eyewitnesses to Jesus' ministry had handed down his teachings to the readers of this book. These readers were second-generation believers who had not seen Christ in the flesh. We also have not seen Jesus personally. We base our belief in Jesus on the eyewitness accounts recorded in the Bible. (See John 20:29 for Jesus' encouragement to those who believe without ever having seen him.)

⁴[and besides this evidence] God also testifying with them [confirming the message of salvation], both by signs and wonders and by various miracles [carried out by Jesus and the apostles] and by [granting to believers the] gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

“God confirmed the message” continues the thought from 2:3. Those who had heard Jesus speak and then had passed on his words also had the truth of their words confirmed by “signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit.” In the book of Acts, miracles and gifts of the Spirit authenticated the Good News wherever it was preached (see Acts 9:31-42; 14:1-20). Paul—who discusses spiritual gifts in Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12–14; and Ephesians 4—taught that they were given to build up the church, making it strong and mature. When we see the gifts of the Spirit in an individual or congregation, we know that God is truly present. As we receive God’s gifts, we should thank him for them and put them to use for the good of the church.

Earth Subject to Man

⁵ It was not to angels that God subjected the [inhabited] world of the future [when Christ reigns], about which we are speaking. ⁶ But one has [solemnly] testified somewhere [in Scripture], saying,

***“WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU ARE MINDFUL OF HIM,
OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU GRACIOUSLY CARE FOR HIM?***

***⁷ “YOU HAVE MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER [in status] THAN THE ANGELS;
YOU HAVE CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR,
AND SET HIM OVER THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS;***

⁸ YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET [confirming his supremacy].”

Now in putting all things in subjection to man, He left nothing outside his control. But at present we do not yet see all things subjected to him.

Jesus Briefly Humbled

⁹ But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while [by taking on the limitations of humanity], crowned with glory and honor because of His suffering of death, so that by the grace of God [extended to sinners] He might experience death for [the sins of] everyone.

God put Jesus in charge of everything, and Jesus revealed himself to us. We do not yet see Jesus reigning on earth, but we can picture him in his heavenly glory. When you are confused by present events and anxious about the future, remember Jesus’ true position and authority. As Lord of all, who will one day rule on earth as he does now in heaven, he can be counted on to give you stability and insight regarding your daily decisions.

¹⁰ For it was fitting for God [that is, an act worthy of His divine nature] that He, for whose sake are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the author and founder of their salvation perfect through suffering [bringing to maturity the human experience necessary for Him to be perfectly equipped for His office as High Priest].

God’s grace to us led Christ to his death. Jesus did not come into the world to gain status or political power but to suffer and die so that we could have eternal life (“bring many children into glory”). If we find difficulty in identifying with Christ’s servant attitude, perhaps we need to evaluate

our own motives. Are we more interested in power or participation? Dominating or serving? Getting or giving?

Jesus was made the perfect leader, or pioneer, of our salvation through his suffering as the complete sacrifice for us (see the notes on 5:8-9). Jesus did not need to suffer for his own salvation because he was God in human form. He perfectly obeyed God through his own painful crucifixion to finalize our salvation. When we suffer, we carry on Jesus' work. Our suffering can make us, as servants of God, more sensitive to the needs of others. People who have dealt with pain are able to reach out with compassion to others who hurt. If you have suffered, ask God to use your experience to help others.

¹¹ Both Jesus who sanctifies and those who are sanctified [that is, spiritually transformed, made holy, and set apart for God's purpose] are all from one Father; for this reason He is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, ¹² saying,

"I WILL DECLARE YOUR (the Father's) NAME TO MY BRETHREN (believers), IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE."

¹³ And again [He says],

"MY TRUST and CONFIDENT HOPE WILL BE PLACED IN HIM."

And again,

"HERE I AM, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME."

We who have been set apart for God's service, cleansed, and made holy (sanctified) by Jesus now have the same Father he has; Jesus has made us his brothers and sisters. Various psalms look forward to Christ and his work in the world. Here the writer quotes a portion of Psalm 22, one of these messianic psalms. Because God has adopted all believers as his children, Jesus calls them his brothers and sisters. We all share God as our Father. In his sight we are all equally his children, so we must never look down on or mistreat any of his other children.

¹⁴ Therefore, since [these His] children share in flesh and blood [the physical nature of mankind], He Himself in a similar manner also shared in the same [physical nature, but without sin], so that through [experiencing] death He might make powerless (ineffective, impotent) him who had the power of death—that is, the devil— ¹⁵ and [that He] might free all those who through [the haunting] fear of death were held in slavery throughout their lives.

It was a necessary part of God's plan that Jesus become human to die and rise again in order to destroy the devil's power over death (Romans 6:5-11). By doing this, Christ delivered us from eternal death and freed us to live with him. When we belong to God, we need not fear death, because we know that death opens the doorway into eternal life (1 Corinthians 15). Jesus defeated death, so all who dread death can find the hope that Christ's victory brings. How can you share this certainty with those close to you?

¹⁶ For, as we all know, He (Christ) does not take hold of [the fallen] angels [to give them a helping hand], but He does take hold of [the fallen] descendants of Abraham [extending to them His hand of deliverance]. ¹⁷ Therefore, it was essential that He had to be made like His brothers (mankind) in every respect, so that He might [by experience] become a merciful and faithful High Priest in things related to God, to make atonement (propitiation) for the people's sins [thereby wiping away the sin, satisfying divine justice, and providing a way of reconciliation between God and mankind].

In the Old Testament, the high priest was the mediator between God and his people. His job was to regularly offer animal sacrifices according to the law and to intercede with God for forgiveness of the people's sins. Now we have Jesus Christ as our High Priest. He bridges the gap between us and our holy Father. Having lived as a human being, he understands our weaknesses. He has once and for all paid the penalty for our sins by his own sacrificial death (atonement), and he has restored our broken relationship with God. We are released from sin's domination and controlling power when we commit ourselves fully to Christ, trusting completely in what he has done for us. (For more on Jesus as the great High Priest, see the note on 4:14).

¹⁸ Because He Himself [in His humanity] has suffered in being tempted, He is able to help and provide immediate assistance to those who are being tempted and exposed to suffering.

Knowing that Jesus suffered pain and faced temptation helps us face our trials. Jesus understands and empathizes with our struggles because he faced them as a human being. We can trust Christ to help us survive suffering and overcome temptation. When you face trials, go to Jesus for strength and patience. He knows your needs and will help you (see 4:14-16).