

So Great Salvation

By Paris Reidhead

(Transcript of Tape)

Will you please turn to Hebrews, Chapter 1. I want you to notice carefully the first two verses, and then without delay we'll read Chapter 2, verse 1. Now, there's a reason which I will explain. The balance of Chapter 2, from verse three on, exalts the Lord Jesus above angels in His character and office. Whereas we recognize this we are desirous of knowing why.

"God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; 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. For if the word 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, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;"

The Scriptures tell us that the word of angels was steadfast.

God respected, honored and attested the word of angels. If this were true, and it was, how much more should we expect Him to honor, respect and confirm the word of His Son.

Let's center our attention on Hebrews 2:3, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation; ..."

The word salvation is an immense word. When you trace it through the New Testament you will find that there are actually four tenses of salvation.

- 1) The Present Perfect Tense: I have been saved, from the pleasure of sin .. repentance,
- 2) The Past Tense: I was saved, from the penalty of sin .. justification,
- 3) Present Continuous Tense: I am being saved, from the power of sin ... sanctification
- 4) The Future Tense: I shall be saved, from the presence of sin ... glorification.

If someone questions, "Are you saved?" it would be quite in order for you to say, "How do you mean it: I was saved, I have been saved, I am being saved, or I shall be saved."

The word "saved" has been usually compressed by most of us to be equivalent to forgiveness, but in the Bible the meaning is far more inclusive than just pardoned. In Romans 13:11 the Apostle Paul says, "for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." If He has saved us by His death, how much more shall we be saved by His life?

Salvation is an immense word, as is the word sanctification. In the mind of God our sanctification was planned before the world began. It was accomplished at Calvary, and it became ours potentially at the point of repentance. It became ours experientially as we saw ourselves in union with Christ and will be effective throughout the endless ages of eternity.

These are vast words, immense words. When we read in Hebrews 1:3, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation;" we cannot say, "Well, thank God, my sins are pardoned. I haven't neglected salvation." The word here used includes everything that God in grace has done for His people through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. The warning given in Hebrews 1:3 is not regarding pardon from past sins alone. It is neglecting anything that the Lord provided for His people, and thus deals with that heart of indolence that selectively says, "Well, I'd like this from the Lord, but really, I'm not the least interested in any more."

The admonition in the first verse is equally explicit: "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard," Why? Because there is a tendency to allow precious things to slip through out hands.

At great sacrifice as a fledgling Baptist preacher I had given my bride-to-be a diamond engagement ring, which she wore constantly, along with the gold wedding band after we were married. We tried to make our mud brick, thatched roof African hut an attractive home by bordering the path leading to the house with colorful zinnias. It was the beginning of the rainy season and the heavy clay soil was sticky, like glue. Whenever Marjorie passed down the path she automatically pulled weeds threatening the young zinnia plants. One day, after such a routine procedure, my wife entered the house and proceeded to wash her hands. To her dismay and grief the set in her diamond ring was gone, pulled out by the sticky mud attached to the weeds. That which Marjorie prized greatly was gone ... lost forever.

I believe this is implied in the text. We become concerned about daily routines. Truth which was in the eternal mind and heart of God and purchased at the tremendous price of the blood of Christ, just slips through out fingers and slides away; not intentionally, but we are left with nothing but regrets. It isn't refusal; it isn't rejection, it is neglect. The question is, "How are we going to face Him who purchased these priceless privileges with His precious blood, included them in His word, and had expounded them to our hearts? How are we going to escape?"

What are the consequences? You understand, of course, that if a person neglects repentance and faith in Jesus Christ he will be forever in hell. I am confident that in hell there are multitudes of people who intended some day to repent. I can't believe that everyone in hell made up his mind at some point of crisis that he was determined to be lost.

Years ago I had an interesting conversation with a young man in Richmond, Virginia. At the request of his mother-in-law, as the visiting evangelist/missionary speaker, I had called in the home. The subject of "religion" was eventually broached.

He proclaimed firmly, "Religion is all right for the old, Christianity and salvation are good for people when they are on their last legs. But anyone who is as young as I am doesn't want to be saddled with a lot of 'do's and don'ts; When I get old enough to take my social security, I'll also take my 'heaven security', and I'll get along fine until then. Right now, sir, don't bother me."

I replied, "Alright, I'll draw up a contract and have you sign it."

So I took a piece of paper his wife's mother had handed me and drew up a contract.

"Because I do not know that I'll live to be old enough to draw my social security and because I have no certainty of tomorrow and because I have made up my mind that I am NOT going to do anything with Jesus Christ until I get to be at least sixty-five I hereby relinquish now and forever all interest in the death of Christ and declare to all to whom this paper may come that I refuse hereafter to consider myself a candidate for salvation. I am determined to go to hell. I have made up my mind that I shall be lost, if lostness is the consequence of my action. I am simply not interested in Jesus Christ."

I handed him the contract. "Will you sign that? In the presence of these witnesses?"

His face blanched as he read the contract.

"No, I won't sign that. Do you think I am a fool?"

I replied, "Yes, I actually do. You have essentially signed it by telling those present that it is your intention to do nothing with Jesus Christ until some point in the indefinite future. You might as well get the thing off your mind so that when people trouble you in the future you can say, 'No I settled that, one Sunday afternoon, in my mother-in-law's house. I just made up my mind that I wasn't going to be bothered about it anymore.' I think that would be the wiser course, rather than just somehow going to do it. In the meantime you are hardening your heart against any work of the Spirit of God!"

The young man said, "Preacher, you put it to me in a hard way. I don't know what I am going to do, but I assure you this, I'm going to think more than I have in the past."

I wish I could assure that this encounter had a happy ending. I can't. I don't know the outcome. At least the seed was sown. I am convinced that hell is filled with people who have said "someday, not now, but some day."

"And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus, Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day." II Thessalonians 1:7-10.

God has promised that every knee shall bow to His Son. (Philippians 2:10-11) But He gave to men and women the option as to WHEN they bow. You can bow now in time, entreated by the Spirit of God, warned by the Word of God, wooed by the love of God. Or you can refuse to bow now, with your head unbowed and your back unbent and meet Jesus Christ at the Great White Throne where He shall be seated in judgment, and the Lamb's book of life will be opened wherein the names of the redeemed are written. (Revelation 21:27) (Philippians 2:5-11)

God promised that every knee would bow to His Son. You have a choice. You will bow willingly in repentance and faith .. and live ... or bow, forced by the majesty of God, and to out into eternal darkness, have acknowledged under pressure what you refused to acknowledge under grace. This is the tragedy of neglect!

There is another truth to consider. We have somehow gotten the idea that whereas it is of tremendous importance to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Saviour, it isn't nearly as important to accept the other provisions of His death. I think this grows out of our misuse of the word "saved." I call to your attention that no one claimed that he was "saved" in a personal testimony.

Read what the Apostle Paul said in II Timothy 1:9 and Galatians 1:16. There were others who testified to the grace of God in their lives, but they did not use the word "saved." I think we have misled a lot of people into thinking that the only interest God has is for people to sign up for a room in eternity. If some eager souls want to go on to the "deeper life or the higher life, or the fuller life or the sanctified life" that's up to them. I believe this is not defensible from the Word of God.

John the Baptist preached repentance (Matthew, chapter three) He proclaimed to his generation that repentance was the means whereby the barrier between man and God was removed and the end of God's grace was to bring mankind into fellowship with God. God's great purpose in grace is not just to take us to heaven when we die. It is to save us from sin. It is to make us like Jesus Christ and to bring us into vital, living, warm, experiential fellowship with Him during the days of our pilgrimage. Then because He has already brought heaven to us, it will be a simple matter for Him to transport us to heaven. Heaven was to begin in our hearts.

Now, I'll say another thing with which I believe you will agree. Suppose God were to send you to heaven and wouldn't come Himself ... give you a mansion right down on the main street of glory, next to the River of Life, and even give you permission to sell bricks of the golden streets to the rest of the inhabitants ... it would not be heaven. All of those things don't make it "heaven". It is the revelation of God. That which your heart demands is not a place, not things, and a situation, but a Person. Let's do away with the materialistic concept! Heaven is the presence of the King of the Lord of Glory, of Jesus Christ.

I would like to emphasize that everything that the Lord Jesus provided is important, everything that was included in His death on the cross was important. So you can't sit back and smugly say, "I'm justified, I'm pardoned, I'm forgiven; that is salvation. There may be a few little heights for others to climb, but as far as I am concerned, I have the important thing." You are mistaken. Everything is important! Therefore, how are we going to escape if we neglect anything that God intended to be ours? There ought to come into every heart an avid hunger to have all that the Lord Jesus died to make ours, to be all that He intended us to be and to experience everything that is ours.

Let me give you an illustration. Suppose you are justified but have a complete indifference to the things of God. When you get home to heaven, the first thing the Lord says is "Come with me, child", and He takes you to the warehouse of His grace. He throws back the big double doors, exposing the deep shelves lined with things He purchased with His blood, signed, sealed, packaged and addressed to you in the various stages of your pilgrimage. Here was help when you were sick, victory when you were tempted, the power of the Holy Spirit when you were entrusted with tasks. In your imagination, He quotes promises from His holy Book and says, "Here is a provision for you. Why didn't you take it? You hobbled along broken, defeated. You could have run. You could have flown as an eagle, but you crawled as a worm in the dust. See what your life was. This is what it might have been."

How are you to escape the heartache and grief that comes from realizing that you have robbed the Lord Jesus of the glory He could have gotten out of your life if you had cared about the provisions of His love? You were stubborn, hardhearted, indifferent, preoccupied. You were satisfied with a crumb when you could have had a loaf! All the time you have been dishonoring Him because you have been less than He provided .. less that He expected.

Suppose I were to send my children to school with their clothes in tatters and their shoes worn out. Suppose my children had completely forgotten about the box of new shoes on the shelf. Further, suppose my children went to school hungry having neglected the food that has been put on the table. When they go out into the community they are dishonoring their Father. The father is responsible to provide for his children. When the children of God spurn the provisions of God's grace and neglect that which He has given, they are actually putting their heavenly Father to shame. They are dishonoring Him because here were provisions of life that in His infinite wisdom He knew His people needed to be strengthened and helped and encouraged and delivered so they could walk in the presence of a skeptical world manifesting victory, joy and peace. They honor their Father.

What are you going to do about it, dear child of God, when you get home to heaven "by the skin of your teeth", yet every step of the way you dishonored the Father Who loves you, and whom you profess to love, by simply neglecting the provisions of His love and grace? Can you see the tremendous importance which is attached to this text?

"Well", you say, "if God wanted me to have these benefits, wouldn't He force them on me?" I think not. God has given us promises through which we are made partakers of the divine nature. He has told us that we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. The god of this world is trying to make these promises unimportant. We are so busy with daily life. Even when we meet someone who claims to have victory and peace, they don't seem any different. Our reaction? "What's the use? What's the value?" The net result is we let these promises slide through our hands. Consequently we have robbed the Lord Jesus Christ of what He has a right to expect from us.

What did the Lord say about this "so great salvation"? Turn to Matthew 5:20. "For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." What was their righteousness? It was the righteousness that a dedicated mind and a consecrated intellect could produce without the Holy Spirit. The Scribes and Pharisees fasted, they tithed, they prayed, they abstained from eating meat, they observed holy days, they memorized scripture, they were zealous in talking about their religion. All of these things can be done without the Holy Spirit. You can be orthodox in your theology, evangelistic in your zeal and missionary in your fervor. You can be devout in your practice, all with the natural energy with which you had previously served the devil. So the Lord Jesus Christ said the righteousness which prepares you for heaven is not that which you produce by your energy, but it is that which is produced in you by another source entirely. It is that righteousness which is from above.

It is the work of God in you.

Now turn to Luke 13:5: "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Have you repented, or have you neglected it? How are you going to escape, for Christ has declared that if you don't repent, you'll perish. We have defined repentance as a change of mind, of intention and purpose, from pleasing self to pleasing God. For in it is the seed of all righteousness and all holiness. Your intention is now to please God and your purpose is to glorify God and the end of your being is His satisfaction.

Now turn to Matthew 13:3. Christ has been walking with his disciples. They have been arguing as to which of them would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Disturbed by their pettiness, our Lord called a little child unto them, set the child on His knee, and turned to His disciples and said, "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

The word "convert" means "to turn again." Our Lord is saying that though the disciples have repented, though they have received Him, the evidence of the genuineness of His work in their hearts is that every time their mind is in conflict with his mind, His mind prevails. Thus, you will find it stated in Romans 12:1-2: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service, And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Many of the things that you carried into this life of forgiveness and pardon were not ordained of Him, nor were they according to His will. At every step of the pilgrimage you will find that some attitude is in conflict with what He proscribes. The Spirit of God may stop you abruptly, saying "You can't proceed that way!" What do you do? Turn about and go His way. You have a constant attitude of rectification.

It is like driving. You have to decide to which town you are going. But when that is determined, you don't just lock your wheels and step on the gas. You'll be in trouble. After you have determined your destination and are headed in that direction, you make many minute corrections, slight adjustments to keep your car safe on the highway. That's plain commonsense! In life you have a disposition and purpose to serve God. When you sense your life drifting, by God's grace, you rectify it. You must have an attitude of constant correction to the will of God and a continuous concern to please Him. A transaction sometime in the past is not enough!

Now turn to John 3:1-21. Note what Jesus says about "this great salvation." (John 3:3) Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:5) "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:7) "Ye must be born again." Our Lord Jesus has made it expressly clear that preparation for salvation is not something that we have done toward God, but something that God has done toward us.

Oh, there is something you must do: repent and believe. But the evidence of the genuineness of your repentance and your faith isn't that you remember when you repented and when you believed but that God regenerated you by the Holy Ghost and gave you the witness of the Spirit that you had passed from death to life. This is a point of tremendous significance. How are we going to escape if we neglect it. Your righteousness is produced by God through the sovereign and supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. Oh, it's a tremendous thing, this salvation!

Now turn to John 6:53. Jesus is talking to a company of people who were going to make him king. They were going to be His disciples. But we find that they have asked him for certification, to do a miracle to prove that He was who they thought He was and who He said He was.

Jesus said, "I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth he, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live forever." (John 6:48-58)

You see, salvation is not in a plan, salvation is not in scripture verses and in ordinances and all the scheme of theology. Salvation is not in a decision, salvation is not in a pronouncement of an evangelist, a pastor or a teacher. Salvation is a Person. (Psalm 27: 1) "The Lord is my light and my sa1vation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

You understand, therefore, that salvation is Christ. He is our light. He is our salvation. He didn't die to send it; He died to become it. He isn't just some Savior because He's in heaven. He has to be in you. In II Corinthians 13:5 Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" So, it isn't just Christ on the cross, or Christ in the tomb, or Christ raised from the dead on the throne. It is Christ in us, the hope of glory.

Christ said that to have life was to have Him become to united with you that it was though you have eaten His flesh and drunk His blood; He has become the life of your life, bone of your bone. He's joined Himself to you and you have received Him. This is the testimony of the Word. How important it is that you shouldn't miss heaven by eighteen inches. Is your salvation in your mind, or in your heart?

Years ago in a Sunday morning service in Chattanooga, Tennessee, a young man came forward in response to an invitation given. A personal worker with a card and snap board approached him with the question, "What did you come for?"

"I came to be saved", was the response.

"From what?"

"I didn't know there was a choice ... sin and hell, I guess."

"Are you a sinner?"

"Yes, or I would not be here."

The personal worker opened his Bible. "Read that!"

The young man read, "He that hath the Son hath life and he that hath not the Son of God hath: not life." (I John 5: 12)

The man with the clipboard asked, "Do you believe it?"

"Yes, I believe it."

"Now, do you want to be baptized?"

"Well, I don't know. I guess so; I suppose so."

"Do you have any questions?"

The seeker replied: "Yes, there is a question. I just read that verse, 'He that hath the Son hath life;' and I told you that I believed it, and that's true, but there is just one question. How do you get the Son?"

"Oh" the personal worker replied, "don't worry about that. We'll take care of that in one of the Sunday school classes. The important thing for you to know now is that you believe the verse."

So the worker signed the young man's name to the card on his clipboard, and then minutes later he was baptized and joined the church.

The personal worker later came to a pastor friend of his. "You know, I've been a little bit troubled. The man believed that verse alright, but I've just been thinking, maybe we ought to do a little more than we do. Life isn't in the verse. Life is in the Son. Have I been wrong about that?"

And his pastor friend responded, "My dear brother, you have been so wrong. You have been so wrong!"

Multitudes of people in that judgment day are going to hear Him say, "Away with you, for I never knew you." Can you see how important it is that you are not included in that number? The Scribes and Pharisees knew him, they knew the right things to say, the right places to go, the right things to do. But they had never had a relationship with Christ as a person. You must understand this truth.

However, we don't stop there. Turn to John 12:20-26. Our Lord Jesus Christ continues to instruct us. A group of Greeks have come to Philip, "Sir, we would see Jesus."

"And Jesus answered them saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I saw unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour."

Four times in the ministry Jesus mentioned the word 'cross'.

1) Matthew 10:38: "And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."

2) Mark 10:21: He said to the rich young ruler; "One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up thy cross, and follow Me."

3) Matthew 16:24: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

4) Luke 14:27: "And whosoever doth not beat his cross, and come after Me, cannot be my disciple."

The only four times the Lord Jesus mentioned the word 'cross' was in reference to His disciples. No wonder His disciples did not understand!

Let's refer back to the immensity of the word "salvation." Salvation includes saving us from sin but from the world. We have lived in this world; it has governed and controlled us. We have sought its rewards and served its interests.

In addition, salvation includes salvation from the flesh, our own personality and nature, traits and interests; those habits and attitudes we have developed and acquired. Another thing included is salvation from the devil. We were his bond slaves. We had given him control of our lives, at the age of accountability. The Lord Jesus died to set His people free. "Whom the Son makes free is free indeed." (John 8:36) You are free from the fear of death, free from the fear of hell, free from the power of the devil. This is all part of His great salvation. No wonder the writer of Hebrews says, "How can we escape it we neglect so great salvation!?" God's salvation intends deliverance from the penalty of our sin and from the certainty of hell, from the power of the flesh, the personality, the nature and the traits of the individual. This immense salvation includes deliverance from the power of Satan himself and the demons of darkness. How unthinkable it is to be selective!

After President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation freeing slaves in Confederate states, a plantation owner in the backwaters of Mississippi explained this landmark decision to his illiterate slaves in this manner. "I can't sell you to anyone else, so you can work for me under the direction of the overseer, live in the slave cabins with your usual diet. Your families won't be separated since I can't sell you, but your daily life will be the same."

The unfortunate slaves labored under that misinformation and abuse year after year until some outsider finally explained what "emancipation" meant. . .FREEDOM.

Years ago an Englishman had made his fortune in the gold fields in California. He was returning to England to live. He forwarded his wealth to London and came overland by stage and river steamer to New Orleans. From there he planned to take a ship to New York and from there to England.

As a tourist in New Orleans he did as most tourists do; he went down to the slave market. In the early 1850's slaves were still being sold in New Orleans and elsewhere in the South. It was a noisy, active market. Men were gathered observing a young, very beautiful black woman who was up for bid. He heard the men's comments as they were speaking about her. He saw two evil looking men bidding for her, quite heatedly, and then he overheard them say what they would do with her. His heart revolted against the whole swinish business.

Finally, as the bids rose higher and more frenzied, he beckoned to the auctioneer and quoted a figure which was exactly twice the last bid, utterly beyond anything that had ever been paid for a slave in New Orleans before.

The auctioneer said, "Have you the money?" "Yes, I have." So the bill of sale was made out. The Englishman went over to the block to claim the woman he had purchased. As she came down one step and stood just about level with his eyes, she spat full in his face and hissed through her clenched teeth, "I hate you."

He said nothing. With the back of his hand he wiped the spittle away. Then he took her by the hand, walked down the street, through the mud, and down another street. Finally they came to a little office building. She couldn't read and didn't know what the building was.

The Englishman went to the desk and began to speak. The man behind the desk began to protest. Ignoring the agent's protests, the Englishman said, "I insist. It's the law. I insist."

Finally, after the business transaction was completed, the Englishman received a paper with an official seal. He then walked over to the black woman, who was like a beast ready to spring on him. He extended the paper to her. "Here are your manumission papers. You are free."

Still she hissed, "I hate you."

"Don't you understand? Here are your manumission papers. You are free."

"No, I don't understand. You paid twice as much for me as any buyer in the New Orleans market, now you are giving me my freedom. I don't believe you."

"Yes, these are your manumission papers, signed and officially sealed." And he put them in her hand.

"Do you mean to say that you bought me to set me free?"

"Yes, that is why I bought you; to set you free."

Tears came up into her eyes. Her face softened, and then she slipped to her knees and reached down and put her hands on those rough miner's boots, and then laid her cheek down on the toe of one of them. Through her tears she sobbed, "You bought me to set me free; you bought me to set me free. You paid an exorbitant price just to set me free!"

Then she choked through her tears, "Sir, all I want in life is to be your slave. You bought me, to set me FREE."

Listen, the Lord Jesus Christ bought you, to set you free. When you comprehend that it's the joy of your life to be His bonds slave forever. He bought you. He bought you to set you free, not only from hell, but from the world and the flesh and the devil. Oh, come to Him, kiss His nail pierced feet, and through humble tears, surrender yourself to Him who is most holy, and serve Him. Amen.