



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hebrews 2:1-4

“The Danger of Drifting”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we turn again to Thee with thanksgiving for the word of God. We thank Thee for the warnings of Scripture, which we are so much in need of, for our tendencies are to turn away from Holy Scripture, as a result of the nature that we have inherited from Adam. We thank Thee for the encouragements and we thank Thee also for those passages that stir us, help us to realize our short comings, our sins, our failures, and those that by the help of the Holy Spirit cause us to turn more zealously to the doing of Thy will as set forth in the word of God. We thank Thee for this great epistle and for its message to us, and we pray that we may be responsive to that message this evening, as we study Thy word.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] We are turning to Hebrews chapter 2, verse 1 through verse 4, and our subject is, “The Danger of Drifting.” We finished chapter 1 and now in chapter 2 in verse 1, the writer of the epistle says.

“Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every

transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?”

Clarence Edward McCartney was the pastor for many years of the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh and of several other churches too, but this was the major ministry that he had. And he's written a number of books, and among them is the book entitled, “The Greatest Questions of the Bible and of Life.” And among the chapters in that book are these questions. If a man died, shall he live again? Job chapter 14. How can man be justified with God? Job chapter 25. My God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Matthew chapter 27. What shall I do with Jesus? Matthew also chapter 27. What must I do to be saved? Acts chapter 16. What if he gain the world and lose his soul? Matthew chapter 16. And then, not surprisingly, one of the first if not the first in the Bible, Where art thou? Genesis chapter 3.

Now, I think, if I were looking at the great questions of the Bible, I would surely include the one that we've just read. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?

George Truett, who was the pastor of the First Baptist Church here in Dallas for many years, a very famous preacher and a very outstanding preacher, whom I happened to hear a couple of times when I was a first year student at Dallas Seminary, said in one of his books of sermons, “The world is a battlefield covered with wrecks, occasioned by neglect.” There's a story that he tells in that particular book where that citation is found, of Napoleon's soldiers, who were marching over the desert, and as so often happens when marching over the desert with the hot sun shining down and wanting to have water, finally, after some hours of marching, one of the soldiers thought he saw a lake in front of them and the soldiers began to run toward it. But, of course, they had the

common experience of those who have contact with a mirage, the more they ran the more the lake ran, also, and finally they came to realize that what they had seen was simply a mirage. And then, he went on to say that, “Human life without God is, at best, a mirage.”

Now, our author has masterfully set forth the divine glory of Christ, the Son of God, God’s last word. He has begun, “God, who at sundry times [or various times] and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.” The word of God, in the last days, I think it’s fair to say, it’s God’s last word. Now, not last word in the sense that He will never speak again, because this same epistle tells us that in the last days He will speak from heaven. But, for us, at least, it’s God’s last word and after so many centuries, it still is God’s final word to us. So having in the first chapter outlined the significance of the message in such a person as a Son, citing seven passages from the Old Testament in order to tell us who the Son is, how great he is as we’ve been pointing out, he’s Yahweh. He may be called that. He is the Lord. He is God. All of these terms are terms that in certain circumstances are applicable to him, the second person of the divine Trinity. And so now having done that, looking at the Scripture, pointing out who He is, and what it means for God to speak to us in such a person as a divine Son, he pauses now to warn us of one of the great human failings, neglect.

I would imagine if I were to ask you to raise your hand, do you feel the sense of one of the great difficulties in the Christian life is the sense of your neglect of the things that God has offered you in the Lord Jesus Christ? I think, all of us would say, yes, we have been guilty there. And this is one of the great things that we have to contend with; the neglect of this great revelation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, we’re going to look at it, and we’ll look at it first, the content of this warning and then the reason why it’s so dangerous. And then, we’ll conclude.

Notice the first word of chapter 2, the word, “Therefore.” In the original text, this is a prepositional phrase. It really means, “On account of this,” literally. But the idea of therefore, that is, a sense of an inference derived from the preceding is fairly close to the sense. What he’s really saying is something like, “on account of this,” or “because of this great revelation that has been given to us.” Then this question is applicable to us by way of application. So this particular little phrase, translated “therefore” in my version, connects with the Son’s greatness. And if we thought about his greatness at all, we could say, “And O what greatness He really possesses.” “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard.” Now, this is the message, “The things that we have heard.” He’s just said, “God has in these last days spoken to us in such a person as a Son.” This is what we have heard. This is the message that reveals what God intends to say to us. It brings us to God. We have heard Him. We ought to give the more earnest heed.

Now, I think, anyone who thinks about the message that God has given to us in the Bible would agree that if it is true that we are His creatures and placed here upon the earth by God’s creative power, and I might say too, his divine grace, then we who are his creatures ought to give him “first place.” Should we not? We surely should give Him first place. Not only should we give Him first place, but we should also give to him the best use of the powers with which he has endowed us. Now, we know that among men and women there are differences of powers. Some, at least for some purposes, have greater powers than others. These are mysteries hidden within the creative power of God. It’s really not true that all men are created equal. We know that. If we look out over humanity, we can see that that is true. All men are not created equal.

We all are responsible, however, to respond to that which God has given to us in a way that will honor Him and those of us who may not have the gifts that some have are still responsible. And according to Scripture, the way in which God responds to us will be in accordance with the gifts that He has given to us. So we should not feel that we

have been neglected if we do not have the powers and gifts of some other individuals. We are responsible for those things that he has given to us. It's not right to God, we can say, if we do not use the powers that he has given us; it's not right to ourselves. Every individual who does not give himself wholeheartedly to using that which God has given to him in the best possible way, first of all, in a relationship to God and then in a relationship to our fellow man, is not responding to what God has done for us in the way that we should. And, furthermore, it's not right to others about us to not give ourselves wholeheartedly to the development of the powers that He has given to us. We are responsible to ourselves, we're responsible to God, we're responsible to our fellow men. In the Christian church, of course, we are particularly responsible to one another in the body of Christ to use the things that God has given us for our good, for the glory of God, and for the benefit of others. It's not only “not right,” it's not safe, because we are to be judged according to the powers, the benefits, the blessings that God has brought to us.

Mr. Truett tells a very touching story. I have told this story several times and, particularly, when I come to this passage. But it always touches me very much. And, as a matter of fact, when I looked at it again after not having seen it in a little while, the other day sitting by my desk, I must confess, in my old age I'm getting sentimental, I guess, but a few tears rolled down my face. They don't roll down my face often enough. But they did when I read this story again.

It's a story of Mr. Truett going to a locality to preach and in this particular place there were some lawyers who were attending the services. He was holding meetings, as I remember, and each night two young lawyers, whom he later met, were in the audience. He was introduced to them. And, finally, while the meetings were going on, he determined that he would go and visit the men. They were lawyers in the same firm. And he visited them and said after a few moments of discussion, they opened up to him and he asked them, though he knew that they had been attending the meetings, why they had not given themselves wholeheartedly to the Lord Jesus Christ. And, one of them

spoke and said, “Mr. Truett, it may seem very strange to you but, this is the reason why. We have come to this community and we have taken, as young lawyers, another older lawyer as our model. And this individual has been our model. And since he is our model, we’ve noticed some things about him. First of all, he’s not a really religious man. He’s well known in this community, well liked in this community, but he’s not a religious man. So far as we know, he’s not a Christian. And so we have sought to follow him in order that we might be a success in the community.” And, he apologized for it, but he said, that was the way it was.

Mr. Truett said, “As they were telling me their story, I knew what I had to do next.” He said, “I left them, walked across the street, went into the building where the lawyer who was their model was, went into his office and went in to talk to him.” He said, he was an unusually fine man, well respected in the community. And he said, “When I walked in and introduced myself, I said that I had a question for him; a question of ethics.” And he said, “The lawyer, the distinguished lawyer, the respected lawyer, said to him, ‘Well, isn’t that a question for preachers?’ And he laughed a bit.” And Dr. Truett went on to say, “This question is one I would like to ask you.” He said, “Well, what is it?” He said, “Well, the question is this, is it right, does a man have the right to do something in the doing of which he will bring harm to others?” And he said, the lawyer, who was a judge, incidentally, the lawyer, who was a judge said to him, “No, of course not. It’s not right to do something in the doing of which you wrong others.”

And then, Mr. Truett said, “Well, I’d like to tell you the story that I’m bringing to you. And it’s this.” And he told him the story of the two young lawyers, who were using him as their model. And they were not coming to the Lord Jesus Christ and giving themselves wholeheartedly to Him because of the testimony or the witness or the example of the judge. He said, “The judge became very agitated when he told him what he told him.” He said, “He walked over to the window, stood there for a few moments, came back to Mr. Truett and said, ‘I’ll be at the services tonight.’” And so that night, Mr.

Truett said, he preached and he said, “I must confess, I preached for that man as well as for others. And in the course of the message, at the conclusion of it, at the appeal of it, I gave an appeal for people to come to the Lord Jesus Christ, and especially to those who may in their actions have harmed others. And he gave the invitation and when he gave the invitation, down came the judge. Down the aisle, walked up to Mr. Truett, shook his hand, and said to him, ‘The question on ethics has really struck home with me.’ And he received Jesus Christ as his personal Savior, obviously. He said, ‘When you left the room, Mr. Truett, this morning, I got down upon my knees. I fell on my knees,’ he said. And cried out, ‘O God, can it really be that I have been keeping two other men from coming to the knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?’ And I gave myself to Him this morning, after you had been in my office.” Mr. Truett said, “Judge, look behind you.” And there were the two young lawyers who had come down, too, and, also at that meeting turned to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I don’t think that we realize how often our actions affect other people. The kinds of things that we do are things that do affect others and affect them with responsibilities toward eternity. So our author says, “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard,” things concerning Christ, “lest we drift away.” That’s a very interesting expression. The Authorized Version has something like, “Lest we let them slip.” But, it really is, “Lest we drift away.”

The metaphors that lie back of this verb are many. Like a ring falling off one’s finger. I remember that happening in a wedding that I was observing. I was sitting up front in Charleston, South Carolina. It was at a wedding with Citadel Cadets, and one of them was marrying one of my relatives. And I was on about the third row. And when the minister asked for the ring, the young man, I got a good look at his face, and he lifted up his hand and looked at it, and obviously the ring was not there because he looked around, he had his gloves on, he was dressed in his regalia. And he had put his ring over his glove and while he was standing there or in the vestry, the ring had fallen off. It

turned out it was in the vestry. He was, the minister, however, was very quick, and he immediately reached out and acted as if he was taking the ring. And they went through the ceremony without a ring, saying the things that they were supposed to say with the ring. And afterwards, I found out afterwards, of course, they did find the ring in the vestry. Sometimes, the neglect issues in such a thing as a ring falling off a finger. Or, particularly, this word was used of ships or boats that slipped by a dock, slipped by the dock in the harbor. And so, “Lest we drift away,” the illustration is that of currents that draw a boat past the place where they should dock.

And, one might ask, “Lest we drift away,” what does that mean? What are the things that cause us to drift away? Well, the current of satanic deception. We do know that Satan is anxious to blind our eyes. He blinds the eyes of those that believe not, lest they do turn to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There is the current of temptation, which carries many away. There is the current of the riches and cares of this world. Our Lord tells the illustration of the parable of the sower. And he speaks of the seed being thrown on the ground and the birds coming and taking the seed away. All of these things, it seems to me, apply to us. The cares, the riches, and the trifles of the world are things that cause us to miss what God would have us have. “Therefore, we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift by,” the picture of the boat drifting by the dock and missing connection. What God is interested in, is in the boat being moored to, fast moored to, within the harbor, to the dock in an immovable way.

Why? Well, he says, “For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation.” You can see what the author is talking about. He’s saying, in the Old Testament in the Scriptures as they knew them, the word spoken through angels was steadfast. And when a person broke the Law of Moses, he suffered for it. That’s what they mean, “If the word spoken through angels.” That’s the Mosaic Law.

Paul and Stephen, both, tell us this. You cannot find it really clearly in the Old Testament, but they plainly say that the law was given by God through angelic mediation. So it's the word spoken through angels is the Mosaic Law; if that proved “steadfast” or valid and “every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward.”

So the angelic word of the Law is here opposed to the Son's word of salvation. The Son's word of salvation confirmed and attested. If one broke the Law of Moses and he always suffered for it, it was always effective in the judgment that resulted, how much more the revelation through God the Son, is the point.

How shall we escape and one might ask, “Well, escape what?” Well, in my opinion now, I must in this indicate to you what I am going to do through this epistle. I do think that the primary warning that this author is giving is addressed to apostasy, apostates. That is, those who have made a profession of faith but are now, apparently, in danger of turning away from it.

Now, right at this moment I have to declare myself. I'd like to declare myself later on. But I'm declaring myself now that, I think, that this author is particularly concerned about the possibility of apostasy. That is, individuals who have made a profession but are now turning away, apparently, from it.

So what is it that they are not going to escape? Well, in my opinion, it's eternal judgment. If you turn over to chapter 10 in verse 39, you'll see one of the texts that I'll try to underline and prove the point from. Chapter 10 in verse 39, the author writes,

“But we are not of those who draw back to perdition but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.” In other words, the ultimate is drawing back to perdition.

Now, there are five great admonitions, admonitory sections, five great warnings in the Epistle to the Hebrews. This is the first one and the question arises in each one of them, warning against what? What is the alternative? That text tells us, I think, properly argued that the alternative is eternal judgment. The other alternative is to go on, of

course. But, if we don't go on, if we don't turn from neglect and the other sins that are specifically mentioned, then eternal judgment is ultimately the goal.

So how shall we escape eternal judgment? We are understanding. The Gospel, incidentally, increases. It does not lessen our danger. The more that we know of the Gospel, the more guilty we become, the more responsible we are. The more we have heard the truth of God, the more responsible we are. As a matter of fact, you in this audience, who've been in Believers Chapel for a long time, and those of you who are just here, perhaps, tonight, you are responsible. And those who have heard the Gospel over and over again are most responsible to respond to it. We don't have to say just the Gospel. The word of God, neglect of the word of God brings responsibility, and the more we have heard it, the more responsible we are.

There's a humorous story that was told about this text by P. T. Forsythe. Mr. Forsythe was one of the great theologians of the British Isles in the earlier part of this century. And on one of his visits to the United States of America, in a theological seminary, on Monday morning he went into a professor's class, invited there to listen to some of the men and what they said after they had preached the preceding Sunday. The professor had this habit, he said, of asking them on Monday morning what text they preached on, and how they handled the text. And, he said, he always thought that one of the most humorous experiences that he had over here was that particular incident.

He said, “The professor opened the class that morning, and he said to one of the students, ‘You were preaching last night?’ The student said, ‘Yes.’ ‘What text did you take?’ He said, ‘I took the text, ‘How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?’ ‘That's a great text,’ the professor said, ‘Tell me how you treated it?’ He said, ‘I didn't treat it. I just took the two obvious points.’ ‘Well, what are they?’ ‘First, the greatness of our salvation.’ ‘Very good,’ the professor said. ‘And what was the second?’ ‘A little advice on how to escape if we neglect it.’” [Laughter] Well, the story always sticks with me and

every time I look at this text I think of that story because, I think, sometimes we preach like that. We should not.

“How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” What does it mean to neglect? A failure to appropriate the truth that we have professed or to apostatize; to say we have believed but not really believe and then to turn from it, to become cold to the truth that we say that we have believed.

In the 12th verse of the 3rd chapter, the author says, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing.” And that word, departing, is the Greek word from which we get the English word, apostatize. We could render it, chapter 3, verse 12. “Take heed brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in apostatizing from the living God.” How shall we escape so great salvation? If we have come to understand how great the salvation of God is and then turn away from it, how shall we escape eternal judgment? This is serious, my friend. Think about how great this salvation is. Just think about it from the standpoint of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

What a beautiful expression this is, incidentally, “So great salvation.” Underlining the supreme worth of Christian truth, this is the way we must enter the harbor of salvation, dock, immoveable and never leave and enjoy what we have. It’s so great in the first place because of its author.

Notice the text which begins the epistle, “God has in these last days spoken to us in such a person as His Son.” The executor of it, also, increases its greatness. Chapter 2, verse 9, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” What an executor of the will of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. And then the administrator of this salvation, chapter 10 in verse 15, our author writes, “But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us,” and goes on to tell us how He witnesses, how he applies the truth to us.

It is so great also because of the price of this salvation. That, chapter 2, verse 9 said, “For the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death.” That is what our Lord Jesus Christ has done, and what a price it is. If you wonder about that being the price or would like to have a fuller treatment of it, turn over to 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 18 and 19, where Peter says, “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot,” great because of the price, great because of the object of the salvation too. In chapter 2, verse 10, we read, “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory.” How wonderful! How wonderful it is to realize that the Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished his work in order to bring me to glory. Isn’t that great to think about it? That I am being brought to glory, to the presence of the Triune God, to the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in a resurrection body, all of the blessings that God has stored up for the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ; great also because of the results. In chapter 9 in verse 12, we read these words, “Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.” Not redemption for six months, not redemption until I sin, but eternal redemption. What a magnificent thing to realize, it is eternal redemption.

And also in verse 15, he says, “And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.” So we not only have the past cared for with eternal redemption but the future also underlined by having eternal inheritance. So great! And so great also because of the penalties, as we read in chapter 10, verse 39, “But we are not of those who draw back to perdition.” So no wonder then that our author has said, “So great salvation.”

Arthur T. Pearson was one of the finer Bible teachers of the earlier part of this century, a Presbyterian minister, and Mr. Pearson wrote a number of books. And in his books there are some excellent illustrations that he, himself, devised. He was invited to preach in Spurgeon’s Tabernacle and happened to be preaching there when Mr. Spurgeon died. Mr. Spurgeon, as I remember, had gone to Switzerland, where he often went for a vacation in order to recoup his health. He was not a real healthy man. And A. T. Pearson was preaching there in Spurgeon’s Tabernacle when he died. He was such a great preacher that they asked him to succeed Spurgeon but he turned it down. In one of his messages he talks about eternal life and he illustrates eternal life this way. He says, “Imagine that you were born of a certain nobleman, and not only is your father a nobleman but your mother is also. And the whole history of the past of those two people is the history of citizens who have the finest background that one could think of. Great accomplishments for the state, great accomplishments in warfare, great accomplishments in life, and now you are born into that family.”

One of the things that the commentator said about George Bush was that he was a patrician and, therefore, he could not interact with the rest of us who are not patricians. Well, there may be some truth in that. It would probably be difficult for a man who had that kind of background to be one of us, one of us people that have to worry about the last day of the month and whether we’re going to get by it satisfactorily or not. But George Bush was a man who, when he was born, had advantages that the rest of us didn’t have. He’s a relative of the Queen; a distant relative, but nevertheless, a relative of the Queen. You know, he’s important because he has four initials. [Laughter]

But, at any rate, Bush has advantages, and people like him. There are some who have more than Bush. But, nevertheless, there are people who have advantages. They are born into a family, and when they are born into the family they partake of all of the things that mark that family. And if the family has been a great family with great

accomplishments and reason for people to admire them, truly, he partakes of something of that relationship.

And, of course, when we are born again, we are told that we receive eternal life; as a matter of fact, Scripture says that we become united to the Lord Jesus Christ who represents us. I like to think of this as having been united to him. I partake not simply of his future, but of his past, as well. I am a son of God. Astonishing that when I walk down the street, I don't look like a patrician. People don't come up to me and say, “My, from your bearing, I know that you're important.” They don't, at all. I rub shoulders with them and they don't pay much attention to me. O, if they really knew who I was, and who you are, if you've believed in Christ. Eternal life! Eternal inheritance! This is what Scripture tells us. We are joined to the Triune God. It's marvelous.

Now, I said all of those things to make up so great salvation. But strictly speaking, what our author does in order to support the point is to point out just a few things that are not, perhaps, in so much detail. He says, “For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord.” This salvation that we have has its origin in the Lord God. Incidentally, “First began to be spoken by the Lord,” would seem to indicate that we ought to pay attention to what the Lord has said. Doesn't it? Seems to me, it follows.

Now, let's bring that down to practical life. What does that mean? We ought to constantly read the Gospel, shouldn't we? This salvation is first spoken by the Lord. That should mean that I should be really interested in reading those Gospel records. I brought that in, in order to let you that I'm already in Judges in reading through the Bible. Martha will tell me when I get home that I'm bragging again.

But anyway, the point still holds even though it's given by a braggart. We ought to be reading the Gospels; it was first spoken by the Lord. This is one reason, as he says,

“How shall we escape if we neglect it? It was spoken by the Lord.” When was the last time you read through the Gospels?

Secondly, he says, “It was confirmed to us by those who heard Him.” Now, evidently, that was the apostles and those earlier believers associated, perhaps, with the apostles. So the author of this epistle, I think, we are correct in saying, is probably not one of the apostles because he says that “It was confirmed to us by the apostles who heard Him.”

And then thirdly, he says we ought to take heed because, “God also bore witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?” And when the Gospel was preached, it was accompanied, as you know, by miraculous signs and wonders. They were the signs of an apostle, Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 in verse 12, “The signs of an apostle.”

Notice also that he refers the time of signs and wonders to past time not present time. He said, “God also bearing them witness both in signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will.” But that is in past time, was confirmed to us, past time, to us by those who heard Him, “God bearing witness,” past time. In other words, as far as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is concerned, the time of signs and wonders is in the past. That is, the signs and wonders that marked the preaching of our Lord and the preaching of the apostles. That was the time when signs and wonders were particularly important for the confirmation of the truthfulness of the Gospel record. That age has passed.

Now, I’m not suggesting that no miracle can occur today. We know that down through history, miracles apparently have taken place. Credible people have given testimony to the fact that miracles have occurred. But miracles occurring is different from the gifts of miracles, the power to keep giving, keep performing miracles. To my mind, that is not happening today and, therefore, I am not sympathetic with most of the charismatic movement in this respect. When they are preaching the Gospel, of course, I

think we should be sympathetic with them. He is talking about the Apostolic age. And while miracles do occur and may occur, and we are justified in praying that a miracle may occur, the gift of miracles, which a man possesses, has long passed and there is no such thing today.

We also look forward, in the future, to that age resuming for a short time. There are passages in the Bible that indicate that and mark that for the future; not for the present.

Well, now, let me make a couple of important conclusions; really, a summary of this first warning. First of all, the vital responsibility of giving heed. You know, when the apostle was preaching in the Book of Acts in Acts chapter 16, preaching in Philippi and Lydia was listening to him, we read some things that indicate how a person properly responds to the Gospel. As the apostle was preaching, we read in Acts chapter 16 in verse 14, “Now a certain woman named Lydia was hearing us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul;” to listen to the things spoken by Paul.

In verse 31, we read, “And they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’” This is a short and meager in appearance, John Calvin says, but it is ample. The proper response to the Gospel is to believe that gospel.

As Jim Boyce mentioned and as I’ve mentioned before and others who have taught here made the point, true faith is *notitia, assensus, fiducia* or “knowledge, assent, trust.” When we say we believe, it comprehends those three aspects. It’s not true belief if it’s simply knowledge. It’s not true belief if it’s simply knowledge and assent to the truth of the message. But when true faith takes place, it is comprised of knowledge, assent, and trust.

That’s what Calvin said with reference to this, “Belief on the Lord Jesus Christ is short and meager in appearance but it is ample as a definition of salvation.” So he says to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You’ll notice too, that this salvation comes from the Trinity. Verse 3, “Spoken by the Lord.” Verse 4, “God also bearing witness.” I think that’s probably God the Father because at the end of this verse we read about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, “According to His will.” So the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, uniting together.

One other thing in connection with this, the responsibility of giving heed not only positive enmity is encompassed in the preaching of the Gospel. We often think that preaching the Gospel is preaching the Gospel to people who are very rebellious. Often I conceive of my audience as being people sitting in the audience who are opposed to the truth of God. That’s not often the case. Sometimes, people who are involved in open sin, I may even know that and I conceive of them in that way, and so positive enmity, open sin, to be punished. But really, I think, in our day and particularly in companies of people such as evangelical churches, what we ought to have in mind, perhaps, even more than these other types of sin, is those who have heard and are drifting, neglecting the truth that is given to them. They’ve heard it, they ascent to it, but they’ve neglected it. They’ve neglected it for years. They’ve heard it often, they come in and out for a month or two, six months, they are interested, then for two years they are not. Then suddenly, they appear in a meeting again, and they are interested for awhile and then they are gone. The sin of neglect, characteristic of all of us, I must say.

“Son,” the Proverb says, “Do not drift away.” In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the very word that our author used is used. “Do not drift away, but observe my council.” And the fatal results of neglect are to slip like the boat that misses the dock; slip by the dock to the falls of eternal judgment.

McCartney in one of those messages I referred to in the earlier part of the message said, “The most dangerous word in the Bible is ‘tomorrow.’ Not hate. Not fear. Not revenge. Not death. But tomorrow is an opiate leading to eternal slumber. Boast not thyself of tomorrow, the Proverb says, “For thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” “Go to, ye that say tomorrow, for ye know not what shall be on the morrow.”

I'd like for you to turn over to Acts chapter 24, as I conclude this message. You know the story, of course, of the Book of Acts. And you know how nearer the end of the Book of Acts, the Apostle Paul is in prison. And being in prison, he has encounters with Festus and Felix and Agrippa. And what interests me is his encounter with Felix, the Roman governor. In Acts chapter 24 in verse 10 through verse 27, we have the account. We don't have time to read all of it. But you'll remember that when Paul was taken captive, he defends himself before Felix; defends himself by defending his ministry. In fact, he says, "I've been only taken for believing in the resurrection." Verse 21, "Unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, 'Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you.'"

Now, when Felix heard these things, he was not like the ordinary Roman governor because he was one who, Luke said, "Had a more accurate understanding of the way." And so he said, "When Lysius the commander comes down from Jerusalem, I will make a decision on your case." And so he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him. And after some days, when Felix came in with Drusilla, now, Drusilla was a Jewess. She had been married once, and then by means of a sorcerer, she had been, by Felix, taken from her husband and now he had taken her as his wife. And so when Felix and Drusilla appeared before Paul, the apostle was speaking to two individuals who were deeply controlled and in sin.

What does he preach to them? Well, I imagine that Felix was hoping that he might speak about the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Or, perhaps, he would have liked for the apostle to expatiate on the Old Testament doctrine of justification. Or, perhaps, even the ways in which the prophets speak of eternal life and the way in which the apostle does.

But, he doesn't do that. We read here that he reasoned before Felix and Drusilla "concerning the faith in Christ." And, specifically, he reasoned about "righteousness, self-

control, and judgment to come.” Righteousness before these two important unrighteous people, self-control by two people who had, because of their lack of self-control violated the truth of God’s eternal righteousness and were standing before him and then, of judgment to come.

Now, Felix was a man who was interested. We learn that from these verses. I need not read them. He was convicted by what the apostle said because when he spoke about judgment to come, Felix, the Authorized Version renders this very beautifully, Felix trembled.

Martha has a son who lives in Nacogdoches. They have a dog, its name is Molly. We just have a time, smiling over this. Molly has had to go to the doctor quite a few times. Every time she goes, she begins to tremble before she goes in. On the parking lot of a grocery store about a week or so ago, she happened to spot the girl who is a nurse in the doctor’s office and began to tremble on the [Laughter] outside the grocery store. I thought, at the time, what an illustration.

Felix trembled. The text is, “became fearful.” He was fearful. And so he said, “Go away now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.” So what did he do? God gave him the gracious emotion of fear; that’s a gracious gift of God to give us fear of divine judgment. And so he procrastinated. Procrastination leads to hardening. It opens the door for all other kinds of sins, particularly, bribery. And Felix, later, will try to bribe the apostle. The truth of the matter is when he said, “Go for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.” The convenient time was that time. That was the convenient time.

So what happens? You know, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, “Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, ‘Today,’ if you will hear His voice.” What happens like this is when the convenient time comes, we discover, if we’ve neglected it, that it was yesterday. That’s what Felix discovered too, so far as we know.

I've told this story often, but I want to conclude with it. Many years ago, there was a Welsh minister, who began his sermon by leaning over the pulpit and saying, in a very solemn voice. “Friends, I have a question to ask. I cannot answer it. You cannot answer it. If an angel from heaven were here, he could not answer it. And if a devil from Hell was here, he could not answer it.” And, in the solemnity of the occasion, he then, in the midst of this death like stillness that pervaded the place, said, in a quiet voice, “The question is this? How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?”

If there should be someone here who has not yet believed in Christ. Maybe you have *notitia*, maybe you have *assensus*, but you do not have *fiducia*, true trust, true faith. Come to Him. Believe in Him. Trust in Him. Acknowledge your need. Bow before Him. Receive as a gift from God in marvelous grace, eternal life. May God help you to do that. For those of us who are so often guilty of neglect, procrastination spiritually, may we, too, bow before the Lord and ask Him to stir us up, to give ourselves more fully and wholly to our Lord.

Let's bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for Thy word and we thank Thee for this great message. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? May our neglect not be the neglect of believing in Christ. And, Lord, if we are neglecting to take advantage of our privileges, O God, stir our hearts so that we give ourselves more fully to the word of God, to obedience to its truth, for the benefit of our great God in Heaven, for our fellow men and women, and for ourselves.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.