

**Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church**  
**The Letter to the Hebrews – Chapter 2, Verses 1-4**  
**Notes From Class on August 4, 2009**  
**Last Revised on (August 7, 2009)**

Good evening everyone

---

Welcome to our continuing study of the New Testament book of Hebrews.

---

This is a text written around the end of the First Century AD, of what is apparently a sermon to be delivered to a group of Christians known to the author.

---

These Christians may, or may not, have been Jewish. The author clearly assumed that they knew the Jewish Bible, which is our Christian Old Testament.

---

Soon after it was written, Hebrews was widely acknowledged, throughout the Christian Church, as an inspired and authoritative text, and this sermon has spoken in a wonderful way to Christian congregations ever since.

---

**Q. What does it speak about?**

---

**A. Many wonderful things; but most agree that the overarching theme is "The Unqualified Supremacy of Christ"**

---

In other words that Jesus has been lifted up above everything in all Creation, everything on Earth, and everything in Heaven!

---

Our author wants to make sure that we really get this point, and that we understand some of the implications

**Brief Review of Chapter 1**

Last week we finished reading and discussing the first chapter of Hebrews,

---

which powerfully introduces the overall theme of the sermon (i.e. The Unqualified Supremacy of Christ)

---

If anyone needs a copy of the text of Hebrews Chapter 1 in the English Standard Version, I have lots of copies left over.

---

Does anybody need one? All set? OK...

---

The author begins by reminding us that God spoke to our ancestors long ago by the prophets (1:1).

---

We have understood that this speech of God is probably a general reference to the Jewish Bible, our Old Testament.

---

Old Testament Scripture is the very speech of God, and the author of Hebrews handles it that way.

---

In these last days, the author tells us, God has spoken to us by his Son. (1:2a)

---

We have understood this speech of God, by his son, to include all that Jesus said and did among men and all that this implies for us.

---

For you and me this speech of God is the New Testament in our Bibles.

---

The New Testament is how we know (and the only way we can know) what Jesus said, what Jesus did, and what all of that means for us.

---

It is worth remembering that the congregations which first read Hebrews would not have had a complete New Testament, nor would they have had many years to ponder all they had heard about Jesus.

---

Consequently they may not have understood about Jesus as well as we do, in some ways

---

But they probably had read several of the the books which would finally constitute our New Testament.

---

Certainly they had read and/or heard Hebrews!

---

And they certainly had heard the testimony of some of the oral witnesses of what Jesus had said and done

---

And they would have had their own direct personal experiences of the gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed among themselves, such as we read about in Acts, the Corinthian correspondence, and elsewhere in the New Testament.

---

Not only do such spiritual gifts appear to have been common in all the early churches , but it seems unlikely that the author would have mentioned such spiritual gifts without explanation, as he does do in 2:4, if such gifts had not been part of the experience of his listeners.

---

So these early Christians, who first heard Hebrews, certainly did know something!

---

Surely they knew that the Son to whom the author refers in verse 2 of Chapter 1 was Jesus of Nazareth,

---

and they probably knew many of the amazing things that Jesus had done during his lifetime,

---

and that he had finally been crucified,

---

and that he had risen from the dead on the third day,

---

and that he had ascended to heaven,

---  
and that his spirit, the Holy Spirit, had somehow come alive in the church,

---  
and even alive in them,

---  
and many other things beside, they probably knew about Jesus.

---  
Just as we know many such things.

---  
Nevertheless --- and here is my point --- the author of Hebrews evidently felt that Christians needed to know more about Jesus and understand better what they know

---  
For one thing, he thought that they needed to understand that Jesus was, and is, superior to all of the other men by whom God spoke.

---  
The same God spoke through all of them, including Jesus, so there was but a single message.

---  
But what God spoke by Jesus was the the final and perfect word.

---  
To again quote F.F. Bruce as I did at the end of last week's class: "Since God has no greater messenger to send, he will send no greater message than the gospel!"

---  
The seven ways in which Jesus is superior to all men are delineated in verses 2b - 3 of Chapter 1.

---  
We have reviewed these several times before and will not do so again tonight.

---  
Suffice it to say that each of these seven things is something that can only be said of the Son of God!

---  
His superiority to all other men is perfect and complete, as symbolised by the 7 part argument.

---  
Recall that the final and critically important 7th point in this series tells us that, having made purification for sins, our sins by the way, Jesus sat down at the right hand of God.

---  
This conveys the thought that making purification for our sins was the purpose for which Jesus was born into our world.

---  
His work in this world had been completed on the cross at Calvary where he made purification once for all. He said so: "It is finished."

---  
Thus Jesus of Nazareth had become superior to all the angels, we are told in verse 4 of Chapter 1, as indeed he was superior eternally in his divine sonship.

---  
It is interesting that what made Jesus superior to all the angels was the completion of his task to save us from our sins!

---

This seems to suggest that the angels and all creation have a similar purpose, or perhaps precisely the same purpose. We will return to that thought in a minute.

---

In the meantime, it readily appears from what we read in the first two chapters of Hebrews, that our author and those to whom he spoke held angels in very high regard.

---

To read their reverence for angels as heresy or as mere superstition would be a very bad mistake on our part. We will return to this thought in a minute also.

---

For now all I want is the observation that these people, our author and the congregation to which he addresses himself knew of nothing higher or greater in all creation than God's angels.

---

So if Jesus of Nazareth had been lifted high above all the angels, well then there was nothing and no one on earth or in heaven, no man or angel, who was superior to the Son of God, excepting only God the Father, of course, but the Father and Son are One. And their eternal one-ness is bigger than creation anyway.

---

These are things that Christians came to understand better over time, or at least we gradually came to agree on the language to be used when discussing things like this, which men are barely able to understand,

---

such as how God can be three persons and yet one God

---

and how Jesus of Nazareth could be simultaneously wholly Man and wholly God.

---

But here our author and his congregation do not have at their disposal all of those fancy words and concepts that we think we understand ,

---

And our author's purpose, I begin to realize, is not to engage in systematic theology but, rather, to shepherd his flock to glory.

---

He continues to hammer on his main point, which again, is The Unqualified Supremacy of Christ.

---

He does so next with seven (7) scriptural citations which, again, seem to pay an awful lot of attention to angels.

---

This is in Chapter 1, verses 5-13 which we will also not review again tonight.

---

Chapter 1 then ends with a statement concerning angels which is interesting and important and which I think we should spend a few minutes discussing again, and at greater length than we have so far done, before reading on into Chapter 2.

## Concerning Angels

We are told in verse 14 that all angels are "ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation."

---

Of all the verses in the Bible, this may be the one that grants us the greatest insight into the nature of angels and their place in creation

---

The word "ministering" tells us that it is their nature and purpose to serve other beings. They have no personal, self-serving agenda.

---

That they have been sent out for such purpose, means, I think, that they have come to Earth from somewhere else, specifically heaven, and that their work has been assigned by the one who sent them, specifically God.

---

The beings which they have been sent out to serve, are those who are to inherit salvation, specifically those whom Jesus has saved by making purification for their sins.

---

Thus we can see why the completion of this work is what exalts Jesus above them. Without his work, their work would be utterly without meaning or purpose. His work ensures that their work will be successful.

---

It is because Jesus has saved us, because there are some of us who are to inherit salvation, that the angels were created.

---

Notice that verse 14 does not say that the angels were sent out to serve us individually but, rather, to serve for our sake.

---

From this I get the idea that some of what angels do benefits Christians generally or indirectly.

---

In any case, verse 14 of Chapter 1 tells us one thing for sure: all of us who inherit salvation shall be beneficiaries of the work which angels have done in this age of the world.

---

Jesus saves us, but they help him.

---

For another thing, this means that in all that the angels ever have done or will ever do, they have sought and continue to seek to glorify Christ and to benefit those he came to save, even us.

---

Let me say that again in other words: everything angels do seeks to glorify Christ and benefit Christians.

---

Conversely I think we can be certain that no angel has ever sought to attract attention to himself and away from Christ or otherwise acted to dishonor Christ or to harm Christians, and no angel will ever do such things.

---

In fact, I think it is impossible for angels to do such things, because such a possibility is not in their nature.

---

I think this explains why we know so little about angels!

---

By their nature and in accordance with their mission and purpose, angels generally keep a pretty low profile.

---

I think this also explains why we tend to come into contact more frequently with the bad kind of spirits, those who may sometimes pretend to be angels, but are not.

---

How would we tell the difference? i.e. between a proper angel and an evil spirit who is just pretending to be one?

---

Easy: Any spiritual being who attracts attention to himself and/or away from Christ or who harms us in any way, is not a proper angel!

---

All of this follows from Hebrews 1:14. But we can easily confirm this, by what we read elsewhere in the Bible.

---

I don't want to spend too much more time on this, but consider first of all what we read in the New Testament.

---

Angels heralded Jesus' birth.

---

They ministered to his needs after he was tempted by Satan.

---

They comforted and instructed his disciples following his resurrection and ascension.

---

If they did these things for Jesus, we can be certain that they are doing similar things for those of us Jesus has saved, even though most of us will never knowingly observe any angels doing such things.

---

The default mode of an angel (to use a crude expression) is to remain undetectable. They don't advertise.

---

Angels did many remarkable things that are recorded in the Old Testament as well.

---

Remember how they spoke to and shaped the lives of Abraham, Lot, Jacob, Moses, and others.

---

But if you think of it, always their words and deeds were for the benefit of those who are to inherit salvation, just as we are reminded by the author of Hebrews, who reads the same Old Testament we do

---

I have not done so systematically, but I am confident that if we took the time, and thoroughly traced the activities of the angels throughout the entire Bible, Old Testament and New Testament, we would find that our author has hit the nail on the head.

---

True angels tend to salvation history. They are always and only working in ways that bring people to salvation in Christ and then protecting them from the evil that would, if it could, snatch them away from this salvation. And they are usually working behind the scenes and out of our sight, and generally doing things to keep Jesus front and center.

---

Often in the Old Testament when angels speak, it is difficult to tell where the speech of the angels ends and the speech of God begins. In some sense I think we can say that the speech of angels is always the speech of God, and we might even press the point and say that the speech of angels is always the speech of Christ.

---

Now that we have a better feel for what angels are all about in general, let's look at something that will help our reading in the first part of Chapter 2. This is the main reason why I led us off into a digression on angels.

---

In the extra-biblical writings of the intertestamental period, that is after the Old Testament was finished and before any of the New Testament books had been written, it was commonly understood that the angels had somehow been involved in the transmission and administration of Torah, that is of the Laws of Moses and perhaps more generally the books of Moses (what we call the Pentateuch) and perhaps more generally still of the whole Jewish bible, our Old Testament.

---

We can read of these things in the Jewish writings of that period which lie outside of the Old Testament proper, but which we do not generally regard as inspired and authoritative, and which clearly do contain a lot of things that we should not believe!

---

But this idea, of angelic involvement in transmission of the Law, seems reasonable to me in light of how the Bible understands the place and purpose of angels generally, and the specific notion of angelic transmission of the Law is not foreign to the Bible either. It is present in at least two passages of the New Testament of which I am aware.

---

In Acts Chapter 7, verse 53, during his discourse before the Sanhedrin, Stephen speaks of the Jewish people as "you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."

---

In Galatians, Chapter 3, verse 19, Paul says that the law "...was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels..."

---

Calvin and others (but not all Bible scholars) have seen both of these passages as references to what Moses said in Deuteronomy 33:2 about how ten thousands of God's holy ones were somehow involved (the passage is obscure) in making the laws that Moses commanded a possession for the assembly of Jacob.

---

In any case this thought ---that the Jewish Bible was proclaimed by angels --- seems to be in the mind of the author of Hebrews and presumably, then, also in the minds of his readers.

---

I think this is why, in what follows, our author begins by comparing "the message declared by angels" with "what we have heard."

---

This is similar to how he began Chapter 1, by comparing how God spoke to the fathers long ago by the prophets with how God has spoken to us in these last days by his Son.

---

He is sounding and resounding this theme of Law and Gospel, Old Testament and New Testament, Old Covenant and New Covenant, the speech of God's prophets and angels and the speech of God's Son!

---

This is what I needed to say now, so that the passage we are about to read would make more sense to us.

---

At least I think this digression on angels was appropriate and useful for this class at this time. May God forgive me if it's not!

---

The last thing I wanted to do was to obscure Christ with too much talk of angels or anything else.

---

OK. Let's read on.

### **Chapter 2: Verses 1-4**

Does everyone have a copy of the text of Hebrews, Chapter 2?

---

OK then. Will somebody please read the first four verses of Chapter 2, in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku)

---

Thank you. Will somebody please read the same verses in English (ESV).

**Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.<sup>2</sup> For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution,<sup>3</sup> how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,<sup>4</sup> while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.**

Thank you. At the very beginning of Chapter 2, we read the word "Therefore."

---

The word "therefore" suggests that what comes after necessarily follows from what went before.

---

So what went before? before the "therefore.?"

---

Whatever it is, it is trapped in Chapter 1!

---

I suppose in some sense he is referring back to the whole first chapter.

---

Christ is above all things, therefore we should pay more attention to what we have heard.

---

But maybe the author is referring primarily back to the last verse of Chapter 1.

---

The angels exist to serve you, who will inherit salvation, therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard.

**Q. So what have we heard?**

**A. We have heard of a great salvation [3:a]**

**Q. And what is this great salvation?**

**A. It is something declared at first by Jesus himself [1:2a, 2:3b]**

Stop and think about this.

---

Our faith is grounded first of all, not on what people say about the Savior, but on what the Savior says.

---

He is the son of God and God, and exalted above everything without exception, even the angels.

---

And he is the one who saves us.

---

There is no better authority.

---

If you are going to believe anybody, you are going to believe him!

**A. what the Lord has said has been attested to us by those who heard [2:3c]**

This is significant point also.

---

Our faith is not grounded on hearsay...on what what somebody heard about the Savior.

---

No! What the savior said has been attested to us by eyewitnesses (and ear-witnesses)

----

They bore witness not only to what the savior said.

---

But also to what he did during his lifetime.

---

And what was done to him.

---

And to his final victory.

**A. God himself bore witness with signs, wonders, miracles, [2.4a]**

Of course the greatest signs, wonders, and miracles in the history of the world surrounded the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ --- and in the salvation this accomplishes for us!

---

That, the Gospel, is the BIG MIRACLE

---

But the little miracles (healings, casting out of demons, walking on water, and etc.) happened too.

---

The purpose of the latter was to point to the former.

---

Miracles exist only to showcase the gospel --- the big miracle!

---

The same is true today, by the way.

---

Miracles still happen.

---

But when they do, it will always be to glorify Christ and to showcase the gospel.

---

If that is not what they do, if they draw attention to some human miracle worker, or otherwise obscure the gospel,

---

then they are not miracles of God

---

but only pretend to be.

---

watch out.

#### **A. and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will [2:4b]**

As on the Day of Pentecost, the witness is not just external, but affects believers themselves, internally as it were.

---

Here the author refers to what are called gifts of the Holy Spirit, the *charismata*

---

These must have been familiar to the people who heard this sermon (as I said before) because the preacher mentions them without explaining what he is talking about and because *charismata* seem to have been common in all churches of that era.

---

**A. In Sum and in short: we have heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the *kerygma* of the Christian Church and are urged to pay much closer attention to it, lest we drift away from it.**

#### **Q. So why in the world would anyone "drift away from it?" [2.1b]**

#### **Q. Why would we ever "neglect so great a salvation?" [2:3b]**

These are a real questions, both exegetically and in our own lives. Why indeed would anyone drift away from the Gospel?! I can count at least four, somewhat interrelated, reasons the author has given us:

**A. we do not understand the supremacy of Christ and what it implies for us (2:1 "Therefore")**

**A. we are not paying attention to what we have heard (2:1 "we must pay much closer attention")**

**A. we do not understand how great a salvation is ours (2:3)**

**A. we don't know or refuse to acknowledge that we are prisoners who need to escape (2:3)**

----

Can you think of any more reasons why we would neglect the gospel?

---

OK now I want to focus a bit on verses 2 and 3a which read: "For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression of disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"

---

**Q. What is the message declared by angels?**

---

**A. The Jewish Bible, our Old Testament (as we discussed in connection with the role of angels)**

---

They know from reading the Old Testament, as do we, that every transgression or disobedience receives just retribution. (2:2)

---

We actually agree that God is right and we are wrong and deserve to be punished for so many things.

---

Under the Law good men and women labor mightily, first to understand better and then to do what is right and then to make purification for the sins which they nevertheless commit and, despite all their efforts, they frequently and sometimes very severely suffer in this life and eventually they....all.....die!

---

While they live, they live in fear of the just retribution of God

---

They may also live in fear of Satan.

---

They fear what may .... or may not .... await them in death .. whether at the hands of God or Satan or blank nothingness.

---

It is from this great and multifaceted fear that we are saved by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

---

And not from fear only, but from any reason for fear.

---

For we know that we are saved and how we are saved and by whom we are saved, and we know that he can save us and, best of all, that he actually wants to see us saved, so much so in fact, that he suffered death on a cross to accomplish it.

---

This is amazing grace indeed.

---

So, if we neglect such a great salvation, how shall we escape ?

---

This is a rhetorical question. The answer is given.

---

The answer, of course, is that we shall not escape in any other way.

---

The gospel of Jesus Christ has always been the only way to salvation, since before the creation of the world.

---

It is this gospel that the angels, the prophets, the law, and all of creation have been moving towards and tending to.

---

To drift away from it, is to drift away from God, who is the only salvation that there is or can be.

---

It is to drift off into nothingness or worse, if there is something worse that drifting into nothingness!

---

To neglect the gospel is to neglect life itself. To commit eternal suicide.

---

No doubt this is why Hebrews and the other books of the New Testament were written,

---

and then why they were brought together to form the New Testament.

---

We need help to remember and understand and apply what we have heard.

---

We need this written corpus to stand beside the Old Testament (the message declared by angels) as a basis for our instruction and meditation and devotion and correction, etc.

---

And we need to really understand this stuff. We are not saved by faith in just anything, or by a subjective experience called faith that has no particular object.

---

We are saved by the grace of God through faith in specifically Jesus Christ and the good news about who he is and what he has accomplished on our behalf.

---

Notice that our author has not accused anyone of having "rejected" the gospel but only warned them against the possibility of neglecting it and, just, drifting away.

---

But to drift away from a proper understanding of the gospel is also to drift away from the gospel and salvation.

----

So our good preacher is admonishing the congregation, even us, to pay closer attention.

---

Questions?