

Welcoming Your Salvation!

Hebrews 1:14-2:4
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Wasn't the cold brutal last week? It was bundle-up weather with coats, hats, mittens, scarves, boots and even thermo underwear. You don't need that if it's not cold. You don't need an umbrella unless you're on a beach scorched by the sun or drenched by rain watching the Colts win the Super Bowl; and you don't need salvation unless you are in danger. The Bible says:

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? (Hebrews 2:1-3, NIV)

Salvation is not an improvement plan or a blessing. It is escape for us, our people and world from immanent danger. It's not fun to talk of danger, but it is necessary, for we are threatened by **JUST PUNISHMENT**.

What is *just punishment*? Consider athletics and the small world of professional football. I know only one player personally. His father and I are prayer partners and have lunch together about twice a month, so I get some insight. The regimen necessary to play football, especially on a super bowl team, is very demanding. It isn't just the studies, practices, diet, weight-training and the care and rehab of injuries. One's abilities and skills must be honed to fit the team's needs. My partner's son has had to transition from a pass-catching tightend, who did some blocking, to a blocking tightend, who does some pass-catching. He has had to put on weight in order to gain better leverage in blocking even though it cost him a step in speed. Every violation

or act of disobedience by him, like the Scriptures declare in Hebrews 2, receives its just punishment. He can lose playing time, be released from the team, or eliminated from professional football. Some players have long careers. Most are gone in four years. They no longer fit or function in that very demanding world.

The world, in which we live, is far more demanding than football. It was created by a holy God for holy living. God saw what he made and declared, "It is good!" This world is holy and requires people to live as the image of God, living and loving like God. Consequently, the violations and disobedience spoken about in Hebrews have a far graver effect than anything experienced in football. All sin comes from unbelief which rejects God's love, wisdom, word, will and presence. It by nature is an act of separation. The just result is separation from the love, wisdom, word, will, presence and kingdom of God. Like a child running away from the loving and protective arms of his mother, our sins separate us from life itself that depends upon our creator. The Bible teaches that sins create the separation:

But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. (Isaiah 59:2, NIV)

In this passage, sins were the reason why God would not answer the prayers of the Israelites. That is often the case with us. Peter in his first epistle warns us husbands to tend to our wives in such way "***That nothing will hinder your prayers.***" God does not endorse sinful people cannibalizing his world. Indeed, the Bible teaches that the wages of sin is death. There is a temporal death, and there is an eternal death; and they both result from sin in a holy world.

Last week we considered why God wants you to be his priest. We noted that sins require action by the judge responsible. If you don't read English and think your 40 parking tickets are ads, you still won't like your visit to traffic court. If you speed past a state trooper, you won't like the reaction. It doesn't matter what you think. All depends upon the judge responsible.

Our record of sins matters. Our present attitudes and actions invite judgment. Forget about appeasing God with some good behavior. God is holy, and sin cannibalizes all that is holy: love, truth, and life itself. Our sins eat away at us, and they eat away at everyone and everything around us. There is no way that sins can be overlooked. There is no way they can be indulged. Since life and God go together, God and sin can't, for life is in God.

That is why God acted in Jesus to save us. In Jesus we have four great acts of salvation. There are four deeds of rescue for everyone and eventually everything on this earth.

The first act is **justification**. In Christ we are released from the guilt of our sin. Our judgment fell on him. That means all forms of judgment are commuted through the cross. All claims on our lives are cancelled. We are forgiven. There is now no condemnation.

The second act of Christ is **reconciliation**. When guilt is eliminated, God rushes in, breaking the separation. His Spirit immediately approaches and communes with us. When we observe married people reconcile, we not only see them together. If they are truly reconciled, they no longer think of their own agendas. In their hearts are the words and will of their mates. Our hearts get hardened by pride, fear, selfish-ambition and unbelief, so that we separate from God. Through repentance and faith, we are not only forgiven; we also put in our hearts the words and will of God that Christ conveys. Through Christ we are reconciled.

The third act of rescue occurs because of reconciliation. It is what God's Spirit does in our hearts as we reconcile. When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he declared: "***Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.***" Jesus does not merely remove the guilt of our sins. He also removes the sins and their hold of destruction on us. This is called **sanctification**. Many of us have moments of sanctification or holiness. We are overwhelmed by the mercy and love of God as we taste forgiveness, and for the moment our hearts are pure. They carry no resentment,

no pride, no unbelief, no guilt and no anger. They are filled with gratitude and joy. This pure heart may last until we turn on the TV or remember some hurt. Consequently, sanctification involves not only the purifying of our hearts with divine love but the renewal of our minds with divine thoughts. Justification and reconciliation involve only Jesus and you. However, now the church, where the Spirit moves and leads, is vital to your salvation. The encouragement and pain we experience in the church family is part of our sanctification. God is dealing with us, disciplining us, exposing us and then cleansing our hearts as we respond in faith.

Consequently, the fourth act of salvation unfolds during sanctification, **glorification**. The redemption of our bodies will occur when God brings all evil-doers to final judgment because death comes with evil. However, right now, in this time of repentance and hope, God's glory is invading our world and revealing the kingdom of heaven that soon will envelop the world. There is renewal, healing and blessing, all signs of the kingdom. Paul wrote:

(We) are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18, NIV)

When you and I enter through repentance and faith into the new covenant with Jesus, we are released from eternal judgment. We receive eternal life as a gift. However, that salvation must work itself out in our lives, or it will slip away as we rebel in unbelief. It must remove the domination of sin and death today. With God's promise, we can put our hearts at ease. With God's Spirit, we can know the heart of God and experience his saving work as we live in the Body of Christ. God will use our conflicts, our disappointments, our prayers, our words of encouragement, our spiritual gifts and our confession to one another to renew us and renew our world. Don't ignore this salvation. Pay careful attention to it. For as you experience it, you become a priest who helps others taste it. That's why you are here and not in heaven. That is why Jesus calls you the light of the world. Believe it and live it.