

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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The Gospel of Christ Jesus: Consequences of neglect

Do you remember when you were very young, always being warned about not doing certain things because something bad would happen? There would be a whole range of different things with varying levels of consequences attached. 'Don't go on the railway line or you will get hit by a train' is a classic one that we were often told at primary school. The consequences were always portrayed as being a certainty. The interesting thing about all of this advice was the fact that, although the warning was there, people would still do some of these things, particularly the more dangerous things. Unfortunately, there was always an element where the awful consequences were not always guaranteed. Take the train advice I have already mentioned. Will you always get hit by a train if you go on the train tracks? It is likely of course, and I wouldn't advise or condone it. But the chances are you would not always be hit by a train. Although we get all of these good life lessons when we are young, there is a tendency for people not to heed the warnings because the consequences are not always guaranteed. The less likely they are to occur, the more likely people are to do it. However, when the consequences do occur, we are never surprised that it has happened, because we all remember the warnings we have heard all those years ago.

As we pick up our topic for this talk, we are delving into the realms of warnings about our actions and their consequences. However, there are a number of things described in the warning we are considering in our passage that are different from the sort that I have already mentioned. Our topic today is the final one in a series of three concerning the Gospel of Christ Jesus. The first two have covered God's love and our need for a decision on the Gospel. Now we come to the warning: the Consequences of Neglect. Our passage for this is in Hebrews 2:3 which states: *"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"*

So only one verse for our subject, but it is a verse full of information for the reader which I will attempt to bring out over the next few minutes. I will split Hebrews 2:3 up into three sections, looking at each section in turn. Unfortunately, I have decided to do the breakdown of the verse backwards rather than the conventional beginning to end approach, but it will be helpful in the end.

The source of the warning

The first of the sections I have titled "The source of the warning," and is covered by the part of the verse which says *"which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him."* It is important that this warning about the Gospel of Christ Jesus has a clear validation to back it up.

How often is a warning challenged because nobody knows who has said it. There can also be the issue of the source not being respected. We may hear things like "says who?" when someone says you must not do this or that. I can look at my own children for this particular issue. I know that when they are told not to do things by their cousins they may or not do it. It is a different matter when they are told by their mother or myself!

This is by no means a new issue. I am sure it is often said that young people today just don't listen to advice, but there are a number of famous quotes by well known historical figures which have a similar complaint. We could go all the way back to Genesis to see the first advice where the source was questioned. Satan said to Eve, *"Did God really say...?"* (Genesis 3:1) Unfortunately God had not said to Eve about what was not to be eaten in the garden. He had told Adam (Genesis 2:16-17) and he had told Eve, but Adam had added to the original message and therefore put doubt in the mind of Eve.

That is why it is so important that our verse today, Hebrews 2:3, comes with clear details of the source of the warning as well as additional confirmatory support by those who heard it. This warning has come from Christ Jesus Himself. I think it is very telling that the term used for Jesus here is "the Lord". Many names are attributed to Jesus throughout the Bible but this one is the most appropriate here. It is a warning from the Lord, not a Lord but **the** Lord. There is no higher authority for our warning than that in this verse. It began with Him as well, which again gives weight to the statement. This is not some good advice passed down that someone has decided to make official. It is something new and was begun by One with the authority to do so. So we can safely say that the source of our warning is clear and it has been declared by the highest possible authority. Jesus did this a lot. So much of Judaism at the time was based

upon the saying of someone who had gone before. Jesus was one who taught with His own authority and this warning would have formed a part of the things that He was teaching as He walked on this earth.

I will take a slight deviation here to bring out a point which I consider to have a bearing on our topic today. I have already stated that this warning comes from the highest authority, the Lord Jesus Himself. But the obvious issue is that many people do not believe that He is actually the Son of God, and therefore of the highest authority. Many people do not even believe He existed. Christ Jesus is no fairy tale however! As a historical figure alone, He is clearly someone who existed. He is also someone who had an impact at the time. He has continued to influence lives and subsequently the world for the last two thousand years. To deny His existence simply is not possible or credible with real facts available to us. The issue then is, is He who people claim He is? The Lord said it about Himself but was He just lying? As I see the influence He has had on countless lives, starting with the apostles, it convinces me of His truth in both His existence and His work of salvation. Ultimately, we must all make our own choice about the Lord Jesus Christ, but we will see the consequences of a choice against Him later as we continue to consider Hebrews 2:3.

Going back again to Hebrews 2:3, we can now see that our source gains further corroboration. In the latter part Hebrews 2:3 additional witnesses are claimed, who heard it said by the Lord. If we consider our Genesis reference again, the doubt was raised by the question, *"Has [He] really said?"* (Genesis 3:1). Often quotes are attributed to famous people but are not actually something they said. This is not the case here as the writer of the verse brings in further confirmation with the statement that it was confirmed to the writer by those who heard the Lord say this very warning. There is no ambiguity or any chance to deny that this warning can be attributed to Jesus. The statement was His and the writer has been told that He made it by those who heard Him actually say it. As a result of this, the warning has been passed down and passed on through the generations so that each of us may know it today in order to realise the significance of the Gospel of Christ Jesus.

So, is the source of our warning credible, has it been validated? It is from the highest authority possible and witnesses heard Jesus say it. Therefore I think that we can certainly say that this is something that we must all take seriously, realising that the consequences of the warning are real and will not fail to be a reality.

The severity of the warning

Now that we have considered the source of our warning we can begin to look at the content of it, moving to the second section of our verse. This section I have titled "The severity of the warning" and it looks at the part of Hebrews 2:3 which says *"so great a salvation."*

My title does not fit in with the normal method of giving warnings. Usually, they are given with a clear description of the consequence. Let us go back to my first warning example of the train. The warning says we will get hit by the train, clearly stating the consequence. There are many more things we could consider which follow the same pattern, such as don't swim in reservoirs because you will probably drown or don't touch electrical power lines because you will get electrocuted - warnings which spell out the consequences. I have applied a different principle here which is more like an engineering safety measure. I am an engineer and I have to design systems which protect people from a hazard. When a hazard is identified, we put in a system which will remove the danger of the hazard and thus keep the person safe. The complexity or the integrity of the system provided gives an indication of the severity of the hazard. There are even standards which give different levels of performance expected from such a safety system. If the level is too high, then it means the hazard that people are exposed to is too high so something is wrong with the design in general.

We can apply this rule to Hebrews 2:3. The measure of the severity is reflected by the complexity of the salvation, if you like, the safety system that has been provided. We should now consider what salvation means here. Frankly, there is a talk in itself to consider "Salvation". However, a short look will help us in our understanding of the consequence we are considering in Hebrews 2:3.

Salvation is actually a very popular topic in our society today. We love the idea of a hero who saves people from immediate peril. Our cinemas are packed with films depicting the desperate last ditch attempts of some hero or superhero to prevent an ultimate catastrophe. In many respects the Bible follows suit here. The book of Judges is full of "heroes" (for want of a better term) who deliver the people of God from some kind of bondage, suffering or peril. The Old Testament theme of "Salvation" is very much one of being saved from an immediate danger - something that hinders the normal everyday lives of people. This is the same with today's idea of salvation. Heroes in films save us from something that affects our normal way of life. The hero acts, and we can all get back to living our normal lives. Is this the meaning we should take from the use of "Salvation" in our passage though? I think not. I am not for one moment suggesting that the Old Testament use is wrong. God provided for the people's need. But the New Testament brings in a higher meaning for salvation. The first time we come across the idea where salvation goes beyond the normal use in the Old Testament is in the very first New Testament book of Matthew, Matthew 1:21: *"And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."*

This then brings our salvation out of the normal sphere of an immediate peril to do with our normal life to the higher plain of our eternal life. The salvation spoken of in Hebrews 2:3 covers this same issue. We no longer look at immediate problems that may befall us in life, but we consider the biggest issue that faces every person that has ever walked this earth, the problem of sin before a righteous and holy God. We can find from other passages in the Bible that sin, failing to meet God's high standards, brings us all into danger. All other biblical principles of being made right with God: forgiveness, justification, redemption, etc. are all encompassed by the salvation spoken of in Hebrews 2:3. Our sin separates us from God, bringing with it a myriad of things that need to be made right and we can do nothing about it. Put simply, we need to be saved. But thanks be to God that He has provided salvation! (See 2 Corinthians 9:15).

What makes this salvation more amazing is how it has been provided. It was provided when Jesus gave His life for us on the cross of Calvary. 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 back this up: *"For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him."*

The manner of God's provision is utterly incomprehensible. That the Father would give His only Son to die for us in our lost state is true, but difficult to comprehend. Here are a few things that I find astounding about the means of providing this Salvation:

- That God would give His son whom He loves - We will never really appreciate the relationship between the Father and the Son and yet the Father was willing to send His beloved Son to this lost world in order to give His life for us.
- That the Son willingly went to the cross for us - The purpose of Jesus coming into this world was to give His life at Calvary. He left the comfort of heaven to lead a life of poverty and rejection, culminating in death by crucifixion. This was not an accident; the step He took was in full knowledge of the path that He would take.
- That the Son of God could die - Jesus is completely God as well as completely man. Being fully God He gave His life at Calvary!

Although we may find these things and many others about this work hard to understand, we must accept that they did happen. Truly this was a remarkable work, and it is a remarkable salvation. It is so complex and so comprehensive. It has dimensions to the work and what it has accomplished that are simply incredible. Let us consider again the thought of the complexity giving an indication of the severity. This salvation is the most complex work that has ever been accomplished. The cost of it is the highest that could have been given. It is simply the most important and remarkable work that has ever been carried out. It is the central focus point of everything. As the salvation is so great, the peril, danger and risk we face if we neglect it must be equally as great.

Consequences

This then brings us to the last portion of our scripture today covering the first section which says *"How shall we escape if we neglect"* 9 Hebrews 2:3). I have decided not to title this bit because we are finally coming towards our main theme of consequences as we consider this last split.

So what are the consequences? What will we not be able to escape? Alas, our verse does not give direct information as we have already said. We must go back again to the thought of salvation and the quote from Matthew 1:21. We are saved from our sins, but is that really so serious? Many people believe that we can weigh up our bad deeds against our good deeds and the balance will determine our destination. Unfortunately this is not how God views things. There is no amount of good that will outweigh even one small sin. God cannot abide sin. He cannot let it slide or overlook it. He must deal with it in judgement. Without salvation we must take the consequences and those consequences amount to separation from God. When death comes to us, when we stand before God, without salvation there is but one outcome. It is difficult to describe what this really means, separation from God. But perhaps it will suffice to remember what we know God offers to us. He is the God of Love, Peace and Joy. He provides blessing and life, the latter is with particular regard to quality. Therefore as a taster, separation from God will mean the complete absence of any of these things. This is not an exhaustive list but already such a state sounds awful and not one anyone could wish for.

But is it really likely? Is such an outcome certain? Surely God will see that people are generally good and only apply this to the very worst people in this world, the people we would all condemn. But this is not what is suggested here. The statement we are considering is *"How shall we escape...?"* (Hebrews 2:3) and it only considers Salvation from God or nothing. There are no other options provided. Without accepting God's salvation, there is only one outcome and it is a certainty. This is given more weight when we consider that we are dealing with God Himself. He is righteous, holy and omnipotent. We are not dealing with a human judge who needs to be swayed by the argument.

His reasoning is sound and His expectations are perfection. Therefore we cannot apply the same thoughts as we would to anybody else. Our verse today, Hebrews 2:3, is from God; therefore it is final.

Finally, on this particular part Hebrews 2:3 a short consideration as to the duration of this consequence. Is it short or long? We have to consider that this consequence is not for our lives now. Once out of this world and into the presence of God, we are no longer bound by the constraints of time. Therefore the thought of short or long does not apply. It is a state and therefore duration has no part to play. The decision will be final and will set the state that we are to hold in eternity.

There are many who would class this stance as rather severe and would suggest that we are leaving God's love out of the equation. But God's love is so very evident in Hebrews 2:3. Those who are concerned that the Gospel does not show God's love are looking at the efforts of people in their lives and hoping God will somehow recognise this. They look to God to validate their behaviour and provide some credit for efforts made. God cannot do this though. He is righteous and sees the real nature within us. He knows every thought we have had and when He considers everything we are left utterly condemned. This is the reality of our condition. Where is God's love then? It is back to that term "Salvation" and this is provided entirely by God. In His great love for us, He has provided the means of escape through the death of His Son in our place, taking the punishment that was rightfully ours. We gain new life when we believe in that work of salvation and we are made fit to be in His presence. Separation from God is therefore avoided and it has all been done by Him. There is no greater demonstration of love. We are not left to our own devices or efforts; we simply trust in the work that has been completed so that we may not suffer the eternal consequences of separation from God.

I have one more point to make regarding Hebrews 2:3 and that is this statement of neglect. It is placed here in Hebrews 2:3 and in many respects it could be considered a bit odd. Surely reject or scorn would be better? However, I believe it is quite fitting because it reflects the simplicity of the Gospel message. We just have to believe in the work of salvation and we gain new life, the direction of our lives here is changed and we look to the future with our Saviour. So simple and wonderful! The term neglect is so simple too; it does not require outright rejection or defiance to miss it. Ignoring it is enough to cause people to suffer the lasting consequences.

The consequences of ignoring the Gospel message is never a popular topic, particularly in our society today. But let me finish with the thought that the consequences bring out how wonderful the Gospel is. The severity of them shows how much God loves us. He has given so much to save us from so great a peril. How thankful we should all be that He has provided this way of escape from the worst of all possible consequences. What a wonderful God we have!

Thank you for listening to the *Truth for Today* talk on "The Gospel of Christ Jesus" - "The Consequences of Neglect", talk number T1072.

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