

Great Salvation

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Date: 15 September 2013

Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] Now can we turn to Hebrews chapter 2 where we're continuing our study, which has been entitled A Better Country, because really the whole theme of Hebrews is pointing to Jesus Christ as being better than anything, better than what's gone before, better than what the Jewish Christians were tempted to go back and to experience again, which was kind of a mixture of Christianity and Judaism. And so he's wanting to highlight throughout this letter the supremacy of Jesus Christ, and that is a message I don't think that ever gets out of date or becomes insignificant. And so he continues to build up this picture.

Last week we looked at Jesus being superior to the angelic beings, and we saw why that was important. And he continues in a sense in that theme and makes it practical as well for us. So I want to look at a couple of things. I want to look first of all at God's self-awareness, okay? That might be a very obvious thing to say is God's word. He's going to be self-aware, but he speaks about himself here. He's telling us things about himself that we will benefit from knowing, or at least being reminded of in our lives. And then I want to say a little bit about God's us-awareness. So there's God's self-awareness where he speaks about himself, and that is important because he then takes that and says, well, I know about you as well.

I know there's an us-awareness, us-awareness, you-awareness in terms of God looking at us. And he wants to challenge us about where we are spiritually in the light of what we learn about him in this passage. I want to say several things then about God's self-awareness as we travel, I hope quickly through this chapter which has got masses and masses of information and truth and theology in it. But in verses three and four, Jesus, God says really that He Himself is the great witness to salvation, to redemption. And in the whole Bible about Jesus and about His redemption of people, of our need for rescue, okay? So He says that He's the great witness to that. He says this salvation which was first announced by the Lord and confirmed by those who heard Him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles. So Jesus and God is much more than just the one who testifies, who speaks about salvation, but He does that also. The Lord Jesus announced salvation and

God testified to it in these miraculous ways and that's very significant. He is, in other words, it's another reminder as we had at the very beginning that salvation is God's, it's from God, it's God's idea, it's God's announcement, God testifies to it. It's not that we've kind of come together and jumbled for a few hours or a few days or a few generations to say, what would be the best way to do salvation? It's not like that. It's not our attempt to reach up to God. It's not our best thinking. It's God's declaration down to us, as it were. His announcement, His testifying to what He is doing is significant and real and important with signs and miracles and wonders to back up what He is doing. And the central pillar to this salvation that He's speaking about, you may argue in different ways what it is, but in verses 14 and 15, I'm going to jump around a little bit today, so please try and keep with me. The central pillar of this salvation is He is the destroyer of death.

Now immediately, everyone's got to be interested in that, haven't they? Because we're all going to die. I'm going to become morbid in this series, I can tell. I spoke about death quite a lot last week and I'm going to speak about it again. Okay, we are all going to die. And the central pillar of what Jesus has come to do is that in verse 14, by His death, He might destroy Him who holds the power of death. That is the devil. And free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. So it's massive. The gospel is big because it deals with this hugely unpopular and unspoken reality in all of our lives.

[4 : 44] And what He's saying is, and I know we know this, but we need to remind it of it really something, is that death has a spiritual genesis. You know, every where we are today will tell us that death is just a natural occurrence. It just happens. We live, we are young, we become

middle-aged, we grow old if we get that far and then we die. And it's just that's life. That's life, people say. But we're reminded here and clearly through scripture that death is not simply a natural thing. It is not just part of living. It has a spiritual genesis that has an evil genesis in satanic slavery. It is a dark reality. It is the just judgment of God, which where sinners are handed over to the powers of darkness, it's a separation, you see, because of our sin, from the author of life. God is the author of life and death is that separation from Him that sin has brought into humanity's experience. Is there anyone on YouTube that claims they'll not die anywhere in the world?

Because we have access to everyone in the world today through internet, really, don't we? Are there people that would claim, oh, death doesn't appeal, it doesn't apply to me. It's not my experience. Don't think so. We'll find it is a universal experience. And I think there's times we recoil from that idea of death being a result of our sin and a spiritual judgment and enslavement, because we have our own self-centered view of justice that sometimes recoils from the idea of God having that right. And yet God reveals Himself as also perfectly good and perfectly holy and supreme and sovereign, as we saw last week, and massive and a God of love. And so Hebrews is wanting to take us to the place where we are not asking God to be realigned to our sense of justice and right and wrong and redemption, but that we seek as we understand Him in our lives to be realigned to God, because He is worth it. And because He is big. That's the whole point of Hebrews is that Jesus Christ is big. He's worthy of our worship. You will not worship Jesus if He's not worthy, if He's small. We simply don't do it. We'll not be obedient to Him by living our lives as living sacrifices to Him, Romans 12 1. If He's small, if He's puny, if He is not sovereign, and that's where our problem so often comes from, because we can stick our fingers up at Him, because He's unimportant and small. And yet Hebrews wants us to say that He has come with a shatteringly powerful news that He is the destroyer of the power of death. He's come to destroy it. Sin is death and destruction and separation. Yet He's come. And why is that such good news? Because we can't. However big and strong and powerful and significant we are in our lives, we have no power over death to avoid ultimately or to defeat its power. It's shattering news Hebrews. Shattering. It shatters our illusions and it shatters our self sufficiency. But it is also wonderful news, because it points us to one who has done these things on our behalf. It's great news. So we only enjoy the good news if we understand the context of our relationship or our broken relationship and our need before God, that we are under the power of death until we come to Jesus Christ. God's self awareness is that He's announcing to us that He witnesses so. He testifies to salvation.

It's His salvation and He wants us to know about that. But He also is the King of Kings. He's aware at that level in verses 5 to 9. He speaks about this amazing truth that God in Jesus Christ became little lower than the angels and David was speaking prophetically probably beyond his knowledge in these Psalms. But then he is crowned with glory and honour and everything is put under His feet. And we have this amazing... Remember last week, if you remember, in the previous chapter it talked about all things. All things. Not just some things. Not just things on a Sunday morning. Not just a little bit civilised, but all things being under His sovereign care. Well, He does this, He repeats it, but this time He uses the word everything. Everything. In verse 8, He says, quoting Sam, put everything under His feet, Sam 8, and then in putting everything under Him. And then in verse 10, in bringing many sons to glory, it's fitting that God for whom and through whom everything exists. So we've got this repetition of everything. Not just some things, but everything is under His lordship. As prophetically David speaks about that, and now as God in Hebrews, through the writer to Hebrews, makes this astonishing claim that Jesus Christ is the life source of this universe, of everything. Of everything. That He is this King of Kings who's ascended because of His amazing work on the cross that He has been placed in this amazing seat of authority and exclusive sovereignty. And it's, I don't have paradoxical the right word to use. I don't think it is. I'm not very good sometimes with words. But sometimes there's two things that are interesting here. One is that we're not the product of a meaningless impersonal universe. We're not some chance coming together of atoms, which is, makes us very meaningless and very insignificant. But at the same time, we are not lords of this universe, which sometimes we think, and masters of our own destiny. We are certainly not insignificant because I will go on and see how much we are loved by God and how much

[11 : 23] He's done for us and how much we become joint heirs with Him. But there's a kind of interesting paradox. If we don't believe anything, then we're insignificant. If we believe we are sovereign in control of our own lives, then that's also crazy because it makes us much more

important than we are. But if we understand who Christ is, then we bow down and worship.

Not because we're insignificant, but because we recognize our place in the universe, that He is the one who is King of kings. It's the Lord of lords who's sovereign over everything.

Now can we see that today? Can we see that in our lives? Can we see it around us? Well, the answer is no, we can't. You go outside, there's no evidence that Jesus is sovereign over everything. Isn't that right? You can't see it. But the Bible reminds us of that because in verse 8 it says, yet at present we do not see everything subject to Him. So the Bible says, okay, you need to believe this by faith because God is saying everything is subject to Me, but you don't see it that way just now. And the Bible is helping us to understand it, that that's exactly okay to understand that. When you look outside you say, well, it doesn't seem that God is sovereign over everything. And the Bible here says, well, that's exactly right. But what do we see? We see Jesus crucified and risen. Okay? So

He says we don't see everything yet subject to Him, but we do see Jesus who has made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. So we do see the Gospels and we do see Jesus and Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And we do see that as history and as reality. And we do see that He died and we do see that He was raised again. We do see that He ascended after 40 days. We see and know and understand these things and they tell us who Jesus Christ is. And that is what this, the testimony of the Gospels and the Bible is all about. He is, as He goes on to say here in verse 17, a faithful high priest in the service of God. So we see Jesus and we see Jesus as a faithful high priest. A couple of weeks ago I asked you to do something over the course of this study. Read Leviticus.

I hope you can do that at some point. And if you can't read all of Leviticus, read Leviticus chapter 16 because that will tell you about the high priest and his duties. And we will look at that in the city group on Wednesday. You'll have got your city group questions with the bulletin and that will help you to understand a little bit more about the high priest. We don't really have time to go into that just now. But Christ is the one who comes to make, as we're told here, atonement for the sins of the people. We're alienated from God. We are guilty before God. And yet the full drama of God's salvation is played out in the human arena. For God takes on God, the Son takes on human flesh. He becomes a brother. He becomes a person, as we're told here. He becomes part of the family of humanity in order to redeem us from our sins. A death on the cross where God's just wrath, just wrath against sin has appeased, has turned away. He pays for our wrongdoing divinely.

[15 : 24] The check is a divine check signed in blood, his life blood. Because without the taking of life there is no remission of sin's life for life. And his divine blood is the cost that sets us free. Sin is put out of sight for all who trust in Jesus. The atonement covers it appeases. It makes us right with God. The power of death is broken because Jesus in his glorious strength paid that price and broke its power by rising on the third day so that all of us who trust in him will also rise to life everlasting. And this high priest who makes atonement is a high priest who was made perfect as we're told in verse 10, made perfect through suffering. Now can I just spend a minute on this because some people look at that and say, what was Jesus not perfect? Did he have to become perfect?

Did he need to be forgiven for things he'd done wrong? What it says he was made perfect? No, it doesn't morally mean that he had to become perfect enough in order to be the Savior but rather that through doing what he did he fulfilled the purpose for which he came and perfected what he'd come to do. For example, you could build, well maybe you couldn't and I certainly couldn't, but someone might build James Bond's designer, might build a car completely to work underwater, to drive underwater. It might be perfectly designed, no flaw in it whatsoever, but you would only stamp the perfect stamp of approval on it when it had actually done what it claimed to do and worked underwater and come up the other side. So it might be perfect in its makeup, but you would only give it that kind of seal of perfect perfection approval when it had done what it claimed to do. And Jesus in doing what he did, in resisting temptation in the desert and not giving into the devil, by obeying throughout his life perfectly, loving the Father and loving one another, his fellow human beings, by suffering on the cross, he becomes what's called here the author of our salvation. A more modern word for that would be the trailblazer. He becomes the trailblazer for salvation. He becomes the one who has knocked down the dividing walls of separation between ourselves and God and who opened up the way so that when we follow him as our trailblazer, because he's the perfect substitute, we also will know eternal life.

I know the greatest thing it says, well, sorry, I shouldn't say the greatest thing, that's making a value judgment. But what I mean is, well, the most encouraging things he says here about Jesus is in verses 10 to 14. He's not ashamed of us. He's not ashamed of us as Christians.

That is a magnificent statement. Amidst this high and mighty and beautiful and glorious declaration of who Jesus is, we are told that Jesus is not ashamed to call us family when we put our trust in him. And that is a great comfort and a strength. This section 10 to 14 is a beautiful section about belonging to God's family, family being so significant in God's eye and God's understanding of salvation. You know, we personalize it and individualize it so much in the West, in our individualistic, consumerist society, which it must be individualized.

We must take him personally. But there's this great family element, this great corporate element where the body of Christ, where the people of God, where the family of Christ, and we belong to him because family matters to God greatly, eternally. You'll not have individual sweets in heaven. It will not be like that. It will be family, however glorious and atman. Don't mean to be trite by saying that. But if you know what I mean, he's not ashamed to call us family. Christ, you see, we're told here, what's so great about this?

[19 : 52] He shares our humanity, doesn't he? He doesn't, he can't. It's impossible for him to point a finger from heaven and say, that's everything's okay. He couldn't just do it from heaven.

He couldn't save us. He had to take this unique and incredible step of sacrifice in emptying himself and taking on becoming, sharing our humanity. And in so doing became the most human being ever. There was no one more human than Jesus, more perfectly human. So when we want to see the perfect human being, see Jesus Christ, I've been asked to speak in a couple of, a few weeks at St. Cath's at their men's breakfast about what it means to be a man and a Christian. And I can't think of anywhere better to go than Jesus.

He's a real man, because he's a real Christian. You know what I mean? He's a real example to us of what a Christian man should be. He was the, he's the perfect example for us.

And he comes into our broken family of humanity to take us into his perfect one. That's what our salvation is about, but through destroying death, taking us into, that we have this eternal family to which we belong now. He's not ashamed of us. Are you thrilled by that today as a Christian? He should be. I think we should be. I think you should stop and take a few minutes to think about that. Because we spend a lot of our lives being ashamed of ourselves.

And he says, I'm not ashamed of you because of what Jesus has done on you, but I love you. And our identity is in Jesus Christ. Now confidence is in Jesus Christ. Now gratitude is in Jesus Christ, because the incomparable Christ is not ashamed of you today as a Christian.

[21 : 39] He's not looking at you and saying, I think I made a mistake with this one. I think I'll start again with someone else. There it is, grace. An embarrassment. It's not like that. He doesn't think the way we think. He's not ashamed of us because he sees his beautiful Son and his perfect righteousness. Sin causes so much shame in our lives. And you may be coming today with a heap of sin or a heap of shame. And you're wondering how to carry on. Price has been paid. Don't allow Satan to keep you in a wallowing in a vat of muddy guilt and shame. Because you've been set free by the Lord Jesus Christ. And we are therefore to delight in him. And delight in obeying him and hating the ugliness of what sin is and seeing things more clearly and ourselves not being ashamed of Jesus.

And some of you will be starting a new life here in this next few weeks. And you may be Christians, you may be young Christians. You'll be tempted to be ashamed of Jesus because maybe you can't find anyone else who believes. And because it's the done thing to have a good poke at Christians and have a laugh at being a Christian. Don't be ashamed of him.

I know it's hard. And I know you might have been in the ministry for 23 years and this temptation is still to be ashamed of Jesus. Don't be ashamed because he's not ashamed of us. Very briefly, can I just say a little bit about God's us awareness? Sin God's self awareness as he explains who he is. But then in his incomparable supremacy, he also knows how to speak into your life and into mine. And he says a couple of things. The first thing he says is, don't neglect me. It's interesting, and I don't think this is just part of our cultural baggage. But it is so interesting that a lot of what God says about us is framed in the negative. He's very honest and he knows our hearts. He knows where to take us, but he also knows what we're like. And so he says, don't, please don't neglect. Verse one, we pay more careful attention, therefore to what we have heard. Don't neglect, he says, what we've heard. And pay attention to what it's a great salvation. We've got a great Savior.

Our sin is being dealt with. We can be forgiven. We are forgiven and we can know newness and transformation. And however unlikely it feels today, because we can't see everything subject to him, believe it. Believe it that this life will soon pass and you will see clearly, yes, everything is subject to him. It was worth it. This suffering and struggling that I'm going through did pass. See the Bible, listen to God, look around spiritually. Consider your own mortality and I must consider mine. Know that truth will prevail. Remember that Jesus Christ as He's revealed is real and objective. Don't simply, don't simply rely on your feelings.

The feelings are hugely important. They're a massive part of our lives. But don't say, because I don't feel him, it's not real. Because he doesn't seem to be answering, he isn't answering. Because it isn't, doesn't look like everything's subject to him. It isn't.

[25 : 26] Take his, that's why the truth matters so much. It's not just kind of theoretical theology for people to ponder over as if it might or might not be pretty and good and nice. It's absolutely founded in reality that we need to believe what we can't see. Because the Old Testament, we'll go and see in Hebrews there later on in Hebrews, Hebrews 11 is the great chapter of faith that people, they didn't see it, but they believed. And we have seen so much more and we're asked to believe. Take that gift. So he says, don't neglect your Christian life. God's saying that because He knows the temptation. He also says, don't drift. Don't drift because again He knows, well He certainly knows my heart. Pay more careful attention, don't neglect it so that we will not drift away. Isn't that such an accurate assessment of what we are like in our Christian lives? It's not that we kind of stand up and announce to the world, well now I'm an atheist and I'm going my own way and I hate everything. It doesn't really work like that. We usually drift away, don't we?

Quietly. Just drift like a boat that's lost its mooring, bubbling on the water, away on the waves.

Unnoticed. It's not usually a huge dramatic falling away from Christ. It's not that we one day suddenly decide Christ's miserable and I would rather just live my own.

It's almost always an intangible, gradual letting go, drifting away. No earthquakes, no lightning, just drifting from His love. Life goes on. We're not hit by God. He doesn't zap us. He doesn't stop us in our tracks. We simply drift from Him. We lose our vision. Our Bible becomes more and more closed. Our prayer becomes less and less significant in our lives. Our church and worship and the involvement in God's people becomes secondary and then thirdly and then fourthly because community of God's people doesn't matter. Our service is unnoticed, unspoken, doesn't happen. They are Satan's most powerful tactics, drifting from Him.

And we can drift and look like we're Christian all our lives but internally be drifting further and further away, becoming harder in our hearts and less interested in this glorious Savior whom we are to worship. How do we not drift, keeping hold of the moorings? Remember, use that illustration before about not, you don't moor a boat to a boat because both might drift.

You moor yourself to something unmovable and the unmovable person is that rock is God, isn't Jesus? Speak to Him. Protect your moorings. Work at it. Don't rely on other people. You need to do it yourself. You have the solemn responsibility as a child of God, as a brother, as a sister of Jesus Christ. You have that amazing privilege that we've seen before, join ear with Christ. I just don't have time to go into it. To take hold of Jesus, to not drift, to rely on Him. And that brings us to the very last verse because it's all encouraging.

[29 : 08] You might think, oh, it's harsh, it's difficult, it's a problem. But listen, He Himself suffered when He was tempted. He is able to help those who are being tempted. That's the picture we're left with in this chapter. A Christ who wants to help. What's your Christ like?

Is He the one who doesn't help you? Do you think you have to earn your help from Him? He wants, He has come with His children. He's destroyed the power of death. He wants to help us. He's suffered and been tempted in every way that we are yet without sin because He wants to help. It's such an important last verse that gives perspective to this whole chapter. You struggle in your Christian life. Who isn't? But are we going to Him who helps so that we will not drift? I can't stop you drifting. I can't stop myself drifting. I need to rely on the rock. I need to go to Him because He loves me and because He knows me and because He's my Father and my brother in all the mystery of God's paradoxical providence is using these pictures. He's the one who provides. And He said, I haven't left you alone. You're not an orphan in this family. I've given you my Holy Spirit to indwell you, to teach and to lead and to inspire and to encourage and to enable and to transform our lives. Go to Him for help. At that level, be a self-help Christian. Go to Him for salvation if you're not a Christian because He wants to redeem you. And He has done this amazing thing and He's told you

this amazing good news because He doesn't want anyone to perish.

Go to Him and if I died and the only thing I'd done was point people to Jesus, then that would be worth it because He's the only one who can do anything and all the rest is just hot air. Everything else that we do is hot air if it doesn't point us to the Lord Jesus Christ because He is the one who alone can help us to live, to defeat death, to honor and glorify Him and serve Him. I want this to be a serving place, not out of duty, not because we have a rota, not because it's what you do in churches, but because He is worthy.

And I want that to be the core of your young lives as young people here. He has served serving people. He will serve Jesus Christ because He's worth it. And there's nobody else worth serving that He is the one who is worth giving your life to in service because He will enable us to live life to the full and know the defeat of death and eternal life with Him. I mean, let's bow our heads in prayer. Heavenly Father, help us to understand that your book is brutally honest and your rescue is not all a bed of roses. It's not just about living a better life or having a spiritual dimension that might make us more complete. It is absolutely more crucial than that, exposing our desperate need and our spiritual depravity and death until we find our life and hope in Him. And may we find that and know that today. And may your grace and your love and your help transform our idea of you so that we can worship you in a right way, worship you from our very, the core of our being out. And so that it's not just a surface thing. It's not just a Sunday thing. It's not just a ritual thing, but it's a life thing. Lord, help us to do that. And all we can do is by understanding your greatness more. It's not that we make the gospel and the good news of grace too big. It's that we make it far too small. And that's why we sin and let you down and grieve you and become selfish and self-centered. So Lord, help us to have a great gospel because you're a great God. And help us to sing praise in a great way as we close our worship, recognizing even in the words some of the truth from this chapter where we ask it in Jesus' precious name. Amen.