

HEBREWS 2:1-3

GREAT QUESTIONS OF LIFE: HOW SHALL WE ESCAPE?

“We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, 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,”¹

“**H**ow shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” The Great Question posed in the message this day is frequently employed when confronting outsiders. However, the question was intended to confront those who appeared at one time to be walking in the Faith, but who have begun to turn aside. On one occasion, Jesus made a startling statement when He said, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” [MATTHEW 7:13, 14]. The entrance to one gate is wide and easy, and the way beyond the gate is spacious; but it leads to destruction and ruin. The majority of mankind opts to follow that path and to pass through that particular gate. Another gate that Jesus described is said to be constricted; and after you have passed through that gate you will discover that the path leading beyond is narrow, requiring your full attention.

You know quite well the encouragement Paul and Barnabas offered to those who had come to faith during the first missionary tour. “When [the missionaries] had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” [ACTS 14:21, 22].

This same theme was presented at other times as the Master taught. Near the end of His ministry in Judea, facing the Passion that was about to break over Him, we see the Master presenting this same teaching. “[Jesus] went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. And someone said to him, ‘Lord, will those who are saved be few?’ And he said to them, ‘Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’ In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” [LUKE 13:22-30].

Canada is not a Christian nation; Canada has a Christian heritage, but the nation has largely jettisoned the Christian Faith for an eclectic, pragmatic compilation of philosophies that permit a patina of religion over much of the life of the nation. Tragically, there is no way that any conscientious and knowledgeable person could say that Canada is a Christian nation, unless they meant by such a statement that it is not primarily Muslim or Buddhist or Hindu.

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I was visiting a congregation just across the border in Washington on one occasion. The pastor recognised me and asked me to say a few words concerning my service before the Master in the Lower Mainland where I was then pastoring. I pointed out some of the needs and explained that despite a Christian heritage, the area was largely unchurched.

After the service, a couple were quite deliberate in making their way toward me. They introduced themselves, explaining that they were visiting from Vancouver. The woman got right to the point. "You make it sound as if we were all pagans." I asked how many of her neighbours attended a church service with any regularity. That was none of her business, she explained. "Well, madam," I explained, "the evidence is that less than one percent of the population self-identify as evangelical Christians. Over one-quarter of the province self-identifies as either atheists or agnostics. By these criteria, we are pagans."

Dear people, note well that those who are born from above bear the image of the Father. Should an individual claim relationship to the True and Living God and yet fail to reflect His image, he is deceiving himself. One entire book of our New Testament was written to stress this truth. Listen to a few of the teachings from that particular book. "By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" [1JOHN 2:3-6].

"Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes" [1JOHN 2:9-11].

"By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother" [1JOHN 3:10].

Salvation is reflected in the life of the redeemed. Merely to say one is saved, does not make it so. Salvation is transformational; if there has been no transformation, the individual should check what has happened to her. The Puritans of old were wont to say, "Say not thou hast royal blood save thou dare prove it by a holy life." Nor should one imagine that John was alone in stressing this truth. Consider these words from the Apostle Paul. "By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" [EPHESIANS 2:8-10].

DRIFTING AWAY? ME? — I do not doubt that hell is populated with many people who never actually opposed the Lord Jesus. Many people are not actually against Jesus the Saviour; they simply neglect to respond to the message of life. These people know the truth and they even believe the truth, after a fashion. They acknowledge the veracity and the propriety of the truth; however, they are not willing to commit themselves to Jesus as Master of life.

The author of this letter warns, "We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it" [HEBREWS 2:1]. Years ago, C. S. Lewis commented, "If you examined a hundred people who had lost their faith in Christianity, I wonder how many of them would turn out to have been reasoned out of it by honest argument? Do not most people simply drift away?"²

² C. S. Lewis, **Mere Christianity** (Macmillan, New York, NY 1960) 124

I have not often used the term “drifting away,” though it is assuredly descriptive of a dangerous situation for the unwary. However, I do recall generating intense animosity and fierce opposition on one occasion when I spoke of those who had been inoculated against the Faith.³ Those who are content to have a religion that makes them feel good, a religion that soothes their feelings of guilt because they know they are not serving as they should, a religion that affirms them though they do not witness the transformational power of the Risen Master, will always be offended when confronted by the mirror of the Word. Compelled to see themselves reflected in the Word, they grow resentful and seek relief by removing what they believe to be the source of their discomfort—the herald of Christ.

James cautioned against precisely such action when he wrote, “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing” [JAMES 1:22-25]. Tragically, we have raised a generation of church goers who appear content to be hearers of the Word. They seem to resent being challenged to be doers of the Word. Compounding the tragedy is the fact that their children are not even hearers of the Word. Drifting away is an apt description of what is happening in the lives of such people.

I doubt there is a person listening to me that imagines they are susceptible to drifting away. However, none of us are immune to running aground on the shoals of doubt or unbelief. In saying this, I am not saying that we should not bring our hard questions to the Faith. I received for Christmas a desk calendar. Of course, because I have such an intense personality, I’ve already set it up and have it opened to January first. Anticipation! The cartoon for that day presents what is undoubtedly the popular view of religion. A caveman is standing in front of a rock on which his features are chiseled. He is addressing two other cave dwellers. The caption at the bottom reads, “The Invention of Religion.” The caveman in front of the carving is saying, “OK, here’s how it works... First, you **NEVER** question anything I tell you...”

Many people imagine that caricature aptly describes the Christian Faith, but those who are of the Faith know better. Frankly, I am disappointed if you do not question what I say; no Christian should accept the word of a mere mortal on matters of eternal significance. I want you to listen with an open Bible in hand, checking to see if the things I say are accurate. My desire for you is that you will emulate the Bereans, of whom it is said, “Now these Jews [in Berea] were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” [ACTS 17:11]. If you accept uncritically what I say, or what any preacher may say, you do God and His Word a disservice. God is not dethroned because we ask hard questions. God invites mankind to question Him.

“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.”

[ISAIAH 1:18]

³ Michael Stark, John 6:70, 71: “Inoculated Against the Faith,” <http://sermons.logos.com/#q=%22Inoculated%20Against%20the%20Faith%22/1000000&content=/submissions/32808&tab=paneTabResults&pane=resultsPane>, accessed 29 December 2012

Suppose right now I should say to you that I am holding two sticks. One stick is perfectly straight—it is a straightedge, a ruler; you can easily imagine how that ruler looks because it can be straight only one way. Then suppose that I say that I am also holding in my hand a crooked stick. If each of you drew a picture of how you think that stick looks, everyone would draw it differently. That's because it can be crooked in a million different ways.

When we begin to drift with the current, we are beginning to be crooked about the Faith. At first, our drift won't seem so serious. The gentle lap of the waves against the bow may even lull us to sleep as the boat rocks. However, as the tide pushes relentlessly, we cease to make headway as we are driven back and toward the hidden rocks that can rip the bottom out of the boat. By the time we hear the roar of the breakers it will be almost too late. Only with great exertion will the negligent Christian be able to avoid making shipwreck of her life.

John MacArthur relates a story of William Parry's expedition to the Arctic Ocean. The explorers wanted to travel farther north to continue charting; so they calculated their location and began a very difficult and treacherous march north. After many hours they were utterly exhausted, and stopped to rest. Taking bearings of the stars, they discovered they were farther south than when they began their trek. They were on a large ice floe that was moving south faster than they were walking north.⁴

How many Christians are like that? How many professing saints actually imagine their good deeds, their religious devotions, their multiplied pious acts are taking them closer to God, when they are in truth being carried farther and farther away from Him? How shall they respond when they awake to their peril one day, discovering that all the while they have been moving in the wrong direction? No one should ever be satisfied with religious feelings, with membership in a church, with being married to a believing spouse, with church activities. Such feelings will permit one to drift into eternity without Christ; such feelings will make shipwreck of life.

How dreadful it will be for those who fall under the condemnation of the Master. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'" [MATTHEW 7:21-23].

How fearful will be the sharp censure pronounced against many supposed followers of Christ. "Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" [MATTHEW 10:33]. Or how shall one answer who hears those awful words, "Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" [MARK 8:38].

AVOIDING THE DRIFT — What causes drifting in the Faith. I need but review the names of those who were "once walking in the Faith" who no longer worship the True and Living God. And though multiple excuses will be offered, the final analysis proves the veracity of John's sorrowful observation, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us" [1 JOHN 2:19]. I understand very well that some will object, saying that I cannot know what is in the heart; and that is true. However, this is not my judgement; this is the Word delivered by the Apostle of Love. More than anything, drifting is caused by neglect.

⁴ John F. MacArthur, Jr., **MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews** (Moody, Chicago, IL 1983) 45

Time, the passage of years, can cause drift. How many older saints appear to have lost the excitement of service? They become focused on the rest that is promised those who serve well, forgetting that they must still complete the course. I am thrilled to recall the names of godly individuals who laboured diligently into the final days of this life, setting a standard to be emulated by all who knew them. I am equally grieved to recall with dismay the names of others who found it convenient to relax and take life easy after an initial burst of excitement. These senescent saints are inevitably offended should anyone question whether their faith is genuine. “Isn’t it obvious that we are Christians,” they protest, “we go to church, we give money, we...?”

I well recall the excited resolutions of multiplied young men and women during my years teaching Bible students. They intended to serve God, and they were zealous for the Faith. You, also, have observed such people who began well. I realise that we preachers are wrong in not cautioning young seekers that the Faith is not a sprint—it is a marathon. Paul was not overly concerned at how he began the race, but he was deeply intent on finishing well.

Writing the Corinthian saints in the first letter, Paul reminded them—and us, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” [1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27].

Paul’s focus is revealed in his final missive to Timothy. “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing” [2 TIMOTHY 4:7, 8].

There is a dreadful cost for failure to continue walking with the Lord to the conclusion of this life. Even if we are redeemed, our children and our grandchildren will use our failure to justify their unbelief. And though we love them dearly, they will turn from the Faith, and we will be the cause of their lost condition. This says nothing of the fact that we will suffer loss. I dare not attempt to explain what Paul means when he writes, “If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire” [1 CORINTHIANS 3:14, 15].

Others will drift through familiarity. We have participated in the services of the Lord, perhaps even serving in holy office. We have been taught the things of God; we are thoroughly familiar with all that is written in the Word, having read it frequently; and therein lays a grave danger. That which is familiar becomes commonplace; and the commonplace soon loses its lustre in our eyes. When one first comes to faith, the excitement is palpable. The newborn child of God is ready to charge hell with a squirt gun. Too often, as they hear the glories of Christ repeatedly presented, they cease to sense the wonder of His grace or the marvel of His mercy.

Let me ask you a candid question! When did you last worship? I mean by that, when did you last find yourself lost in wonder before the Risen King of Glory? When did you last sense awe because you witnessed His might and power? When did you last marvel at the majesty that belongs to Him alone? When did you last find yourself lost in contemplation of His mercy—mercy that overwhelmed your soul and left you speechless? When did you last realise that you were in the presence of One who can only be described as “Other”? The great tragedy of modern Christendom is that we have accepted the lie that worship is defined by doing rather than being defined by being—we want to “do” something rather than marvelling because we are in the presence of the One who flung the stars into space, and then named every one of them.

Yet other *professing children of the Lord God have drifted through busyness*. John Foster Dulles was a great statesman and a man of legendary busyness. He almost lived on a jet as he fulfilled his globe-trotting responsibilities. His busyness was so notable that it was once suggested that the President should tell him, “Don’t just do something; stand there!”⁵ The United States has had another Secretary of State that is just resigning who is equally busy, though nothing of significance has resulted from her busyness. And that is the tragedy of busyness—seldom does anything of lasting significance result from busyness. We need to heed the admonition of the Psalmist, who speaking for God writes, “Be still, and know that I am God” [PSALM 46:10].

I remember with great sorrow a young man who was an inspiration to many. He came to faith, and he was so very powerful in his stand for the Faith. He would boldly stand on the street corner near Woodward’s Department Store in New Westminster to hand out tracts. He would testify to the grace of God, sharing his testimony with the people passing by.

A nagging concern gnawed at my mind as he frequently spoke of a need to be successful. He wanted his father to acknowledge him; he was exhibiting a tendency to compensate for an absence of a father’s love through personal drive. So long as that drive could remain directed in productive channels, he would undoubtedly excel. He enrolled in a course of study that would open the way into the import/export trade. About this time, his father died; and something changed in that young man. He married a beautiful young woman who loved God. However, he was becoming very successful. He was advancing rapidly in the world of business.

Soon, he was too busy to make all the meetings of the church. At first, he excused himself, saying it was temporary; He would again be engaged in the Faith when this one deal was completed. Of course, there was always one more deal, and he was trapped by the tyranny of the urgent. Finally, he ceased coming to church. He was at last successful, according to the standard of this dying world. However, he had ceased walking with the Lord. He didn’t want children—they would distract him from his goal of making money. He had no time for Christ or the things of God—that would only distract him from what was really important in his life.

I cautioned this young man in the Words of the Master, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” [MATTHEW 6:24]. These words anticipate what Jesus’ half-brother would say but a few short years after Jesus had spoken. “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” [JAMES 4:4].

One of the times we are most apt to begin drifting away, is during times of transition. Transitions are extremely dangerous times. At such times, we are disoriented. We are not able to analyse rationally what is happening, but we are distracted. Perhaps it was the result of a move to a new location. Perhaps it resulted at the death of a beloved pastor. Perhaps it was through a change in our family situation. Regardless of the reason, transitions are times of extreme danger to the child of God.

The flaw that is frequently exposed is that our focus has been on someone or something other than that Master of the Faith. If our focus was on the man of God—we enjoyed his preaching, his insight into the Word, his forthrightness, his gentleness with the young in faith, whatever it was that we admired in this man, with the passage of time a subtle refocus away from our first love took place. Now, because we are no longer at that assembly or because the preacher is no longer available to speak, we just can’t find a church to replace what we once had.

⁵ Hudson T. Armerding, **Leadership** (Tyndale House, Wheaton IL 1978) 102

Vance Havner spoke of such professing Christians as “Pittsburgh Christians.” He tells of meeting a man who spoke glowingly of his church in Pittsburgh. He told Dr. Havner of all the activities the congregation performed each week and the missionary effort that extended around the globe. When he paused for breath, Havner asked him where he was attending church. The man replied, “I don’t go to church anymore. I just can’t find a congregation like that one in Pittsburgh.” Such people have taken their eyes off the Master, focusing instead on the servant of Christ. Others cannot let go a dilapidated building that once housed a vibrant congregation. These people are prepared to jettison the Faith if only they can hold onto a fading memory. These saints did not intend to deny the Faith; but they did deny the Faith.

The real problem is that the drifting person has neglected what was preached. They have lifted the anchor, and rather than tacking to make headway against the current, they are drifting. My beloved people, you are either driving against the current, or you are drifting with the current. If you are tacking into the wind, you will be making headway against the current. If you are drifting with the current, you will shortly be driven onto the shoal tearing the bottom out of your barque. It is an impossibility for one to remain stationary in the Christian life; we are either making progress in the Faith, or we are being driven by the tide.

As the author begins this text, he writes, “Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard...” He refers back to the first chapter of the Letter to Hebrew Christians. In that first chapter, the author has repeatedly stressed that the Word points to Christ the Son of God. He quotes repeated passages from the Old Covenant, making the point that the revelation God has spoken is “the things heard.”

I recently made the acquaintance of a gentleman in Australia. His signature line is on the forum is startling: ***Lick the Lolly Pop of Mediocrity Just Once and You Will Suck for Life!*** The saying applies to church life: ***Lick the lollipop of complacency just once, and you will suck for life.*** Thus, many fine saints have settled for something less than God’s best, not because they chose to do so, but because they simply did not resist the urge for comfort.

Spurgeon once said, “I’d rather be a lean bird in the woods than a fat bird in a cage.” It is undoubtedly a sad sight to watch an eagle beating its wings against the bars of a cage. Sadder still is the sight of an eagle that has grown fat and has given up the dream of soaring high above lofty crags. Eagles were not meant to be imprisoned; they were meant to be wild and free. Eagles belong to the heights where other birds cannot go.

An eagle pair nested in a large tree across from our house in Coquitlam. We could watch them from our kitchen table. I frequently watched them as they circled above our subdivision. On one occasion I watched as a murder of crows attacked the big female eagle. From the front porch I watched the great bird; she did not fight as I might have thought; rather, she began to circle seeking an updraft. The crows continued to make raucous calls, swooping in to harass her attempting to deter her. She found an updraft and began a rapid ascent. I watched for what seemed a surprisingly short time as she spiraled upward, the crows attacking constantly.

She continued riding the thermal until I could no longer see her, though I could still hear the crows making their mad cries. Almost without warning, it grew silent—I could hear no more cries from the angry crows. Looking upward, I noted a tiny black dot plummeting earthward. Then, I could make out a second tiny black dot, and a third, and yet another. As the dots neared earth, it became apparent that these were crows. The eagle had simply soared into the heights where she was created to soar. The crows, unable to breathe in that rarified atmosphere, passed out and began to fall to earth. At the last moment, each falling crows spread its wings, avoiding disaster and clumsily flew away. Later that afternoon, the eagle was back in her nest.

It is a picture of the child of God. As the world attacks, the believer knows that he is created to soar in the heavens. He can ignore the raucous calls and thus simply seeks for the updraft of the Spirit in order to rise higher until the strident crows drop away, falling out of the heavens. However, when one forgets why she was created, she begins to look for comfort from the world rather than moving into the element for which she was created.

I heard of a wild duck on migration that left his fellows and came down into a barnyard. He liked it so well that he stayed a week. The week turned into a month, and the month became an entire season. One day while feeding he heard a familiar sound high in the air and recognised the honking of his erstwhile companions on their way back south again. For a moment his heart quickened its beat, and his eyes sparkled. He attempted to join them but, alas, he had fed too well and could get no higher than the roof of the barn.

I have known Christians who once mounted on eagle's wings. Then they settled in the barnyard of this world. For a while they were still sensitive to the voice of God. In a good old meeting when the preacher preached and the saints sang about "higher ground," their eyes filled with tears, their hearts felt a momentary urge to rise to better things. But the longer they lived in the barnyard the less was the response to heaven, until finally they were content to stay "where doubts arise and fears dismay." They no longer recalled the things they had heard; they had drifted away.

I must address one additional matter. Why does the author speak of angels attending the transmission of the Law? Why does he emphasise that angels mediated the Old Covenant?

PSALM 68:17 gives us a clue.

"The chariots of God are twice ten thousand,
thousands upon thousands;
the Lord is among them; Sinai is now in the sanctuary."

At Sinai, when Moses received the Law, the LORD was accompanied by a host of angels. I don't know how many angels are in a host, but Moses himself reports,

"The LORD came from Sinai
and dawned from Seir upon us;
he shone forth from Mount Paran;
he came from the ten thousands of holy ones,
with flaming fire at his right hand."

[DEUTERONOMY 33:3]

It seems obvious from these passages that angels attended when God brought down the Law.

Stephen mentioned specifically that at least one angel was present with Moses on Sinai. "This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us" **[ACTS 7:38]**. Shortly before he was stoned, Stephen showed his exasperation, "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it" **[ACTS 7:51-53]**. Take special note of **VERSE FIFTY-THREE**. Note especially that the verse emphatically declares that the Law was delivered by angels.

Both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant speak of the involvement of angels in delivering the Law. That law made no exception for anyone who violated its rules; the Law was inviolate. Whenever one broke the Law, there was no appeal. Every transgression and every act of disobedience was to be addressed justly; and retribution was to be administered fairly. The concept of fairness dictates that the greater our understanding, the greater our culpability. Restating the principle, the more opportunity we have to know what is right, the more severe must be our punishment when we violate God's Law.

Jesus was quite pointed in emphasising this principle of fairness. "[Jesus] began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. 'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the Day of Judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the Day of Judgment for the land of Sodom than for you'" [MATTHEW 11:20-24]. The principle is this: the more you know, the greater the punishment for not living according to what you know. We need grace, not Law.

THE INESCAPABLE QUESTION — "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation" [HEBREWS 2:3]? The Father attested to the authenticity of His Son through signs and wonders. Jesus challenged the religious leaders of His day, "Even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father" [JOHN 10:38]. This was the same testimony to which Peter appealed on the Day of Pentecost. "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know" [ACTS 2:22].

There are those who argue that we need to perform dramatic and awe-inspiring miracles today in order to get a hearing. However, according to the testimony of the Apostle to the Jews, "We have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" [2 PETER 1:19-21].

When Jesus warned against living for this world, he told of a rich man and a poor man. The rich man lived for this life; the poor man begged for relief from the grinding poverty that marked his life. Each man died. The poor man was escorted into Paradise. The rich man awoke in Hades. Seeing Lazarus, the man who had been poor in this life, ensconced in the glorious Paradise, the rich man pleaded for relief. However, such relief was no longer available.

Then this once wealthy man pleaded with Abraham, "I beg you, father, to send [Lazarus] to my father's house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment." Take careful note of Abraham's reply; it is significant for our study at this time. "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." This elicited a frantic plea from the rich man, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." The second response that must be considered germane to our study is this one from Abraham, "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead" [LUKE 16:19-31].

If we have not recognised the majesty of the Son of God, if we have never worshipped, if we have treated Him as a casual acquaintance rather than the Lord of Glory, dare we imagine that we shall be accepted in Him? If we have lived for this world, though we perhaps claimed allegiance to the King of kings, if we have not sought His glory, rather seeking our own comfort, how shall we find succor in the Day of Wrath? If we have never been awed by His glorious might, and if we have never witnessed His transforming power, durst we hope in His grace in the hour of our death?

The author was confronting a people who professed to know the Lord. They had paid a price for their confession. Later in this Letter the writer reminds them of what their profession had cost them. “Recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For,

‘Yet a little while,
and the coming one will come and will not delay;
but my righteous one shall live by faith,
and if he shrinks back,
my soul has no pleasure in him.’

“But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls” [HEBREWS 10:32-39].

All this meant nothing, if they had no faith in the Living Saviour. Similarly, your church membership, your service among the people of God, your pious efforts and religious duties, have no value, gain you no merit, if you do not have faith in the Son of God. His call is a call to life in Him. He does not call you to be religious; He calls you to be born from above. Christ calls you to life in Him; and when you have that life in Him, you will adore His majesty, you will marvel at His grace, you will wonder at His might and power—you will glorify Him because you will serve Him.

Well, do you have this life? Are you one of His twice-born, redeemed saints of God? Have you the Spirit of God living within? It is time to do business with the True and Living God. Settle the issue today, and determine that you will receive His reign over your life. Otherwise, you have no answer to that awful question, “How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” The only escape is through faith in the Son of God.

What a comfort is found in some of the verses this writer has left us. “Just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” [HEBREWS 9:27, 28]. What terror those same verses hold if we do not have Christ the Lord. “Just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” [HEBREWS 9:27, 28]. Amen.