

Leviticus & Hebrews: The Necessity of the Cross

Lesson 3: Salvation Through the Cross

Key Verse: *But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom."~Hebrews 1.8*

Tom Johnson's easy description of the rare birds to listen for when camping inside Big Bend National Park is transcendent¹. Instantly, you are alongside him in the middle of the park, listening with awe to the glorious calls of rare birds. I gasp in empathic pain to hear that this gifted birder died suddenly at the age of 35, all his extraordinary talent and potential extinguished too soon. But Hebrews reminds us of the hope God's people have in **salvation**. Rather than remain in the ruins of death we are given eternal life through **The Scepter**, Jesus. Even as we gasp in empathic pain, or gasp in our own pain, our privileges IN Christ remain.

Thank You, God, for extending Your Scepter, Your Son, towards me. Thank You for the relief I have today knowing I am secured IN Christ, no matter my hardships, my struggles, and my disappointments. Keep me anchored in You. As I study this week, sear into my mind one tangible application that keeps me from drifting away and neglecting this "great salvation" You have graciously gifted me. Likewise, sear into my mind at least two privileges I have because I am IN Christ. Be my anchor today, using what You are revealing to me, and keep me anchored until we see one another face-to-face.

Hebrews 1.5-2.18 For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"? ⁶ And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." ⁷ Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire."

⁸ But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. ⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." ¹⁰ And, "You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; ¹¹ they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, ¹² like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end."

¹³ And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"?

¹⁴ Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

CH 2 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ 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, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

⁵ For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. ⁶ It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? ⁷ You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, ⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. ⁹ But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

¹⁰ For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. ¹¹ For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, ¹² saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." ¹³ And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me."

¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.

¹ [Sounds to listen to on your next visit to Big Bend](#); Texas Standard, July 27, 2018

¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation [put away, appeased God's Just wrath] for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Diamonds: In explaining the superiority and supremacy of Christ, the author of Hebrews highlights concrete contrasts between Jesus and angels. While the writer never identifies himself as the author of this letter (Hebrews), it is well-supported to strongly suspect it is the apostle Paul. After introducing Jesus as God's Son, Messiah, and King (Hebrews 1.1-4), Paul proves Jesus is superior to angels.

1. Contrast Paul's descriptions of Jesus with his description of angels from Hebrews 1.5-2.18. Highlight your favorite contrast, planning to (bravely) share that one with your group this week:

Description of Jesus	Description of angels

What Paul explains about Jesus to this small group of Christ-followers provided them with new, exciting information upon which to buttress their battered faith. Remember, the members of this fledgling church were constantly challenged about their faith in Jesus as God's Son and Messiah. Additionally, their controversial faith in Jesus as Messiah upended every aspect of their lives *and* livelihood!

2. Imagine you are reading this portion of the letter to your fellow Christ-followers. Where do you suddenly stop reading to ponder what Paul says about Jesus and/or about angels? What portion do you imagine makes your voice rise with excitement as you read aloud? In other words, what new, refreshing and/or exciting understanding have you pondered about Jesus, and/or about angels in this contrast? How does this information buttress your faith today?

On March 26, 2024, a container ship lost power, drifting away from its course and into the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland. This bridge's inevitable and catastrophic collapse killed 6 people and closed the busiest port in the United States². Paul likewise warns this fledgling church of new Christ-followers of a similar catastrophic reality if they do not remain anchored in the foundational truths of Christ: God's just punishment for

² This port's closure threatened the employment of over 100,000 local industry workers, as well as losing up to \$15 million/day in economic trade to the area.

abandoning their salvation in Christ (Hebrews 2.2-3). Paul's first of five warnings to this fragile, small group of Christ-followers is, "Don't drift away!" (Hebrews 2.1).

Rather than focus on the negative imperative of the warning, Paul encourages the Church using Old Testament prophetic scripture. In doing so, he shifts the focus onto the privileges of being anchored IN Christ!

3. Choose one (or more if you like) of the coinciding Old Testament passages Paul uses to explore his robust list of privileges of being anchored IN Christ. Use the Old Testament for context alongside Paul's enthusiasm to explain (a) what the privilege is, and (b) how you see it as one of the privileges of being anchored IN Christ:
 - a. Hebrews 2.6-8 with Psalm 8
 - b. Hebrews 2.12 with Psalm 22
 - c. Hebrews 2.13 with Isaiah 8.17-18

Deity: The Scepter~ (Hebrews 1.8) The Old Testament prophecy of a "scepter" points to a Messiah (Anointed One) coming from Israel through the line of Judah (Genesis 49.10; Numbers 24.17). Holy God is the High King of Heaven (Psalm 45.6; 60.7; 108.8) and He alone has the authority and power to hold out a scepter (Esther 4.11; Revelation 2.27).

Before the arrival of Messiah, God's people were waiting for God to fulfill His promise and prophecy (Psalm 2.9). Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled in the virgin birth, sinless life, atoning death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ (Hebrews 1.8; Revelation 12.5).

Using parallel imagery, Holy God as High King of Heaven "holds out" His Son, Jesus the Messiah, as the Scepter so that His people may live eternally in His presence.

With Jesus as the Scepter, His people are secured from wrath, warring, and the King's coming Judgment and Justice to His creation. His Righteousness spares the lives of His people (Esther 4.11, 5.2; Hebrews 1.8), thus securing them from death (Esther 8.4; Revelation 2.27; 19.15).

With Jesus as the Scepter extended by God, God's people can confidently stand and petition before the King (Esther 8.4; Hebrews 4.16). Even more so, God's people will one day live in God's presence because of the work of His Scepter. What a glorious future awaits God's people through His Scepter! (Matthew 17.5-8; Revelation 22.1-5)

Often Christians speak of living in "the already and not yet". This means that we already live with Christ, even in the midst of our sin, fellow sinners, and the harsh reality of a sin-marred earth. It also means that our future hope to enter into the King's presence, like Esther's, is anchored in the King's extension of His Scepter to us (Esther 5.1-2). Because God extended His Scepter, those who submit to receive His Scepter simultaneously live in the "not yet", too.

Understand that God's Scepter is more than a rod that could also be used to beat or punish. It is a revelation of the compassion and mercy of God towards His people and His creation. Even further, through studying Jesus in the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), we know this Scepter to be empathic! Jesus' empathy towards His people is a further exploration of the depth of God's mercy and compassion.

“Jesus did not merely resemble humanity in *some* qualities of human nature, but ‘in every respect’ – ‘in all things’ (Philippians 2.7) – except for sin (Hebrews 4.15)...This means Christ grew from infancy, through childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and into maturity – in both body and mind. His body developed, as did His mind and emotions. Not only that, but both as a child and through adulthood, He experienced human emotions – anger and joy and sorrow. May we reverently understand that the Incarnation meant that Christ progressively smelled like an infant, a boy, and a man – he thought like a child before he thought like a man – he knew the same range of human emotions as we did as he grew to maturity.”³

4. “...Jesus is ideally suited to help us in our struggle with temptation to sin and despair, because He has been through it all Himself.”⁴ How does this truth shape your response to struggles, hardships, and despair? What will change about how and when you pray to Him? How will you pursue a more intimate relationship with the God who extended His Scepter in mercy, compassion, and empathy?

Doctrine: Salvation⁵~ (Hebrews 2.10) defined as to be rescued from calamity, the Biblical use of this word means to be saved from the ultimate calamity, the judgment of God. Salvation is the subject matter of Scripture, and is solely of the Lord, Jesus Christ (John 3.13-21; Romans 1.16-17; 1 Thessalonians 1.10).

5. Complete the sentence found in Hebrews 2.10: “For it was fitting that He, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons [and daughters] to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through _____.”

Our impulses rightly find the requirement of blood sacrifice in the Levitical law abhorrent. And now, we read of God’s requirement for Jesus to have been made perfect through suffering. It is common to first think that “a suffering Savior [is] not a God-worthy concept.”⁶ It is important to understand that the perfection referenced by Paul is “not in character but in His office as Christ.”⁷ In addition, the word “perfect” in this text is synonymous with the “consecrating” required of the priest before service to God in representing the people.

6. What position or relationship do we have with God *because* the “founder of [our] salvation [was made] perfect through suffering”? How are we identified in verse 14, and verses 16-17? (Freely change the masculine to the feminine in your answer because this applies to women, too!)

Salvation is a divine work accomplished and applied exclusively by God (Ezekiel 36.25-27; Matthew 10.28). “Salvation is both *of* the Lord and *from* the Lord. It is the Lord who saves us from the wrath of the Lord.” (Zephaniah 1.7) At the day of judgment, all humans will be held accountable to God before a tribunal of God

³Hughes, p.82

⁴Phillips, p. 80

⁵Sproul, R.C., *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 1992) pp.167-168

⁶Hughes, p. 63

⁷Phillips, p. 72

(Matthew 25.31-46).

The Levitical law was an outward expression of worship but always required “inner, higher, and spiritual demands.”⁸ Jesus revealed this truth in His preaching from the top of a mountain (Matthew 5). Recall the presentation rite, which was the first rite in the ascension offering (Lesson 2, Leviticus 1). Through an outward action, here in the quality of the offering presented to the priest, is where the (inward) heart of the worshipper toward God was dissected and revealed.⁹ Now, even today, Jesus as the perfect and final sacrifice accomplished what the law couldn’t accomplish: “It is the miracle of a changed life – a changed mind, and a changed heart, changed attitudes and changed behaviors – changed *into* the likeness of God’s Son, Jesus Christ.”¹⁰ Now that Jesus sits on His Father’s throne as Messiah, He offers a greater salvation whose hazards are increased under the new covenant: eternal life in Him or eternal death without Him.

This “day of the LORD” will be the darkest hour and worst calamity in human history (Zephaniah 1.2-18). To be delivered from God’s wrath is the ultimate salvation. “This is the rescue operation Christ performs for His people as their Savior” (1 Corinthians 1.26-31).

7. How does this understanding of your position before God anchor you IN Christ?

The Bible uses the verb of salvation, to save, in almost every tense of Greek. As such, salvation is used in the past, present, and future:

- God’s people were saved from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1.3-10);
- God’s people were being saved by the work of God in history (Jeremiah 31.34);
- God’s people are saved by being in a justified state (Romans 6.23; Ephesians 2.1-5);
- God’s people are being saved by being sanctified or made holy (James 3.2; 1 John 1.8; 1 Thessalonians 1.6-10);
- God’s people will be saved and experience the consummation of their redemption in heaven (Hebrews 9.23-28).

8. What is one tangible application you are applying to keep you from neglecting this “great salvation” and from drifting away from Christ? What two privileges of being IN Christ are seared into your mind to help prevent you from drifting away and neglecting your salvation?

⁸Phillips, p. 53

⁹Morales, p.126

¹⁰Phillips, p. 55

Your Scripture-Soaked Prayer: Paul used 8 unique Psalms to assist in encouraging and building faith in Jesus. Choose any of the 8 listed, using one of them, or a portion of several of them, to write your SSP: Psalms 2, 8, 22, 45, 97, 102, 104, 118.

Lecture Outline:

Aim: The salvation found in Christ is strong and secure.

- I. The Angels (Hebrews 1.5-14) **TR1:** The exalted Jesus invites us to rest in the blessed assurance of a strong and secure salvation.
 - a. Have you found the exalted Jesus a worthy recipient of your faith? What difference would that make in the storms of life?
 - b. Which situation in your life is requiring you to believe that He mighty enough and sovereign enough to trust?
 - c. How might Paul's Scriptural arguments strengthen and secure the reality of your salvation?
- II. The Admonition (Hebrews 2.1-18) **TR2:** The exalted Jesus urges us to hold fast to the truths of the gospel!
 - a. How is the truth of the gospel presently transforming you?
 - b. What could you do to hold fast to gospel truth?
 - c. How might you regularly infuse your life with the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Hughes, R. Kent, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015) pp. 37-88
Phillips, Richard D., *Hebrews*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006) pp. 31-82