



"Leading the Way"

- Hebrews 2:5-18

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5 And furthermore, it is not angels who will control the future world we are talking about. 6 For in one place the Scriptures say, "What are people that

you should think of them, or a son of man that you should care for him? 7 Yet you made them only a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. 8 You gave them authority over all things." Now when it says "all things," it means nothing is left out. But we have not yet seen all things put under their authority. 9 What we do see is Jesus, who was given a position "a little lower than the angels"; and because he suffered death for us, he is now "crowned with glory and honor." Yes, by God's grace, Jesus tasted death for everyone. 10 God, for whom and through whom everything was made, chose to bring many children into glory. And it was only right that he should make Jesus, through his suffering, a perfect leader, fit to bring them into their salvation. 11 So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. 12 For he said to God, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among your assembled people." 13 He also said, "I will put my trust in him," that is, "I and the children God has given me." 14 Because God's children are human beings — made of flesh and blood — the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. 15 Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying. 16 We also know that the Son did not come to help angels; he came to help the descendants of Abraham. 17 Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people. 18 Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested.

2:5-18

Throughout the entirety of this letter, there is a reoccurring appeal: *Put your eyes on Jesus and keep them there.* Thus we can gather that everything else we read in this letter is dependent on that one critical aspect of faith. Whatever else is being taught in the letter of Hebrews cannot be done without a complete and consistent focus upon Christ. And yet even with knowing that fact, we struggle still! Perhaps it is because we are simply unable to grasp what that looks like in the practical realm. How do we accomplish such a feat? Then again, perhaps we *do* understand but reject it because the investment, *the cost to our personal and selfish lives*, is simply too much. So we look for alternatives. An easier path that will hopefully produce the same results.

I have often noticed on the international flights I frequent, how when the flight attendants go through the whole repertoire on how to get through the flight alive, that rarely anyone listens. Oh, we do at first. You can always spot the newby. Because like all of us, on our first flight overseas we listen intently and make sure we actually know where the nearest exit door is! But then as the years and the flights become more routine, we close off those speeches, with a *"Ya, ya... heard it all before."* But the staff are just trying to get you from point A to point B in one piece. They want you to not die.

This of course is essentially what I do every week as I speak from this pulpit. I'm trying to get you through this trip alive. One day the plane will indeed start to go down and of course there will be those that inexplicably fail to know where their life-preserver is or which door to get out of. The writer of Hebrews is saying, "Just don't take your eyes off the life preserver. *Ever*. Be ready always." This message is not a new one. No, God has been repeatedly warning us, directing us, and teaching us how to get through this flight alive. And not only alive, but truly blessed! (Read Deut 6:1-9.)

It seems we just can't get it through our heads that God isn't trying to take something from us. We can't seem to bring ourselves to trust Him completely. We privately think that He's out there trying to take something away from us. But He is not taking anything from you. He's trying to **give you something**. He's trying to **give you everything**. Let's face it! We live in a distrustful society! An age where everybody is trying to sell us something. Everybody is trying to take advantage of us. Trying to take something from us. Or at least that's what we believe.

Thus we are generally cynical and distrustful. Especially of organizations, and that includes churches. We've heard the stories. We've read the papers. And now we want to lump everyone together and even God Himself gets swept into the same basket as government, sales people, corporations, etc. But there is a fundamental difference in what we are hearing in this passage because this is not coming from a flight attendant, a store in the mall, or a newspaper ad. This is ultimately coming from Jesus. This is coming from God in flesh.

Let me ask you this: why is it that we tend to claim that we believe in Jesus and we are Christians, but we purposely ignore half of what He said? Luke 6:46 implores us with "...*why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?*" We claim He was a righteous man....that He was a prophet and great teacher...that He was even God in flesh! But then we go on to ignore or even reject vast segments of His instruction! How does that work? Because if he is who He says He is, then that makes Him the "brass ring." That makes Him **everything**. That makes Him the key to life, the road to happiness, the fulfillment of our destiny and our very being. And it also makes him judge, jury, and executioner!

On the other hand, if we *can't* believe Him, if we *can't* accept what He said, then frankly that makes Him just another nut out there. Just another con man. And despite our best attempts, there is nothing in between. It's childlike *to say the least*...our attempts to have it both ways. Moreover, that ground is broad and shallow, with nothing concrete to hang onto. That thinking creates a world of constant shifting sand! Fluid doctrine and varying directions. Never have I heard a flight attendant say, "*Just pick a door—really any of them will do—and somewhere around here are the life jackets, but don't worry, if there's a problem we will try to get them out for all of you.*" That wouldn't present a very secure environment, and frankly some of you today know exactly what I am talking about, because you aren't feeling very secure at all in Christ. You just aren't real sure about any of it.

For those of us on that flight, we know we aren't right. We know something is amiss. Something is just sort of out of whack with the world, as well as with each of us personally. Maybe every day we are aware of it or maybe just in those quiet, dark moments in the middle of the night. But for sure, something's wrong. And we know almost instinctively that we have to move on this...we have to do something to try to make it right. The halfway path inevitably leaves us wanting and the other religious, social, and cultural approaches clearly continue to fail. Mankind keeps sinking deeper into the abyss of his own making. We don't know who to trust anymore or how to fix this mess we have gotten ourselves into personally, as a nation, or as a world. The only option we have is to move on this, or surrender to mediocrity and a lifetime of uncertainty.

But then there is Jesus.

His path is clear and without ambiguity. So much so that martyrs throughout the ages have died terrible deaths and still refused to recant, refused to back off. They believed they had found the truth, that “brass ring,” and they refused to let go of it and rejoin the masses in the crowded field of gray. He has been confirmed over and over again in our lifetimes as well as the centuries gone by. Hence we are compelled to ask, “How will we escape so great a salvation?” The writer is asking: *Where else are you going to go? Where are you going to get this kind of salvation? Who else has the track record of history as well as the lives of those who have embraced it? Who else is offering this free gift of being made right with God and with the heavens...with every failure erased, even those you have yet to commit?*

What’s stopping *you* from jumping in all the way? Do you think a better deal is out there? What is causing you to neglect this great salvation?

Many of us have been to the edge of this...some of us many times, and we still have never fully committed, we have never “jumped.” Why? Perhaps you have even “come inside” at some point and “tasted the good word of God and the power behind it” as Hebrews 6 speaks of, and yet ultimately you walked away from it. You drifted back into the chaos of the world. Why? What were you looking for? What did you think you needed that you weren’t getting inside the arms of Jesus? And how is it working out for you out there now? Did you find what you were looking for? Has it brought you the satisfaction that you had hoped for?

God is saying. *“Follow me so I can bless you. Come with me so I can show you what I made you for and what peace really looks like, even in a world that knows no peace.”* You see, God has heard our cries. He didn’t just send help...He came Himself. He came to the rescue. He knows what we were made to be. Verses 6-8, quoting Psalm 8, tells us what we were made to be. This is the “bar.” This is the “mark.” This is where we are supposed to live our lives. He *“crowned [us] with glory and honor...set over [us] the works of His hands...He has put all things in subjection under [our] feet.”* Let me ask you now: *does that sound like the life you are living? If not, why not?*

Verses 14-15 tells us of the biggest issue in all of this: our fear of death. No, not just our fear of actually dying, actually experiencing the cessation of life. But death in the framework of an “end.” The inevitable departure from all the experience of life on this plain of existence. Thus our white-knuckled drive to cling to such at any cost, believing that no matter how dreary or forlorn our actual lives may be, it always trumps the alternative, which is no life at all. That fear ultimately is or at least becomes the greatest motivating force in our personal lives.

One must truly ask the question: What *is* life? What is it supposed to be? Because if death is the end of us all, then what really does any of this matter? Does any of our search for meaning and purpose and significance really matter if we’re just going to die in the end anyway? No matter how well I fight the fight, am I doomed to lose in the end? The inevitability of my death therefore effectually renders my life meaningless no matter how I live it. Like the prophet Isaiah said in 22:13, *“...instead (of) joy and gladness...Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!”* Paul echoed the same in his letter to the Corinthians. What’s the point then, really?

But the writer of Hebrews is telling us a different story. He is telling us we were meant to be “crowned with glory and honor...set over the works of His hands...all things put in subjection under [our] feet.” How does this really happen?

Verse 10 says, *“...bringing many sons to glory, to [be the] captain [the champion] of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”* We are running for our lives from this mutual enemy (death) and it seems that our

champion has stepped between us and this monster. No one else is so willing. No other creed or belief system steps into that breach. And He does so not because we are deserving or because we have paid enough, sacrificed sufficiently, or achieved some nebulous righteous standard to earn his rescue. He simply steps up because He is the champion. He led the way on this. He went first. He took on the enemy of death and not only beat him, but took away his power. What power? The power of fear. He didn't just tell us that we can beat this fear, he *showed* us how to do it. Hamlet said,

*“But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveler returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;”*

But Hamlet was wrong! Because we **do** return...we will return and such no longer need “puzzle our will” as Hamlet lamented. How many of us have rather “bore the ills that we have, rather than fly to others that we know not of” because we had no champion who was willing to stand in the breach, no champion willing to lead the way and overcome our greatest enemy. Because he did, we can truly live, no longer cowards. No longer having to live paralyzed by fear of death. This thing we follow, Christian, is no religion. It is a person.

Life will not be easy. Life is never easy! Life has pain and problems and troubles. And none of it is new. None of us are “blazing that trail.” He led the way and now we share his path. However,... *and here lies the great truth to all of this*, ...all of it was conquered. He won. We win. So how can we ignore such a great salvation as this?

Verses 11-13 say, “*So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. For he said to God, ‘I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among your assembled people.’*” He also said, ‘*I will put my trust in him, that is, ‘I and the children God has given me.’*”

For those who have never tasted this salvation, I ask you today: **why?** What more could be offered? For those of us who have treated this salvation lightly, I would like to share this (from a Billy Graham message in 1957):

Rev Graham said “I have in my hand a letter written by a Communist student at an eastern university after he had gone to Mexico and become a Communist. He wrote to his fiancée, breaking off their engagement. Here is in part what he said. This was given to me by the minister of the Presbyterian Church in Montreat, North Carolina, where I live. Here is what it says:

“We Communists have a high casualty rate. We're the ones who get shot and hung and lynched and tarred and feathered and jailed and slandered, and ridiculed and fired from our jobs, and in every other way made as uncomfortable as possible. A certain percentage of us get killed or imprisoned. We live in virtual poverty. We turn back to the party every penny we make above what is absolutely necessary to keep us alive. We Communists don't have the time or the money for many movies, or concerts, or T-bone steaks, or decent homes and new cars. We've been described as fanatics. We are fanatics. Our lives are dominated by one great overshadowing factor, **THE STRUGGLE FOR WORLD COMMUNISM.**”

“We Communists have a philosophy of life which no amount of money could buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life. We subordinate our petty personal selves into a great movement of humanity, and if our personal lives seem hard, or our egos appear to suffer through subordination to the party, then we are adequately compensated by the thought that each of us in his small way is contributing to something new and true and better for mankind.

“There is one thing in which I am dead earnest and that is the Communist cause. It is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife and mistress, my bread and meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream of it at night. Its hold on me grows, not lessens as time goes on. Therefore I cannot carry on a friendship, a love affair, or even a conversation without relating to this force which both drives and guides my life. I evaluate people, books, ideas and actions according to how they affect the Communist cause and by their attitude toward it. I've already been in jail because of my ideas and if necessary, I'm ready to go before a firing squad.”

Such a position was held for the political position of communism. What are you willing to do for Christ? Your Savior, your Lord, your God...?

CS Lewis once said *“It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”*