

Turning from his initial statement of faith that Jesus is superior to angels, the author issued his first of many exhortations to live the faith from which he feared they were drifting away. In so doing he alluded to the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai by angels. Note his belief that angels communicate God's will as in Acts 7:38, 53 and Gal. 3: 19.

Strongly asserting that the breaking of the Sinai covenant brought just penalties when disobeyed, he urged his audience not to neglect the salvation offered through one so much greater, namely Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. Neglect is ever the great enemy of saving faith.

Then off goes the author once more to argue that the gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is superior to the ancient Hebrew tradition because Jesus was human and angels are not. His argument was rather involved, so let's look at it more closely.

Quoting Psalm 8:6-8, he stated the obvious that God did not give angels dominion over creation that God gave to humans. Jesus was born into a full humanity, experienced suffering and death, and now is "crowned with glory and honour" seated at the right hand of God.

This was all part of God's plan for us too. Like Adam we are not perfect and are suffering the consequences of sin. But we are all members of the family of God with Jesus. God intends to transform us to be like Jesus. To quote Frances Taylor Gench: "When we look at Jesus, we see fully revealed not only who God is, but also who we are meant to be."

Another word the author used to convey this truth is "pioneer." We shall read this word again in a later exhortation in the letter. This is the clue to our ongoing moral transformation.

A second purpose accomplished by Jesus' human life is that he freed us from the fear of death by sharing our flesh and blood (2:14-15). He experienced this final reality which all of us shall one day face. But we are not to fear it because we know through faith that death is not the end of God's purpose for us. Faith in Jesus and his resurrection will bring us into the same glorious experience of the presence of God.

Lastly, by sharing our life of flesh and blood Jesus has total sympathy and solidarity with our human condition. He knows the struggles we are in from day to day. So total is his identification with us that we are family, the descendants of Abraham (2:11-18). He is not ashamed to have us as brothers and sisters. Because of that complete solidarity, he is able to be our high priest, offering sacrifice for the atonement of all.

This introduces the next phase of the author's argument: the high priesthood of Jesus Christ. The subject will be elaborated in great detail as the letter continues. At this point it should be noted that it was because he suffered as a human being like us that he is able to make intercession and sacrificial atonement for us.

The question atonement for sin, our need for it and how it occurs in our religious consciousness still roils the Christians of every tradition and denomination. It has done so ever since the first NT documents such as Paul's letters to young churches were put in writing.

It is one thing to quote scripture or to refer to the meandering thoughts and arduously composed writings of various theologians of the past and present. It is quite another to come to terms with what actually happens and how it happens in our own religious experience. It also must happen in both as an individual and a community experience.

OPENING PRAYER

What is this gift we have received? Help us, O God, to accept so great a salvation, your gracious love offering us life with you and our Lord Jesus Christ, now and forever. Amen.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. One of the author's concerns is that his audience not drift away or neglect their faith. How would you describe what this drifting or neglect is like?
2. Does the picture give any hint as to how Jesus may feel when this happens to us?
3. In both Hebrew and Greek, the primary meaning of the word *salvation* is secular in the sense of victory in a military engagement. In the NT it has to do with healing, forgiveness and admission to God's kingdom, as both a present and future experience. What is your experience of the word?
4. In what ways can salvation be a community experience as distinct from a personal religious experience?

CLOSING PRAYER

By your grace grant us, O Lord, a deeper sense of your presence and your love, that we may faithfully worship and serve you throughout this day and for the remaining days of our lives. Amen.

4 – THE GIFT WE RECEIVED

Hebrews 2:1-18

