

Christmas 1, 2018

Chasing Waterfalls

Hebrews 2

St. Andrew's – Jacksonville, OR

By Fr. Bill Baker

Therefore 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?

How indeed...These words of scripture were resting in the back of my mind the other night as I was watching Wheel-A-Fortune. The answer to the current puzzle was 'Astounding Waterfall'. And that got me humming the melody to a song that came out in the 1990's – "Don't Go Chasing Waterfalls". Waterfalls are natural attractions that draw large crowds and inspire National Parks. I've never been to Niagara Falls but I know of it because its beauty has made it so popular. Even in my hiking adventures I have taken countless pictures of waterfalls...they are truly captivating. Although waterfalls might be beautiful and may have the ability to draw us in, we must be careful to not let their attractiveness pull us over the edge. There are many heresies surrounding Jesus that have their roots in the beginning of Jesus's ministry and Paul is very aware of the potential dangers of their attractiveness, their lure and their pull.

"THEREFORE", Paul exhorts, "We MUST pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it." I can only imagine the serious nature in which Paul is addressing those willing to listen. What is it that we have heard that requires such an admonition from our brother Paul? Is it possible that we have heard the truth but still remain easily sidetracked by the waterfalls that take our attention from the deeper waters? Waterfalls crash on rocks...deep waters sustain life...

In the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Hebrews, Paul is reminding his listeners where the deep waters are:

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Here Paul sustains the truth of the Hebrew God who’s revelation has been exhorted by the prophets of old, whose plan for mankind’s redemption came through the willing consent of Mary and the birth of God’s very word into our midst. The distraction of other gods, be they careers, hobbies or even charity work can drag us to the rocks below if we allow them to replace the Lord of our hearts. Lot’s wife was turned into a pillar of salt for a mere final glimpse of a world she didn’t want to leave behind.

We must pay attention to what we have heard of the Gospel of Christ, *“For since the message declared by angles proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?”* Well, the answer is simple...we do not escape. We have two positions and only two that we can consider. First, we have heard but don’t think our salvation is as important as our worldly lives. God is therefore neglected as secondary at best. Second, we neglect our salvation because it takes too much effort to seek God and live lives according to His word. Therefore we know not of salvation. For whatever reason we do not engage the message of salvation we risk its loss.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). Do we believe? Do we truly believe? What does it mean to neglect such a great salvation? The answer is simple to those who cling to Christ for their eternal lives; to neglect God’s salvation is to reject His love, to reject His forgiveness, to stifle the gifts He has entrusted us with...to snuff out the Gospel message on the rocks below.

Can there be other Gods, other things more important than worshipping God Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth? There is one God...and he came to us in human flesh...taking our nature upon himself so that by overcoming the price of sin we too could receive eternal life. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is good news indeed! What waterfalls are you chasing?

How far will you follow the stream? To its end? Those who do will realize at the point of no return that it is not the beauty of the falls they should have dwelled on but the things of God found in the deep waters.

How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? We shall not. The real question between the lines is, "how shall we escape this world as we traverse the perils that attract us?" It is only by looking at Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity who entered humanity that we can begin to have hope in our eternal lives.

"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, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. 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 for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

Comforting words for those who heed Paul's words. The creator of all took upon himself flesh and blood that through suffering for the sins of all he could overcome a debt we could not and offer us a gift we could never earn. This is why we spent Advent focused on our need for Christ's birth and why we now celebrate with great joy that life that came down from the highest glory into the hearts of mankind. How do we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?...Why would we neglect such a great salvation. Take up your cross, follow him and spread the Gospel! Jesus Christ has entered humanity that we may enter eternity!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.