

HEBREWS AND HOW TO MISS THE BOAT

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Welcome: Over the summer, blending the Pastor's Wednesday morning Bible study with the sermon on Sunday morning, we are having messages about the messages in the book of Hebrews. Today, I am going to tell you a story that relates to verse after verse after verse in Hebrews. May the Lord use this for our understanding and benefit. Let's worship God together.

Sermon: I am going to tell you a true story, and it is a kind of parable within which is Hebrews. I want to tell you about how I literally missed the boat ... and how you can too. Let's pray.

Good God, who made men and women for robust life and rule in fellowship with you, we come hungering for that robustness of life, hungering for your soul-anchoring presence, hungering for intelligent understanding of life, and you, and freedom, and power, and love. Please graciously bless us with your satisfying self and guiding understanding. In Jesus' name. Amen.

When I finished my Master's Degree in England, we celebrated by taking a trip to Scandinavia. We drove our Mitsubishi station wagon to Harwich, England. My parents and sister, Stacey, my wife and son, Taylor, were all piled into the car. It was crowded

and I had actually bolted the child seat into the rear of the wagon to make room. We took the car ferry and arrived for nine or ten days of exploring those gorgeous lands. Waterfall after waterfall. The midnight sun. Lovely forests.

And the time for our return came too quickly. We made our way, per our tickets, to the port and to Pier 92, or something like that, and arrived expecting the typical long line up of cars waiting to drive aboard and return to Harwich. However, however, something was amiss. The pier was eerily empty. In fact, not a car or a person was in sight.

I emerged from the driver's seat rather mystified, and grabbed my folder of travel info. Yes, we were at the right port and yes, we were at the right pier, and yes, we were at the right 1 p.m. time. But then my eyes riveted on the date. I checked the calendar on my watch (when on vacation you lose track of time, right?) and then it dawned on me in a dreaded, thunderbolt fashion that we were a day late. Yes, we were, as they say, a day late and a boat short.

This proves that you can get a Master's Degree and not be real bright.

The passages we read today tell us that there is a boat of God and that we can actually, for real, miss it. So let's talk about how we can miss the boat of God.

Here's the first way to do it -- by thinking that there isn't a boat to miss, or that missing cannot happen. The verses we read together are all admonitions and exhortations -- pay attention, focus, see to it, be careful, hold firmly, show diligence, hold unswervingly, throw off distractions... And they tell us one thing and they tell it very clearly -- focus *so that* you don't miss the boat of God. That means if you don't think about how not to miss it, if you don't think of how to gain it, you very much could, very likely will, miss the boat of God.

As we look at the book of Hebrews over the different weeks of the summer, this is, I think you could reasonably say it this way, this is *the* reason the author wrote the letter -- He doesn't want any of his readers to miss the boat. If we couldn't, if it wasn't a possibility, if it wasn't a concern, he wouldn't have written the letter. But it is a possibility, it is a concern, and he doesn't want that to happen, so he writes the letter. And it is a letter written to brothers and sisters, in other words to those who have, at least initially, identified themselves as Christians. So the issue is Christians, who have a ticket for the boat, can miss the boat.

The boat is a healthy life with God. It's being forgiven. It's being given a claim in the life of the world to come. It's having peace with God now and also forever. It's being delivered, not from physical death, but from the worse forever-soul-death (what does it profit a man to gain the world and lose his

soul?). It's being made a family member in God's family so that you have all those family member rights and responsibilities and privileges (refrigerator rights, as someone once said; "this is my home" kind of prerogatives and comfort). All these good things are on the table to be had ... or to be missed.

The first way to miss them, to miss the boat about them, is to think that they cannot be missed, that they are just *automatically* yours and everyone else's. If it's mine, period, and I cannot lose it, period, why are we talking about missing them and doing that which is necessary to gain them? It's a pointless discussion. But the author of Hebrews is having the discussion, and so it is not pointless. It can be had or can not be had. It can be gained or it can be lost.

A lot of time a lot of people think of God as just a big softie of unconditional love, and all anyone has to do is say "Jesus" and it matters not how you are, how you will be, what you have done, what you are doing, what you will do. You are simply, by saying "Jesus," *in with God*. Sure, maybe if you don't say "Jesus," you could miss out on God, although even that is thought to be rather severe and narrow-minded of God; he's probably too loving to let even that happen. So people commonly think.

But that's not what Hebrews says. It's not that God is not full-on love, he is. But, that everyone is always, regardless, ok with God is not the way love, and truth, and humanness, and Godness works.

At one point he remarks that people will say to him, “Lord, Lord,” and he will ask, “Who are you?” This comment of his is right there with the comment that trees that are meant to bear fruit and that don’t bear fruit are dug up, chopped up, and the wood burned. Right there with SEEK the kingdom of God meaning; no seeking, no finding.

If you get into medical school and then stop studying, you lose being a doctor. If you have a girlfriend who cares about your character, and you like to party more than any of that, you lose the girlfriend.

There is something at stake with the Kingdom of God. Don’t think that there isn’t something at stake. Thinking that there isn’t will make you think that focus, effort, prioritization, and choice-making is irrelevant. It isn’t irrelevant. There’s a world of God to be gained and world of God to be lost. The Bible, these passages, make that clearly so.

A constancy, an attentiveness, an “I’m on this today” factor are involved in the Christian life. So I ask you and me, “Are we on our toes with pursuing God? Is it a spinal cord in our life?” If not, beware, you’re in danger of missing the boat.

Another way to miss the boat, not completely dissimilar to this first way, is to think that not missing it isn’t that bad, and catching it isn’t that great. One, there is no such thing as missing, or two, there is such

a thing, but it's not that much of a miss. Or gaining it isn't that much of a gain.

I can think, for example, that I can stay here and eat wonderful steaks, and drink wonderful wines, or I can go to heaven and get a white robe, and get a harp, and sit on a cloud for a really long time. That's not the right way to think of heaven, but we often do, and in that line of thinking I say, "I don't like the white robes. Harp music is fine now and then, but for eternity?" So missing this boat is not anything I am going to shed many tears over.

But, if I have, on the other hand, misplaced a winning lotto ticket, I seek it with passion. There's a lot to be lost and a lot to be gained. This is meaningful to me. If I find it, yeah! If it went down the garbage disposal, "Oh no!" Getting this boat is big. Missing this boat is a big deal. And, unfortunately, for various reasons, many people, ourselves probably included, regularly do not feel or think that who God is or how we are with God is at the level of having a winning lottery ticket, or not having it because of it going down the drain.

The author of Hebrews says do not neglect, be oblivious to, inattentive about soooo GREAT a salvation. It's not like not having aspirin and dealing with a headache. It's like not having the vaccine and getting polio. The salvation is a big deal and the not getting it is a big deal.

The Bible tells us to fear not the one who can kill the body, but God, who can destroy the body and the soul. There is a soul life that is an eternal and eternally meaningful life that can be lost. And such is painfully, painfully tragic. Especially if the loss is due to folly, due to prizing lesser things. And all things are lesser things than the well-being of our souls.

There is a soul life that is an eternal and eternally meaningful life that can be gained. And such is freedom and joy. The Bible says that eye has not seen nor ear heard or the mind imagined what God has for those who love him.

Unless you are convinced that you are just going into the ground and there is nothing else, period, then you and I best be considering the consequences – the rewards to be lost and the hells to be left with.

Our author of Hebrews points, in verses in between the ones we read, to the exodus journey where, yes, there was a deliverance from the bondage, and Pharaoh of Egypt, but there was also a journey to the Promised Land, and some...most...all but two...didn't enter it. They missed it. It was missed and it can be missed.

So, here is a lesson from history that has application for whom? For when? For us, now. You pay heed. Jeff, pay heed. Today-- if you hear God's voice-- the author quotes again and again. Today-- if

you hear the Holy Spirit say. Today-- if you hear the Spirit-inspired scripture say, then take heed.

I told you a parable, a real life one. Jesus told one, too. His message, he says, is like a seed and it can be disregarded, taken in superficially, choked, or heeded. When it is heeded, there is 30-60-100 fold flourishing. Then he says, "Let him who has ears hear." Today, if you hear his voice, take heed.

If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or have someone pray with you, the pastor and elders would welcome your call.

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