

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost  
October 7, 2018

Text: Hebrews 2:1-18

Theme: “Focused”

Focus is a good thing. It helps a lot with driving. We hear a lot about, maybe know a lot about distracted driving. There have always been distractions, but mobile devices have opened up a whole new distracting world, distraction that can lead to disaster and destruction. Focus is good in almost all areas, certainly so in the classroom. The teacher is focused on the lesson and the participation, the engaging of the students or lack thereof. The plan for presenting may need to be changed to maintain focus. If the lesson plan were a clay model, say maybe a horse, by the time the class is over it may be reshaped so that the end production looks more like a duck. And then there is the focus of the students. The object of their focus is related to their interest at the moment and that may or may not be the lesson at hand.

The act of focusing may not be the real issue, no, it may be the object of focus. Many objects result in competition for focus. Which one will win?

Our text from Hebrews is all about focus. Actually, the whole book is about focus. It was written to people who had been given eyes of faith to focus on Jesus. Now, probably years later after that gift was first given, the situation they find themselves in is a temptation to shift focus off of Jesus. If one fell to this temptation, or had already fallen, and did not turn back to refocus in repentance, then the end would be the same as that of distracted driving, disaster and destruction, but on an eternal scale.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews certainly puts before us the Son of God. He puts Him before us in His glory from eternity, in His lowering of Himself in His work of

salvation, and in His being exalted after that work was complete. In chapter one we see Him in that initial state. Here He is described as heir of all things and the One through whom all things were created (v 2). He is presented as the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature (v 3). He is shown to be One who upholds the universe by the word of His power (v 3). But in our text we see Him who for a little while was made lower than the angels so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone (2:9). We read, “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.” (vs 17)

But in our text we also see Him exalted. “You crowned Him with glory and honor, putting everything under His feet in subjection (vs 7—from Psalm 8 in the LXX). He is the One upon whom to focus for salvation. We read He is “the founder of our salvation.” (vs 10) In chapter 12 we find the familiar and calling words, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith.” (v 2) He is the object of focus, but oh, there are distractions.

Problems can be quite distracting. We all know about problems. We talked about a few in our Breakfast Bible study today, problems such as marital difficulties, childlessness, family conflict, fires, earthquakes, hunger, theft, and death. Everyone knows about problems. Problems are no fun and understandably we seek relief from such. Problems are big attention hogs. We may in our eagerness to be shy of those problems go for solutions that bring more problems.

In our Gospel lesson (Mark 10:2-16), Jesus is asked about divorce. Divorce can be seen as the solution but may be no solution at all, instead the source for more problems. Such is the case when the divorce happens where there is no God allowed reason for it.

Jesus points out that divorce was not a part of the plan. He goes back to that plan in Genesis 2. This is the one man, one woman, joined together by God plan, not to be unjoined by man. But marriage or problems in marriage are not the only place where problem relief may be sought in God displeasing ways. One can become more devoted to problem minimization than perseverance and faithfulness to God's Word.

That was the temptation to the original recipients of this letter. They are facing trouble because of their Christianity, persecution. In chapter 10 they are reminded of their former days when they were first enlightened. Then they had endured struggle with sufferings (v 32). They had joyfully accepted the plundering of their goods (v 34). Now trouble has returned. How bad is it? We are told how bad it is not. "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." (12:4) But maybe that was getting closer. If they would back off, way off this confession of Jesus they might just save themselves a lot of problems. Could it be time to mosey on back to Moses so some problems would just go away? Would it be wiser to focus more on safety than faithfulness?

Problems of this life can cause us to lose focus on the bigger problem, that enduring problem and even the root problem—sin. You see, in the end, sin is always the cause. All creation is in bondage because of sin. With that sin comes death. It all started when the big lie was spit out by the father of lies in the garden and swallowed by the woman and the man, that couple that had only known the perfect and good before would now know evil first hand. The writer tells us Christ is the one who came to destroy the one who has the power of death, the devil. How can he have such power? He is only a creature? He has that power as he keeps people in their sins and thus in death. When they are bothered by

their sin and the thought of God's justice he would try to convince them they have all the time in the world to turn it around. Such turning around, repentance, can come later.

Because of sin, left to ourselves, we are but faulty builders trying to build with faulty materials. We tried to demonstrate this in our Bible class this morning as some tried to build working behind their backs, others had to build lifting the materials in place with these craft sticks. Still others had colorful materials like these eggs, but it is a futile task to try to build with them, destined for failure again and again.

Left to our own there is slavery to the fear of death. There is the tactic of trying to ignore it, but it's the elephant in the room, maybe more like the skeleton in the closet. Those hardened in sin may be fearless to death, but that won't keep it from coming. Apart from Christ there is no freedom, only slavery to fear and sin.

No repentance and a much bigger problem awaits. We read in verses 2 and 3, "For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution,<sup>3</sup> 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." In chapter 10 we read, "It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (vs 31)

God gives the refocus. He shines the light of the law on the problem. We see there is never an overlooking, getting a pass, or hearing, "no big deal for nobody's perfect." His Word is a lens to sharpen the focus. That Word is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit...discerning the intentions of the heart." (4:12) We are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we all must give account." (4:13) There is plenty to focus on and it's not pretty and it's not good.

But God points us to the solution, to the One who is that solution. “For it was fitting that He, for whom all things exist and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their faith perfect through suffering.” (v 10) Perfect, was He not perfect already? There was no sin. He was tempted in every way that we are, yet without sin (4:15). That’s right, but perfect He was made through suffering, that is, He became the perfect sacrifice through suffering. He did taste death for us all. He faced the living justice of God in our place. “But when Christ had **offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins**, He sat down at the right hand of God.” (Hebrews 10:12)

Our focus is directed always to Jesus. No, going back to Moses and staying there will not do. The saving focus is that on the One Moses wrote of. To Him there is more glory than to Moses as there is more glory to the builder of the house than to the house (Hebrews 3:3) This greater, even greatest One is now risen and seated at God’s right hand as our High Priest. This exalted One indeed upholds the universe by the word of His power for the sake of His body, the church.

His words grab our focus. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven,<sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”<sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 10:32-33** Again, we are urged to “pay attention to (focus on) what we have heard, lest we drift from it.” (vs 1) Hear the wonderful words Jesus is speaking of His followers once more, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation, I will sing your praise.” (vs 12—Jesus is singing the praises of those who trust in Him) “Behold, I and the children God has given me.” (vs 13—children of faith) Focus on what awaits:<sup>22</sup>But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,<sup>23</sup> and to the assembly of the firstborn who are

enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, <sup>24</sup> and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” (Hebrews 12:22-24)

But in the meantime, before that day of the heavenly Zion there is freedom, freedom from the fear of death and freedom from slavery to sin. We remember Jesus’ words, “I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” (John 11:24, 25) We live and will live because the One who spoke those words died, yet now lives. We have been freed from slavery to sin, freed from the slavery of heeding the devil’s lies.

We have life now. It is certainly not trouble free as we are still in this creation subject to the bondage of sin. Yet we have life and life to the full, abundant life. This life is built on the framework of God’s Word in all areas of life, marriage being one of those. As we are new creations in Christ, God uses us, builds us as living stones into a spiritual temple. This is a life of repentance when in sin, a life of calling one another to repentance, a life of bearing up one another, and a life of praying for one another. No, things are not in shambles. We are God’s workmanship, the One who works everything for the good of those who love Him

The liar has been exposed. The truth is told. Death is defeated in our risen, reigning and returning Lord Jesus. We live for Him now even as we long for the day of reigning with Him. For His sake. Amen