

AM Hebrews 1:1-2:4 Attentive Christianity

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[0 : 00] Turn with me in your Bibles then to the first part of the Bible in Deuteronomy chapter 6.

! And we're going to read the first nine verses. This is Moses addressing the people of God. He's been doing that for quite a bit and we're just breaking into a little bit of that address. So at chapter 6 verse 1 he says, Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you that you may do them in the land to which you are going over to possess.

That you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you all the days of your life, and that your days may be long.

Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you in a land flowing with milk and honey.

[1 : 40] Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise.

You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Amen. Amen. And we will now turn to the New Testament. And our second reading is from the letter to the Hebrews.

The letter to the Hebrews. And we're going to be reading chapter 1 through to chapter 2, verse 4. So Hebrews chapter 1.

[3 : 04] Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

He, that's the Son, is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. And he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

For to which of the angels did God ever say, You are my Son, today I have begotten you. Or again, I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son.

And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, Let all God's angels worship him. Of the angels, he says, he makes his angels winds or breaths and his ministers a flame of fire.

[4 : 30] But of the Son, he says, Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.

You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.

And you, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain.

They will all wear out like a garment, like a robe. You will roll them up like a garment. They will be changed, but you are the same, and your years will have no end.

And to which of the angels has he ever said, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?

[5 : 27] Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

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? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Amen. May the Lord add his own blessing to the reading of his word. We're going to the book of Hebrews, chapter 2.

The book of Hebrews, chapter 2. And we will read again there, verses 1 to 4.

[7 : 04] Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

That is, from the message of the gospel, from the truths of our faith, from the truths of Christianity. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, that's the revelation of Moses and all the teaching that he gave to the people of God, if you like.

And every transgression and disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

What I'm going to do this morning, I'm going to try and give you a feel for the book of Hebrews. I don't know if you've ever read the book of Hebrews.

[8 : 42] I hope you have. But it's a great read. It's a great read because it contrasts the situation prior to the coming of Christ with all the ceremonial and ritual and all the provisional revelation, one might say, until Christ came.

This letter was written to Jewish Christians. These Jewish Christians had realised that their attachment to the kind of Judaism that they experienced during their lives, because we have to bear in mind that Judaism wasn't simply a black and white kind of religion.

It had various takes. There were a kind of liberal Judaism, if you like, that was quite eclectic, and it would bring in different things.

It still had, one might say, its basic beliefs in the God of the Bible, of the Old Testament, Jehovah. There had many other beliefs, and we'll see in a moment, one of these beliefs was the place of angels.

Why does the writer take the trouble to open this letter with a very, very high Christology, with a very, very high description of the identity of Jesus Christ?

[10 : 44] And the reason he does that is that he wants to bring those Jewish Christians who appear to be in danger of compromising their faith, who appear to be in danger of feeling the pull of going back to the kind of Judaism that they, shall we say, enjoyed before they put their faith in Christ.

The book of Hebrews is an appeal, the entire book is an appeal to those Christians not to do that and to hold fast to their profession of faith in Jesus Christ and in him alone.

The writer uses, if you like, two strategies during this entire letter to endeavor in his appeal and exhortation to get them to hold fast to their profession of faith.

The first strategy that he uses is contrast. Throughout the letter he contrasts the old revelation, if you like, before Christ with the new revelation in Christ.

he contrasts the sacrificial system, he contrasts Moses with Jesus Christ, he contrasts the law which in chapter 10 he says was merely a shadow and not the reality with Jesus Christ.

[12 : 37] And he does that throughout the entire letter, watch out for it, the contrasts. But the second thing, strategy that he has is this, warnings.

there are five. There are five warnings punctuated throughout the letter. This is the first one in chapter 2.

Now it's very clear, isn't it? You don't need to be an expert or a professor of theology or anything like that. All you need to do is read chapter 1 and you realize there's a problem with angels.

angels. And within that mix, within that mix of eclectic kind of Judaism, Judaism that was taking in other things and other ideas, is angels.

And this is the reason why he says things like, for to which of the angels did God ever say, you're my son?

[13 : 49] And why does he say, because these are all quotes from the Old Testament that the writer is using. And why does he say, in fact, far from the angels having any place in our salvation and in our redemption and in our faith, it actually says, let all the angels worship him.

Verse 6. Read that very carefully yourself. And verse 13, and to which of the angels has he ever said, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool.

Are these angels not all ministering spirits? There's an unbridgeable doff between the angels and Jesus Christ.

And he wants to remind them of who we're talking about. And that's why he says things like, Jesus Christ is the heir of all things.

Jesus Christ is the one through whom God created the world. Jesus Christ is the radiance of the glory of God.

[15 : 23] What a statement that is. The outflowing of the majesty and glory of God. God is the God this is who we're talking about.

And he is the exact imprint of his nature. Didn't Jesus say in John's gospel he that hath seen me hath seen the father.

And by the way in other words the whole phenomenon of Jesus Christ his actions his attitude the thrust and ethos of his life his teaching his crucifixion God you see God hanging on that cross as you look at Christ and that cross he that hath seen me hath seen the father.

the writer wants to help these people see the glory of Christ that they appear to be forgetting.

And you know something is it not true that we live in a kind of world where there's so many glittering so many voices so many pools that seek to draw us away from holding faster profession of faith.

[17 : 21] I said that there were two strategies that this writer used contrast and you can see the contrast he opens the letter up with contrast doesn't he?

Look at it verse 1 long ago and that many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

So what he's saying is the entire revelation of God the entire disclosure of God the entire giving out truths about God and ourselves was always through prophets and notice also that this happened at different times and notice that this also happened this kind of revelation in different ways.

There it is there. You don't need to take my word for it. Long ago at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. People talk about the wonderful but that you often see in scripture.

There's another wonderful one here but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son.

[18 : 49] Here is the full and final revelation and disclosure of God. Again I say it he that hath seen me hath seen the father.

And have you seen that revelation of Jesus Christ? What a revelation it is isn't it? And there's a theologian called Bonhoeffer who puts it like this everything every breath that Jesus took every cell in his body every sinew every bone everything that he ever did was for us.

He did not become flesh but for us he dwelt among us. He did not go to that cross because he needed to go to the cross himself.

He went to the cross as the sacrifice for guilty sinners like you and I. to the cross as what is it therefore that the writer to the Hebrews is saying here in chapter 2 verse 1 notice he begins with the word therefore that's the first thing you should notice.

What he's really saying with that word therefore is pregnant and replete with the entire chapter 1.

Do you realize what I've just said it's as if the writer is saying in chapter 1 about Jesus Christ therefore now notice a few things here in the language of verse 1 notice we notice must that's a very strong verb doing word in the New Testament it means absolute necessity we must he says we

[21 : 43] Christians pay much much notice the word much much closer attention and notice to what we have heard what's he saying he's appealing for what I want to call attentive Christianity I'll repeat that he's appealing for what I like to call attentive Christianity as opposed to drifting Christianity we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard let's put it this way what like

what might inattent of Christianity look like something like this we read our

Bibles maybe once or twice a day without taking anything in we say a prayer without listening for God's voice speaking to us we go through our entire week never picking up any opportunity to tell the gospel and we kind of drift along like a rudderless ship and our minds are filled with so much that we feel we don't have any time quality time we've got to remember haven't we I've got to remember all of us have got to remember it's a relationship and any relationship requires input intentional input

Bonhoeffer once said we are fighting today for costly grace I want to say we are fighting today for a tent of Christianity you know the greater importance of anything requires a greater attention doesn't it I mean think of a surgeon or surgeons which is quite probably what it would be more like to be in a complicated surgery think of the attention think think of the concentration think of the whole person concentrating think of a serious mountain climber taking on

Catman Jury or whatever the mountain is what this writer appears to be saying throughout this letter is the stakes my friends are very very high Jesus Christ confronts every single person with the biggest crisis of their life when he says to them are you going to follow me or not and remember who it is that's confronting us Hebrews 1 so he's talking about a tent of Christianity and he's saying we must pay much closer attention and we might ask the reason well what are some of the reasons that he gives well verse 2 he says 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 so great salvation what he's doing here is he's using a little bit of the if you like logic or reasoning from the lesser to the greater he's saying if you think about it it's a historical fact he's not just sort of giving a kind of logical argument he's actually relating it historically but he's saying if you think about it if that revelation through prophets which was at different times it wasn't a you know it was a bit of a piecemeal revelation and it was in different ways if that revelation stood and endured and the kind of things that it said happened e.g.

every transgression received their just great division how shall we escape if we neglect something far far greater than the full and final revelation of Jesus Christ and if we reject so great salvation now I see it in the ESV here it has such a salvation salvation but I can't remember the translation that I read it could have been the AV or the NIV I can't remember and it has this word so how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation it's the same little word as John 3:16 God so loved the world and what that's indicating is it's incalculable it's beyond words when we realise who we're dealing with and you know in that very chapter one he alluded to that didn't he he alluded to that salvation after saying all these very very high things the radiance of God the exact imprint he says after making purification for sins he sat and he's just slipped in there the writer the entire work of [29 : 07] Jesus Christ and he's saying this one who is so majestic hung with you know with shaming this grace on a cross for my sin and for your sin and this is why he says this salvation is incalculably great it's incalculably great because of who hung there it's incalculably great because of the sacrifice he tells him later on he tells him in chapter 10 of Hebrews he says what all the animal sacrifices had they gone on forever were unable to do take away our sins this person's one act of sacrifice on the cross took away our sins forever if you're a believer and you're trusting in

Jesus Christ he has taken away every sin and you know if you're a real believer you have to say past present and future but remember this Jesus once said this he that endures to the end the same shall be saved in other words the true people of God will endure to the end the it's great because of who the person is it's great because of that sacrifice and it's great because of the length and breadth and height and depth of this salvation it's for everyone

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes has eternal life have you believed in Jesus Christ Christ the writer here and I'm nearly finished says lest we drift away there's an interesting Greek myth called the sirens sirens according to Homer an ancient writer the sirens who were half bird and half woman lived on an island near Italy and Sicily here they awaited passing ships with their mesmerizing singing voices they enticed sailors to their doom on the rocks one of the most famous stories concerns the sirens attempt to lure Odysseus and his crew as they passed on their home voyage to Ithaca following the Trojan War the Greek hero was already renowned for his quick wits and planning and he proved to be a much more difficult catch than the sirens usual victims he had himself tied to his ship's mast so that he could hear the sirens beautiful song and not be tempted to land while the rest of his crew were made immune by blocking their ears and they safely sailed on out of harm's way what about you

and me is it possible that we could be slowly yet relentlessly lured away from Christ to the rocks of spiritual disaster could we be charmed by the voices of this world in social media and so called cultural influencers are we drifting along in a state of inattent of Christianity to have we been drifting away perhaps from our first love from wholehearted commitment to Jesus Christ well let's renew that commitment at this communion and let's rededicate and re-consecrate ourselves to this remarkable person who is our saviour the point of that Greek myth is to show the deadly state of drifting without really being involved and engaged our whole person in a kind of attentive Christianity therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard you've heard have you many times the wonderful gospel of [35 : 29] Jesus Christ I trust that you've tied yourself like goddesses to his cross and to his being as your saviour Amen do