

The supreme Son

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[0 : 00] Our reading today is from Hebrews chapter 1, starting at verse 1, and you'll find that on page 1203.

Hebrews 1, verse 1. 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 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 the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

[1 : 03] 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 and his ministers a flame of fire.

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.

[2 : 08] 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? 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.

Thanks, Lizzie. Do keep that passage open. My name is Andy Meadows. I'm the assistant pastor here at Grace Church. Let's pray. As we begin. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your wonderful word that has true wisdom on its pages.

[3 : 41] Please help us now to listen to you. Amen. We'll do follow along. There's a sermon outline on the back sheet, on the back of the sheet or on the screen.

When I was 15, so year 10, me and some friends went on a school trip sailing an old fishing boat from my hometown in Lowestoft in Suffolk over to Belgium.

It was great fun. It was one of the best weeks of my life, before getting married, obviously. And it took a few days, and we had a few shifts that we had to do to keep sailing in the right direction.

Somehow, I ended up on the midnight to 4 a.m. shift with a few others. And so you imagine it's 2 a.m. We're up on deck. A couple others decided, alongside me, to make hot chocolate.

And we go downstairs, and we leave one guy in charge up top. Your job is just to keep us going in this direction. Keep your hand firmly on the tiller, and we're going in that direction.

[4 : 49] Well, a while goes past. A long time goes past. And we hear a shout to come back up. My friend had not been paying attention.

I had not been paying attention. We were downstairs drinking hot chocolate. He'd fallen asleep. His hand had drifted. So rather than sailing towards Belgium, we were now drifting towards Norway. And if your geography isn't great, that is the wrong direction. We didn't mean to. We didn't pay attention. And so we were drifting.

And we got to Belgium fine in the end. But one of the things about drifting that makes it so dangerous is that you don't mean it to happen. Sometimes you don't even notice that it's happening in the first place.

It's gradual and often silent. Well, this morning we're starting a new series in the book of Hebrews. We're going to do it in short bursts, trying to do the bulk of it over the whole year.

[5 : 54] And one of the big messages of Hebrews is that drift is a danger in the Christian life too. Flick over to chapter 2, verse 1.

It says this, Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

Now, as we go through the book of Hebrews, and as we preach through it, I'm going to make the assumption that it would be possible for any of us to drift away from Jesus. I hope you don't think I'm being rude.

It's just that drift has always been a tendency for God's people, even for those who have been really involved in the people of God.

The writer even includes himself. Did you notice that? What we have heard, lest we drift away. He includes himself. Well, why might these group of people that this guy is writing to drift away?

[7 : 01] That's a question. Why might they? Well, as we go through, we'll see there's both pull and push factors involved. It becomes apparent their sin is pulling them away.

The sin that in chapter 12 describes as that which clings so closely. It's true, isn't it? The sin that clings to our hearts causes us to drift away from the Lord Jesus.

There's also the pull factor of sight. For the first readers here, there was a real temptation to drift away from Jesus and to drift to the visible, tangible, outwardly impressive religion of Judaism and all the sacrifices and all the ceremony which they'd either come out from or at least very familiar with. Perhaps it's not our particular temptation to drift away from Jesus into Streatham Synagogue down the road, but we experience the same temptation to live by sight, to live as what is impressive to the eye is what really matters, both in the draw of the physical and spiritual experiences of God or simply living for the world instead of living by the invisible realities of God's word.

And then there's the push factor of shame. Having turned to Jesus, we learned in chapter 10 that some of this group of believers had been imprisoned, that had their possessions taken away.

[8 : 38] They used to stand strong, but now in this stormy, hostile waters, their temptation is to drift away from Jesus in order to claw back their social respectability.

And how true it is for us that the shame, suffering from standing with the Lord Jesus is such a pressure that causes many to drift away from him.

If you wouldn't call yourself a Christian here this morning, perhaps it's these issues that you're thinking through in why turn to Jesus in the first place. Is he really such a big deal?

Is he worth the cost? Is he really the answer to my guilt? Hebrews will give us answers to those questions and more. But propelled by the strong currents of sin, sight and shame, these first readers are in real danger of drifting from following Jesus.

And so Hebrews is a letter, or more accurately perhaps, a written sermon from a pastor to his congregation, a pastor and a Christian brother to people he really cares about and to encourage them to keep fixing their eyes on the Lord Jesus, to weigh anchor in him and not drift.

[10 : 01] Well, with this big aim in mind, how does the pastor open his sermon? Well, it's the first point on the handout on the screen. God has spoken his supreme word in Jesus.

God has spoken his supreme word in Jesus. The assumption many make is that God is not a big talker. Perhaps he's just not that good with people.

But God has been in the business of speaking truth for a very long time. So turn to Hebrews chapter 1 verse 1. It says this, Long ago at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in his last days, he has spoken to us by his son.

In the Old Testament, God communicated through dreams, prophecies, visions, miracles, words, appearances, a donkey, tablets of stone, disembodied fingers, and so on. They were all amazing events to witness, I'm sure, but now God has gone further, deeper and fuller. He has spoken to us in his son, at Jesus Christ, the full word, the fulfillment, the full revelation of God.

[11 : 21] That's why in these verses, there's a strong sense of movement from long ago to these last days, from our fathers to us, from the prophets to the son.

It's a movement from promise to fulfillment, from provisional to final, from partial to complete. He's saying that Jesus is not a mere word from, the latest word from God, with more to follow.

He is the last word. St. Anthony was an early Christian monk who had such a reputation that three successive Roman emperors wrote letters to him.

You can imagine others gathering around him excitedly when they hear that Anthony had received another letter from the emperor. And these letters weren't, they've just dropped through the letterbox, accompanied by an imperial escort.

But here's what Anthony is quoted as saying as they gathered around. Do not be astonished if an emperor writes to us for he is a man, but rather wonder that God wrote the law for men and has spoken to us through his own son.

[12 : 31] God, the creator of the universe, is a speaking God and he has spoken to us through his son, through all that he said and all that he did. There is nothing more to add.

The writer is saying, you don't need to look anywhere else for truth about God. We have the son, who, verse two, is indeed God himself who created the world.

Have a look, verse two. whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature and he upholds the universe by his right hand of his power.

After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. God's final word here is bound up in Jesus' final work.

Jesus, through whom everything was made, he radiates the glory of God because he is God in the flesh, upholding the universe right now and provided purification for sins through his saving death on the cross, his resurrection and his ascension to heaven.

[13 : 45] And now he is sitting at the right hand of the Father on high right at this very moment. That would have been very important for these first readers when it came to that temptation of living by sight and the impressive outward Judaism that is around them.

Yesterday was Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, originally given in the Old Testament as a visual, a tangible representation of the purification of sins for God's people.

Imagine the early Christians who had left that behind. All those visual props of Judaism to follow Jesus. They had no priest. They had no temple sacrifice.

No sanctuary. But what they needed to know is that the Day of Atonement was only a shadow preparing for the far better fulfillment, the ultimate reality found in the Lord Jesus.

Purification for sins fully and finally through his death on the cross. It is finished, Jesus said as he died. And Jesus is now sat down at the right hand of the Father.

[15 : 08] And we need to keep hearing that too. We meet in a, it's a lovely building, but it's not that impressive, really. We don't wear any special robes.

There isn't much to see, really, when you gather here this morning. But Christianity, as it's been said, is an iceberg faith. 99% unseen.

The action that counts is not what we see on earth, but what is going on in heaven right now. at Jesus, the Son, upholding the universe, sat down at the right hand of God.

The purification for sins is finished. He's presenting himself to the Father, interceding for his people. That is the action that counts. What will cause us to not drift?

Well, it's grasping that God has spoken his supreme, final word in Jesus about the supreme, final work of Jesus. We aren't to turn anywhere else.

[16 : 13] We are to stay anchored in him. So God has spoken his supreme word in Jesus, and secondly, he's given a supreme status to Jesus. A poll conducted by the Bible Society a few years ago found that one in three people believe they have a guardian angel.

Now, despite the widespread rejection of Christianity, our culture, well, many people are still fascinated by angels.

In fact, you can probably guess the song that regularly tops the charts of non-religious songs played at funerals. It is Angels by Robbie Williams, that karaoke classic.

And Hebrews 1 appears to share this interest in angels. So it starts in verse 4, doesn't it? If you look down, Jesus, having become as superior to angels as their name he has inherited, is more excellent than theirs.

Now, people of Israel in the Old Testament, they knew that the angels were divine messages of authority, sent from heaven above. They're powerful, imposing figures.

[17 : 25] What did they have to say when they appeared to people? Do not be afraid. They delivered the Old Testament law to Moses as well.

They're pretty impressive beings. And to help these believers not drift, the Riper wants them to grasp how the Lord Jesus Christ is higher than the angels.

He is better. Hebrews picks the best, the most glorious that they thought, and shows that Jesus is more glorious. He is superior.

And so we have a kind of angels versus Jesus running through these next few verses. The writer provides this series of Old Testament quotes to reinforce that Jesus the Son is greater.

He is more superior. He is better. Now, we can't go through all these in any detail with the time we have, but we're going to touch on them briefly. So firstly, we get Jesus' royal status.

[18 : 25] Have a look at verse 5. For to which of the angels did God ever say, you are my son, today I have begotten you? For 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.

The writer kicks off with these foundational quotes from Psalm 2 and 2 Samuel.

These two passages speak in the first place about the human kings of Israel. At their coronation, the king was adopted as God's son, while 2 Samuel 7 promises an eternal reign to David's descendants.

And the point being that in Jesus, where we have the promised king, the royal son of David has come. No angel has ever been anointed as their messianic king.

No angel will reign forever on David's throne. No angel is the son. No angel is the heir of all things.

Jesus is worshipped, and the angels are not.

[19 : 35] Well, next, it's Jesus' everlasting reign. Verse 7, of the angels, he says, he makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.

But of the sun, he says, your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of uprightness is the spectre 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. angels are ministers.

They're servants. They're messengers. They're really scary postmen and women. But Jesus is God. Angels obey.

Jesus reigns forever. Angels are under authority. Jesus above all. But Jesus has been set above everyone and everything else.

[20 : 32] And next, we see Jesus' sovereign power in verses 10 to 12 taken from Psalm 102. The contrast here being implicit. The difference is that angels are creatures.

They receive life from God. But Jesus is the one through whom God created the world and who is now upholding the universe by the word of his power.

And lastly, the writer emphasizes Jesus' ultimate victory. Verse 13, to which of the angels did God ever say, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

Perhaps you've had the experience of visiting a home or an office and sitting down and then gradually realizing that you've sat in someone's special chair. Imagine being at the royal reception at Buckingham Palace and after a while you take an opportunity to sit down and rest, you're tired. But the room falls silent, every eye turns to you. Only then do you realize you've sat on the throne. Well, in heaven no angel would ever presume to sit at the right hand of God.

[21 : 49] That's Jesus' seat. He is right there at this very moment. And to summarize the writer's point in these verses, Jesus is superior.

He is better than the angels. Angels don't uphold the universe. They won't rule the future. They're not God. But Jesus is. Now, I don't expect that for us the big pastoral issue at the moment you're

facing that might cause you to drift is that you're too much into angels.

To quote Robbie, that you're loving angels instead, perhaps. And yet, sorry, I'm really sorry. And yet, like the original readers, perhaps it's the shame of following Jesus that is that push factor at the moment.

For them, it would be, why are you following this human Messiah when we've got the law given through angels? Do you know how powerful and scary they are?

Angels themselves delivered this. Why on earth are you not following it? Why on earth would you give that up for this human Messiah guy?

[23 : 00] You can't even see. Why are you doing that? Well, perhaps we don't get that, but we do get intimidating voices, don't we, closer to home, family members and friends questioning why.

Why are you going it all in on this guy, Jesus, who lived 2,000 years ago? What's there to get excited by? Can't even see him. And when we feel that push factor of shame, perhaps, what will cause us to not to drift is by remembering the supreme status of Jesus, his royal status, his everlasting reign, his sovereign power, his ultimate victory.

well, we've only really scratched the surface of chapter 1, but having laid out all the Old Testament texts, chapter 2, verse 1, is the big take home.

So that's our last point. So we must pay much closer attention to Jesus. Verse 1 says this, therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away.

this is the big punchline that chapter 1 has all been leading up to. But I guess it can seem like a bit of a letdown, like the finale of a TV show that just didn't deliver.

[24 : 29] After all that build-up, surely there's something a bit more impressive, something a bit more dramatic than that. But chapter 2, verse 1, is exactly what we need to hear and go on doing.

Now almost everyone in the room, I imagine, has flown on a plane before and have sat through those safety instructions from the flight attendants about what to do in the event of emergency.

They're the same, aren't they, on every flight, every day, every airline. And every day, every airline, every flight, no one pays attention.

Why? We've heard it before. We know to put our mask on before helping others. We know to follow those little lights down the gangway to the nearest exit.

Nothing new is ever said. Nothing exciting. So we don't pay attention. There's the danger for each of us that we have that attitude when it comes to paying attention to the gospel, paying attention to what the Lord Jesus has declared.

[25 : 48] Perhaps it, you wouldn't call yourself a follower of Jesus with delight to do or you'll hear. Perhaps it's the temptation to think like those plain safety instructions. What you hear in church is something that you don't think you'll ever need.

And perhaps, well, it might be important someday, but not now. And if I really needed it, near the end, if emergency did happen, someone's just going to tell me what to do.

Yet, believe it or not, Hebrews wants to impress upon us what's at stake. So have a look at verse 2.

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?

If neglecting the Old Testament law that was delivered by angels brought punishment, how much more if we neglect the message of a great salvation through Jesus, God himself, the final word?

[27 : 00] You see, the gospel is not like the message that comes through in a leaflet through the letterbox that just goes straight into the recycling. It is a message of a great salvation.

the message that the hurricane is coming and the helicopter is waiting outside, waiting to take you to safety. The message that the boat is sinking but there is a space on the lifeboat for you.

The message that we can be reconciled to our maker, the perfect son of God has provided purification for sin, cleansing through his blood. Once for all, a finished work and through trusting in Jesus we have a place in God's new world to come.

And for those of us who would already call ourselves followers of Jesus, well this is why throughout the letter the writer appeals to us to take care, to strive, to enter, to hold fast, to run with endurance. It's why this series is called Getting to the End. Perhaps for some we find ourselves paying less and less attention to God's word than we did in the past.

[28 : 16] No deliberate reason. But the things of this life begin to crowd out God's word and we start paying less attention to the gospel than we used to.

Just think back to five years ago. Most of us probably in fewer WhatsApp groups you probably had less responsibility.

Time has passed and life is more full, too full perhaps and in many ways that is unavoidable but nonetheless the author would say to us all however busy life is at the moment we must pay attention.

Actually do you see he says pay closer attention. Actually he says pay much closer attention. to the gospel that we have heard. After all what do we need to do to drift from Jesus?

Answer nothing. If you're in a boat sailing to Belgium and you do nothing you drift of course. If you're following the Lord Jesus but don't pay closer attention to what we've heard then we'll drift of course.

[29 : 32] We'll drift away from that gospel message of salvation and Jesus and I'm sure all of us can name people on our heads who have done that. Wouldn't it be great if we as a church would be even more committed to paying much closer attention to what we've heard and encourage one another to do the same as we meet each week as we speak to each other because it is through listening to God's voice in scripture about the son's final work of salvation that our hearts will be guarded from drifting from him.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we are prone to wander. We thank you though that you've given this book of Hebrews in your kindness to show us the Lord Jesus afresh your final supreme words his royal status that he reigns forever as your king and has ultimate victory.

Please help us to be those who pay much closer attention to what we have heard. Amen.