

Drifting Away

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[0:00] So Hebrews 1, 1 to 2, 4. It's a fairly depressing topic to think about. Why do people who profess to be Christian drift away?

! 35 years.

And as I reflect back on that time, I've seen people drift away. Not just the ones that move on to another church to do other things, but I've seen people who have claimed Christ for their own that let go and wander off.

And so I want to begin by thinking about what are the things that cause us to drift away? I've seen people drift because God gets squeezed out.

Because of weekend sport. Because of study. Because of work. Get this. Even ministry work. I'm doing God's work.

[1:10] It's my calling, I've heard people say. But they end up neglecting their personal walk with Jesus. And while often having a godly public appearance, their hearts have actually hardened, and their faith is far from flourishing in their private lives.

God gets squeezed out because of family. Too busy. Life's hectic. So we say, I've got no room for the majestic son of God. I've got no time to fit him in.

And once I squeeze Jesus out, it just becomes easy to leave him on the sideline. I've seen people drift away because they can't control their tongue. They gossip and slander and character assassinate and burn all their bridges.

They drift away lonely and turn their backs on God, blaming others without stopping to look in the mirror. Or I see people drift because of a relationship with someone that just isn't helpful.

A relationship with a person that doesn't see Jesus in the way that we see Jesus, as he's presented in the Bible. So people go after that relationship and leave the majestic son of God behind.

[2:20] I've seen people drift off because they might have been in Christian circles for a while, and they look back over their shoulders at what they used to have, and they think the grass is greener. The things that they had left behind become a temptation again, and the world reels them back in.

Because the world reminds us, why don't you get into these other things? Everyone else is doing it. Remember, you do you.

Whatever makes you happy. And why don't you put the majestic son of God on the shelf? Or I see people drift off because of some kind of failure in their life, whatever it is.

Something that causes guilt and shame, and rather than coming to Jesus and leaving at the cross and confessing that failure, they say, look, I'll deal with it myself.

When I put things right, I'll be able to come back. And they drift off. And the purification that God makes for sin in his son, they think, I'll do it myself, God.

[3:23] I'm all right. And they drift off. The readers who would have received this first letter were in a number of ways tempted to drift away from the central truth that Jesus is the centre of all things.

He's God's majestic son. Hebrews is a letter intended to say, wake up. You who are tempted to drift off. You who are tempted to put Jesus to the side.

And we all go through that. It's the posture of our hearts. There are things for all of us that encourage us, urge us, tempt us to leave Jesus on the shelf.

But this word that comes to us through Hebrews says, wake up. Pay attention. Don't give up. Remember who Jesus is.

He's the last word that God has spoken and it's a word of salvation. He's the last word that God has spoken and it's a word of forgiveness. He's the last word that brings life and our only hope.

[4:27] Why would you want to drift away from Jesus? And so we come to the letter of Hebrews. A letter whose authorship is uncertain while God remains the inspiration.

A letter whose initial audience was Jewish Christians, scattered and dispersed throughout the Mediterranean area. A letter that deals with the person and work of God's son, Jesus, based on Jewish prior understanding of Old Testament scripture and the fulfillment of this scripture in the coming of the Christ.

A letter to be read and embraced and copied and forwarded to other churches in the region so that they can learn and apply the richness of its content.

In chapter one, what we're seeing in the opening is basically saying, pay attention. Pay attention to Jesus. This is what I want you to know about him.

Jesus is superior. And for a group of people who attempted to slip into the Old Testament ways, at least embrace the Old Testament at the expense of the new, Hebrews chapter one says, don't just get caught up in the old messengers, but come and see this last word.

[5:41] Come and see that Jesus is superior. And so we're going to be invited this morning, those of us who attempted to drift, to come and take a fresh look at Jesus. Hebrews 1, 1 to 3, the opening verses.

Jesus is the heir of all things. It was through Jesus that the universe was made. Jesus is the radiance of God's glory. People say, show me God.

If you want to know what God's like, look to Jesus. Jesus sustains the universe by his powerful word. Jesus made purification for sins. Jesus has sat down at the right hand, the majesty of God. So verse four tells us that Jesus became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. And the rest of the chapter really wants to give us some proof from the Old Testament that Jesus is greater than the messengers of the Old Testament.

And the logic of this part of the passage goes like this. Jesus is superior. And because Jesus is superior, the message that God brings through his son is superior to the message of the Old Covenant.

[6:52] And so we're warned, be more careful, pay more careful attention to Jesus lest you drift away. Now I want to bring out a few points from Hebrews 1.

The first one is this. Jesus is superior to the angels. Because he's not just another servant of God, he's God's only son. He's not just another prophet, he's not just another messenger, but he is the one who is to come from the Father, God's own son.

And Psalm 2 verse 7 is quoted. For to which of the angels did God ever say, you are my son, today I've become your father. Or again from 2 Samuel 7, I will be his father and he will be my son.

What the writer of Hebrews has done is that he picks up on a whole series of Old Testament quotes and applies them to Jesus. And he uses the argument that Jesus is superior in the first case because he's the son of God.

Not just a servant, not just a worker, not just a prophet. Jesus is literally God with us. One God, three persons, Father, Son, Jesus, Holy Spirit.

[8:03] If you want to know what God looks like, look to Jesus. He's superior because he made all things, including the angels. Remember in the life of Jesus at his baptism, a voice came from heaven.

This is my son in whom I am well pleased. Then when he was transfigured on the mount, we hear the voice again. This is my son whom I love. Listen to him.

And so the writer of the Hebrews picks up on some great Old Testament passages that speak of the Messiah and says, Jesus, he's superior to the angels because he's God's chosen one, the anointed one, the son, which the New Testament fleshes out in much more detail in the Gospels.

And it's through this son that God will establish his throne forever in the great promises of 2 Samuel 7. And so there's a challenge for us. Don't get caught up with the messengers of the Old Testament at the expense of the majestic son of God, as the first readers may have been tempted to do.

To get caught up with the angels is a bit like if you got invited to Buckingham Palace. And you rock up to Buckingham Palace and you really focus on the changing of the guards and the guards and you actually get to go inside and walk the grounds and go into the palace.

[9:21] And then you get caught up by the butlers and the servants and the king walks by and you completely miss it. It's nuts. Jesus is superior. The second thing that comes out of this section of the argument is this.

Because Jesus is superior to the angels, it is Jesus who is worthy of worship. As God's own son, the one who was foretold to come, he deserves our honour.

In verse 6. And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, let all God's angels worship him. Now there's a difference between Jesus and other messengers that came before him. All other messengers came pointing to the one to come. And in Jesus, he has come. Jesus is superior to the angels because he is the one worthy of worship.

And the things we worship, we make time for and we make sacrifices for. We get a magnificent picture in Revelations 5 verses 11 and 12 as one example when John looks in his vision.

[10 : 25] I looked and I heard the voice of many angels, a great multitude that no one could count. They encircled the throne and living creatures and the elders all in a loud voice they sang, worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and strength and wisdom and honour and glory and praise.

Jesus is worthy of worship. He is greater than the angels and it's the angels who in joyful service sing praises to the lamb, the lamb who's seated at the throne.

So if I'm tempted to get caught up in the message of angels at the expense of the great son, Hebrews wants to say, come back, come back and see who Jesus really is. The third thing I want to say about this section is this, that Jesus is superior and because of that he's the one who's going to come to rule forever.

It builds on the illusion of the Old Testament passage in Psalm 45. Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.

You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore, God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy. Jesus is superior because through him God will establish his kingdom forever.

[11 : 49] The majestic son will come and rule and he's seated at the right hand of God as we read earlier in verse 3. And notice how the writer continues to pick on Old Testament passages that are speaking about God and he applies them to Jesus.

Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever. It's at the name of Jesus, we read in Philippians 2, that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he's Lord.

And it says, Jesus will rule forever and he's there from the beginning, the one from whom all things were created. So Hebrews 1, 10 to 12.

In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundation of the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain. They will all wear out like a garment.

You will roll them up like a robe, like a garment, they'll be changed, but you remain the same and your years will never end. Later in chapter 13, verse 8, which I'm looking at next week, we're reminded of this again, that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

[12 : 58] Jesus is superior to the angels, for it is Jesus who will rule forever and the angels are merely servants of God. And so the comparison continues in verse 13, where there's a question that picks up on Psalm 110.

To which of the angels did God say, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet? Jesus is superior to the angels who are sent to serve those who will inherit salvation. God will raise up the throne of Jesus forever and there is a balance here. In talking about angels, they have a role, serving God and serving the people of God, continually offering up worship to the Son of God, in the Old Testament, they communicate God's message and minister to believers. The balance that is struck here, don't give the angels too much significance, don't go chasing after them as if it's some extra level of being spiritual, don't have an over-exaggerated, glorified view of angels placing them above the superior Son.

Remember, angels served, are servants of God, or if they're fallen angels, they're actually demons and they're servants of the evil one. So how can we know if an angel is from God?

[14 : 19] Because they won't do anything outside of Scripture and they'll only point you to Jesus and they'll be doing God's bidding. Angels appeared to Abraham, to Lot, to Balaam, to Daniel, to Zechariah, to Mary, to the shepherds.

They comforted Jesus in the wilderness and they comforted Jesus in the garden and they spoke to the women at the empty tomb. We're reminded they are real and they are significant.

Hebrews 13 verse 2 says, Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by doing so, some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Entertain, practice hospitality.

You could be entertaining an angel. In 2 Peter 2 we're reminded not to slander angels and in Psalm 91 it says, God will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

So angels watch over us. It's biblical. And 1 Peter, angels long to know what we know, salvation through Jesus. Jesus didn't die for the angels, he died for us.

[15 : 28] I can't verify this as an angel but I have had an experience which was definitely a messenger from God. I remember a moment in life, it's probably about 10 years ago where I was at High Street, if you can go to High Street in your mind, Willoughby, High Street Bakery, Harris Farm, do you know that little spot?

And I was standing outside Harris Farm and there's a butcher's and a fish and chip shop or something and there's one of those machines where you put 50 cents in and you turn it and get bubble gum balls out of it and I remember standing there and I was just thinking I was pretty sad actually, I was feeling a bit anxious.

I remember standing there going like, I just don't think I'm doing it right, like being a good husband and being a good dad, doing my job right, I was feeling quite anxious and I just don't think I'm there. And I felt this touch on my arm and I looked down and it was a really short, really old lady, she was very frail. And she grabbed my arm with both her hands and she looked up at me and I hadn't, I'm a bit emotional to think about this, she said, God's told me to tell you you're doing a really good job and that Jesus loves you.

And man, I needed to hear that right then, I couldn't believe it, I was like, thank you, thank you, and I was like, oh wow, I went to thank her again and she wasn't there. And I went out to the car park and I couldn't find her and she wasn't there.

[16 : 51] I'm telling you, I don't know, she was an angel but it was definitely a message from God. Angels are real and whether she was an angel or not, that was definitely a message I needed to hear at the time.

So let's just be aware that spiritual things happen and angels are significant and they have their place, don't elevate them too highly. I know a lady who worshipped angels, angel olatry is a real thing, worshipping or giving undue recognition to angels.

Angels are created servants of God. Jesus is superior. Jesus did not die on the cross for angels, he died on the cross for us. We can only approach God and his eternal throne through Jesus.

In Colossians 2 verse 18 we read this, do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize.

Such a person goes into great detail about what they have seen and their unspiritual mind puffs them up with idle notions. Not only don't worship angels, don't worship anything God's created.

[17 : 58] In all of creation, worship Jesus. So we're reminded, pay attention to Jesus. Take another look at Jesus. The logic is going to take us further. If Jesus is superior to the angels, then that word that God speaks through him is a superior word.

and so it's a word that we have to pay attention to. Have a look at chapter 2 verses 1 to 4. We must pay careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard so that we do not drift away.

We live in an age today where it's so easy to drift away from the majestic sun and put other things at the centre. There's been a growing mistrust with mainstream religious institutions.

Statistically, atheism is on the decline that people are searching and we're in a spiritual age where people aren't looking in the right place. And so, there's sort of a spiritual awareness that you can still be spiritually dead.

All around us, there's evidence of people pursuing something spiritual. There's cults and sects, even health and well-being gurus. All kinds of religions that will lead us away from the superior son, Jesus.

[19 : 12] Many are founded by visions from an angel. Siddhartha or some vision experience. Siddhartha had an enlightened experience under a Bodhi tree.

Muhammad was walking in the desert and apparently an angel visited him. Joseph Smith was apparently visited by an angel. I had a bit of an encounter actually. I don't know if you're a procrastinator, but when I was actually studying theology at Moore College, I happened to be in near Hyde Park and I was, two Mormons came up and spoke to me.

And they'd got a tabernacle or something actually near Hyde Park and ultimately semi-convinced me to come and do Mormonism 101. And so I went back with them and played a bit of the devil's advocate and they proceeded to share scripture with me out of context.

So they said, do you think there's a God and his proof? And they read Galatians 5, the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faith, and self-control. They said, have you

got any of those attributes?

Because if you do, then there's obviously a God. No, that's non-contextual reading of scripture, do it. But anyway, let's keep going. Ultimately, they had this big crescendo that built up to Joseph Smith asked the question, oh Lord, what church shall I join?

[20 : 32] At which it was apparently told by God, all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines. and then he had a vision from an angel.

And then they asked me, so who said the angel? And I said, oh Satan. At which point they shut up shop and ushered me out pretty quickly.

And it says in 2 Corinthians 11, Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising then if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness.

Their end will be what their actions deserve. Mormons, Jehovah's Witness, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Atheists, Pagans want to devalue Christ.

They want to take away the fact that Jesus is God with a whole myriad of lies that lead people to destruction. We need to flee these false teachings. And so it's with these words in mind in Hebrews 2.1, be careful that we do not drift away.

[21 : 36] Drift away from what we have heard, pay more careful attention to the son to whom God has brought the final word, his last word about life, hope and salvation. This passage is really trumpeting Jesus' praises, reminding us to keep Jesus at the centre of our lives.

We live in an age where these words are important for us to hear. Pay more attention to the son. Don't believe lies lest we drift away. In verses 2-4, he picks up the angels again, he says, look, this message that was spoken by the angels in the Old Testament, it was a message that was spoken by God, and look what happened to those who rejected that message.

They received judgment. As we look at Old Testament examples, the fall, the wanderings in the wilderness, the split of the kingdoms in Israel, the exile, they're all reminders for us that when God spoke his message through his messengers, those who rejected his message found destruction and judgment.

The logic of the passage takes us further. If rejection of the inferior message brought judgment, how much more foolish, how much more dangerous is it for us to reject the son?

Look at these sobering words from Hebrews 2-3-4. How shall we escape this judgment that is coming? The things in brackets I've added in. If we ignore such a great salvation that comes through the majestic son of God, this salvation which only Jesus brings was first announced by the Lord, which Jesus announced, repent, believe the kingdom of God is at hand, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.

[23 : 19] God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. The writers pick up later on this in chapter 10.

How much more severely do you think a person deserves to be punished who has trampled the son of God underfoot and who is treated as a joke that blood Jesus shed to put us right with God?

Who has insulted the spirit of God? And he'll go on to say that it's a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. This last word God has spoken by his son is a powerful word.

It's a word which the son himself brought in. It's a word of salvation and hope. How shall we escape judgment if we ignore such a great word of salvation which God has given to us?

So let's pull all this together. If you're a person who's tempted to drift, if there are things happening in your life which are causing you to distance yourself from the superior son of God, the one who offers you forgiveness, hope, new life and his resurrection, come back.

[24 : 30] Acknowledge the son afresh. See the power of these words in Hebrews 1. Reacquaint yourself with the majestic son of God. Come back. We must be careful.

We must pay more careful attention therefore to what we have heard so that we do not drift away. Jesus is returning. We don't know when and if you've already begun to drift, come back to Jesus. Come back.