

**JESUS – Greater than
God's Final Word
Hebrews 1:1 to 2:4
Rev'd Chris Johnson - October 3, 2021**

This morning we start a new series launching into the epistle to the Hebrews.

The theme of this passage and indeed the whole book can be best summed up in Chapter 2:1, *"We must pay the most careful attention, therefore to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away."*

The writer of this epistle is concerned that his readers do not drift away. Although our context is very different to that of the original readers I would suggest to you the message is still highly relevant.

To illustrate this I want to share with you some comments made recently in a discussion in our Church talking about the healing of the blind man and the deaf man. You might recall our previous series in Mark's gospel. This discussion was about recognising spiritual blindness and deafness in our own lives?

I would like to suggest such a question is very closely related to drifting away. We can sometimes become deaf to the word of God and blind to seeing Jesus for all he is. When we close our spiritual eyes and ears, this is just another language for drifting away.

I've asked permission to share these comments and I think they're general enough that no one can be recognised. The following comments were made,

- *When we know the truth, yet turn the other way and do things our own way anyway.*
- *When I ignore God and try and to do things in my own strength; when I fail to trust in the Lord's plan for my future.*
- *Not recognising God's work in situations; preferring to use my own solutions to problems, rather than praying about it.*
- *It is sometimes difficult to focus on what is 'real' and important; especially when it comes to Christian things; our society tempts us to become our own 'god', to value self above all.*

I trust we can all identify with these struggles. If you do then Hebrews is for you. There's lots of practical encouragement here to encourage us to resist these temptations, to keep our spiritual eyes open and ears listening, and to not drift away.

The Book of Hebrews is written to first century Jewish believers who were also facing the temptation to drift away from Christ. And I don't think it was because the

Tel Aviv beaches were so alluring on the sabbath. For them it would have been social pressures to conform with Jewish cultural expectations.

- It would have been about being told if you want to follow Jesus as Messiah then leave home.
- If you want to follow Jesus then don't bother coming into work the next day.
- It would have been about the local Rabbi arguing Jesus couldn't possibly be the Messiah if he died a shameful death on a cross. How could a story about Jesus being a sacrifice possibly take the place of visible sacrifices in the Temple? How could Jesus as High Priest take the place of a visible priesthood in the Temple?
- There would have been enormous pressures on first century Jews to return to the Jewish fold.

What do we know about the background to this book of Hebrews? The answer is not a lot!

Who wrote it? We don't know.

Who was it written to? We don't know. The title 'To the Hebrews' was only given to it much later because it is obviously written to people with a Jewish background.

Where was it written? We don't know.

When was it written? We don't know. Most commentators agree that it would have to be before AD70 which is when the Jewish Temple was destroyed by the Romans. The writer takes it for granted that the temple sacrifices are still being offered.

The letter does give us a great insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the early Christian community. These Jewish converts began well with a bold confident faith but it seems like now they are in danger of falling away,

- maybe through family pressure,
- maybe through social pressure or
- maybe it was just apathy.

Hebrews 2:1 says, *"We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away."*

So what is the writer's answer to the temptation to drift from the faith?

His answer is Christ,

Consider Christ he is greater, by far, than anything else on offer.

Look at the way the writer describes Jesus Christ in the first chapter.

He is

-v2 the heir of all things - This means everything belongs to him. Everything on earth, in heaven, in this age and the age to come. It all belongs to him.

-v2 the one through whom the universe was made

The whole created universe was made by God through his Son Jesus Christ.

This assertion is also made in John's Gospel ch 1 and Colossians ch 1. So when it says that Jesus is the heir of all things this is only natural if the universe was made through him.

-v3 the radiance of God's glory

All the greatness and majesty of God shines through his Son. Just last week we looked at the Mount of Transfiguration Peter, James and John experienced that glory and radiance in full measure.

-v3 the exact representation of his being

This means that the Son truly and fully shows us the character of God.

-v3 he sustains all things by his powerful word.

God didn't simply create the world and then walk away to let it run by the laws and principles he had put in place. Through Jesus he goes on sustaining and upholding all things in heaven and earth.

-v3 he provides purification for sins

The way sins are purified is through the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Later on in the book the author will explain how the one full and sufficient sacrifice of cross replaces the animal sacrifices of the temple. More on that in the weeks to come.

-v3 he sits at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven

This is about the Ascension. Jesus ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father - the place of highest honour and power. His humiliation and suffering on the cross is now vindicated as he is honoured by the Father in this supreme place.

-v4 he is superior to the angels

Many of us today might not get over excited about this idea. But angels were very important in the Jewish community. There are a number of references that point to the presence of angels when the law was given to Moses. eg In Galatians 3:19 it says *"The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator."*

The mediator of course is Moses but here we are told that he was given the law through angels. So angels are important in the Old Testament, however our writer in v4 is keen for us to understand that Jesus is much, much superior to the angels.

And the rest of the chapter is an appeal to various Psalms to show how the Son is much superior to the angels.

V5a The angels never had that status.

V6 That's interesting, the 10 Commandments say to worship only God. But here worship is to be directed to the Son, and it is the angels who are to worship him. Angels are inferior to the Son who is God.

V8a This is from Psalm 45 where the King is equated with God. Jewish Kings were anointed to rule God's people on behalf of God. Here in Hebrews the author equates the Son with the King and with God. Jesus is King and Jesus is God is the message; and his throne will last forever and ever, and his reign will be marked by justice & righteousness, if you read the rest of those verses.

So the argument here is that the angels are wonderful creatures and they revealed much in the Old Covenant, but now the Son has been revealed he is shown to be far superior.

It is not just angels of course but the author goes on to show how every aspect of the Old Covenant is fulfilled in Christ. He is greater than all that has come before. He is greater than all the heroes of the Old Testament – Moses, Abraham, David, the prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. All of these people were great leaders but the Son as v3 says is *'the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being.'* So he is worthy of worship.

I wonder if you have ever watched a small child unwrapping a Christmas gift, with lovely shiny wrapping, perhaps in a fancy box with ribbons and bows. And then seeing the child find more interest in the fancy wrapping or the box containing the gift than the gift itself.

We could liken the box or the wrapping to the Old Testament. Jesus is the present inside. When he appeared on earth it was like the wrapping had come off, and God was fully revealed.

God's Son comes into the world and fulfils completely the law of Moses and the words of the prophets, and the new age dawned.

How sad to think that the wrapping is the main game. How sad to be distracted by the wrapping and miss the gift.

The Hebrews were in danger of taking their eyes off the gift of God's Son and going back to the wrapping. How tragic.

So the author warns them not to drift away, he warns them in v3 Chapter 2, *'How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation.'* And this warning is in the context of judgement for disobedience.

Now whenever you see warnings about judgement in the Bible you should be aware they always stem from God's love. Think about Jesus, he often spoke sternly and warned people about the coming judgement, and he did that so that people might repent of sin and be saved. Likewise, the writer to the Hebrews wants to warn his readers to not drift, because when you drift you're usually heading for danger.

It's like a dinghy drifting in a fast flowing river. It's probably not flowing quickly for no reason at all.

The lesson is to not drift but purposefully to set your eyes on the Son, who is superior to all things, and follow him.

At this time of our national life it is so easy for Christians to drift. COVID has brought many interruptions to our regular routines, including worship. It is easy for Christians to get out of the habit. It is easy for Christians to drift.

Quite apart from COVID there are the usual discouragements and disappointments in life. It is easy for Christians to get discouraged and wonder if God is really there for them. But that is why we need each other - to keep encouraging and supporting one another and stay strong in the faith.

A little later in Hebrews chapter 10 we will be looking at verses 24,25 which say, *“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching.”*

And there is lots of other practical advice like that throughout Hebrews. So stay tuned!

I'm hoping one of the outcomes from our Vision 26 process is that we will as a church have a greater sense of purpose and direction. When people have purpose they can usually overcome any obstacle. And what greater purpose is there than knowing the living God through Jesus Christ.

So my friends Jesus is greater, greater than anything else and God's final word. Listen again to his CV as written by the author of Hebrews.

Hebrews 1: 2-4. He is

- the heir of all things
- the one through whom the universe was made
- the radiance of God's glory
- the exact representation of his being
- he sustains all things by His powerful word
- he provided purification or forgiveness for sins
- he sat down at the right-hand of the Majesty in heaven
- he is much superior to the angels

or anything else for that matter.

I think this is a great quote from Andrew Lansdown “When Jesus speaks, speculation ends.” Our only proper response to Jesus is to listen. The message is crystal clear, So listen to Jesus.

Hebrews 2:1, *“We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.”*