



## Drifting is Deadly

*Series: Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul*

Hebrews 2:1-4

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I don't know if you have noticed or not, but in the first 14 verses of the sermon to the Hebrews – the whole first chapter – there is not a single command, not a single application made to the Hebrew Christians receiving this letter. Did you notice that? All the author of Hebrews wants to do is to shine a light on the glory, the greatness, the majesty, and the matchless splendor of Christ. He wants to fill our vision with a towering picture of Jesus the Son – as the final word from God, as the One who alone is the radiance of God's glory; as the One who is the Creator, Sustainer and Owner of the Universe; as the One who alone saves sinners, as the One who sits enthroned in Heaven, greater than all the angels, awaiting the day when all His enemies will be under His feet and His Kingdom, though invisible now, will be seen by all, and **“every knee (shall) bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...”** (Philippians 2:10–11, ESV)

There are no commands, no application, no instructions, only proclamation and celebration of the greatness of Jesus Christ our Lord, only reveling in the matchless glory of Christ, only an “in-the-face,” bold testimony to the supremacy of Christ. But that all changes this morning as we look at the first of what are called the “five warning passages” of Hebrews. Here's the deal. Theology is not just for knowing; it's for living. The writer of Hebrews doesn't preach the glory of Christ simply so that we are impressed, or so that our level of spiritual knowledge increases. He tells us all this so that we will ground our lives, and find our hope, and surrender our souls to Jesus alone. And so for that reason, here at the beginning of chapter 2, after he has preached the awesome glory of Christ, he says: **“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.”** (Hebrews 2:1, ESV) Now, before we actually look at these 4 verses, let me give you three truths, three facts, that you need to understand in order to properly interpret this and the other warning passages in Hebrews. Let me give you

**Three Truths That Frame the Warnings in Hebrews** First, we need to know and remember that the Hebrew church to whom this letter is addressed had been experiencing for some time persecution on an increasing scale and it was going to get worse. Being faithful to and following Christ was difficult and demanding and, as a result, they had experienced defections from the church. There were those, as in our own days, who had joined themselves to the church and made a profession of faith in Christ, but when the crucible came and they began to experience the cost of discipleship, they fell away. So the writer of Hebrews is warning the entire church: “You may have heard the word of the gospel, and professed faith in Christ, but unless you anchor yourself in Him, and faithfully follow Him, you will drift away and your profession, in the end, will have proven to be false.” A true Christian cannot lose his salvation, but a false professor of faith in Christ will eventually be revealed. To claim Jesus as Savior but be indifferent to His Lordship is a sure evidence that someone is not truly saved, and those kinds of people always fall away when the fires come.

The second truth that we need to remember is this: Everyone who professes faith in Christ is either drifting from salvation because of neglect or growing because of deliberate attention and effort. It’s one or the other and no-one grows by accident. In the matter of our faith and life, Christianity requires hard work. Scripture describes the life of faith as a fight, a race, a field in which a farmer labors. Paul says things in various places like: “I press on...I follow after... I strive... I fight.” When it comes to the past tense of salvation – the forgiveness of our sins through faith in Christ (what we call justification) – there is no place for our works. We do nothing to save ourselves; it is all the work of Jesus Christ, all His faithfulness, all His sacrifice, all His work, all His forgiveness; we simply receive what He has done for us by faith. But when it comes to our growth in Christ, when it comes to our sanctification, when it comes to living out the new life in Christ, that takes Spirit-empowered effort on our parts. Christianity is not passive.

Then the third thing is this. These warning texts serve as an alarm or a security system for us. When I was a pilot, I learned very quickly to pay attention to the “Master Caution” light on the control panel. If that light started flashing and its accompanying noise started in the headset, it meant that there was a serious problem that would eventually lead to aircraft failure if it were not addressed immediately. Likewise, these warning texts serve as the flashing lights and blaring horns of imminent danger. If you are genuinely saved, these texts serve as a warning, a warning that we are straying from Christ; they prick our consciences and the Spirit of God uses them to make us stop and think, to tremble even, and to respond in repentance and to preserve us from spiritual shipwreck and disaster. God uses these

warning texts to keep true Christians faithful and preserve us in our faith. True Christians take stock of these words and examine themselves. It is possible for a Christian to fall into sin for a time, to drift from Christ for a period and become entangled in sin, but not forever. These are the kinds of texts that God uses to convict and humble, and bring to repentance sinning brothers and sisters in Christ. He's used them with me.

OK? So these are the three things we need to keep in mind. Not everyone who professes to be a Christian really is. Some who profess faith in Christ will fall away. Everyone who professes faith in Christ is either drifting from salvation because of neglect or growing because of deliberate attention and effort. And these warning texts serve as an alarm or a security system for us to keep us on the right path. So let's look at this first warning in the sermon to the Hebrews, ok? And the first thing the writer of Hebrews has to say to us is:

**Beware the Temptation to Drift From Christ and His Gospel (1)** In light of everything that the writer of Hebrews has been saying about Jesus, he says: ***“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.” (Hebrews 2:1, ESV)*** This is just the logical outcome of all that he has said to us about the superiority and supremacy of Jesus Christ. If Christ is everything that he has said, then it is essential that we hold fast to the gospel and that it make a difference in our everyday lives. Now, let me show you what the writer of Hebrews is doing here. He is using nautical terms, sort of comparing the Christian's life to a boat or a ship. When he tells us to “pay much closer attention” the English words just cannot grasp the intensity and weightiness of the words that he uses. They are words that mean to emphatically, forcefully, and vigorously hold fast to the truth that we have heard. It was a phrase used of securely anchoring a ship or a boat in the midst of a storm or in the midst of strong and powerful currents, in order to keep it from being pulled out to sea and drifting away, slipping anchor and drifting to destruction. That is the picture here.

Now, the storms we face are obvious. The storm of persecution was a very real thing for these Hebrew Christians. The persecution and hardship threatened to break them loose from their moorings in Christ. That's why the writer of Hebrews is so adamant about reframing things in terms of Christ's Lordship and faithfulness, His ultimate justice, His promises to save and preserve His people, even in the most horrible and horrific of circumstances. In Christ, they could ***“with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that (they) may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16, ESV)***

Holding fast to the truth about Christ, they could weather any storm. The storms are obvious, but the currents that draw people away are not so much.

We need to remember, it is the chief ambition of Satan to rob us of God's truth and so rob us of life. That is his scheme. There is a current to this evil age, this world under the sway of Satan, pulling strongly out from the safe harbor of faith in Christ, this pull that little by little and imperceptibly at first, relentlessly tugs upon the human heart and soul, deteriorating the spiritual condition until we become dull and deadened to the truth of God, dull to the glory of Christ and to the weightiness of the gospel. We've seen it. We have all experienced it to one degree or another. Drifting is one of the besetting sins of our day. Professing Christians neglect their anchor – Christ – and begin to drift away.

Sometimes it's the current of years or familiarity. Over time, some people become bored with Christ, bored with the glories of salvation. That which once held such fascination and was exhilarating is replaced by other things, other pursuits, and lesser pleasures. Sometimes it's the busyness of a thousand cares or worthless and worldly distractions that cause people to begin a deadly drift. Sometimes it's the current of ease, the longing for a redefined Christianity that is not so costly or demanding. Rather than the old truths, the gospel truth, the desire to have the ears tickled or a version of Christianity that is not too heavy or too deep, that will not tax their minds or deal with their sins – soft, superficial, shallow words that lift the emotions and entertain the heart but do nothing for the soul. I have known people who have spoken of Christ with great eloquence and even prayed with great swelling and spiritual words, only to fall away from Christ and from what they once seemed to be. The anchor was loosed along the way and they drifted until their eternal soul I was suddenly shipwrecked. There are not many who in one moment of time commit some massively disastrous sin that seemingly comes out of nowhere; but there are many who drift from Christ and suddenly awake to find that their lives are in shambles, their faith shipwrecked.

CS Lewis wrote: ***“We have to be continually reminded of what we believe. Neither this belief nor any other will automatically remain alive in the mind. It must be fed. And as a matter of fact, if you examined a hundred people who had lost their faith in Christianity, I wonder how many of them would turn out to have reasoned out of it by honest argument? Do not most people simply drift away?”***

There is only one safeguard – to pay attention, to anchor ourselves, to the truth about Christ, to the Word of God. There is an urgency here to go on believing and hearing and receiving God’s Word to us in Jesus Christ. It is a serious thing to receive the grace of God. God’s truth, the truth about Christ, is not something about which we can be trivial or casual. The gospel has gravitas; it has weight, the ultimate weight. We cannot act as if we know all there is to know, or that there is little to be gained from really hearing and anchoring our lives to Christ. It is not just for the especially spiritual, or when you are facing a trial or moment of crisis, or during Renown weekend. Being anchored to Christ and His truth is absolutely necessary always if we are to escape spiritual shipwreck and truly be saved.

We have to organize our minds and our hearts around the Bible’s message every day. We need to remember humanity’s fall into sin, our own sin that we still must battle. We need to be reminded of the character of God – His faithfulness, His power, His justice, His mercy and His love. We need to be reminded of His holiness and the offence that our sin is to Him. And then we need to focus our hearts and minds on the cross, the ultimate display of God’s love for sinners like us, for you and me personally, where God’s mercy was so wondrously displayed, remembering that we are forgiven and have been purchased by His blood, not to live in sin any longer, but to live out our identity as His people.

Christ and His word are supremely valuable, more important than anything else in this world or the world to come. A lack of urgency, a lack of vigilance, and we will be drawn right back into all the things – greed, pride, hatred, sensuality, sexual immorality and more – that define our natural state in sin and leads to destruction. That is the writer’s point. Drifting is deadly. To prove this point, he first uses:

**An Argument from the Lesser to the Greater (2-3a)** He says: ***“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?”*** (Hebrews 2:2–3a, ESV) Now, look what he is saying. It’s an argument from the lesser to the greater, from the Old Covenant of the Law, to the New Covenant in Christ’s blood. The Old Covenant, the message that was given to Moses by the angels on Mt Sinai, had to be taken very seriously, even though it has been superseded by the gospel that has been given to us in God’s Son.

It was a valid and binding covenant, a covenant that pointed to the coming of Jesus, and every transgression or disobedience – unwillingness to hear and to obey – was justly punished. You can see this all throughout OT story of the Exodus and wilderness wanderings of Israel. The first readers of Hebrews were well aware of how Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled against Moses and against God and were swallowed up by the earth. Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, offered strange and false worship to God and were consumed by fire. The whole generation of Israelites who did not trust God were made to wander 40 years in the wilderness and died without ever seeing the Promised Land. They knew how Achan had disobeyed God at Jericho and took spoils from the battle and was stoned for his disobedience. There is story after story describing the judgment against those who transgressed and disobeyed God's Law.

If this is what happened to those who broke faith with God in the OT, how much more will we come under God's judgment if we hear the gospel, and profess faith in Christ, and neglect – fall away from – the great salvation that is offered through the death of Jesus Christ, God's Holy Son? ***How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?*** The answer is: No one will. If you neglect and fall away from this great salvation in Christ, there is no other way. All that remains is ***“a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume (His) adversaries.” (Hebrews 10:27, ESV)*** This is a great salvation because it is the one thing that every person needs more than anything else. And it is indescribably great because it comes to us from none other than the eternal Son of God, who humbled Himself and gave Himself to bear the weight of our sin, dying on the cross and rising triumphantly from the dead and showing us how, by grace, we should live in way that pleases the Holy God. We cannot neglect the greatness of salvation in Christ. We just can't. We must love it and cherish it, meditate on it, think about it, be moved in our hearts by it, be grateful for it, speak of it to others, be shaped and fashioned in the whole of our lives by it, and set all our hopes on it. Do not neglect such a great salvation... and here's why, because this great salvation is confirmed by God as the only way of eternal life. Picking the way salvation and choosing a Savior is not like choosing a favorite football or baseball team – it's not a matter of preference; it's a matter of truth.

**A Great Salvation – Confirmed By God (3b-4)** The writer of Hebrews says of this 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.” (Hebrews 2:3b-4, ESV)** This great salvation is not some imaginary or whimsical idea, nor is it a bunch of religious philosophy, but it is a matter of divine revelation and historical fact. It starts with God the Father, the God who speaks, and it ends with Him. Let me show you what I mean.

**It was declared at first by the Lord** – or really, “by means of” or “through” the Lord Jesus. On other words, this salvation was first spoken of by God the Father and then from Him, through Jesus. The writer is referring to the whole of Jesus’ life and ministry on the earth – as he preached and healed, worked miracles and lived a life of perfect holiness, as He declared the Kingdom that would be built through His death and resurrection and then did it. It all spoke of the salvation that He alone can give.

**It was attested to us by those who heard** – the Apostles, Jesus’ eyewitnesses who lived with Him, heard Him preach and teach, who watched Him feed 5000 and still a storm with a word, who heard Him declare Himself to be God’s Son, who heard Him clearly state His mission – not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many, those who saw Him die and peered into an empty tomb, who met with the resurrected Christ in Galilee and watched Him ascend into Heaven, calling them to **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And heard Him promise: And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**” (Matthew 28:19-20, ESV) They knew the gospel is truth and they endured persecution, trial, and even martyrdom, in order to make that truth known.

**God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will** – God confirmed the truth of this message by enabling the Apostles to do signs and miracles and wonders – all pointing to the truth and the power of the gospel to save. He poured out on new believers the gifts of the Spirit, changing lives and hearts forever, and thereby testifying to the effectual work of the gospel message to save those who believe. This gospel message is the truth! It is a message like no other. And the sum of the whole message of these four verses is this:

**Don't Neglect This Great Salvation** Don't neglect Christ and His supreme glory. Don't neglect this overwhelming display of God's love for you. Don't neglect the sacrifice of Christ's life and the shedding of His blood on the cross. Don't neglect the forgiveness, the gift of righteousness, the acceptance of God, the extinguishing of God's wrath and reconciliation to your Creator. Don't neglect the strength, the provision, the shepherding love and care of God in Christ. Don't neglect the gift of the Holy Spirit, fellowship and communion and friendship with Jesus Christ. Don't neglect the gift of the family of God. Don't neglect the invitation to draw near to God in worship. Don't neglect the reward and blessings of faith in Christ. Don't neglect free access to the throne of grace. Do not neglect the treasure of heaven.

This is a great salvation. What are you doing to keep yourself anchored to Christ?

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