

Pay Attention

Hebrews: Jesus is Better • PART 3 • Hebrews 2:1-4

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We'd like to welcome you to the Four Lakes Church of Christ this morning! If you are visiting with us today (either here in person or online), we are glad to have you with us, and we would invite you to fill out an online visitor card by using the QR code on the front of the bulletin or by going to our website at fourlakescoc.org/visitor.

We are here today to worship God, and part of that is preaching the good news that Jesus loves us and gave himself up for us on the cross. We respond in awe, believing the message, turning away from sin, publicly confessing that Jesus is our King, the Son of God, and by submitting to his command to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. And we do have two examples today, starting with an update that comes to us from Bernard Owusu Ampaafu, a gospel preacher in Accra, Ghana. He posted a quote from Acts 8:39, ***"...and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing."*** He then says that "Our beloved sister Rose gave herself to Christ today. Let's us remember her in our prayers brethren." Great news from Ghana this week!

And this last one comes to us from the church up in Green Bay. They say, "God is GOOD! Yesterday we celebrated Lane Whiting and his decision to put Christ on in baptism. We prayed over him as a church and presented him with a personalized Bible. We are always so thankful for the access we have to Jesus' complete saving work in baptism. If we boast, as Paul says in Galatians 6:14, we boast ***'in the cross of Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.'***" God is adding to His kingdom and we are grateful for His church, through which we have edification, encouragement, and a body of believers planted in the Gospel to help us on our journey to stronger faith." From Ghana to Green Bay, we share these two examples by way of encouragement, and if we can help with your obedience to the good news, please let us know.

Most of you know by now that I have a way of paying attention to warning signs – not necessarily heeding the warnings on those signs, but mainly just noticing interesting signs. These two signs are in the lower level of what is basically a hiking thrift shop out in Denver, Colorado. They have about two steps right in the middle of the sales floor, and these signs are apparently there for a very good reason.

The next two are also hiking related, with the one on the left at a park not too far from my in-laws house just south of Dayton, Ohio. I was looking for a place to run a couple of years ago, and they have a very nice park in

the area, where the main trail is almost exactly one mile, which is nice, but then they have some bonus trails that go off into the woods. Very primitive (in a good way). And the sign on the right is on the trail out to the sea caves in the Meyers Beach area in the Apostle Islands National Seashore, almost straight north of here, right on Lake Superior. I was there about a year ago, at maybe 17 degrees below zero, and when I saw the sign, I was somewhat concerned about what kind of creature had perhaps been chewing on the sign. The top part was missing!

This next one is found along the North Country Trail in the U.P., near where the Presque Isle River empties into Lake Superior. I was there a year or so ago, at roughly 21 degrees below zero. Absolutely beautiful, but I had no plans to go swimming or wading in that river. No plans whatsoever!

The sign on the left is on the trail to the Olympic Hot Springs in Olympic National Park. This hike is right up into the mountains, roughly 26 miles round trip, and I remember this, because several reviews were saying that it was 26.1 miles. A marathon is 26.2, so although I was completely wiped out after this, I walked around the parking lot at the trail head a few times when I got back, just so I could say that I hiked a marathon! But this is in cougar country. Basically, you don't see them, but they see you, so be aware. And the sign on the right was also on this trail, and I just appreciate how pets are not allowed, but children are excluded! Children do not count as pets on this trail.

The pic on the left is from our trip through the Smoky Mountains on our way home from Florida this past summer. To me, that sign looked like a challenge, a dare of some kind. It reminded me of a loop you might do with a matchbox car. The sign in the middle is from a firewood dealer out in Sequim, Washington, near my sister. I think that's one of my favorites. If you are joining us on the phone, this one basically says, "Six feet for social distancing, 60 feet political" (if you plan on sharing your politics). And then the one on the right was on an airboat tour to see some alligators in the Everglades last summer. They simply didn't allow any coronavirus on their property. They banned it, since signs banning things work so well. But these are some warning signs that have caught my eye over the past year or so.

This morning, I'd like for us to return to our series of lessons on Hebrews, as we come to the first WARNING in the book. Hebrews, of course, seems to have been a sermon that was written down, addressed to a group of Christians who were starting to have a hard time listening to Jesus. Like all of us, sometimes, they were perhaps tempted to go back to a former way of life, and so the book of Hebrews is a "**word of exhortation**" (according to Hebrews 13:22), reminding these people (and reminding us today) that JESUS IS BETTER. In Chapter 1, we learned that compared to how God communicated in times past, Jesus is a "Better Messenger," and we also learned that Jesus is "Enthroned on High." Jesus is better in every possible way and is now seated at the right hand of God. And the author proves this by appealing to Scripture.

Today, though, we come to the first WARNING, the first COMMAND, as the author tells us to PAY ATTENTION. Remembering that Jesus is the Better Messenger, and remembering that Jesus is Enthroned on High, let's look at Hebrews 2:1-4 this morning – Hebrews 2:1-4,

¹ For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. ² For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, ³ how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, ⁴ God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

As we allow these ancient words to challenge us this morning, I'd like for us to notice the DANGER, then we'll note the CONSEQUENCES if we choose to ignore the warning, and then we'll close this morning by noting the REMEDY.

I. **As we get into this, though, let's start by noticing the warning itself as the author of Hebrews warns us about the DANGER OF DRIFTING.**

And we start this part of it with a *"therefore"* (in some translations), or in the case of the NASB, we have the author saying, *"For this reason."* The *"reason"* is everything we just learned about Jesus in Chapter 1. Because of how much *"better"* Jesus is, the warning is that we must be especially aware of the danger of *"drifting away"* from what we have heard. This is a warning we must take seriously. This isn't optional. This isn't just good advice, but this is serious. This warning is urgent.

And the warning is about the danger of drifting, *"so that we do not DRIFT away from it."* And I've included the word *"neglect"* (down in verse 3), because this is the danger, this is the warning: We must not *"neglect"* our salvation. By the way, that word *"neglect"* is found one other time in Scripture, in the parable of the king who gives a wedding reception for his son. The king sends out invitations, but there were many who *"paid no attention"* to the invitation (in Matthew 22:5). They didn't outright reject the invitation, but they *"paid no attention to it."* That's the danger addressed in Hebrews 2, that we drift, that we fail to pay attention. The word translated as *"drift"* (in verse 1) is a word that refers to something "flowing by," it refers to something "slipping away." The word was used in ancient times to refer to an arrow "slipping" out of a quiver, it was used to refer to snow "sliding" down a mountain in an avalanche, it was used to refer to a ring "slipping" off of a finger, it was used to refer to an inappropriate word "slipping" into a conversation, it was used in the medical field to refer to food "slipping" down the windpipe instead of the esophagus. We have the picture of something just happening. There's no intent, but the lack of intent is what allows this to happen. We might think of going tubing down a river. You don't really do too much to steer or propel a tube down a river. It just floats, and you go where the river goes. A couple of years ago, my wife and I tubed down the Eau Claire River. We would normally have dozens of kids with us in canoes, but we were alone, so this time we just floated, and instead of only 2-3 hours, this time it took 5-6 hours. We were drifting. By the way, right as we got in, she decided to give me her nearly brand new Keen sandals to keep safe. I strapped them to the side of my pack, but that strap came undone early on, and I looked down, and one of those sandals was gone. It had *"drifted"* away. It was at that moment that I realized that half a pair of \$90 Keen sandals is not worth \$45, but \$0! I didn't intend to put \$90 through the shredder, but it happened by *"neglect."* That sandal *"drifted,"* and is perhaps now in the Gulf of Mexico at this very moment.

The same thing happens in other areas of life. A garden can be destroyed by neglect. In order to destroy my garden, I don't need to go out there and set it on fire; no, I can just leave it alone, and nothing good will grow there. A beautiful house can be destroyed by neglect as well. When we first built our house, the builder would send us a quarterly checklist for new homeowners, "Clean your gutters. vacuum your smoke detectors, check the sump pump, clean out the dryer vent, re-caulk the sink, check your drains, drain the hoses before winter, vacuum the coils on your refrigerator," and on and on. And you know, we could ignore all that stuff, but the house would pretty quickly deteriorate – not because we've burned it down, but because we've neglected it.

Or maybe we could think about a marriage. I'm guessing that far more marriages have been destroyed by neglect than by adultery. And I'm thinking the same thing can be said about our Christian faith. We don't need to commit some huge and outrageous sin to be lost; all we need to do is nothing! Without intent, our walk with the Lord has a way of falling apart very quickly. Maybe we play a game on the phone instead of reading a

chapter of the Word. Maybe we're tired after work and watch a few hours on Netflix instead of checking in with one of our senior saints. But you know, we don't neglect what's important to us, do we? No, if it's important to us, we pay attention to it. If we value our job, we show up on time. If we value our family, we spend time together. If I value my yard, I spend time and money taking care of it. And in the same way, if I value my relationship with God, I pay attention to it, because there is a very real danger in neglecting it. The danger is that we may very well drift away from it.

So, the question is: Are we drifting? Am I drifting right now? If you've ever gone swimming in the ocean, then you know that drifting can be almost imperceptible. So, how do we know whether we're drifting? We look back! If my wife is on the beach here, and now I look back and she's over there, I've drifted! In the same way, I would suggest looking back spiritually. Can you think of a time in your life when you were closer to the Lord than you are right now? If so, you've drifted. Jesus hasn't moved; we have. And we need to be aware of the danger, the danger of neglect, the danger of drifting.

And speaking of warning signs, when we ignore those warnings, some terrible things can happen. We heard on the news a few weeks ago that someone down in Alabama died as a result of being sucked through a jet engine. The news said that they died "after" they were ingested into the engine. I think it may be more accurate to say that they died "as" they were ingested. But either way, we know that terrible things can happen when we ignore certain warnings. And the same is true of our relationship with God. There is danger in neglect. We are in danger when we hear truth but fail to let it change our lives. And I love that the author includes himself in this, ***"For this reason, WE must pay much closer attention."*** This can happen to your preacher. This can happen to anybody. The warning is for all of us.

II. **And this leads us to a description of the CONSEQUENCES: If we fail to heed the warning, there will be NO ESCAPE FROM PUNISHMENT.**

In verses 2-3, ***"For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"*** It's a rhetorical question, and the implied answer is: We won't! If we fail to pay attention to God's message, we will NOT escape. And we have an argument from the lesser to the greater here as the author starts with a reference to ***"the word spoken through angels."*** It appears to be a reference to the Law of Moses, but I usually don't think of that Law as being ***"spoken through angels."*** I think of Moses getting those tablets directly from God on Mount Sinai. However, as Moses re-tells that story nearly 40 years later, right before the people cross over into the Promised Land, Moses says (in Deuteronomy 33:2), ***"The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; at His right hand there was flashing lightning for them."*** Stephen refers back to this in his sermon to the Jewish ruling council (in Acts 7:38), when he says (referring to Moses), ***"This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you."*** Paul makes a similar reference in Galatians 3:19, when he says, ***"Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made."*** Angels, then, were in some way involved in delivering the Law of Moses.

And under that Law, ***"every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty."*** He uses two words here, starting with ***"transgression,"*** which refers to the crossing of a line, willfully or defiantly crossing a line that God has told us not to cross. But the second word is ***"disobedience,"*** and this word refers to "flawed hearing," or we might think of this as "half-hearted listening." As parents, we've seen both of these, haven't we?

Sometimes, we may be dealing with outright rebellion, “I know you said not to do this, but I did it anyway.” Other times, though, it’s as if our kids’ ears are broken. They didn’t set out to cross a line that we told them not to cross, but they just weren’t paying attention. Under the Law of Moses, both of these were bad! Either way, if you transgressed or if you failed to listen, there was a price to pay. Nobody got away with anything. And sometimes we think, “Wow! At least we are under the New Covenant now!” But no! The author of Hebrews is pretty clearly making the point that punishment for ignoring Jesus (as a much better messenger) will be even worse (or at least more certain) than ignoring a Law delivered by mere angels. If nobody got away with transgressing or mis-hearing a Law delivered by angels, then how much more true is this for a message delivered by Jesus? There will be no escaping the consequences.

III. **As we come to the end of this passage, we come to the REMEDY – the solution to drifting is TO PAY MUCH CLOSER ATTENTION TO THE WORD OF GOD.**

As I understand it, the word we have here as *“pay attention”* goes back to two words meaning “facing towards” and “to have or to hold.” So, it’s the idea of facing whatever it is and holding on. It’s used in a negative way in the qualifications of deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8, where we find that these men must not be *“addicted”* to much wine. If a man is facing his wine and holding on, that’s not the guy you want serving the church. The word is used in a positive sense in Acts 16:14, with reference to Lydia *“responding”* to the things spoken by Paul. She was *“paying attention.”* And that’s the idea here: To prevent drifting, the opposite of *“neglect”* is to *“pay attention”* to the word of God, and we must pay *“much closer”* attention. Even the word *“attention”* here is modified by a word meaning “abundantly” or even “furiously.” We are to *“pay much closer attention to what we have heard,”* a reference to the word of God.

This word, the author says, *“was at first spoken through the Lord,”* it was then *“confirmed to us by those who heard,”* and then was also confirmed by God himself, *“both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit.”* So, we have the word of the Lord himself, passed along to us by eyewitnesses, and confirmed by signs and miracles. This, by the way, is something the apostle Paul would never say! Paul, in fact, made a huge deal about getting his message directly from the Lord himself. I’m just saying that whoever wrote Hebrews is clearly a second-generation Christian.

By the way, this passage straight up tells us the purpose of miracles. Miracles weren’t just to amaze people, but the point of miracles was to *“confirm”* the word of God. In those days before the written word of the New Testament, God provided miraculous confirmation. If I pop on the scene in 35 AD and try to claim that you don’t need to sacrifice in the temple anymore and that you need to repent and be baptized to be saved, I can’t point to that in a book somewhere, so God may give me the ability to make some guy walk who had never walked before, and that way you would know that my message was inspired. Now, of course, we have the written word, so those miracles are no longer needed – almost like the scaffolding around a building under construction – there is a time in the construction process where the scaffolding is taken down – it’s not needed. So also with miracles. And, in fact, the miracles seem to fade as we progress through the New Testament. At one point, people are healed by touching Paul’s handkerchiefs, but by the time we get to 1 Timothy, Paul is telling Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach (1 Timothy 5:23). And by the time we get to 2 Timothy, Paul is leaving Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20).

And now, maybe in the mid-to-late 60’s AD, the author refers to this as taking place in the past: Jesus spoke, his word was passed along through eyewitnesses, and their word *“was confirmed”* by those signs and wonders and miracles. Now, we have the written word. And so, if somebody comes in and claims to have some “late

breaking news” from God, we don’t need a miracle; we just need to open the written word. The solution to drifting, then, is *“pay much closer attention”* to the word.

Conclusion:

And that’s the message of Hebrews! We may have a hard time listening to Jesus, we may be tempted to give up or turn back to an old way of life, but we need to realize that Jesus is better. There’s a great danger in drifting, and so this preacher encourages us to pay attention to the word. How are we doing with that right now? Are we looking at it? Are we holding on to it?

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven,” Jesus says, *“but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS’”* (Matthew 7:21-23). Let’s decide right now to pay more careful attention to God’s word this week. Make a note in your calendar, set an alarm on your phone, decide to sit down and read a book of the Bible this afternoon. Make a commitment to study Genesis 34 with us this Wednesday evening at 7. Doing nothing is neglect, and there is great danger in drifting.

Jim has chosen some songs to emphasize what we’ve learned from Hebrews this morning, but as we prepare our minds for the Lord’s Supper, let’s go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You have revealed yourself so clearly through Jesus, and we are thankful this morning for your word, delivered through angels, brought to us this morning by your inspired messengers. We ask that we would lean forward with great anticipation as we read and as we understand not only who you are and how much you love us, but how we need to be living to honor you. We ask, Father, that we may be able to pay more careful attention to what has been written. Keep us from drifting, protect us from the evil one. Give us opportunities to love and to share. Empower us to “be Jesus” to the world around us. Forgive us, Father, when we sin.

We come to you through Jesus, our Savior and Lord. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com