

Week 1 Devotionary™ Reading

A Daily Devotional on the Book of Hebrews

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The Sufficiency of Christ

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 angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. – Hebrews 1:1-4 ESV

While do not know who the author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* was, we can almost certainly conclude that his audience was made up primarily of Jewish believers. Throughout the letter, he makes references to facts regarding Judaism, apparently assuming his readers were well-versed in them. He takes little time to explain details regarding the sacrificial system, the office of high priest, the history of Israel, or the identity of the individuals listed in chapter 11, who were primarily Jewish in their ethnic identity. The fact that the author was also addressing Jews whose faith in Christ might be in question is evidenced by his repeated warnings against drifting away, neglecting so great a salvation, having an unbelieving heart and failing to enter into the rest God has promised. Even in the opening line of his letter, the author tells his readers that, “in these last days he [God] has spoken to us by His Son” (Hebrews 1:2 ESV).

He is acting under the understanding that his audience was very familiar with the words of Jesus and the message of the gospel. Interestingly enough, he does not mention the name of Jesus anywhere in this first chapter, but simply refers to Him as God’s Son. That Jesus was inferred and understood by his readers as the one being discussed is quite clear. The original recipients of this letter would have known exactly who was being discussed.

That the writer would delay the mention of Jesus’ name until the ninth verse in chapter two is intriguing. But it would seem that he felt no need to use the name of Jesus, but simply referred to His unique designation as the Son of God. That term would have been very familiar with his Jewish audience and would have brought to mind the very reason for which they had rejected Jesus to begin with. It was Jesus’ claim to be divine, the very Son of God, that led the Jews to accuse Him of blasphemy and to seek His death. At one time Jesus had said, “My Father has entrusted everything to me. No one truly knows the Son except the Father, and no one truly knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matthew 11:27 NLT). These kinds of statements did not endear Jesus to the Jewish religious leaders of His day. In fact, when He was arrested and brought before them on the night He was betrayed, Caiaphas, the high priest, questioned Jesus asking, “I demand in the name of the living God—tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.” (Matthew 26:63 NLT). Jesus answered, “You have said it. And in the future you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God’s right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64 NLT). And Caiaphas, in shock and horror, responded, “Blasphemy! Why do we need other witnesses? You have all heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?” (Matthew 26:65-66 NLT). And his fellow religious leaders shouted out, “Guilty! He deserves to die!” (Matthew 26:66 NLT).

It was Jesus' claim of divine Sonship that got Him in trouble – not His miracles, signs and wonders. It was not His teaching that drove the high priest and his cohorts crazy, but His insistence that He was divine. And the writer of Hebrews jumped all over this very fact, claiming that God had “spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2 ESV). He attributes to Jesus the divine role of creator of the universe. He was and is God. In fact, “The Son radiates God’s own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command” (Hebrews 1:3 NLT). This man from Nazareth, who was murdered at the hands of the Romans as the insistence of the Jews, was the Son of God. And it was the very fact that He was the Son of God that made His sacrifice on the cross acceptable to His Father. He was without blemish, sinless, making Him the perfect sacrifice and the only acceptable payment for the sins of mankind. And, the writer of Hebrews reminds his readers, “When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven. Jesus returned to where He had come from, the very throne room of God. The apostle Paul writes about this very reality in his letter to the Philippians.

*When he appeared in human form,
he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal’s death on a cross.*

*Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
and gave him the name above all other names,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. – Philippians 2:7-11 NLT*

Over the next chapters, we will see the author go out of his way to insist on the superiority of Christ. He is superior to angels, Moses, and any earthly high priest or institution. His sacrifice was greater and more effective than anything man could ever hope to accomplish through the sacrifice of bulls and goats. Jesus was and is incomparable. There was nothing in Judaism that could compare. There was no reason for those who had placed their faith in Jesus as their Savior and Messiah, to return to the old covenant of laws and ritualistic rule keeping. Christ was sufficient. The good news was good enough. There was nothing missing and no man-made requirements necessary to complete or compliment what Christ had done on the cross.

Peter reminds us, “By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world’s corruption caused by human desires” (2 Peter 1:3-4 NLT). In Christ, we have all we need to for salvation, sanctification and our ultimate glorification. Nothing is missing. Nothing need be added. As the old hymn, *Rock of Ages*, so aptly puts it, “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling.” Jesus is enough.

No Comparison

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.” – Hebrews 1:5-7 ESV

For the author of Hebrews, it seemed important to establish the uniqueness and complete sufficiency of Christ. Writing to a Jewish audience, he wants to ensure that they understand that Jesus was much more than just a man, so he presents seven facts concerning Jesus. 1) He was appointed the heir of all things by God. All that belongs to God, which includes everything, belong to Jesus as His Son. 2) He created the universe. All that exists in time and space was made possible by Jesus as the second person of the Trinity. Paul wrote to the believers in Colossae:

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can’t see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. – Colossians 1:15-17 ESV

Jesus wasn’t created by God. He is the God who created all things. 3) He is the radiance of the glory of God. In His incarnation, Jesus made God visible to man. He shone forth the glory of God, if be it in a veiled sense during His earthly days on earth. But His words and works revealed the power and majesty of God to man. 4) He is the exact imprint of God’s nature. In seeing Jesus, men were able to see the nature of God revealed. He made God’s goodness, wisdom, glory and righteousness visible to men. 5) He upholds the universe by the word of His power. His very words sustain and maintain the universe. His word has power beyond that of any other source. 6) He made purification for sins. By sacrificing His own life, Jesus made it possible for mankind to experience both the cleansing from and removal of sin and its deadly consequences. 7) He sat down at the right hand of God. Having faithfully and obediently completed His God-appointed task, Jesus ascended back to heaven and retained His rightful place next to God the Father, where He rules and reigns.

All of this puts Jesus on a different plane than anyone and everything else. There is nothing and no one who can compare with Him, including angels. These heavenly beings, who played a vital role in the history and religious understanding of the Jews, were not to be compared with Jesus. In Judaism, angels were viewed as divine messengers from God. In fact, the Jews closely associated angels with the giving of the Law of Moses. We read in Deuteronomy 33, “The Lord came from Sinai and revealed himself to Israel from Seir. He appeared in splendor from Mount

Paran, and came forth with ten thousand holy ones. With his right hand he gave a fiery law to them” (Deuteronomy 33:2 NET).

Paul tells us that the law “was administered through angels by an intermediary” (Galatians 3:19 NET). So, angels were venerated by the Jews. And it would seem that there were some in the early days of the church who took the veneration of angels and turned it into worship. Paul warned about it in his letter to the church in Colossae.

*Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or **the worship of angels**, saying they have had visions about these things. Their sinful minds have made them proud, and they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For he holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it. – Colossians 2:18-19 NLT*

The writer of Hebrews wants us to understand that angels, while superior beings in many ways, are not to be compared with Jesus. And to support his point, he provides four Old Testament passages as evidence. Quoting from Psalm 2:7, he asks if God had ever said to any angel, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you?” And the answer is no. The Jews in his audience would have known that Davidic psalm as speaking of the Messiah. And while angels were often referred to in the Old Testament Scriptures as “sons of God,” no angel was ever called “the Son of God.” Quoting from 2 Samuel 7:14, the author asks whether God ever said of any angel, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son” (Hebrews 1:5 ESV).

Again, the Jews would have recognized this as a promise of God given to David the king. It was a Messianic passage, partially fulfilled in the life of Solomon, David’s son, but ultimately fulfilled in Christ, “who was descended from David – according to the flesh” (Romans 1:3 ESV). Using Deuteronomy 32:14 as his reference, the author reminds his readers that God said even the angels would one day worship Jesus. Finally, using Psalm 104:4, the author presents angels as nothing more than divine messengers. The psalmist compares them to wind, invisible and at the mercy of a far greater power. They were created by God and were designed for His glory, not their own. Like flames of fire, they sometimes brought illumination and, at other times, judgment. But they were never meant to be worshiped.

In the book of the Revelation, John was visited by an angel and given words from God that he was to write down. John's response was to fall down and worship the angel, but he was told, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God” (Revelation 19:10 ESV). And then the angel gave John an important point of clarification: “For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10 ESV). All that John was being shown in his vision concerning the end times revolved around the person of Christ. In fact, in the very next verses of John’s revelation, we read:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a

flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. – Revelation 19:11-16 ESV

Jesus is superior to angels. He alone is to be worshiped and revered. It is He who sits at the right hand of God and who will one day return as the King of kings and Lord of lords. There is nothing and no one to compare with Jesus. He alone is worthy of our praise, worship, glory, honor, and love.

Our Incomparable Christ

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; 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? – Hebrews 1:8-14 ESV

Angels are ministers. They are servants of God. Like the wind, they blow according to His will. They are worshipers and are never to be worshiped by men. But the Son of God is different. As the author expressed earlier, "The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God" and "he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command" (Romans 1:3 NLTa). He holds a "place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven" (Romans 1:3b NLT). And as a result, "the Son is far greater than the angels" (Romans 1:4 NLT).

Using the Old Testament Scriptures as a proof-text for his thoughts, the author of Hebrews presents the Son of God as having royal pedigree, ruling over an everlasting kingdom that is marked by righteousness. He is eternal, having always existed as God and having no beginning or end. Rather than having been created, He was the creator of all that exists. And, as God, His nature is unchanging. The fact that He came to earth and took on human flesh in no way diminished or altered His divinity in any way. He sits at the right hand of God the Father, ruling in righteousness over all that exists. For the writer of Hebrews, the deity of Jesus is essential and non-negotiable. He is the Son of God and, as such, He shares the nature and character of God. He is royal, immutable, all-powerful, sovereign, righteous and, ultimately, the victor in the battle over sin, death and Satan.

Part of what the writer of Hebrews is going to try and do is promote the superiority of the new covenant over the old one. And since the average Jew believed the old covenant was brought to them from God by angels, they placed a very high value on angels. But the point of this letter is to establish the superiority of Christ in all things. He is greater than angels. The new covenant in His blood is superior to the old covenant which was based on works. His service to men through the offering of His life as a payment for sin is far superior to any service the angels may offer up.

The angels, while important, pale in significance when compared with Christ. In fact, they exist “to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14 ESV). They serve God’s people. And we serve Christ. He is the head of the body of Christ. He alone deserves our worship and full attention. Angels could bring “good news of great joy that will be for all the people” (Luke 2:10 ESV). But they could not save anyone. They could announce the arrival of Jesus on the scene, but He would still have to sacrifice His own life to make salvation possible to men. And while angels were the ones who told the women at Jesus’ empty tomb, “He is not here, for he has risen, as he said” (Matthew 28:6 ESV), they were simply messengers of some very good news. Without Jesus, there would have been no news at all. Apart from Jesus, salvation would be impossible for all men. Had Jesus not died and rose again, there would be no victory for anyone. But Jesus DID come. He DID die. He WAS resurrected from death to life. He HAS ascended back to heaven. And He WILL one day return.

The Danger of Doctrinal Drift

Therefore we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken through angels proved to be so firm that every violation or disobedience received its just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was first communicated through the Lord and was confirmed to us by those who heard him, while God confirmed their witness with signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. – Hebrews 2:1-4 ESV

After his powerful opening regarding the supremacy of Christ, the author of Hebrews provides his readers with a warning against slipping away from the truth regarding salvation. That message of salvation came from the lips of Jesus Himself and by virtue of His bodily sacrifice on the cross. Jesus had clearly taught, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6 ESV). He claimed, “I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved” (John 10:9 ESV). He had told Martha, just before he raised Lazarus from the dead, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26 ESV). And Jesus told Nicodemus, the Pharisee, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16 ESV).

So, the author tells his readers, “we must pay much closer to attention to what we have heard” (Hebrews 2:1 ESV). The message of Jesus, carried on by His disciples after His ascension into heaven, had been circulated among both Jews and Gentiles, resulting in many people coming to faith in Him as their Savior. But there was always the real possibility of drifting away by those who had embraced the good news of the gospel. The Greek term the author uses is *pararreō* and it means to “let slip, glide by.” Rather than remain anchored to the truth regarding their salvation, they could easily find themselves drifting away, carried by the current of moral subjectivity and doctrinal heresy. In chapter six of this same letter, the author reminds his readers, “So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is **a strong and trustworthy anchor** for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God’s inner sanctuary” (Hebrews 6:18-19 NLT). We will not drift as long as we remain firmly attached to the truth of the gospel. Those who fled to Jesus for refuge from condemnation and the penalty for sin, can have great confidence that He will one day return for them. Drifting always begins with doubting. When our assurance weakens, the likelihood of our drifting increases.

That church’s experience 2,000 years ago intersects our lives in this way: *drifting is the besetting sin of our day*. And as the metaphor suggests, it is not so much intentional as from unconcern. Christians neglect their anchor—Christ—and begin to quietly drift away. There is no friction, no dramatic sense of departure. But when the winds of trouble come, the things of Christ are left far behind, even out of sight. – R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews*

The author compares the message concerning Jesus with “the message declared by angels,” which refers to the Mosaic law. Moses recorded in the book of Deuteronomy, “The Lord came from Sinai and revealed himself to Israel from Seir. He appeared in splendor from Mount Paran, and came forth with ten thousand holy ones. With his right hand he gave a fiery law to them” (Deuteronomy 33:2 NET). Paul expanded on this in his letter to the Galatians. “Why then was the law given? It was added because of transgressions, until the arrival of the descendant to whom the promise had been made. It was administered through angels by an intermediary” (Galatians 3:19 NET). And the author of Hebrews says that message, the law, proved to be reliable. What is said about sin and punishment was accurate, just and righteous. It revealed that all men are sinners and incapable of living up to God’s holy standard. So, the author asks, “So what makes us think we can escape if we ignore this great salvation that was first announced by the Lord Jesus himself and then delivered to us by those who heard him speak?” (Hebrews 2:3 NLT).

This passage is not talking about losing your salvation. But it is talking about drifting away from the truth and hope of the gospel. It is talking about allowing doctrinal drift to subtly creep into your life, causing you to doubt the hope promised to you in Christ. The message of salvation declared by Jesus was carried on by the apostles. It was supported by signs and wonders. It was proven by the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the church. But in spite of all this, there is always the temptation to lose our grip on the solid rock of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone. The issue has to do with doctrinal drift that begins with doubting the promises attached to the gospel message. When we begin to wonder if faith alone is enough, we will begin to add to the gospel. This usually begins when we allow present circumstances to define the veracity of the gospel message. In other words, if things do not appear to be going quite the way we expected, we begin to wonder if something is missing. We begin to question whether there is more that we need to be doing. Difficulties can bring doubt. Doubt can lead to drift. Drift can result in shoddy doctrine. And we end up neglecting or making light of “a great salvation.” As soon as we start taking our salvation for granted, we will find ourselves prone to doctrinal drift, a subtle, but dangerous unmooring of our faith in the one thing that can truly provide us with hope. It does not mean we lose our salvation, but we will most certainly lose our ability to enjoy peace in the storm, joy in the midst of sorrow, hope in spite of setbacks, and assurance in the face of uncertainty.