

# Don't Drift!

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Preacher: Mike Scrivani

[ 0 : 00 ] Hebrews chapter 2 verses 1 through 4.

! May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word.

Would you please be seated? I grew up in the Kansas City area, which in Kansas, like Oklahoma, is landlocked.

We didn't grow up going to the ocean, but every summer we did visit a place in Kansas City called Oceans of Fun. Yeah, right, some of you have been there. Oceans of Fun was a giant water park with water slides and a lot of water rides.

My favorite place in Oceans of Fun was the wave pool. The wave pool was an enormous pool of water beginning with a gently sloping shallow end that gradually deepened the farther it went on the other side, the far side.

[ 1 : 43 ] But about every 20 or 30 minutes, the safaris' wipeout would blast over the speakers announcing the arrival of the waves.

And the waves began in the deep end of the pool and they rolled powerfully to the shallow end of the pool, sending excited swimmers bobbing up and down in the water and their inflated tubes and other pool toys.

And when I was a little kid visiting Oceans of Fun, my parents instructed me to stay in the shallow end and to remain inside my tube whenever the waves began.

After the waves stopped and the laughter subsided from going up and down in the water as the waves crashed over me, I realized that the waves had pulled me into the forbidden territory of the deep end of the pool.

And so I slowly paddled over to the side in my tube and began the slow work of pulling myself down the side back to the safety of the shallow end, hoping my parents hadn't noticed my little adventure.

[ 3 : 01 ] If you've been to the ocean, you know the danger of drifting out deeper into the waters. You venture a little bit further and a little bit further, letting the waves carry you out deeper into the ocean until suddenly you realize that your feet can no longer touch the bottom and the shore is much farther away than you expected.

All this to say, it's easy to drift away if you aren't paying attention. In our passage today, the author of Hebrews warns his readers about the danger of spiritual drift, of drifting away from the spiritual truths that they heard about the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

We don't know much about the original recipients of this letter. It's really written as a sermon. All we truly know about them, though, comes from what we read here in the book of Hebrews.

We know that this audience either was predominantly or completely made up of Hebrews, of Jews. They were Jews who had heard the gospel.

They were Jews who were very knowledgeable of the Old Testament, the Old Testament sacrificial system, and the Levitical priesthood.

[ 4 : 29 ] Some biblical scholars believe that many of them served as Levites in the temple in Israel. What is certain is that this group of Hebrews faced persecution for being associated with Christ.

We read about that in Hebrews 10, 32 through 35. But recall the former days when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.

For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. Then in Hebrews 6, 10, we read, For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints as you still do.

From those two passages, we infer that these people at some point heard the gospel and they were living as Christians.

[ 5 : 40 ] They were facing persecution as a result of that, which was tempting them to waver, to wonder if following Christ was truly worth it.

There's a temptation for them to return back to their old ways, to their old faith, or maybe to have one foot in each world, in one foot in Old Testament Judaism and one foot in New Testament Christianity.

The author of Hebrews urges them to resist this temptation. He encourages them to endure, to press on because Jesus Christ is better, because Jesus Christ is worthy and he is worth whatever persecution they are enduring because only Jesus Christ can save us from our sins.

One commentator said, The book of Hebrews was written by a Hebrew to other Hebrews telling the Hebrews to stop acting like Hebrews.

In the face of mounting persecution, these early Jewish believers were tempted to slip back, to drift towards the things that they had left to follow Jesus.

[ 7 : 03 ] And so to keep his audience anchored to Christ, the author of Hebrews reminds them through use of Old Testament scriptures of who Jesus is and of what Jesus has done.

The beginning of chapter 2 contains the first of seven warnings or hazards, which the author of Hebrews provides throughout this book to these Christians who are struggling to persevere in their faith in Jesus Christ.

And it's a hazard that followers of Jesus Christ continue to face today. So the main idea for this morning's sermon is guard yourself against the hazard of spiritual drift.

Guard yourself against the hazard of spiritual drift. Drifting is often, again, so slow and subtle that you barely notice that it's happening at all. It's like the wave pool at Oceans of Fun.

One moment you're exactly where you intended to be, and the next you're unknowingly have drifted away. The persistent waves of temptation, the ever-changing winds of the world, and the fears and the concerns that those things bring to us can gradually pull us away from Christ if we're not on our guard.

[ 8 : 24 ] And the personal struggle that we have with our sinful flesh can likewise cause us to drift as we become sluggish in practicing the spiritual disciplines, like praying and studying Scripture, obeying the Lord's commands to not forsake assembling with other believers to worship Him in the church.

Sometimes spiritual drift follows the same pattern as our New Year's resolutions. For example, someone, maybe you, makes a resolution to go to the gym.

They buy new workout clothes. They purchase good food and supplements. They get a gym membership.

There's an excitement. There's a newness, a goal, and a determination to realize it. And things start off well.

A routine is established. But then an interruption comes. Maybe you get sick and you miss a week of workouts.

[ 9 : 29 ] Maybe you decide you need a day off. Maybe you go on vacation. Maybe the weather is bad and you decide to stay in your warm bed. Maybe it starts simply with you just pressing the snooze button on your alarm one time.

And before you know it, it's been weeks since you last worked out and you've drifted to the point where going back feels like starting over, which is not something you want to do.

You come up with excuses for yourself so you don't have to admit defeat. The truth is that we are either swimming toward Christ or we're drifting toward something else.

Again, there is no lack of shortage of things in this world that tempt us to drift without our even realizing it. The author of Hebrews understands this and he's aware of the pull of the world and of the flesh that pulls us, that tempts us, that's tempting his readers to drift away from Christ.

I think it's safe to assume that he felt this temptation to drift himself because notice he includes himself in this warning. He says we must pay closer attention to what we have heard lest we drift away from it.

[ 10 : 58 ] The author of Hebrews has felt the undertow of sin in the things of this world which compete with his love for Jesus.

For his immediate hearers, the tide that threatened them to drift away from the Lord was the pull of the old covenant and the old rituals and the old ceremonies that truly were there to point to Christ but no longer served a purpose since Jesus had come and fulfilled them and inaugurated a new covenant through his death and his resurrection.

The persecution they faced for their professed faith in Christ came at a cost. And some were questioning if following Jesus was worth the mistreatment they were enduring.

At present we don't experience in our nation at least the same levels of persecution in our culture that other Christians are facing in other places in this world or that the original recipients of this letter endured.

But we experience enough to tempt us to drift from Jesus. A Christian can drift because they love people who hate the God they love and the truth he's revealed.

[12:19] When the people they love or the people they seek approval from make belittling comments about their convictions as a Christian a Christian can be tempted to drift from Christ because they fear losing that relationship or they fear being excluded from that group that they desire to belong to.

Again, a Christian can be tempted to drift away from Christ because of unrepentant sin struggles with sinful thoughts or with worldly desires. We can allow ourselves to be preoccupied with deadlines, promotions, headline news our favorite sports team making a sports team report cards, social media or a number of different things.

The warning for these believers back then to guard against the hazard of spiritual drift applies today because we are all again either swimming towards Christ or drifting away.

And so now the question becomes how do we keep from drifting away? The author of Hebrews inspired by the Holy Spirit provides us with two ways to be on our guard against spiritual drift.

In chapter 1 he's already provided a preview of how to keep from drifting which is by focusing on Christ focusing on who he truly is focusing on what he's done.

[13:39] The child born in Bethlehem he's told us is the eternal word of God he is the radiance and glory of God he is the exact imprint of God the Father's nature. He upholds the universe that he created and though he is eternal he stepped down from heaven adding a human nature to his divine nature to give his life as a sacrifice to redeem us and to purify us of our sins.

After dying and rising again he proved that even death isn't a match for him. He is better than anything that ever came before or that will ever come after.

He is Christ the Lord. He is worthy of our praise. He is worthy of our devotion. He is worth following. He is worth the cost of whatever might be lost or whatever persecution that we could face because only he is able to save us.

Only he is able to purify us of our sins. Only he is able to give us eternal life. Brother and sister today maybe you realize that you are drifting.

The Lord in his goodness has ordained this day for you to be here to hear his word to wake up from your spiritual lethargy and to help you to swim.

[15:01] We all know someone I'm sure who at one time was active in our church but has drifted away. Like the author of Hebrews we are called to compassionately urge them back.

We need each other in the church to hold one another accountable and do what the Holy Spirit commands through the author of Hebrews and we'll get there eventually in Hebrews chapter 10 verses 23 through 25 but let's look at it now.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who promised is faithful and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some but encouraging one another all the more as you see the day drawing near.

If you're here this morning and you're not a believer God has brought you here today friends so that you will hear the good news of who Jesus is and what Jesus done that you will avoid the ultimate spiritual hazard which is to die in your sins to suffer then eternally for rejecting your holy creator and neglecting the one way the only way that he's made for you to be saved from his wrath through faith in Jesus Christ his son.

I'm glad you're here and I mean it when I say I've been praying for you and I hope that today is the day of your salvation. The author of Hebrews again presents us with two ways to be on guard against the hazard of spiritual drift.

[16:49] The first way we see in beginning of verse 1 through the middle of verse 3 heed the warning signs heed the warning signs verse 1 therefore we must pay closer much closer attention

to what we have heard lest we drift away from it.

Anytime we see the word therefore in scripture we must ask ourselves what is that therefore therefore therefore or phrases like for this reason help us come to the right conclusions when we're reading the Bible.

Chapter 1 in Hebrews established Jesus' superiority over the angels. Angels are ministering servants Jesus is the son of God.

Angels delivered a word from God but Jesus is the word of God. Therefore we must pay closer attention to what God the father has said in these last days through his divine son Jesus Christ. Said in another way it is extremely foolish to not listen to what Jesus the son of God has said and to not take seriously what he's said.

[18:06] If you tonight were woken up in your bed by an angel you'd be terrified. You'd be terrified.

As we read the accounts in scripture where God had an angel appear to somebody it wasn't like hey an angel it was oh my goodness falling down in terror an angel.

But say that happened say God sent an angel and he sent them to you with a message. And you know from scripture that God doesn't just send angels to people for no reason.

We like to jump out of you know dark places and scare the people that we love because we think that's funny. God doesn't work in that way. He's not just trying to terrify people. If he sends an angel he does it with a purpose.

That angel has a message for that person. So say this happens to you and you're shaking in fear but what you know about the Bible what you know about angels comes to your mind and you know that this angel has a message for you from God.

[19:12] You're going to pay very careful attention to that message aren't you? You're not going to say hold on wait a second I need to use the bathroom first or hold on wait a second I've been watching I've got this other chore that I needed to do I'll come back.

No you're going to pay careful attention. Sometimes husbands we are accused by our wives of having selective hearing. We're listening we hear words we know those words are being spoken to us and we say things like hmm hmm uh-huh or mm-hmm we say those words and what we are doing is we're agreeing to do whatever we're asked by our wives and then when we don't do it we're shocked whenever our wife says you weren't listening to me.

Here's the point. You would give your full undivided attention to an angel with a message from God to you and if you would give an angel your full attention how much more should you give your attention to Jesus Christ who is superior to angels because he is the son of God.

We have his message for us recorded for us right here in our Bibles. We have what we need to know who Jesus is.

We have what we need to know what Jesus has done and we have what we need to understand why knowing who he is and what he's done matters so much for us and for others.

[21:08] The phrase pay much closer attention is one word in the Greek. It means to give heed. It conveys the idea of deliberate continuing attentiveness.

It's translated in Matthew 16:6 as beware and there Jesus uses it when he warns his disciples against the teaching of Pharisees and Sadducees against the idea that there are some things that we must constantly be on guard against and spiritual drift is one of those things.

That's what the point is that we need to be aware that there are things that we need to be spiritually on guard against and spiritual drift is one of those things. The National Safety Council reported that 1.6 million car accidents occur every year because of people being distracted by their phone. A person may feel completely confident while driving. They've driven a car for years. They have one hand on the wheel, they have the other hand down here on their phone, eyes glancing up and down, following the same daily routes that they've always taken, convinced that they have everything under control.

Yet, in a moment's distraction, they can drift into the other lane or collide with another car. The same thing can happen to us spiritually if we are not paying constant, consistent attention to the truths we have heard about Jesus and the truths that he's taught us in his word that he commands us to obey.

[23:01] Matthew 26, Jesus leads his disciples out to the Mount of Olives. He's just met with them in the upper room where he instituted communion, where he prayed for them, and where he informed them that soon he would leave them.

Matthew 26, 30-35 says, Then Jesus said to them, his disciples, You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. Peter answered him, Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.

And Jesus said to him, Truly I tell you, this very night before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times. And Peter said to him again, even more emphatically, Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you.

And all the other disciples said the same thing. Later that night when Peter faced potential persecution for his relationship with Jesus, he drifted from his confession and his association with Jesus Christ.

[ 24 : 20 ] Matthew 26, 74 through 75. This is the last denial Peter makes of knowing Jesus. And he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, I do not know the man.

And immediately the rooster crowed. Peter remembered the saying of Jesus before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.

And he went out and he wept bitterly. The good news for believers is that the Lord didn't leave Peter adrift for too long.

Jesus, after his resurrection, appeared to Peter and to the other disciples and he spoke with Peter and he recommissioned Peter to shepherd his sheep.

Having experienced the temptation to drift, Peter issues a similar warning to believers to the one that we read here in Hebrews chapter 2.

[ 25 : 33 ] In 1 Peter 5, 8 through 9, he implores Christians, be sober minded, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. God, if you've been in the church again long enough, I trust that you know someone who drifted away from their confession of faith that they once made that Jesus Christ is their Lord and their Savior.

And they've just continued to drift further and further from the safe harbors of Jesus Christ. So we read passages like this and we can wonder, well, what about those people who have drifted and they keep drifting?

Jesus tells us about such people in his parable of the soils and it teaches us a sobering reality.

Matthew 13, 18 through 21, Jesus is explaining the parable of the sower to his disciples. Verse 19, he says, when anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart, this is what was sown along the path.

[ 27 : 08 ] And here's what I want you to see, verse 20, as for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word, hears the gospel and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself but endures for a while and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

John tells us in 1 John 2.19 of such people, they went out from us but they were not of us. For if they had been of us they would have continued with us but they went out that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

we know this is a reality but like the author of Hebrews it shouldn't preclude us from continuing to pray for them, continuing to warn them about the danger of drifting and continuing to urge them to turn to Jesus and not forsake or neglect such a great salvation in his church.

church. I once heard a story about a pastor from a long time ago. He went to visit a church member who had drifted away from the Lord and hadn't been in church in a long time.

It was winter and the pastor trudged through the snow and he let himself inside the house of the man who had drifted. That man was sitting down by his fireplace with a fire lit inside of it and the pastor sat down next to him.

[ 28 : 44 ] Without saying a word to him, he took some tongs and lifted a burning coal out of the fire and sat it down just outside the fireplace. Together they watched the burning coal slowly lose its heat and it didn't take long for it to lose its orange glow as it slowly turned gray and lost all of its warmth.

The man kept his eyes on the coal the whole time and without looking up he said, Pastor, I'll see you in church next Sunday. When you drift away from the Lord, you lose the warmth of his light and his truth.

You drift into sin which the author of Hebrew warns brings a just retribution in verse 2 through the beginning of verse 3. 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?

As I've already mentioned and as we see in Old Testament scriptures, angels delivered many messages from God. The author probably has the Mosaic covenant in mind here which the Bible says that angels had some part or some role in delivering.

When God gave his law, delivered in some way by angels, he gave it with a warning and that warning is summarized in Deuteronomy 30, 19 through 20.

[ 30 : 13 ] I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life that your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him for he is your life and length of days that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them.

The point can't be missed. If you obey God, you live. If you disobey God, you die. Under the old covenant, every transgression of the law demanded a just penalty.

The author of Hebrews is using a lesser to greater argument to make his point here. If the old covenant that came from God and was delivered by mere angels demanded retribution from sin, how much more will God judge those who have spurned the gospel delivered by his own son?

The danger of spiritual drift is not only that we miss out on a spiritually flourishing life, but if that a person abandons the gospel, they will find themselves under the eternal judgment of God for their sins.

The warning that we must heed and call others to heed as well is that if you neglect Jesus and the salvation that he offers, then the just punishment of your sin against your holy creator is eternal separation from him in hell.

[ 32 : 08 ] Jesus is a better messenger with a better message. He is a better mediator, being both fully divine and human, to offer himself as a sacrifice for our sins, taking our place, enduring the punishment we deserve, that by trusting in him and who he is and what he's done, we are saved.

If you neglect his salvation from your sins, then there is no escape for you. Heed this warning, friend.

This is the day God has made. He's brought you here to hear this warning and to heed it. We'll see in chapter 3, the author repeatedly saying to his readers today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts.

And friend, God is telling you today through his word, don't harden your heart to him. Turn to him. Hear his voice. Repent of your sins and you will be saved.

How terrible it will be for you. How terrible it will be for anyone to die in their sins. To have rejected the gospel that they've heard and to know and to think forever and ever that there is no escape.

[ 33 : 47 ] They'll be in hell, eternally separated from God, and they'll know in their mind, I'll be in this wretched place.

I'll be in this eternal fire. I'll be in this place where all I hear is the weeping and gnashing of my own teeth. And I know there's no escape.

And that this will never end. How awful. How terrible. May God have mercy on your soul to open your eyes to see and your ears to hear the good news about who he is and what he's done to save you from that.

Heed the warning. Guard yourself if you're a believer against spiritual drift. Pay close attention by next hearing the witnesses of God.

How do we keep from spiritually drifting? Hear the witnesses of God. The rest of verse 3 and verse 4 says, it was declared at first by the Lord.

[ 34 : 58 ] It was attested to us by those who heard again this gospel, who Jesus is, what Jesus has done, while God bore witness and signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

The author of Hebrews says here that the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus, this great salvation, is superior to the old covenant, which was delivered by angels through four witnesses in four ways. First, it was declared by the Lord himself. Jesus is God in the flesh. When Jesus speaks, God speaks. He's the eternal word of God.

He created the world. He sustains the world he created. He came into this earth adding a human nature to his divine nature to make purification for our sins.

He said he would die. He said he would rise to atone for our sins and to give us his life if we trust in him, if we put our faith in him. And that's exactly what happened, which secondly was attested by those who heard the second set of witnesses.

[ 36 : 06 ] Jesus commanded his disciples to go and make disciples after his death and after his resurrection before he ascended into heaven. In Acts chapter 1 8, it records Jesus' words to his disciples before he returned to heaven.

He said, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

Notice here that there's no question in Jesus' mind that his disciples will accomplish what he's commanded them to do. He knows they'll do it because he knows that he's going to empower them to do it through the Holy Spirit.

He says to them, you will receive power, you will be my witnesses, and your witness will reach the end of the earth. And friends, here we are this morning, a place far, far away from Jerusalem that I really highly doubt that any of Jesus' disciples knew even existed, and we've witnessed, haven't we?

We've heard their witness and we've believed their testimony which has been verified by the third witness. Signs and wonders and various miracles.

[ 37 : 22 ] In the New Testament, Jesus and his apostles performed miracles that verified the truthfulness of their word. That's the purpose of the miracles, to verify that what they said was true.

And today, we continue to see the miracle of salvation and the transformation that the Holy Spirit brings to the lives of those whom he's saved. In Christ, we have a joy, we have a peace, we have a patience, a kindness, a goodness, a faithfulness, a self-control, all these fruits of the Holy Spirit at work inside of us that are visible.

We're not perfect, but we're a work in progress as the Lord is sanctifying us and changing us and making us more like Jesus Christ until the day when we are made like Jesus Christ in glory.

If you've experienced this, you know that it's only Christ. It's only he who could change and transform you.

Look, I stand here before you today as a miracle of God's doing. Only God could take a shy kid afraid to talk in front of groups of people who flunked out of college and who drifted away from him time after time and would be so gracious to save him, to bring him back, and to give him things in life that he does not deserve.

[ 38 : 54 ] I know this is true because I've experienced this in my life. The miracle of God to save a wretch like me. And the more I read his word, and the more I hear the witnesses, the more I'm amazed that God would save me from what my sins deserve.

How can we neglect so great a salvation? How can you reject so great a Savior?

Jesus has brought you here today, friend. If you don't believe him, you've heard the gospel. You've heard about who he is. You've heard about what he's done, and you've heard the warning about what happens to those who reject him.

You will suffer eternally for your sins committed against your holy creator. But God has made a way for you to be saved, to be forgiven, to be purified.

He made that way by sending Jesus Christ, his only son, to live the sinless life that you and I could never live, who only died on the cross to endure the wrath of God that our sins deserved, and who rose again on the third day as proof that all the things that he said that he would do, he did.

[ 40 : 18 ] And all the things that he says that he will do, he will do. And what you need to do is to just simply turn to him in acknowledgement that you're a sinner and that Jesus is your only Savior.

Repent of your sins and cry out to him and he will save you. For those of us who are saved, who have experienced the grace of God to save us and to keep us, what do we do with what we've heard when we drift or when we're tempted to drift?

This is how we adjust, is to hold fast to Christ all the time. Hold fast to Christ. What does this mean? Hebrews 10, 23 through 25, we've already read it.

Let God's word have the final word. This is what it means for us to hold fast. And it also means that we must encourage one another to do the same thing until that day when we go to be with the Lord.

Here he calls us home to himself. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who promised is faithful.

[ 41 : 32 ] And let us consider how to stir one another up to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that you are a God who saves us and who keeps those whom he's been gracious to save.

Lord, we're thankful to know that though we drift, that you keep us anchored to who you are. Lord, you remind us through your word as we've heard this morning of the danger of thinking that our ways are better than your ways or just being neglectful to practice the spiritual disciplines that you've commanded us to practice because of the good that they produce in our lives and in the lives of those who we love.

And so, Lord, for those today who realize that they've been lethargic, that they've drifted, Lord, I pray that in your grace they've heard and they'll return to the place where they never should have left or drifted.

Lord, for those who have at one time professed faith in you and who maybe even were baptized, but Lord, who we haven't seen in months and years, God, we pray like the author of Hebrews that we would do as you commanded us to do as your disciples, to urge them, to warn them about the danger of neglecting such a great salvation and plead with them to turn from their sins, to repent and come to true faith in Jesus Christ.

[ 43 : 19 ] And for those in this world, Lord, who have never heard or who have heard and haven't believed, God, we pray that we would see the command that you've given us, that we would follow the example of the author of Hebrews here, and that we would be diligent and obedient to go and to warn and to proclaim the good news of who you are and the sin that you save us from and the eternal consequences of it.

God, we need your help in doing this, but Lord, we trust that you will provide it, and we pray that the results would please you and would glorify your name as we are obedient to do all that you've commanded. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.