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Sermon Notes

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The Danger of Drifting Away

Hebrews 2:1-4

Summer of 1983 was a memorable summer for me;

It was the summer I was on a three-month project with Campus Crusade for Christ at Hampton Beach, NH.

It was the summer I first learned about missions, and about evangelist on beach outreaches

It was the summer I learned how to work on a job as a Christian, doing my work as unto the Lord

It was also the summer I almost drowned in the Atlantic Ocean!

There had been a serious storm the day before Chad and I went swimming late one midweek afternoon. The ocean was extremely choppy, and the waves looked awesome... like Waikiki Beach in Hawaii... Chad and I went body surfing, unconcerned by the fact that the beach was deserted on a summer day. At first, we had a great time... but soon I became tired, and I hadn't noticed that the rip current was pulling me gradually but surely out to sea... unbeknownst to me, I was drifting away from the beach; I became alarmed and called to Chad and we both began trying to swim into the shore... but it was immensely difficult, battling the rip tide. After about half an hour of vigorous swimming, we finally made it back, exhausted and barely able to stand...

This became a picture to me of the danger of gradually drifting away from Christ... only the danger is even more pronounced.

“We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.”

Is it possible to drift little by little, further and further away from an active and healthy walk with Christ, our hearts becoming gradually hardened to the things of God and the dangers of sin? The Book of Hebrews implies that, not only is it possible, it is a great danger in the life of the church

I. Such a Great Salvation

A. The Central Message of Hebrews

1. A superior mediator
2. Bringing a superior covenant
3. Resulting in a superior life

B. “Such a great salvation...” (vs. 3)

1. The word “great” is greatly overused in our culture

In nature, there are the “Great Lakes,” the “Great Barrier Reef” and the “Great White shark.”

In history there are Alexander the Great and the Great War.

In literature, *The Great Gatsby* and *Great Expectations*.

In commercial life, you can go to “Great Clips” for a haircut and search on Google to find “great wedding gift ideas” or a “great vacation spot.”

Perhaps in no aspect of American life is the word “great” so overused as in SPORTS... Every sports enthusiast likes reading the list of the “100 Greatest Baseball Players of All Time”, and Muhammad Ali called himself “The Greatest of All Times.” Once I was watching a basketball game in which one player scored a lot of points in the fourth quarter to win a key playoff game, and the announcer said, “You’re watching what true greatness is all about!”

In most cases the word “great” is an overstatement.

2. In the case of our salvation, it is a vast understatement
3. The author speaks of “**SUCH A** great salvation...” as though he’s already fully described the greatness of it
4. Already described the greatness of the SAVIOR... Jesus Christ, in Hebrews 1
5. Verse 1 of our passage looks back to that chapter and the truths already laid down

Hebrews 2:1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

- a. Therefore = because of what we have just been discussing; because of what truths we have just laid open to your eyes

b. What truths? The infinite sublime majesty of Jesus Christ

C. Our Great Salvation

1. Given by an infinitely great Savior

- a. God's perfect prophet who speaks God's final word to the human race...
Jesus Christ, the Son of God
- b. The "heir of all things... through whom He made the universe"
- c. God in the flesh...

Hebrews 1:3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

d. The One who worked a perfect atonement for sins

Hebrews 1:3 After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

- e. The One who sits now at the right hand of Almighty God
- f. This Savior is infinitely greater than all the angels, who are merely servants of God and of God's people
- g. Christ however, is the Son of God who reigns on a perfect throne for all eternity

Hebrews 1:8-9 about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. ⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."

- h. This one who created the universe, sustains it by His powerful word, and who will one day bring it to an end and replace it
- i. Jesus Christ, who never changes
- j. A GREAT SAVIOR who has brought us such a GREAT SALVATION

2. An infinitely great answer to the problem of sin

a. Sin's penalty atoned for by the blood of Jesus

Hebrews 1:3 After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

b. Sin's power over us broken by our transfer into Jesus' Kingdom

- c. Sin's practice gradually eradicated by the ministry of the word and the Spirit
 - d. Sin's very presence in the universe eventually destroyed when the Lord makes the New Heavens and the New Earth
3. Worked out in an infinitely great way
- a. Justification: by faith apart from works... God declaring sinners like us perfect in His sight, imputing Christ's righteousness to us
 - b. Sanctification: gradual transformation, little by little, into Christ's image, Christ's thoughts, Christ's lifestyle, Christ's holiness
 - c. Glorification: instantaneous transformation into the perfection of heaven when we see Jesus Christ face to face
4. Achieving an infinitely great condition: eternity in heaven

THIS is our GREAT SALVATION

It is great in every way... such a great salvation... greater than we can possibly imagine!!!

It should result in great praise... great thankfulness... great obedience... great works of righteousness... in short, a GREAT LIFE in this world

But it also arouses GREAT ENEMIES: Satan, Satan's world, our own flesh

So before us there is a GREAT DANGER

II. The Danger of Drifting Away

Hebrews 2:1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

A. "Drift Away"... a Potent Image

1. Greek word: pictures a river with a strong current in which the water flows by... if you threw a twig out into the stream, it would be quickly carried away from you
2. Nautical... like the ebbs and flows of the tide that pulls the sailboat away from the dock

Drifting away from Christ is a painful thing to watch in someone else, and even worse to experience in ourselves. The image in my mind is of a sailboat alongside a dock, with its mooring line just lying loosely on the pier. The gentle ebb and flow of the basically placid sea does not present any immediate threat to

the boat, so if you came back in five minutes, you would barely notice that the mooring line had slipped a little. But come back in ten hours, and the changing tide and the consistent bobbing of the boat has caused it to drift away entirely. It is gone. So it is with many who profess faith in Christ. Their initial excitement about the Christian life can soon ebb, and their neglect of the gospel can result in drifting away from Christ.

3. Medical: the image of someone bleeding out gradually... little by little bleeding to death
 - a. An earthquake has resulting in a man being pinned down and unable to move... he can breathe, but he is pinned there
 - b. A man has received a significant cut on his arm... and he watches his blood flow slowly but surely out of his arm
 - c. That blood is his LIFE... and his life is slowly flowing out of the cut in his arm
 - d. If the flow of blood is not stanching, he will bleed out and die

B. Gradual Process of Moving Further and Further Away from Christ

^{NIV} Hebrews 2:1 ¶ We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

^{KJV} Hebrews 2:1 ¶ Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.

1. These are the two images... us moving away from something, or something flowing out from us
2. Either the person is moving further away from Christ OR
3. The doctrine of the gospel is flowing out of them

Thus, the “things we have heard” = the gospel truths about Christ; the idea is that we should let these precious truths bleed out of our lives little by little until they are no longer in us

Joshua 1:8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.

4. In any case, the net result is the same... where once the individual was close to Christ and to His words, now there is a vast distance between the individual and Christ/the gospel
5. Christ/the Gospel are unchanging... they never moved...

6. But we drifted away!!!

C. Beware!! A Great Danger! I've Seen it Again and Again!!

1. I YEARN to get your attention here, dear churchgoing friend
2. The Book of Hebrews is the ultimate WARNING book in the Bible
3. Hebrews 2:1 is a warning to all Christians to give constant and full attention to the health of your souls
4. The great danger here is to blow off the warning... to say "It'll never happen to me" or "This passage doesn't apply to me"
5. One famous bible teacher denies this passage could possibly speak a warning to Christians

"To whom is this warning directed? It cannot be to Christians. They can never be in danger of neglecting salvation—in the sense of not receiving it—since they already have it. They can neglect growth and discipleship, but they cannot neglect salvation."

The problem with this is that it does not properly come to grips with the fact that our salvation is a PROCESS... and that failure to make progress in sanctification does in fact call into question our justification

If we're not growing, we're drifting dear friends...

This man is usually a very faithful bible teacher, but if you take that approach to Hebrews, you'll miss the whole point of the book

This is an epistle of WARNING to people in the church to keep attending to the gospel until we are DONE being saved!!!

6. If you think drifting away from Christ can never happen to you, BEWARE

^{NAU} ***1 Corinthians 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.***

D. What Causes It?

1. The immediate answer? NEGLECT OF THE GOSPEL
 - a. The remedy given here is to give more careful attention to the gospel
 - b. So the opposite must be the cause... someone who NEGLECTS the Gospel or IGNORES it

Hebrews 2:3 how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?

- c. This CERTAINLY can refer to someone who intellectually knows all the truths of the gospel but who rejects it for himself
- d. But it can also stand as a warning to others who have made an outward profession of faith in Christ, but who ignore the gospel from that point on... they ignore the health of their souls, they stop listening to Christ and to His word and gradually drift away

2. Hebrews 3's answer: the hardening of the heart by the deceitfulness of sin

Hebrews 3:13 so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

3. What is the "hardening of heart"?

- a. Key moment in our spiritual lives: when the word of God comes

Hebrews 3:7-8 So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts

- b. Hard = unyielding, unsubmitive; soft heart = yielding, submissive, obedient
- c. When the word of God comes, do you resist or yield? Do you melt or bridle up? Do you follow Christ or do you dig in your heels?
- d. SIN has a deceitful power to harden your heart... sin is deceitful and little by little causes a hardening of someone's heart against Christ

E. What Are Some Markers Along the Way?

1. Loss of initial joy of salvation, excitement over Christ, the word, spiritual things
2. Growing critical spirit toward other Christians
3. Growing annoyance with spiritual disciplines
4. Gradual lessening of spiritual disciplines
5. Growing critical spirit in public worship
6. Gradual lowering of standards of personal holiness
7. Growing hunger and thirst for worldly pleasures
8. Change in habit patterns: more Sundays missed, more QTs missed,
9. Growing irritability in life in general... less characterized by the Fruit of the Spirit, more characterized by the marks of the flesh

10. Spasms of conviction, guilt, rapid repentance, brief spurts of half-hearted obedience, but less and less lasting power

F. What Are Some Times of Drifting Away?

1. Times of peace and prosperity: when you let your guard down and start drinking at the fountains of this world's pleasures
2. Times of persecution: when the world steps up its hatred of the gospel and makes living the Christian life unbearable
3. Times of temptation: when the devil unleashes his fiery arrows of lust and covetousness and sensual pleasures, some fall away then

III. The Remedy to Drifting Away

Hebrews 2:1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

A. Focus: What We Have Heard

1. This can be nothing less than the gospel of Jesus Christ

Hebrews 1:1-2 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son

2. Jesus IS the Gospel, and He is God's final word to the human race
3. More specifically, then, the WORDS of the gospel bring us salvation

Romans 10:17 faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

^{ESV} Galatians 3:2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

4. Basic concept: faith came by HEARING the word of Christ... faith is also SUSTAINED by continued hearing

Colossians 2:6-7 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught

B. Pay Attention

1. The remedy to drifting away: PAY ATTENTION to what you have heard
2. The word means to give your full attention to the word... concentrate on it

- a. Consider the author of our salvation
 - b. Consider carefully the matter of this message... the gravity of it, the weight
 - c. Allow the gospel's seriousness and power to rest heavily on your mind
3. The opposite of this careful attention of the word of God is **IGNORING** it, undervaluing it, looking at it as though it were a thing of little value

C. Pay More Excellent Attention

1. The author intensifies the command... not just pay attention, but pay more excellent attention... the most seriousness and focus you can muster
2. Consider the matter of **ETERNITY**... of heaven and hell...
3. Consider the word of God in all its power, its truth, its details
4. Jesus Christ... eternally God, taking on a human body, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, did astonishing miracles, signs, wonders, spoke like no man had ever spoken before... willingly laid down his life on the cross; rejected by his own people, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; on the third day, he rose again from the dead; after his death he appeared to his disciples and gave them many convincing proofs that he was alive; after forty days, he ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of Almighty God; from that place He will someday come to judge every single human being that has ever lived
5. We are all sinners; the death of Christ is our only hope of salvation, but it is a sure and certain hope: that if we trust in Christ alone, His death will take the place of our hell, His righteousness will take the place of our rebellion, we will be **SAVED**
6. We are then to work out our salvation with fear and trembling... growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ
7. We are to feel the **WEIGHT** of these truths... appraise them properly

Christie's of London: a world-renowned art appraisers and auction house has been the site of some of the most famous and high-priced art auctions in the world

Christie's employs some of the finest art-appraisers in the world, with specialties ranging from 19th century Italian furniture to antique Swiss pocket watches to musical instruments... to become an expert appraiser of fine collectibles requires a deep knowledge of history in the field, plus a sharp eye, attention to detail, and a careful meticulous personality

When a Christie's appraiser of Dutch Masters paintings looks at something supposedly done by Rembrandt, their trained eye is looking at details that would escape us—colors, brush

strokes, lighting, details of composition, etc. they have looked at countless thousands of paintings over decades and can appraise each painting properly

This is the level of attention a Christian should give to the word of God

8. John Owen's Understanding of What This Means

- a. A due valuation of the grace of God given in the gospel... an estimation of the value and worth of God's grace in Christ
- b. Diligent study of it: searching into the mind of God so you can grow in the mysteries of God hidden in the Bible; as diamond miners probe the bowels of the earth for precious gems and do not merely rake across the surface of the earth, so we must probe deeply the mind of God hidden in the word of God and the gospel of Christ
- c. Mixing the word with faith: when we diligently gaze into the word of God, we do so as if hearing the very words of God Himself, not the word of mere men; it is as good never to hear at all as to hear and not believe; to hear and not believe is the same as seeing a steak dinner and not eating it... it does you no good at all
- d. Laboring to live out the truths of the word: conforming heart and life to what you hear

D. So That We DON'T Drift Away

1. The remedy is effective
2. If we obey this injunction we will stay close to Christ

IV. The Obligation to Take the Remedy

“We MUST therefore pay more excellent attention...”

A. “We Must...”

1. The author uses the language of obligation
2. To pay more excellent attention to what we have heard is an OBLIGATION of the Christian life
3. Every Christian is required to look more intently into Christ, more intently into the gospel message

B. “Therefore”

1. Because of the greatness of Christ that we saw in Chapter 1

2. Because of the great salvation which Christ bought us with His own blood
3. We have an obligation to look after our souls, to pay the most excellent attention of our lives to the word of God

C. God's Testimony to The Excellence of the Gospel

Hebrews 2:3-4 This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. ⁴ God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles,

1. Christ Himself declared it first
 - a. The word "first" gives preeminence to Christ in His role as a prophet and apostle of the gospel

Matthew 4:17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

Luke 4:16-21 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. ¹⁷ The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, ²¹ and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

- b. The gospel Christ preached was the same gospel preached by the Old Testament prophets and by John the Baptist
 - c. BUT the preeminence of preaching it once the New Covenant was opened was given to the Son of God
 - d. Therefore, since it was a message first preached by Christ, how much more should we give it its fullest hearing... how much more OUGHT we to may more careful attention
2. The author acknowledges that he didn't hear it from Jesus Himself
 - a. The gospel message was FIRST announced by the Lord...
 - b. But then it was confirmed TO US by those who heard him... i.e. the apostles

- c. The plan of God was to inaugurate the gospel through Jesus, then to continue the proclamation through the apostles who heard him

1 John 1:1-3 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard

- d. In this way the church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets in their testimony to Christ as the chief cornerstone

3. God testified also by signs, wonders and miracles

Hebrews 2:4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

- a. God the Father endued Christ with more wonder-working power than anyone else in history
- b. Jesus did a river of miracles which showed the worth and value to the salvation Christ came to bring
 - i) The blind saw
 - ii) The lame walked
 - iii) The lepers were cured
 - iv) The deaf heard
 - v) The dead were raised
 - vi) AND the good news was preached to lost sinners

- c. Jesus said these miracles were God the Father's validation of His message

John 5:36 I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.

John 14:11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.

- d. The apostles used the same language of Jesus' miracles... they ACCREDITED his preaching

Acts 2:22 "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.

4. So it was also with the apostles
 - a. After Jesus ascended the Holy Spirit came and enabled the apostles to do similar miracles
 - b. The apostles did great signs and wonders according to Acts 2

Acts 2:43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

- c. Peter and John healed a lame man in Acts 3
- d. In Acts 4, they prayed for the power to do more miracles

Acts 4:30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

- e. In Acts 5, the same was stated again

Acts 5:12 The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade.

- f. The effect of these miracles was to CONFIRM the message

Acts 14:3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.

5. The author of Hebrews is saying that this GREAT SALVATION has come to the earth ANNOUNCED by Jesus, the Son of God, confirmed by great signs, wonders, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, confirmed also by the apostles who heard him... this is the TRUE GOSPEL MESSAGE...
6. Therefore, to ignore it or drift away from it is a GREAT CRIME against God

V. The Punishment of Ignoring Our Salvation

Hebrews 2:2-4 For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, ³ how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?

A. The Old Covenant Had Its Own Penalties for Disobedience

1. The "message spoken by angels" is the Law of Moses

2. As we noted last time, this is the teaching of the New Testament... that God mediated the Old Covenant through angels, but gave us the New Covenant directly by His Own Son
3. But even the message spoken by angels was binding and had punishments for disobedience
 - a. If anyone violated the Law of Moses, the punishment was physical death
 - b. Hebrews deals with this later

Hebrews 12:18-21 You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; ¹⁹ to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, ²⁰ because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." ²¹ The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

- c. The death penalty was dished out for many violations: the murderer was to be put to death, the adulterer was to be put to death, the blasphemer was to be put to death, the Sabbath-breaker was to be put to death
- d. The message of the Old Covenant was BINDING on the Jews... they couldn't refuse it, or ignore it... the Law would hunt them down and inflict its punishments on them

B. HOW MUCH MORE the Gospel!!!

1. The gospel is a greater message... given by a greater messenger—the Son of God; it deals not merely with physical life and death by eternal life or eternal death
2. So how much more seriously do you think someone will be dealt with who drifts away from this gospel, or who hears it, understands it, and ignores it?
3. This is the same argument the author will later use:

Hebrews 10:28-29 Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

- C. Summary: We MUST pay more careful attention to the gospel message about Christ so that we do not drift away from him... if we drift away, the punishment is more severe than we can possibly imagine; but paying more excellent attention to the gospel is the remedy to this spiritual sickness

VI. Applications

A. Come to Christ

1. If it is dangerous to drift away from Christ, how much MORE dangerous is it never to have come to Christ to begin with?
2. Simply put, sin is the great danger, and the gospel of Christ is the only remedy
3. Perhaps you have heard the gospel many times... but you have never taken it to heart
4. NOW is the time!! Trust in Christ

B. Stay Close to Christ!!! Do Not Drift Away!!!

1. Do you see these markers in you?
 - a. Loss of initial joy of salvation, excitement over Christ, the word, spiritual things... FORSAKEN YOUR FIRST LOVE
 - b. Growing annoyance with spiritual disciplines
 - c. Gradual lowering of standards of personal holiness
 - d. Gradual lessening of spiritual disciplines
 - e. Growing hunger and thirst for worldly pleasures
 - f. Growing critical spirit toward other Christians
 - g. Growing critical spirit in public worship
 - h. Change in habit patterns: more Sundays missed, more QTs missed,
 - i. Growing irritability in life in general... less characterized by the Fruit of the Spirit, more characterized by the marks of the flesh
 - j. Spasms of conviction, guilt, rapid repentance, brief spurts of haft-hearted obedience, but less and less lasting power
2. Take in the remedy: PAY MORE CAREFUL ATTENTION to the Gospel... to Christ crucified, to the Scripture, to the indwelling Spirit
3. Turn away from worldly pleasures, worldly idols
4. Pray that the Lord would rekindle your first love for Christ

C. Pray for each other in this regard as well!!!