

Hebrews 1:1-2:4

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[0 : 00] We've all had conversations at one time or another that stick with us. Some of those will have been positive, happy conversations, and when we replay them in our minds.

They make us smile, and some of them will be conversations that we wish we could forget. When we replay them, they make us wince, and they make us feel bad.

For me, amongst the worst of those that I have had are a handful of conversations where people have told me that they're giving up the Christian faith. If it feels like they're etched in my mind, I could take you to offices, to rooms, to cafes, where we've had conversations, and I can remember everything about what was going on.

I particularly remember turns of phrase, facial expressions, the awkwardness when we parted ways. They're the kind of conversations that have left the deepest marks.

Now, people go cold and drift away from Christ for a host of reasons, but usually, when you peel it back, they think that they would be happier on a different course.

[1 : 18] That's really what it boils down to in the end in most cases. Sometimes that's because of opposition that they're facing, because they identify with the Lord Jesus. They think that if they retreat, if they walk away, that opposition will go away.

Sometimes it's just because they're frustrated because, well, God hasn't given them the life that they've wanted. And usually, the draw, the place that they go is back to their old life, back to the familiar, back to what they know and what they're convinced will be easier.

Because, of course, it was easier back there, wherever there might be. That's the case in the book of Hebrews. The people that the letter is written to have put their faith in Jesus, but they are drawn back to their old lives.

They feel the pull, and some, we can assume, have had those conversations with their ministers and have gone back. They've gone back to their old lives, and particularly, they've gone back to the Judaism that they left to follow Jesus in the first place.

And the author of the book of Hebrews writes, in fact, he pleads with them, urging them not to do that. Pleads with them not to do that, not to go back.

[2 : 43] And we saw the first week, the reason that the letter gives for this is because Jesus is way better than anything else they might turn to. Jesus is better, way better than anything else they might turn to.

And last time, we looked at Hebrews 1, 1-4. We saw seven assertions about the supremacy of Christ. If you remember, he is God's supreme Word, who is his heir.

He is creator, revealer, sustainer, redeemer. He is victor. And when the author concludes the introduction, he emphasizes that the Son, the Lord Jesus, is superior to angels.

And that is the theme that he develops in our section this evening, verses 5 to the end of chapter 1. The question, the obvious question is, well, why angels?

Why make all this fuss about angels? To our modern ears, the whole idea sounds irrelevant, if not a bit daft. The world where angels operate is the world of fantasy.

[3 : 50] We, of course, live in the real world, the serious world, the scientific world of reality and such. Our world, thankfully, we think or we're told, our world has progressed from that.

The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor describes this world, our culture today, as disenchanted. And we're jolly glad that that's the case. We've moved on from the spooky and the supernatural.

Secular, enlightened people don't feel the need to believe in a spirit world. We've left it behind. All that matters, we're told, is matter. All that matters is stuff.

Things you can see and touch and feel. And if we just get past the make-believe, well, then we can really make progress. Angels. Come on. I have a friend called Charlie, and his wife's maiden name

was Angel.

And when they were going out, he referred to her as, you guessed it, Charlie's Angel. It's cute, isn't it? That's how we think about angels.

[4 : 57] Cute. He stopped doing that, I should tell you, when it became clear that he realized or he woke up to the fact that his surname was Butler.

And so when they married, she described him as Jenny's Butler. But we think angels are cute, or they belong in some sort of fantasy world.

But that's not the world inhabited by previous generations. Certainly not the world of the author and the first readers of the book of Hebrews. They understood the magical nature of the world that we live in.

We live in a world that is spoken. It is a story that is spoken by God with great spoken characters, where what we call natural, what we call the things of stuff and matter, well, that is only part of a bigger picture.

We live in a story where angels and demons are engaged in what is happening all around us. This is why the author to the Hebrews would say in chapter 13, verse 2, he says, Show hospitality, because if you're hospitable to people, you may entertain an angel without even realizing.

[6 : 06] But the main reason for the focus on angels here is because of the role that they played in the Old Covenant. The religious system that was the big draw for these hearers.

And angels were very important in that context. Not only were angels outwardly impressive, they were awesome, striking fear into those who saw them, but they were God's messengers.

That's what the word means. Angel means messenger. And they were God's instruments for revelation, making things known, and redemption as well for salvation. Apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 3.19 that the Old Testament law came through the mediation of angels.

And in the Old Testament prophets, for example, Zechariah chapter 1, chapter 3, they serve as both messengers and mediators between God and humans. Angels were impressive beings.

And a return to the forms of the Old Covenant was a return to the world where angels mediated, where angels had a really significant role to play. So what our author does here in the rest of chapter 1 is essentially reiterate the seven qualities that he highlighted in verses 1 to 4 through quotes from the Old Testament.

[7 : 17] Seven quotes, you'll notice. Seven denoting completion. That's the number seven in the Bible represents completion. So here is a complete revelation. Seven quotes using Old Testament scriptures that were familiar to the Hebrews as it were to prove the superiority of Christ through revelation that they believe and that they trust.

He's saying, look, go back to the stuff, the material that you believe and that you trust. Let me remind you what it says there. Two points this evening. First of all, he highlights the superior son. The superior son. Verse 5, 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.

Verse 5, he starts by quoting Psalm 2 verse 7, which reveals Christ's unique relationship to God the Father. From all eternity, the Son of God proceeds from the Father.

But as Paul says in Romans 1, this sonship is declared through his resurrection from the dead. How do we know that Jesus is the eternal Son? It is through his resurrection.

[8 : 27] Romans 1 verse 4, the gospel Paul preaches is God's message, quote, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh, and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness, by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

So the begetting that is in view here is not the language of Christ's eternal relationship with the Father, the language of the creed, begotten of the Father, but a begetting from the dead.

That's what was intended in Psalm 2. When you look up all the New Testament quotes of Psalm 2, the opening lines, Why do the nations rage? Psalm 2 refers to the crucifixion of Jesus.

And then what happens in Psalm 2? God laughs at the nation's schemes, and then he says, You are my Son today, I have begotten you. After that, God gives all the nations to Christ as the inheritance his death has purchased.

Paul makes the link really clear in Acts 13. Acts 13, 33. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us, their children, by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, You are my Son today, I have begotten you.

[9 : 45] Christ shows that he is God's Son by being raised from the dead. He is begotten from the dead. That's how he can be the heir of all things, verse 2.

That's how he can be the true Son in David's line. That's the quote from 2 Samuel 7. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

Christ is the King over all the earth because of the resurrection. He rules and reigns now. We're gathered here. Christ is ruling and reigning as the exalted Son because he was raised from the dead.

Angels, on the other hand, look at verse 6, well, they are subjects. And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, Let all God's angels worship him.

Because Christ is superior, the angels are subject to him and are required to worship him. Look at verse 13. 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?

[10 : 53] The seat of rule and authority belongs to one man and only one. The angels haven't been given this authority. They are subject to the Son. The main reason for this is, it's made clear, verse 7, They are created of the angels.

He says, He makes his angels winds and his ministers a flame of fire. That's from Psalm 104, verse 4. Now, the language seems a bit strange to us. What's going on there? Angels are winds, ministers a flame of fire.

But the point that the psalmist is making in Psalm 104 is that angels belong in the category of created things. Things like wind and fire. And they are servants of God and of men.

Look at verse 14. Ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation. There are two great cosmic categories in existence.

Creator and created. There is a creator and there is everything else. And if you aren't the creator, you belong in the other category. And however impressive these angels may have appeared, they belong in the created order of things.

[12 : 04] That's what the author is saying. They are created. The Son, by contrast, verse 8, is eternal. You see, verse 8?

But of the Son, he says, Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. It's Psalm 45, verse 6, speaking to the Son. And the speaker there in that psalm is God.

And God is calling him God. And then, verse 10, quoting Psalm 102, verse 25, he calls him Lord. And the point he's making is that this divine Son is uncreated and therefore eternal.

You, Lord, laid the foundations, verse 10. 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. Professor Richard Baucom says that angels are an important measure of the status of being.

[13 : 09] Now, what he means by that is that when we think about different kinds of beings in the cosmos, angels are the measure. To be below angels is to be human.

To be above them is to be God. So, you see what he's saying about angels being an important measure of the status of being?

If you're below angels, you're human. If you're above them, you're God. So, the kingly rule of the Son, we're told here, will not end. His kingdom won't get worn out like an old coat, because it won't be hindered by human frailty like all the kings that have gone before him.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, because he is the eternal Son. And God's Old Testament Word says that about him and not about angels.

The Son is supreme over the highest beings in the created order, because he is supreme over all things. Now, what's going on here? Well, our author is again pushing against our small view of Christ.

[14 : 22] He is pushing hard against any diminishing that we might be tempted to engage in when it comes to thinking of Christ. When you put your faith in Jesus, you put your faith in this man.

You put your faith in one who has this power and this glory and this majesty, and he has this authority. You are in a relationship with the living God, the Son from all eternity, the Lord of all the earth.

There is no one and there is no thing greater than him. So, why look anywhere else? The sad truth is that there are many things that we set up in his place.

If we're honest with ourselves, there are many things that we devote our time to and our energy to. But none compare. Not even angels get close.

Not even angels get close. Not even angels get close. And when we see him like this, when we grasp his majesty and his magnitude, surely we see why settling for less is just dumb.

[15:37] There is nothing. There is no one who is greater. The superior Son is superior to all things.

So, whatever it is that you are tempted towards, whatever it is that you are tempted to run off after, to give your time and attention to, to devote yourself to, it is not worth it in comparison to him.

Those of you that are at school, there are voices all around you trying to persuade you to follow a particular path away from the Lord Jesus. Your life will be better, you are told, if you go in this direction and leave him behind.

Whatever that direction is, it is not as good. And it will not deliver. It is not worth your time and effort in comparison to the Lord Jesus.

See, we read this, picking over all of these Old Testament quotes. I know it feels a bit stodgy as we go through, but we read this, we get it and we think to ourselves, what on earth were the Hebrews thinking?

[16:48] Why would you turn your back on the glory of Christ? Surely this is madness. But let's be honest. When we prize our choice and our freedom and our comfort over Christ, we do exactly the same thing.

When we give him what's left after we've sorted ourselves out in life, we do exactly the same thing. When we fit him in around our preferences and plans, and we give him kind of what's left, as it were, in our lives, we do exactly the same thing.

And then when we can't make him fit and we can't make it work, as it were, we want more, well, we just reject him altogether and we walk away from Christ and do something else.

What is that if it isn't a version of the same madness? He starts with the superior son. He wants to explode afresh our view of Christ.

But where we're tempted to do that, where we are tempted to look away or to walk in a different direction or to go off after other things, our author has something to say about that. Here's the application, if you like, of all of this.

[18:06] The so what, and it is a word of warning. So having described the superior son, our author warns us in light of this, he says, don't neglect point number two, the superior salvation.

If he holds out, first of all, the superior son, secondly, he calls us to not neglect the superior salvation. That's two, one to four. Chapter one, God has spoken in these last days by his supreme son.

Therefore, chapter two, verse one, in light of that, therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard lest we drift away from it. 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?

This is the first strong warning the author makes in the book. All that lofty theology, all the Christology of chapter one isn't just there for fun.

It isn't just a theology lesson. It isn't just for those who like that kind of thing. It is designed to shape how we live. Christ is held out as greater than the angels so that we are drawn to him and we don't drift away from him.

[19:20] Again, it's a lesser to a greater kind of argument. Can you see? So verse two, if the law, which was delivered through angels, included penalty for sin and disobedience, how much more will our salvation involve more striking penalties?

The word of the law proved reliable. Those who obeyed were blessed. Those who wandered away were judged. How much more will the word of the gospel prove reliable as well?

Well, how can we know this? Verse four, the Lord spoke at first. Those who heard it from the Lord also confirmed it. And God from heaven confirmed the message with miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The miracles in the New Testament, they are signs pointing the way to something greater. They aren't to be sought after for their own sake. We are to treat them as we do. Any kind of sign. And then what do you do with a sign?

You go where it's pointing. And if a miracle is a great thing, and he's talking about the sort of remarkable things we read of in the book of Acts, how much greater is the Christ who is vouched for by that miracle?

[20 : 27] If the sign is impressive, how much greater the one to whom the sign is pointing? And so we follow the miracles to the person and work of the Lord Jesus, who is to be the central focus of our hearts and minds, the one at the very center of our lives.

The recipients of this letter, the first recipients, are told this as a warning against drifting back to their old ways. And in order to guard against this, do you see what they're told not to do? Do you see this?

What are they told not to do? Not neglect. We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard lest we drift away from it. They're not to neglect.

How is it that you neglect the great work of God? You take your salvation for granted.

You presume on the grace of God. Hebrews recognizes here that turning away from the Lord has small beginnings.

[21 : 35] We don't go from a healthy life of personal devotion and corporate worship to denying the faith. No one gets up from deep, faith-fueled meditation on the person and work of Christ and walks out on their marriage.

In my experience, everyone who has walked away from Christ has done so in small steps. The obvious rejection, the obvious sin, the obvious decision, that awkward, painful conversation, that has always been the end of a longer process that has involved lots of smaller rejections along the way.

And it all starts with neglect. How shall we escape, verse 3, if we neglect such a great salvation?

Going cold to Christ's great salvation.

Going cold to the supremacy of the one who has just been described to us here in such majesty.

And the warning is there is no escape if we indulge this neglect.

Just as He did in the old covenant, God will judge those who wander from Him. And with the greater clarity of the new covenant, all of the shadows, all of the types of the Old Testament come into clearer focus in the coming of Christ.

[22 : 55] He is the fulfillment of them all. If we neglect that, the greater revelation, that brings greater judgment. To whom much is given, much is expected, Jesus tells us. I wonder, I fear, that some of us think that the new covenant is a covenant without sanctions.

New Testament Christianity, the theory goes, isn't like that mean Old Testament version. The New Testament is all about grace and we can do what we want as long as we say sorry. That's not the case.

Sincere repentance always leads to forgiveness, yes, but the warning here is solemn and clear. If we neglect our salvation, we can't expect to escape judgment.

So the question for us is this, if we've confessed the name of Christ, are we paying careful attention to this great salvation? Are we taking Jesus really seriously or are we messing about?

Have we grown cold to all that Jesus has done? Have we allowed our Bibles to gather dust while other things captivate our hearts more fully? One of my children got a book for Christmas and was captivated.

[24 : 14] Any free moment, opened it up, sitting in a busy room, lots going on, fixated, undistractable, called for dinner, didn't move, completely lost in the story.

I ask myself, why am I not like that with my Bible? Giving close attention to the great salvation that's been won for me in Christ.

Our author warns us that such spiritual laziness is dangerous. Don't neglect the grace of God. Don't presume on the Lord Jesus.

Don't go cold in the small things of the Christian disciplines. Just to say, we need each other in this. That is what the writer is saying here.

The first so what of all of the majesty of Christ is, do not neglect such a great salvation. Don't presume on it. Don't go cold to the things of Christ.

[25 : 14] And the point I want to make here is that we need each other in this. That's partly why God gives us the church. And why if you're a member here, you make vows to care for others, to treat our fellow believers as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The primary way that we care for anyone is to care about their spiritual growth. It is to care that they don't neglect such a great salvation. The best thing we can do for a brother or sister in Christ is encourage them to keep putting the Lord Jesus at the center of their lives no matter what the cost. To keep going hard after Christ no matter how difficult it gets. To support them while they do it. We need to allow other people into our lives to call out our neglect of the things of Christ and to stop the drift when they see it happening.

We're not the best judge of how we're doing spiritually as individuals. We need one another. It might be awkward to have that conversation, but it is the loving thing to do.

And I suppose if we're really humble about this recognizing that awkwardness one of the things we'll do is well if someone raises concerns with us we'll choose not to make it awkward. We'll thank them.

[26 : 26] We'll receive their brotherly sisterly input and be grateful that they care. It may just keep us from disaster. So resist the pull away from one so majestic.

However that pull comes and the devil is very clever he's far cleverer than you and me he knows exactly how to get under your skin and whatever way that pull comes resist it.

Pay close attention instead to this supremely majestic Christ. Never stop fixing the eyes of your heart on the glory of this person. On the glory of Christ and the worth of his work.

That is how we spiritually thrive. That is how we don't neglect such a great salvation. To choose to do anything else frankly is madness.

And if our brothers and sisters are kind to us they will call us back from that. We will be kind to others if we call them back from that. We are not sniffing around looking for sin all the time and trying to be difficult and annoying but when we see patterns that are leading people away from regular worship leading people away from keeping Christ at the center of everything it is kind of us to call them back urge them not to neglect such a great salvation.

[28 : 01] Let's pray together.