

The Final Word on Listening

1. Intro

- How are you going on your Christian walk?
 - Do you think you're growing as a Christian ... or going backwards in your faith?
 - If you were to graph your progress as a Christian ... would it be on an upward trajectory or a downward trajectory?
 - Are you moving forward or drifting away?

- Sadly ... the Christian church is littered with people who have at some point come to hear the good news of Jesus ... but have drifted away
 - Maybe they went to Sunday school or Youth group
 - Grown up in a Christian home
 - Church for a while

- But for some reason or another ... they've drifted
 - They're no longer following Jesus as Lord and Saviour

- Others are still in church
 - But reality is their life is a sham because their hearts not really in it
 - There's no real love or concern for Jesus and his mission

- It maybe that they
 - Like the tradition of church, but not the commitment to Jesus
 - Drifted because of doubt

- It maybe that some have slipped away through the
 - seductiveness of what this world has to offer and following Jesus just gets in the way of all that
 - frustration with their church
 - busyness or apathy

- There's a continuum here
 - Some ppl are starting to become apathetic about Jesus
 - Others have abandoned Jesus altogether
- If you think you're a person who's faith is on a downward trajectory rather than an upward one ... then you can probably work out where you are on that continuum

- Hebrews is a great book for us to read
 - Because it tackles the issue of remaining strong in your faith and not drifting away
- Don't know who wrote Hebrews
 - Commentators suggest Paul, Barnabas, Luke, Apollos and others
 - But we just don't know

- Wasn't written to the Nu Zulunders (Hey-Bro)
- Don't know exactly who the letter was written to ... but given the extensive teaching from and references to the OT ... it seems clear that Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who'd been active for a while as Christians but who had begun to slip away from their original commitment and practice
 - They were beginning to drift away perhaps even unaware of what was even happening
 - And as they were, they were in effect turning away from the living God

- Hebrews was written to stop that drift
 - It describes itself as a 'word of exhortation' ... and it's aim is to encourage ppl to stop moving away from their Christian faith and practice
 - It does this by
 - Warning them of the dangers of rejecting God
 - Urging them to hold fast to Jesus, the Son of God & great High Priest

- Do you think your faith waning?
 - Irregular at church or GG?
 - Commitment faltering?
- Hebrews is a good message for you to hear and to refocus and turn that downward trajectory around

- But even if you're a person who's going strong in their faith in Jesus .. and you feel your Christian growth is on an upward trajectory, Hebrews is a great for you too ... because it will help keep it going that direction
 - Provides a warning not to drift
 - Shows you to way to continue going strong in your faith

- To do this the writer wants us to see clearly the supremacy of Christ
- Time and time again he shows us from the OT that Jesus
 - He is the final word of God
 - He is the promised Son of God
 - He is the great high priest
 - He is greater than every person and every thing from the OT > Aaron, Moses, the prophets and even the angels
- By giving us an even greater vision of Jesus – who he is and what he's done ... he wants Christians everywhere to continue fixing their eyes on Jesus and going strong in their faith right to the very end

- This first chapter he shows us, Jesus is the
 - Son who is the final word of God
 - Son who is greater than the angels

2. The Son is the final word of God [SLIDE]

- Hebrews starts with a majestic introduction to the work and the person of Jesus as the Son of God
- Key point he's making is that Jesus is the final word of God

- That is ... Jesus is the fullest and clearest revelation of God to us
- What our writer is asserting here is that God is a God who speaks
 - This is part of who he is
 - God is not silent
 - He doesn't leave us to ourselves to work out
 - Who he is
 - Why we are here
 - How we are to live in relationship to him
 - He's told us all that
 - We know ... because he's a God who reveals himself to us by speaking to us

- v1 says *'in the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,'*
 - The OT begins with God saying 'Let there be light'
 - Thought the OT God was constantly revealing his plans and purposes and character to his ppl
 - Spoke to Abraham when he promised him land, nation and blessing.
 - Spoke to his descendents > Isaac, Jacob, Moses
 - Spoke to the ppl of Israel at Mt Sinai when he gave them 10 Commandments
 - Spoke through the written and spoken words of prophets like
 - Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Jonah, Haggai, Malachi etc
 - And by their words God encouraged, promised, rebuked, warned, and guided his ppl
 - That's our Old Testament

- But he goes on to say things are different now because ...
 - *'... **in these last days** he has spoken to us **by his Son,**'*

- God has spoken definitively, finally and for all humankind in his Son Jesus
- He is the greatest and final revelation of God
- There's no more up-to-date message

- Not saying
 - OT inferior
 - OT to be ignored > obsolete > irrelevant
 - Forget the OT because now we have an even better revelation in Christ
 - No! He spends much of the letter quoting from the OT

- We shouldn't say the OT is less true or worthy than the NT
 - The OT presents the promise which is fulfilled in Christ in the NT
 - Jesus himself says this on the road to Emmaus
 - *Luke 24:27 – And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.* [SLIDE]
 - Then later to the disciples
 - *Luke 24:44-45 – "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." 45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.* [SLIDE]
 - So the OT presents the promise ... that finds its fulfillment in Jesus
 - The OT points forward to Jesus

- So the readers are being reminded that while God had spoken in the past through the prophets ... now he speaks to us through his son
 - Implication for them of course is ...
 - if you think the OT is important because that's how God revealed himself ...

- How much more should you listen to Jesus who is the final word of God?

- In v2-3 Writer gives us seven facts about Jesus that show us his greatness and add further weight to as to why we he is the final word of God

- God has spoken to us by his Son
 - **Whom he appointed heir of all things (v2)**
 - Because Jesus is God the Son ... he's the heir and that means all things in heaven and earth and the age to come belong to him
 - **Through whom he made the universe (v2)**
 - By him all things were made > he made everything > the heavens and earth > all that is seen and unseen > he was there in the beginning bringing about the creation
 - **The Son is the radiance of God's glory (v3)**
 - All God's greatness and majesty flows and shines through Jesus > he is God on earth > God in the flesh
 - **The exact representation of his being (v3)**
 - The fullness of God's character and essence is seen in Jesus
 - Could say ... Jesus is God's ultimate selfie
 - **Sustains all things by his powerful word (v3)**
 - Not only did he create the heavens and earth ... he upholds it and keeps it going day by day > he's got the whole world in his hands
 - **Provided purification for sins (v3)**
 - As well as his cosmic and eternal work in creating and sustaining the heavens and earth there is also the work he did on earth for all humanity ... dying on the cross to win us forgiveness with God and cleanse us from sin
 - **Sat down at the right hand of God in heaven (v3)**

- Now risen, ascended, alive and well, at the right hand of God the Father in his rightful place of honour where he rules over the heaven and earth as King of kings and Lord of lords.
- In 2 verses ... the writer crams in so much about the work and person of Jesus to remind us of his greatness and supremacy
 - He tells us all this ... to reiterate why we ought to listen to him as the final word of God

Application

- Raises a few questions
- If Jesus is the final word of God ...
 - what about the rest of the NT? Letters of Paul, Peter, John etc
 - what are we to make of them?
- NT letters focus on Jesus
 - No new revelation contained
 - The NT writers merely
 - retell what Jesus told them
 - unpack the implications of what was revealed in and through Jesus
 - As eye-witnesses to the life and teaching of Jesus, those guys were in positions of authority to do that
- Other question that flows out of Jesus being the final word of God
- What about when people when people say they
 - "had a revelation from God"
 - "God spoke to me"
- What about a guy like Joseph Smith who said in 1830 he had dreams and visions from God that led to him starting the Mormons / Church of Latter Day Saints?
- Need to say ... God can and does use dreams and visions to speak to ppl

- It happens
 - God gave Apostle Peter a vision about eating unclean foods to show him that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews
 - Jesus appeared to Apostle Paul in a vision
 - Many Muslims are converted after having some dream / vision experience of Jesus
- God can and does do this > they are rare > not normal

- However ... those are individual revelations
 - They are times God will speak directly to that person and their situation
- Not a revelation for the whole church or Christian community
 - God isn't revealing new things for the Christian church to learn and know
 - He's not going to reveal new things about himself and his plans and purposes for us and his world
 - He's already done that ... in the past through the prophets and in these last days through his Son > we have all that written down for us in the Bible
 - Nothing else to add
 - What he hasn't revealed ... we don't need to know
 - All we need to know has been revealed
- When it does happen ... it needs to be tested against the word of God
 - Is it consistent with what God has revealed in his word

- These verses remind us that God has revealed himself most supremely in his Son
 - Our understanding of God, his plans, purposes and character ... must therefore come from the Bible ... which God has given to us ...
 - Not church tradition > Catholic / Anglican / Orthodox
 - Not our own preferences
 - No ... God's word

- But as we read God's word, particularly the OT, we need to filter it through our understanding of the work and person of Jesus
- E.g.
 - Like our reading of Ruth > Boaz a kinsman redeemer God uses to rescue his Ruth ... points us forward to Jesus a greater kinsman redeemer who rescues the whole world
- Because God has spoken ... and Jesus is the final word of God

3. The Son is greater than the angels

- When my kids were little and we'd open presents at Christmas and birthdays ...
 - Guarantee ... they'd have more fun playing with the paper than with the gift the paper was covering
 - Wouldn't matter how special or expensive that gift was > Faberge egg > gold plated Thomas Tank Engine ... they loved the paper more
 - Or if the gift came in a box ... they'd be there playing with the box
 - Looking inside > putting in their head / hand > putting other things in
- Crazy irony that they're more interested in the wrapping rather than the gift
- Hebrews written so that ppl won't make that same mistake when it comes to Jesus
 - Written to Jewish Christians who were in danger of returning to Judaism
 - In effect playing with the box and wrapping and ignoring the present that it came it
- In v5-14 the writer wants us to know even more clearly ... if we haven't worked out already from v1-4 ... the supremacy and honour of Jesus the son
 - And he does this by pointing out that the Son is superior to the angels

- Why he is concerned to teach that Jesus is greater than the angels?
 - Angels were associated the giving of the OT law at Mt Sinai - God's greatest OT revelation¹
 - Jews thought that angels had responsibility for ruling various nations (2:5)
 - Some Christians had been tempted to worship angels as some in Colossae were (Col 2:18)
- Writer wants them to see they need stop playing with the wrapping and focus on the gift they'd received in Jesus

- And so to make the point ... he lists seven quotes from the OT which point to the great supremacy and honour of the Son and how he's greater than the angels
 - Not just this writer telling us Jesus is greater than the angels
 - It's the word of God spoken to us in the past at many times and in various ways in the OT ... that's attesting to the supremacy of Christ

- Skip through these OT quotes and get the vibe ...
- See they're all making the same point ... Jesus is supreme because he is God the Son
- As you read through those OT quotes from Psalms, 2 Sam 7, Deut 32 ... the point is clear
 - Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, the creator, the Lord of Heaven and Earth
 - He's worshipped by angels, his rule is forever, he created all things, he will bring everything to judgment and now he is at the right hand of God
 - Jesus is greater > he is supreme
- In contrast to the Son, angels are sent to serve Christians ... those whom Jesus came to save

¹ Deut 33:1-2; Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19

- Summary
 - Jesus is the final word of God
 - Jesus is greater than the angels

- Whole point of all this ... becomes clear in 2:1
 - *We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.*
- The remedy for drifting is to pay careful attention to what they've heard about the gospel ... the good news of Jesus
- They'd become slack, lazy and passive in their faith
 - They were drifting away
 - They need to hear afresh the message they first heard that turned their hearts

- Reason they ought to pay more careful attention to the gospel is
 - Because if the message of the OT given by angels was binding and led to punishment for those who disobeyed and ignored it
 - How much more the message of Jesus that we've heard now
- If people drift away from Jesus and the gospel ... the final word of God and one greater than the angels ... then there is no hope for them
- So he implores them
 - Don't drift from Jesus > stay focused on him > listen to him > obey him > keep your eyes fixed on him
 - He's not just a spiritual being like the angels
 - He's way greater than that
 - He's God the Son ... who is the final word of God to us

Application

- Obvious thing for us to think about is ... what's the thing that's causing us to drift?

- Not the lure back to Judaism ... like original readers of this letter
- Doesn't matter what it is ... if there's something luring us away from following Jesus .. then we're in the same shoes as them and we need to be rebuked and reminded afresh about Jesus

- So ... are you drifting
 - Do you think your faith is waning?
 - Irregular at church or GG?
 - Commitment faltering?
- Why is that?
 - What's luring you away?
 - Job
 - Family
 - Doubt
 - Money
 - Spouse

- Whatever it is ... realise ... all that stuff is wrapping compared to the great gift God has given us in Jesus
 - Don't keep playing with the wrapping when you could be enjoying the beauty of the true present instead

- If you recognise you're drifting and there are things that are luring you away ... what do you do?
 - *We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.*
 - Return afresh and fix your eyes on Jesus ... who he is ... what he's done
 - Compare ... how great he is ... how supreme he is ... compared to the thing that's grabbing your attention instead

- How do we do that ...

- We need to soak up the word of God ... as much as possible
- The word of God that reminds us of the supremacy and greatness of Jesus
- Church, GG, personal reading, music, podcasts, Christian books
- Drench yourself in the in the word of ... pay careful attention to the gospel

- I think C@P is drifting
- I think we're like the people this letter is being written to
- We're in danger of taking our eyes of Jesus and going back to our old ways
- Example ...
 - Seven years ago we started with 25 adults and kids
 - 2008 48 > 2009 51 > 2010 64 > 2011 66 > 2012 69 > 2013 80 > 2014 71
 - 2014 finances trending towards \$60k > last year \$95k > 36% drop!
 - Other factors

- We are drifting!
 - Churches don't drift ... the Christians in churches who drift
 - No amount of urging from me to invite ppl to church or get involved with Toys & Tucker is going to change that
 - It can only come from a deep love of Jesus and all he's done for you at the cross

- How do we stop the drift?
- We need to return afresh to the amazing grace of God that once brightened our life as we came to understand the good news of the gospel ... and
 - How great Jesus is
 - How supreme he is
 - How amazing he is
 - And be blown away by him once more

- And the way to do that is to continue
 - Soaking your lives in the scriptures
 - Drenching you mind with the good news of the gospel
- Why? So that ... you will
 - Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus
 - Love him
 - Obey him
 - Worship him
 - Serve him
 - Honour him
- For he is God's Son ... who is
 - *the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for YOUR sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*

PRAY

Our great God, we praise you that you are a God that delights to reveal yourself to us. Thank you that you have done that in the past through the prophets, but we give you great thanks that you have revealed yourself most supremely in your Son, Jesus. We praise you for Jesus and all that he has done for us. Help us to not only to believe the message about Jesus, but to stand firm in it and never drift away. We pray this for your name's sake,

AMEN