

# The Final Word on Listening Hebrews 1:1-2:4

Preached at 8.15 and C@10 on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2014

## Intro

In the movie 'Castaway', Tom Hanks plays Chuck Nolan, a Fed-Ex executive who is stranded alone on a deserted island after a plane crash.

Out of the washed-up wreckage he finds a Wilson brand soccer ball.

And after cutting his hand trying to light a fire he smears the blood accidentally on the ball in the shape of what looks like a face.

With a few adjustments he makes the ball into a head that becomes a companion he can talk to – obviously he calls him 'Wilson'.

When Chuck makes his last ditch stand to be rescued, he builds a raft and he fastens Wilson to it and makes for the open sea.

After we don't know how many days he's exhausted, the raft's falling apart, and while he's asleep, Wilson's fixing becomes loose and he falls into the water and starts drifting away.

As soon as Chuck realises Wilson's not there, he looks and sees him getting smaller and smaller on the horizon, as they drift further and further apart.

He can't let go of the raft to chase after Wilson, and in the end can do nothing more than cry out 'Wilson!'

Hebrews is a letter written to Christians who had begun to drift away from Jesus.

They hadn't rejected Jesus as such, but what they'd come to understand about him and about what he came to do had started to figure less and less in their lives.

He became smaller and smaller on their horizons.

It's the story of too many people who've come to hear about Jesus – who've either grown up in Christian homes, or gone through Sunday School and Youth Group, or have come to church for a while – and over time have just drifted away.

You don't even have to leave church to drift away from Jesus – you can still even be a regular attender... but the eagerness to get to know him and love him, and the desire to put your life into serving him has turned into lukewarmness towards him, or even apathy.

So this letter gives us a good opportunity – each one of us – to check on just how large (or how small) Jesus figures in our life.

If you're a Christian, think back to the time you first came to understand the gospel – when you first came to grips with who Jesus is, what he came to do, and what it meant for the way you thought about life and the way you live.

Think about the way you felt... what became more important and less important for you... what it was like to open a Bible and understand that you were hearing God speak...

And think about whether you might have drifted – or are drifting – away from Jesus.

Because Hebrews has plenty to say to help us and encourage us to keep our eyes and our thoughts on Jesus so that we'll remain strong in our faith in him, and not drift away.

### **Hebrews background**

We're not certain who wrote Hebrews, or who specifically the letter was written to – like we do with Paul's letters where he tells us who's writing and who to.

But we can infer from the content that it was written to Jewish Christians who'd begun to slip away from their initial commitment.

So Hebrews says it's a word of exhortation – a word of encouragement and warning to stop people moving away from their Christian faith.

It warns us about the dangers of rejecting God, and urges us to think constantly about who Jesus is and reminds us who he is and all he's done...

... that he's God's final and complete word to the human race

... that he's the unique Son of God

... that he is the only perfect high priest who can deal with our sin  
... that he's greater than the greatest people of the Old Testament.

The way the writer of Hebrews deals with drifting Christians is to show us once again how much greater Jesus is than anyone or anything else we've ever known.

... because the answer to a shrinking view of Jesus that leads to apathy and drifting, is a greater view of who Jesus is and what he's done.

## **Jesus The Final Word of God**

Chapter 1 begins straight away to unfold this majestic picture of Jesus as the Son of God.

There's so much in this chapter that we could spend weeks on it, but we won't.

The key idea is that Jesus – as the Son of God – is God's final word to the human race.

Throughout history up to Jesus, God had spoken to the Jewish people in many ways at various times (v1) (as Bob showed us a little last week).

He revealed his plans and purposes – he spoke to Abraham, and made promises of land, nation and blessing. He spoke to Abraham's descendants, Isaac, Jacob, Moses...

He spoke at Mt Sinai when he gave the Ten Commandments to Israel.

He spoke through prophets like Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Malachi, etc.

That's what we have in the Old Testament.

But "in these last days, he has spoken to us by His Son."

Jesus is the clearest and most complete revelation of God to us.

That means there's no greater or complete knowledge of God, life, the world or ourselves than what we come to understand through knowing Jesus. He's God's perfect word to us.

That doesn't mean that we can ignore our Old Testament now – look at what Bob M showed us last week about how it helps us understand Jesus all the better.

And the author of Hebrews constantly quotes the Old Testament as he paints this grand picture of Jesus.

But Jesus is the final word. That means that we understand the Old Testament in light of who he is and what he came to do... because he fulfils everything about the Old Testament – all the prophets, all the promises, all the offices like High Priest, all the religious practices like the sacrifices...

We're meant to look at Jesus and the gospel and be able to say "ah, wow – that's how God blesses – that's what Jesus' sacrifice has achieved – that's why only he could make the sacrifice we can't make."

In verses 2-3 there are 7 reasons why Jesus is God's final, complete, perfect word.

God has appointed him heir of all things (v2) – everything in heaven and earth and the age to come belongs to him.

The universe was made through him (v2) – as we know from John 1 – Jesus is the creator of everything we see and don't see.

He's the radiance of God's glory (v3) – Peter and John got a glimpse of it on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured – Jesus is God on earth, in the flesh.

He's the exact representation of God's being (v3) - everything about God's essence, his character, and his beauty is on display in Jesus.

He sustains all things by his powerful word (v3) – Jesus not only made the world but it (we) depend on his say-so to keep it going every day.

He provided purification for sins (v3) – his death on the cross has cleansed us from the guilty verdict our sins deserve and made us pure in God's sight.

He sat down at the right hand of God in heaven (v3) – after dying he was raised and ascended to heaven to the place of all authority over everything – at the right hand of God.

Do you think anyone or anything else could have anything more important to say to us than Jesus?

There's nothing greater or better that anyone has to say, because there's no one greater than Jesus to say it.

In the next few verses it talks about how Jesus is greater than the angels.

This was probably part of the original reader's drift – thinking that angels as God's messengers (which is what angel means) were superior to a man like Jesus – so they were placing more weight on the Old Testament Law given at Mt Sinai which angels were associated with giving.

People are still more likely to look for messages delivered in spectacular ways than listen to the ancient word of a first century man.

But that man's word is more impressive because he has a more important place than anyone or anything else in all creation.

And verses 5-18 aren't just the writer's thoughts – they're all quotes from the Old Testament that prove that Jesus is THE supreme being.

He's God's Son (Ps 2)

Angels worship HIM (Deut 32:43)

V8-9 – he is God, and his righteous rule will never end (Ps 45:6-7)

V10-12 – he's the creator and ruler of the world, and he'll outlast the world when he brings it to an end (Ps 102:25-27)

V13 – He rules at God's right hand and will be victorious over his enemies (Ps 110:1).

See, what God said in various ways in the past – throughout the Old Testament – is now perfectly clear – it was always all about Jesus and what he came to do.

## Listen to Him

Why is this all so important to say?

The punch line comes in 2:1...

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

What stops a Christian drifting away? Paying more careful attention to the word God has spoken in Jesus Christ.

That means keeping Jesus and the gospel that we’ve heard and responded to, constantly large in our thoughts and lives.

...

When I was 14 I received this little Sanyo portable stereo from my Mum as an early Christmas present. (She and Dad had not long separated and within a year she had died, so I don’t think I could ever part with it).

When I got it, I couldn’t leave it alone. I played every record I had. I recorded everything I could. I had headphones and I remember some nights I didn’t even go to bed – I stayed up all night listening to music until I passed out exhausted!

But over time I became less enthralled by this gift that had occupied my thoughts every waking moment when I first got it.

It seemed like it lost its shine – especially when I started looking at bigger & better hi-fi systems and had the money to be able to spend on them.

And my little Sanyo – once so precious to me – sits in the corner of my study collecting dust. Every now and then I pull it out for a look, but that’s about all...

As you think about when you first became a Christian, is that what’s happened to Jesus and the gospel for you?

Has the God’s greatest and final word to you – the good news of Jesus and what he’s done – lost its shine for you?

Although you don't want to part with it completely, does it sit in the corner where you know where it is, but doesn't have the part in your life that it once had?

You might think that's something that could never happen. You say you still believe in Jesus. So do I.

I've gone through some difficult times this year for a number of reasons. In particular I've struggled to come to grips with some issues about my perception of myself as the leader of this church.

That struggle has taken a personal toll on me, and has affected my health (as many of you have noticed and asked about) in ways that are probably going to affect me for the rest of my life.

The holiday we've just had gave me time to reflect on why I've been feeling the way I have.

Even though there were things said that I've taken harder than I should have, and medical reasons too – what's becoming clearer to me is that the things that have been concerning me have become bigger on my horizon than Jesus and the gospel.

The word of Jesus in the gospel says that I'm loved, valued, forgiven and a son in God's family forever.

My word to myself has been telling me I need to do better, be smarter, work harder...

You think it's hard to drift from faith in Jesus? It's subtle. It can happen to any of us when the worries and concerns of this life eclipse God's word to us in Jesus.

Do you know when I realised that?

When I thought I'd better start looking at Hebrews to prepare for this sermon series while we were away.

As soon as I read this passage I saw what was happening.

As God reminded me in these verses who Jesus is and what he's done, I remembered the new-ness and the freshness of my first days as a Christian.

I remembered how different life felt.

I remembered how great it was to have certainty about my eternal future.

I remembered how keen I was to get involved in serving in church and wanting my family and friends to come to faith in Jesus too.

I remembered how good it was to know that no matter how many times I blew it, Jesus' death covered it.

I remembered the comfort of knowing that I can lean on him and trust him to do what he'll do with me.

I remembered what it was like to have Jesus as the most important person in my life.

And God gave that to me again as I sat with the Bible on my lap and read what I thought I knew so well – that there's no-one more important in the world or in my life, and no-one with anything more important to say to me.

Have worries caused you to drift? Have other interests and priorities become larger on your horizon than Jesus?

Are you so far away from the way you felt about Jesus when you first understood the gospel?

In these last days – the days we live in – there's nothing more important than the word God has spoken in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Pay more careful attention to what we've heard, and let nothing else become louder or larger, so that you don't drift away.