

The Danger of Drifting Away

Hebrews 2:1

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, April 10, 2022

If you would, please open your Bibles to the book of Hebrews, which is a relatively new book in the life of our congregation. We haven't been in it that long. The first sermon was on February 6 of this year. And since we've been in it, we've found that it doesn't take too long to get into some deep stuff here. When you read the book of Hebrews, you only have to go a few pages in before you're into some heavy doctrine, which is ironic because some pastors think the best way to start a sermon is to tell a joke or a story and give a quote from the newspaper. But not this guy. He has a very different approach. And if you would read Hebrews one, verse 13, you'll see what I mean. It says,

But to which of the angels has God ever said, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?" Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? For this reason, we must pay much closer attention to what we've heard, so that we do not drift away from it. Foe if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will.

For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. But one has testified somewhere saying, "What is man that You remember him? Or the son of man, that you are concerned about him? You have made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, and have appointed him over the works of Your hands; You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. But we do see Him who has made for a little while longer than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

For it was fitting, for whom for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I will proclaim Your name to My brethren, In the midst of the congregation, I will sing your praise." And again, "I will put my trust in Him."

We will stop the reading there. I don't have to tell you that this is hard to understand at first glance, because it contains a lot of references that are unfamiliar to us. Like the thought of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God or the word of angels proving unalterable, or God perfecting the author of our

salvation through suffering. But the argument is pretty clear when you go back to the beginning of all that because Chapter Two starts with the phrase *for this reason*. If you look in your Bibles, he says, “For this reason”, or “therefore,” which means therefore, in light of all he said before, about the greatness of Christ in chapter one, this is what you need to do. Now, you need to make sure you don't drift away from it. Because if you do, there'll be no hope for you. You need to make sure your mind doesn't wander off to other things, because if you do, you could end up being lost.

And just to say a few words about that, I mentioned last time that I don't really have to explain why the author puts this in here. Because if you've been a Christian for any number of years, you'll know that people love to drift away from Jesus, don't they? They love to wander off from Him. As the hymn writer put it, “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.” And if you notice, he didn't say, “Prone to follow Lord, I feel it. Prone to be faithful to the God I love” because our hearts aren't like that. You know what it's like, our hearts are prone to go into something else like sin. And as a result, we have to be reminded to pay attention to Christ. In fact, this phenomenon is so common that theologians have come up with a term for it called backsliding, which refers to someone who professes to be a Christian, but they've slipped away from it now, they say they're a believer because they prayed a prayer, walked an aisle, got sprinkled as a baby, learned the Catechism as a teenager. Now they don't do it anymore. Now that's all lost on them. Because they've chosen to go another way. They didn't run back to the world, they slid back into it. They didn't sprint towards sin with all their mind, they did something worse. They stumbled into it one step at a time. It's so common today.

In fact, Hebrews three verse 12 refers to this just a few verses later, I'm going to have you turn to another book in a moment. But if you just want to write that in your notes, Hebrews three, verse 12, says, “Take care, brethren, that there not being any one of you with an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.” And that's a very interesting verse, because get this, he said that to a church. In other words, he didn't say to a bar or a club or a tavern where people do horrible things. He said it to people in this room, make sure you don't have an unbelieving heart. Why? Because it's possible to do that. It's possible for you to come to church, week in and week out, sing the songs, read the scriptures, pray the prayers, and ignore it all, and completely blow it off. Later on, he says the same thing another way, when he tells us in Hebrews 10, verse 26, “Then if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment.” And that's also a very frightening passage, because he means that God will judge the people in church. I think it's safe to say most of us come to church because we're afraid of the judgment. We don't want to be judged by Christ. Well, God says you will, if you come here and fake it, if you go on sinning willfully as if it never meant anything to you at all, because the idea here is not that you have your salvation and lose it. It's not that you have faith in Christ, but you let it slip away. The idea here is that you never had it at all. And it just took a little bit of time for everybody to see it. That's what backsliding is. It just takes a little bit of pressure and a little bit of trials and a little bit of suffering and the real you comes spilling out. But the point is that this is something the Bible says over and over again. It tells us this repeatedly because apparently it's a real issue.

It might be helpful to show a few more instances of this in order to get our minds around what the author is talking about here. So if you would, keep your finger in the book of Hebrews, and turn to the book of Revelation. I know it usually makes people nervous when you say turn to the book of Revelation. But just to calm your hearts. We won't get into the futuristic stuff here, because it doesn't start off talking about prophecy. The book of Revelation starts off with some very practical advice to churches, churches that existed in the first century, and it all centers around one problem, the problem of backsliding. Just about every one of these churches dealt with it on some level. And if you look in chapter two verse one, it says, "To the angel of the church and Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this, 'I know your deeds and your toil and your perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My namesake, and not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you've left your first love.'"

Now, that may not mean a whole lot to you when you first read it, but the church and Ephesus was one of the greatest churches of the first century. It was right up there with the church in Jerusalem, because this is a church that was planted by Paul, pastored by Timothy, and the apostle John was said to have died in it. So in other words, they had a very rich history. I mean, this was a church with all the degrees on the walls. Because you see this in the passage, verse two says they were diligent the ministry, they took it seriously. They didn't tolerate evil men and put up with heresy. Verse three says it didn't grow weary in it either or slack off. This was not the kind of church that you would show up and hear them crack a few jokes. This is the kind of church that they would use the big terms, the big theology, the heavy doctrine. They were very diligent in that. But verse four says that Jesus nevertheless had one thing against them and that is that they didn't care anymore. When they came to church, they went through the motions, they put on a show because it had all become mechanical for them. And as a result, verse five says that the Lord was going to remove their lampstand, which is another way of saying He was going to destroy them because they were backsliding. They didn't have any passion at all for the work. I think some of us have been in churches before where they had a lot of good theology, but they were cold. Nobody cared. That's the church in Ephesus.

Another church that Jesus confronted over this issue is the church at Pergamum. If you look at chapter two, verse 12, they have the same problem, but from another angle. It says, "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas.'" If you look in verse 14, it goes on to say, "'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam.'" Now, again, this is an unfamiliar setting for us. But Pergamum is another one of the cities in the list that's no longer here today. But if you look at it on a map, Pergamum was the northernmost city in the list of churches here and was right on the coast of the sea. So that if a messenger brought this letter from John through the port of Ephesus, he would go from

Ephesus, to Smyrna, from Smyrna, Pergamum. And there he would go east, which means that Pergamum was isolated. It was way up there on its own. And as a result, verse 13, says, they live where Satan's throne was. They had idolatry everywhere, immorality, witchcraft, sorcery, all that kind of stuff. And they didn't deny the Lord's name. But what they did do is this in verse 14, they held to the teaching of Balaam, which is a reference to an Old Testament prophet who led Israel to commit adultery. Because apparently, that was happening here. They weren't cold, like the Ephesians were, they weren't apathetic. But what they were was halfhearted in their loyalty to Christ; they chased after the flesh. This was the kind of church you'd go in and they would say that it's okay to commit adultery. This is the kind of church they would say it's okay to have homosexual pastors. This is the kind of church that says divorce doesn't matter, all these types of things, that's Pergamum. And as a result, the Lord said the same thing in verse 16, you need to cut it out, or I'll make war with you.

I just have one more church to mention in this list, because they're all kind of like this. If you look at one more, in chapter three, you have the church in Laodicea. And this is really the icing on the cake because this is some of the worst words in Scripture to a church. But in chapter three, verse 14, the Lord writes, "To the angel of the church in Laodicea wright: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this, 'I know your deeds that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of My mouth.'"

That's interesting because in particular passage, the Lord doesn't even compliment them anymore, like His patience has run out. And he says that this church is neither cold nor hot, they are neither here nor there, on nor off to the things of God. And as a result, this church makes God want to puke. That's the only time to my knowledge that the Lord says a church makes Him want to vomit. And it was all over the sin of backsliding. I find this fascinating to read this in the book of Revelation, because you wouldn't think this would be a problem because the church had just started. I mean, it hadn't been around that long as an institution. Jesus had died a few years before the apostle John was still alive. And yet this was a massive issue in the church, because this is how sin operates. Give it a few years. And if you don't watch it, you will go back to the sins of the world. It happened in the first century and it happens in the 21st century. It was going on when the church began, it's going on now and the church is still operating. Which is why the author of the book of Hebrews gives you this warning in chapter two, if you want to turn back there.

This is why he says this in verse one. "For this reason, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it." Those churches who just read from were drifting. And the author tells you not to do that. And I'll say a few words about this in a moment, but the term *drift away* is important here; it's one word in Greek, and it's the word *pararreo*, which means to drift away and wander off. But it's a very colorful word, because depending on how it's used, you could translate it a lot of ways. It can refer to a ship slowly sailing on the water, or a ring gently slipping off your finger, or a rock rolling gradually down a hill. It doesn't refer to someone who leaves Christ quickly. They do it

slowly. It's not talking about someone who turns their back on him right away, but they do it gradually over time. The trouble the author is describing here is not that a fleeing from the Lord, as much as that of falling from the Lord. It's not about running from Him as much as it is dozing off and going to sleep. I can't tell you how many Christians are in this world today that are sleeping, and I'm talking about drifting, dozing Christians because even though they come to church and attend our services, and show up faithfully every Sunday, let's be honest, they don't care anymore. It just doesn't mean anything to them because their love for the Lord is wrapped up in one thing, and that is church attendance. And their commitment to Christ is seen in one hour and one hour only because when they go home, they don't do anything for him at all. Their passion for Christ completely stops.

I was sharing with Prairie chapel last week that I grew up in the Bible Belt in the United States in Tennessee. And I was just surrounded by religion everywhere. This was a problem there. Now I'm in the Bible Belt in Canada and it's a problem here. The point the author's making here, as he starts out the book of Hebrews is that God hates it when you act that way; He can't stand it. He hated it in the book of Revelation, He hates in the book of Hebrews, because your worship of Him needs to go home with you. Your love for the Lord needs to go past the walls of this room and into your homes and into your jobs and into your schools and into your hearts and relationships. Otherwise, it's all for nothing. Because again, this passage is not talking to the people out there, it's talking to the people in here. And it's not a warning for the people in the bars, or the taverns. It's a warning for those who show up in church. We are the audience of this. You know, I don't know about you. But when I read a verse like this, if I'm not careful, I can find myself saying this doesn't relate to me because I would never do something like this. I love Jesus way too much to ever drift away from him. But if you ever find yourself saying that I want to remind you that the church in Ephesus said the same thing and look at what happened to them. They made the same pronouncement and look how they ended up. So you don't want to do that. As I studied it this week, I also found myself saying, yeah, yeah, don't drift away. I've heard that before. It sounds like a Paul Washer sermon, doesn't it? It's like something you would read in a John MacArthur book. So why don't we just skip over this and move on? But if you find yourself doing that, the church in Laodicea did it too. And it destroyed them. And I don't want it to destroy our church. That's why I want to spend one more week talking about this.

So if you're taking notes, in Hebrews chapter two, I want to give you three tips to keep from backsliding. Last time I was with you, I walked you through the book of Hebrews and I showed you several times when this warning is given to the church. Here, it's mentioned over and over again. But I don't know if I gave you a lot of practical tips in order to defeat it. And so that's what we're going to do this morning. Let's just back up for a moment and talk about how to get victory over this sin.

You see this everywhere in the church. I mean, you see this with young people when they graduate high school, they start to drift. And you see it with old people when they go through the midlife crisis because they start to drift. They buy their Harley Davidson and off they go. And you see it in all types of walks of life and during the Coronavirus. They've done studies on this and found that one in three people have

stopped attending church after the Coronavirus. They never came back. And a lot of them are literally leaving the faith altogether. And if you find your heart going that way, this sermon is for you. Let's talk about three tips to prevent this.

The first one is to remember your Saviour. This means that one way to keep from falling into this trap is to keep in mind all that Christ has done for you and all that He has sacrificed and let it motivate you to remain faithful. So if you find yourself growing apathetic, go back home and read your Bible and see what it tells you about the Lord. If you look in verse 13 of chapter one again, just to get some setting for this and context, he says this, "But to which of the angels has He ever said, 'Sit in my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?' Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation" For this reason, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard. So that we do not drift away from it."

I want to remind you that the author here is not just writing a theological treatise, he's writing to a church, which means he's not just interested in doctrine here, he's interested in application too; He's not giving you a bunch of information and pie in the sky kind of stuff and leaving it at that; he wants to actually shepherd your heart and see your life change as a result of what he's saying. And in order to do that, in verse one, he starts off with the phrase *for this reason*, which is in Greek, *dia hoytos*, which is a grammatical device known as a subordinate conjunction. Now, that may sound really nerdy, but there's a reason I'm telling you that because it is used to connect one thought to another, it's like a bridge between the two passages here, because the thought in Hebrews one is that Jesus has done all these things for you. He's made the world and created it and died and risen again, to sit at the Father's right hand and *for this reason*, this is what you need to do: you need to pay attention so you don't drift away. That's the thought of the passage. It's even more special when you remember that the author's just mentioned Jesus' enemies in verse 13 of chapter one, and said, He will turn them into a footstool, which means He's going to crush them, and destroy them, and obliterate them from the face of the earth. So what he's saying here now is that unless you want to be one of those enemies, and go through that yourself, this is how you need to conduct yourself, you need to wake up when you come to church. You need to snap out of it. And stop being so wishy washy in the Christian life. Because there's really only two groups of people in this passage. At the end of the day, there are Christ's friends, and there are His enemies. There are only two camps you fall into, you are a part of His beloved, or you're part of His opponents. And his friends do this, they remember Him. They think about Him constantly. They can't ever get Christ off their mind. In other words, they don't do it once on Sunday morning, and that's it. And they don't think about Jesus when they come to church, and then forget about him when they walk out the door and go back to their, their job. It's an ongoing thing for them.

I've spent a lot of time in the previous weeks or months going over what the author says about Christ in chapter one, so I don't want to repeat any of that here. If you want to learn any more about that you can go online and listen to the previous sermons. They are all called "Jesus is greater"..."Jesus is greater than the world"; is "greater than the nations", that type of thing. But it might help to show you a few

other things the author says about Christ in this book because it highlights what he's telling you here. So if you look in chapter four, verse 14, this is just another thing he says about Christ in the book. And it's a wonderful thing he tells us about our Saviour. He says, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet was without sin. Now, I love that passage there because of the image it gives you. Because remember, he's writing this book to the Jews, and the Jews had an office called the priesthood. And over the priesthood, you had a high priest. And one day out of the year, the high priest had the responsibility to go behind the curtain in the temple that separated the presence of God from the rest of the worshipers. The reason that's so important is because it was the only time anybody went in there. The rest of the time, the Holy of Holies, of the Ark of the Covenant was off limits to the people. The Jews actually took this so seriously that they would tie a rope around the high priest's foot with a bell on it, so if the Lord struck him dead after he walked in there, and the bell stopped ringing, they could drag him out like a sack of potatoes. I don't know about you, but I'm very grateful I'm a pastor, and not a High Priest. That sounds like an awful job. But the reason that he relates it to Christ here is because not only has Christ passed through the curtains for us, but He has literally pass through the heavens Himself. He has gone straight into the throne room of God. Verse 15, says He sympathizes with your weaknesses, which means He knows what it's like to be human, He understands it. He's been tempted in all things as we are, so that when He sees you struggle with sin, and he sits beside the Father, Jesus doesn't shake his head and say He doesn't get why you do that. He knows why you do that. He's been there too. And when He sees you battle with things and wrestle with things and weep over your flesh, He doesn't say, "That's crazy. I don't get why it's so hard." He gets it. You have One sitting by the Father who knows exactly what you're going through. And He's been through it Himself, which is why verse 16, says that you can draw near to the throne of grace, with confidence, because you have someone sitting there who is on your side. You don't have an enemy at the throne of grace, you don't have an opponent there, you have a friend. In fact, it's a throne of grace; it's not a throne of judgment because Christ is there. He is your great high priest,

So many people don't understand this today, because every time they pray to God, they tremble, don't they? They're scared to death because they think God is out to get them. And He's up there with lightning bolts trying to hit them every time they fail. You don't have that; you have a Saviour like this.

And if that's not enough, the author adds to this later on in chapter six. If you want to turn over there, in chapter six, verse 19, tells you something else about your Saviour. This book is full of statements like this. It says this hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast, and one which enters within the veil. Again, there's that same reference there within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek. Now, there's a lot in here, and we can't to get to everything. But here he calls Jesus our forerunner, which means He's the one who went before us. He went behind the veil to remind you that you can go there, too. He passed into the presence of God to show you that He will take you there to be your anchor.

I love what John Calvin says about this verse because he said that some people's anchors go down, but ours go up. And some people's hope is buried deep beneath the sea, where the winds of life can't take it, touch it, and it doesn't move. But we have ours buried in the sky, which is so much better. Because it means you don't have to freak out every time you watch the news anymore. And you don't have to fall apart every time the world goes crazy because Jesus is your anchor and you know He's not going anywhere. He's your hope and your hope won't move. If there's anything this world is lacking right now it is a sense of peace, right? People are just going back and forth like a bunch of rabbits. They turned to all kinds of things right now to give them comfort like sex and drugs and alcohol. It's why they get hooked on stuff like prescription pills. And the author of the book of Hebrews says you don't need any pills anymore. You have Christ. You don't need drugs. This is all you need.

And if that's not enough, I'm not done yet, the author tells you one more thing about your Saviour. In chapter 10, verse 11, it says, "Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that moment onward 'until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet.'" And this one is what is helpful as well because the author has called Jesus our anchor, and he's called him our High Priest, but now he calls him our sacrifice. Just to show you how much your redemption cost him, it cost him his life. Because this is what sacrifices do, they die. And this is how offerings operate, they put down their life on the altar, spill their blood and save you. They don't sit passively by and watch; a sacrifice gives everything it has. And that's what Christ has done as well. He became the priest and the sacrifice, He became the Offeror and the Offering.

Verse 14 says, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." I told you before that the Jews would offer 1000s, maybe even millions of sacrifices every year. Some said on the day of the day of Passover alone, they would kill about 200,000. Jesus died once because His death is enough to cover every sin. And I mentioned that because that's what the author of Hebrews is referring to when he gives you this statement in chapter two, *for this reason*. That means that for this reason that Christ is our Great High Priest, and He's our anchor, and He's our one-time sacrifice for sin who has passed behind the veil. This is what you need to do now, you need to take it seriously and stop backsliding. That's all background for this one verse. You need to wake up and pay attention and stop messing around. And let me tell you what this has to do with our life today: when you backslide, do you realize what you're doing? You're not sinning, you're being stupid. And when you fall back to the ways of the world, you're not just disobeying God, you're being ungrateful because you're trading something this wonderful for that. You're trading something this special for dirt. You're saying, "I know Jesus did all this for me, but I don't care because I just want to sin. And I know that He paid such a high price, but it doesn't matter because I just want my lust." And that's a terrible thing to do. I mean, this is why Jesus told the church in Laodicea that if you don't stop it, He will spit you out of His mouth because it makes Him furious when you act this way. And this is why He told the church in Ephesus that if you don't cut it out, He will destroy you. Because it's just so ungrateful. It's like taking a precious gift, a priceless

treasure, and throwing it on the ground, which is so common today. You see it happen all the time. I've lost track of the number of people that I've met who have come to church and said, I'm bored, you're bored; we are all so bored because that's what they think of Jesus: He's boring to them; He's a dull thing. They want to be entertained. They want to rock and roll show. They want to smoke machine behind the pulpit. Or they come here for worship and they open their Bible and they say, I can't study this because it's hard because I'm tired, you're tired, we're all so tired. So they sniff at it disdainfully and they look at it with contempt. But they do that because they forget how wonderful all of this truly is. Friends, when you come to church, you don't read your Bible because you have to, you do because you want to, and when you worship God, it's not a chore for you; it's a blessing. It's a privileged to be in here. I love sitting on the front row because you guys sing like it's a privilege. You pour your hearts out to God because you love it.

My point is that this is where the battle against backsliding begins, it begins in the heart. And this is where you get victory. You get victory when you ask yourself, "What's my motivation for coming here? Do I do it? Because someone's twisting my arm? Or do I do it? Because I love it? Do I come to church because my parents made me do it, or my friends made me do it, or my wife made me do it. And she's gonna get really angry if I don't come to church and quiet at the dinner table. Or do I come for something else?" If you want to write this passage down, first John four verse 19, says, "We love because He first loved us." It doesn't say that we love Him because if we don't, somebody is going to be mad at us. Or we love Him because if we don't, we're going to make our parents upset. We do it because He started it. And we can't help but love Him back. Luke four seven, verse 47, says he who has been forgiven much, loves much. And friends, let me ask you the question, do you know that you've been forgiven much this morning?

When you come in here, do you come in here with a debt of gratitude? That's how you're going to defeat this sin, by looking at it that way. And it leads to another practical tip to keep from backsliding. The first one is to pay attention. So the first one is to remember your Saviour because that's the foundation for everything in the Christian life. You're not saved by earning your salvation, you're saved by remembering it. You're not saved by working your way into heaven. You're saved by reflecting on the work of Christ. We're going to have the Lord's Supper in a moment. But we do the Lord's Supper regularly, because it's a memorial to remind you of Christ. That's how you're saved.

A second practical tip to keep from backsliding is to pay attention, which means you need to listen when you come to church, instead of daydreaming. As we come to this next point, I need to point out that the one thing you notice, as you read a book like Hebrews is that the author has an uncanny ability to take something deep and make it simple. In other words, he can take a very profound idea, like the fact that Jesus sits at the right hand of God and He's going to make his enemies into a footstool. And apply it by saying something basic like this, you need to pay attention. It's a gift that the author has. And just to give you insight into this, when he says *Pay attention*, this is another Greek word, *prosecho*, which means to pay attention or be mindful of something, but it can actually refer to the act of turning your gaze in a

certain direction, because you were looking over here, but now you're looking over there. And you were fixing your mind in this place. But now you're fixing your mind in that place. And depending on how it's used, it can also mean you're doing this in a military setting. Because this word was used often to describe a soldier on patrol, looking out for the enemy, making sure his outpost was safe. The author of Hebrews uses it to say this is how you should treat all these precious doctrines of Christ like a soldier at war. Because you're not cuddling up to the world, you're fighting it. You're not buddyng up to the culture, you're resisting it, because you're serving in a time of war, not peacetime. In fact, if you read some of the ancient records from this time in history, one thing you find is that it was a capital offense for a soldier to fall asleep when he was on duty; they would actually kill you for doing that. In the Roman Empire when the chief priest wanted to spread the rumor that Jesus had not been resurrected, they tried to trick the people by asking the guards to tell everyone that they had fallen asleep while they were watching and the guard said, we can't do that, because our commander will kill us. So the chief priests bribe them to change their mind. And later on in the Bible, when Paul and Silas were in jail in the book of Acts, and an earthquake hit the prison. The jailer was going to do the same thing. He wanted to commit suicide because he thought his commander was going to kill him because it looked like he had fallen asleep.

But I mentioned that because all that is tied up in this word, *prosecho*. It's a term that denotes great seriousness or earnestness toward something. Because the idea is that when you do this, you are straining so hard that your eyes almost pop out of your head. And you're looking so intently that you almost pop a blood vessel. Because if you notice in the verse, the author doesn't say you need to pay attention, but you need to pay much attention, which alludes to the frequency of it. You don't need to be doing this a little bit, you need to be doing this a lot. And you don't need to be listening to the Lord every once in a while when you come to church on Sunday morning, you need to be doing it all the time. And if that were not enough, he doesn't say you need to pay much attention. He says you need to pay much closer attention, which talks about the intensity of this because when you get into the doctrine of Christ, you need to get into the nitty gritty details. You don't need to fly over it like so many people do.

I grew up in a place where if you ask someone are they saved They would tell you a time when they prayed a prayer, shook a preacher's hand, responded to an altar call. And that's all they would tell you. They wouldn't tell you anything about Jesus, they wouldn't tell you anything about the cross. They wouldn't tell you think about sin, they wouldn't talk about the resurrection, they wouldn't talk about the ascension. It was just date, time, name, boom, done. That's not how this is presented. That's not how you look at the Christian life. You need to be learning about Christ in detail every day.

And it's interesting how he puts this here in verse one because he says you need to do this: pay attention not with what you heard, but with what we heard. Not with what God told the apostles, but with what God told all of us. And the significance to that is, apparently the author was not an apostle here. Some have said that Paul may have written this book, or James or John are one of those guys. But the way this is worded, it looks like he didn't see Jesus with his own two eyes. This man didn't follow Him around

Galilee. So in order for him to be saved, he had to do the same thing you do, he had to pay attention too. You don't get a pass on this just because you're a pastor. You don't get to ignore this just because you're special and you wrote the book of Hebrews; this commands for everybody.

Let me tell you how this applies to our lives. You don't ever want to come to a point when you think you're too good to listen to God anymore. Even if you're a preacher, or someone who has done what this guy has done, you don't want to ever come to a place where you say, "I don't need this stuff about Christ. I've heard it all before." Because the moment you do that, you begin to drift. And the second you act that way, you start to crumble. I was talking to our leadership training class the other night. And I said that this may be one of the greatest issues I think that we face in the church today. And that is that so many people have heard the gospel here; they become hardened to it, which is why this country is becoming so secularized right now. And they've done studies on this and found that really the only reason Canada has a strong religious population is because of the immigrants. Native born Canadians who have grown up around church have turned their back on it. There was even an evangelist in the 1800s, who call this the burned over phenomenon, because he preached a series of revivals in the US where a lot of people got saved, or they said they did, only to come back 30 years later, and find that most of these people had wandered off, and they were harder to reach than ever, because they were burned over with the gospel. It's happening all over the place right now.

You can meet all kinds of people in Chilliwack, who tell you they grew up in church, but they don't go anymore. And the author of Hebrews says that if you don't want to see it happen to you, this is what you need to do, you have to pay attention. And that means it's not enough that you paid attention yesterday, you have to do it today. And it's not enough that you went to church and read your Bible and prayed as a kid, you have to do it as an adult as well. Otherwise, it's no good. It has to be an ongoing thing. I've met with people in our church who have told me that they don't know when they were saved. And it scares them because they feel like they're doing something wrong. And I've told them you're not doing anything wrong, as long as you're saved right now. It doesn't matter the date or the hour. God has that recorded in heaven. You can leave that with Him. What matters is that you're living for Him this moment and you love Him this moment and you care about Him this moment. I've talked to other ones who have told me they're so worried because they just can't stop fighting sin and they can't stop struggling with it. And they wonder if they are doing something wrong. And I've said you're not doing something wrong unless you don't struggle with sin. You're not doing anything wrong unless you give up the fight because your soul is in danger, and you have to see it that way. The Bible says the devil is like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. It doesn't say he's looking for someone to nibble at. And it doesn't say he's a mouse. He is a lion, and that's what you're fighting. You have to act like it.

It also says you need to pray and watch that you do not enter into temptation, for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. And that shows you why this is so important, because your flesh is not your friend, it's your enemy. And your soul is not powerful, it's puny. So you have to ask God for help repeatedly. The

Bible also says to pay close attention to your life and doctrine. For as you do this, you will ensure salvation for yourself. And there's that phrase *pay attention* again because this is how you make it through the Christian life, you do it like a soldier at war.

And that brings us to one more tip to keep from backsliding. Just to review these other ones, the first one is to remember your Saviour. And the second one is to pay attention because you can't ever be slothful in the Christian life. It's not a stagnant thing, you're either growing or dying in this, you're either getting closer to Christ, or farther away, you're never staying put. And if you want to grow, you have to wake up.

And that brings us to one more practical tip to keep from backsliding. And this is just following the text here, and that is that you have to remember not to drift. We've already said a few words about this, but we're going to say a few more because this is how the passage closes. But a third practical tip to keep from backsliding is to remember not to drift, which means you need to remember not to let your mind get taken up with other things in the Christian life. Don't ever let it get distracted. If you notice, there's a progression of thought in this text. And that is that if you don't remember your Saviour, and you don't pay attention, and you don't keep fighting it, this is what you do, you will backslide. You don't try to do it, you just do it. You don't make any effort to backslide, it just happens. And if you read all of verse one, again, it says this, "For this reason, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it." And that phrase shows you why you need to wake up to the things of God, so that you don't sail off into the arms of the enemy and drift away. And I just told you a moment ago that the word *drift away* has a lot of meanings. But it basically refers to someone who just goes with the flow of things, you just follow the crowd. So if the wind blows one way, they blow one way, if a tree falls this way, they fall that way. They just don't put up any resistance. It's not a purposeful thing. They don't do it with any intention. They just shut their brain off and drift. In fact, the way the passage is constructed, you can see that there's a contrast being made here, between paying attention and drifting, because these are the two main verbs in the text. And they actually sound alike in Greek, *Prosecco* and *Pereiro*. The author alliterated it for effect, to highlight the fact that you're either doing one or the other, you're either keeping watch or you're drifting. You're either paying attention, or you're falling down. But you can't do both. And this is very telling, because the context is interesting, because again, he says this to a church. He's writing it to a group of religious people, which means the author is not warning you against drifting into Satan worship or something like that, because most Christians aren't going to do that. He's not warning you against drinking blood or something horrible. He's warning you against being the kind of person who says I don't need Jesus anymore because I'm nice. I pay my taxes. I'm good to my neighbors. I'm not breaking the laws, because those are the two things you can pick from. You can choose that or you can choose salvation. And he's not cautioning you against getting drunk or going out and partying every weekend. He's cautioning you against doing that and coming in here and acting like it's no big deal because it is a big deal. God hates it when you act that way. Because this is a warning against drifting and like I told you last time, it doesn't take a lot of work to drift. All you have to do is drift. And this is a caution against wandering; it doesn't take a lot of effort to wander, all you have to do

is wander. Just prop your feet up, relax, take it easy, and I promise you, this is where you will go, you will go straight to hell.

One commentator said like this, he said, "When you come to this passage, you can't help but wonder how many people are damned right now who once thought they were saved, only to wake up one day and find that they were wrong. Why? Because they tried hard to be damned? No. Because they worked hard to get there? No. Because they put in some effort and sweat and strive and broke their back because they said I want to go to hell now? No. Nobody does that. They just didn't try to do anything. They were completely indifferent to all things related to Christ." And that was it. That was all it took.

Listen, friends, I tell you this because salvation is so simple. At the end of the day, it's not about doing a bunch of works. It's not about keeping a bunch of rules. It's not about following a bunch of commandments. It's about staying close to Jesus Christ. And that's it. It's not about being a good person. It's not about paying your taxes. It's not about being nice to your neighbor, and being a good parent and being a good husband. It's about drawing nearer to him. And that's it. And backsliders don't do that. They fail in this department because they stay close for a while, and then they stop. And they stayed near to Christ for a season and then they leave him for something else. And as a result, they miss their only hope of salvation. They don't fly past salvation, they blow past. They don't run straight to hell, they go slowly down a hill, which is why the author keeps telling you all throughout this book that you need to fix your eyes on Christ, fix your eyes on Christ, fix your eyes on Christ. That's why he keeps reminding you as you go through this, to put your hope in Him, put your hope in Him, put your hope in Him. Because Christ is over here and the world is over there. Jesus is going this way, hell is going that way. And if you want to stay away from hell, keep putting your mind on the things of Him.

Last week, when Pastor Mike was with us, He gave us a very good principle for teaching. Because he said most people learn by repetition. So when you teach them, you have to repeat certain things over and over again to make them stick. Any of you who have children, you know what that's like. And that's what the author is doing here because he keeps telling you over and over again about Jesus in order to make it stick. Because if you don't catch it from this angle, he'll give it to you from another angle. This is what we like to do as a church. You know, anytime someone joins our church, one question that often comes up is, what do I do now? Now that I'm a member of Grace Fellowship, what do the elders expect of me? And the answer is simple. We just want you to come to everything you can for this reason, so we can tell you more about Christ. So if you can go to care group, go to care group. If you can go to youth group, go to youth group, and Lord bless you good luck. If you can go to men's Bible study, go to the study, if you go to the ladies study, go there. Because the goal in all these ministries is the same. They're designed to increase your affection for the Lord.

Now, the question that comes up is, what is our vision for the church? What is our goal for the ministry here? And the answer to that is simple as well. We want to make disciples of Christ. I don't care how big it gets, I don't care how much money is in the bank. I don't care about the smoke machines and the lights

and the games and all that doesn't matter to us. We want to train people up to grow in their knowledge of Him so that they don't become a backslider. It's all about Jesus here. In fact, if you've been convicted by what we've talked about this morning, and you feel your soul wandering away from Him, I want to remind you that it doesn't have to be that way. You don't have to drift. Because the Bible says Jesus died for every sin, including this one. And when He went to the cross His death covered every transgression, including the sin of backsliding, which means that He will forgive you of that this morning if you ask Him to. He forgave Peter when he did this; remember that Peter slid away from Him and denied Him three times? We're going to talk about that on Good Friday. He forgave Thomas when he did that, because after he resurrected Thomas says, I'm not going to believe, unless I see the nail prints in His hands and the scar in His side, and Jesus showed up and forgave him. He did that for all the apostles, and He'll do the same thing for you if you want Him to because God is a merciful God. Even though it's a terrible thing to act like this, the good news is, no matter how many steps you take away from the cross, it's only one step back. And no matter how many times you fail, it only takes one prayer of repentance, prayed from a sincere heart, and He will hear you because Christ is the God of second chances. So will you call out to him today?

In my studies this week I came across a story that really illustrates this very well is it was of a man named Charles Templeton, who was a famous evangelist during the time of the Billy Graham crusades, who turned his back on Christ and became an avowed atheist. He was so passionate in his atheism, that he wrote books, spoke at conferences and that sort of thing. But toward the end of his life, somebody asked him, "Mr. Templeton, what do you think about Jesus now?" And he broke down in tears because he said, "I miss Him. I have nothing to replace Him with." And friends, I mentioned that story because he's right. If you leave Jesus Christ this morning, there is nothing to replace Him with. You have no alternative to get you to heaven. He's the only one that can make you right with God. So will you come to him today? I can think of no better thing to talk about as we approach the Lord's table than this.

Let's close in a word of prayer and prepare our hearts to take the Lord's Supper. Heavenly Father, we are so thrilled and excited over the things that you have done for us. As we read the book of Hebrews, I know I'm not the only person who says that my heart is just warmed and overflowing with thankfulness, that we have a Saviour like this one who has done everything to bring us to heaven. He's even sitting in heaven right now to show us what it's like. And in response to that, Lord, we are so utterly thankful for Christ. We don't come in here to worship every week to earn our salvation. We don't do it to get a pat on the back. We do it for Him, to remember Him. Thank you, Lord, for such a Saviour. And Lord, I do pray for those here this morning who are finding their hearts drifting away from this. I just pray that if anything this morning, they will see how ridiculous it is to leave such a gift behind. It would be the worst thing in the world to stand before you on Judgement Day and to hear You say, "I never knew you, depart from me, you worker of iniquity." So I pray, Lord, this would call them back to the great and merciful high priest.

Father, as we take this this Lord's supper and as we remember this ordinance physically of what our Saviour has done, would it truly be an act of worship for us? We join with millions of Christians all throughout the world who do this every Sunday. We stand shoulder to shoulder with saints down throughout the ages who have remembered your Son in this way. Now we want to do it as well, Lord, to be faithful to our great King. Would you be honored father as we go off from this place, and live a life that honours Him? We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.