



Sermon Transcript September 29, 2019

We Believe! Jesus is Better Hebrews 1:1-5 and 2:1-9

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on September 29, 2019 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Sermon Text

Hebrews 1:1-5

¹Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. 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”?

Hebrews 2:1-9

¹ Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

⁵ For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. ⁶ “What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? ⁷ You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, ⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet.” Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. ⁹ But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Introduction

The writer of Hebrews warns us in Hebrews 2:1 that it is possible to *drift away* from our faith. This *drifting away* from faith can happen in many forms.

For some it is an active struggle and a crisis of faith that can actually lead to an outright rejection of what they once believed. This week I read a few “de-conversion” stories. Many of these stories come from people who once had prominent roles within the church—pastors, worship leaders, theologians—but now they confess that they don’t believe it anymore. That is exactly what the former Christian minister Bart Campolo confessed to his father Tony Campolo, who is himself a prominent evangelical evangelist. Bart confessed to his dad, “Listen, I gotta break it to you . . . I’m post-Christian . . . I don’t believe it anymore. I don’t believe any of it.”¹

Last month Joshua Harris made a similar announcement. Harris wrote the book *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. It was a popular book in the late 90’s that gave rise to the “purity culture” within the evangelical church. He pastored a large church for 17 years. And yet, he announced last month, “I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus. The popular phrase for this is “deconstruction,” the biblical phrase is “falling away.” For all the measurements I have for defining a Christian, I’m not a Christian.”² Of course, whenever someone prominent like a Campolo or a Harris makes such a public announcement, they are flooded with support from those far lesser known who have similar stories and similar journeys. They just *drift away*.

And yet, for others, *drifting away* is not so much an active rejection of what they once believed. Rather, it is more of a passive neglect of their faith. Faith no longer holds the priority in their life that it once did. For whatever reason—it may be the busyness of life, the difficulties of life, the pleasures of life, or the seeming irrelevance or dissatisfaction with the church—and they just *drift away*. Donald Guthrie says that the word for *drift away* means “literally to flow past like driftwood in a river.”³ The next thing you know, due to the neglect of their faith, they are carried along with the current and are no longer active in living out their faith in the community of the church. They just *drift away*.

Now this *drifting away* is not something new. The potential of *drifting away* from our faith is not unique to our time. In fact, it is the very issue behind the writing of the book of Hebrews. This letter was written to a group of Christians who came from a Jewish background and they were struggling with hanging onto their Christian faith. Stephen Wellum describes the recipients of this letter as “weary and wavering Christians.”⁴

There seems to be a strong temptation for them to walk away from their faith in Christ. I think they were weary because as Jewish Christians it was doubly difficult to follow Jesus. Not only were they at odds with the Roman culture that expected its citizens to worship the Emperor and the pantheon of gods, but there was also the ostracizing and strong disapproval of their Jewish family and their Jewish community. That was the hard reality of life for this Jewish Christian community. It is just a reminder to us that following Jesus has always been counter-cultural and at times that can be wearisome and it can cause us to waver in our faith.

But here is what I find fascinating about this letter. It is insightful to observe what the author of Hebrews uses to encourage this “weary and wavering group of Christians” to hang in there and to not *drift away*. Clearly, he is making an appeal to them to not *drift away*. In his final greeting, he characterizes his letter to the Hebrews like this, “*I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation.*” He is exhorting them to not *drift away* from Jesus. But what does he offer them for their comfort and encouragement? What does he offer them to keep them from *drifting away*?

He offers them Jesus! He is telling them to not forget who this Jesus is. Jesus is unlike anyone else. He is truly God and he is truly man. Therefore, the main subject matter of the letter to the Hebrews is the “majesty, supremacy, and glory of the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁵ The words “*better*” and “*more*” and “*greater*” are applied to Jesus twenty-five times in this letter. To this Jewish audience, the writer of Hebrews argues that Jesus is better than angels, better than Moses, better than Joshua, better than the Old Testament priests and better than their sacrifices. In order to prove that Jesus is “better” in each category he reminds them over and over again of who this Jesus is—the identity of Jesus. He reminds them that Jesus is truly God and he is truly man. That is what we find in our confession this morning. “We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate (God in the flesh) fully God and fully man.” This is the confession that holds us and keeps us from *drifting away*.

I don’t mean to diminish the crisis of faith some experience. Nor do I want to ignore the complexities of life and the challenges they can bring to our faith. We ought to be able to ask our questions and express our doubts as we grapple with the complexities of life and faith. And yet, as we wrestle with these things, the call of Hebrews is found in Hebrews 10:23, “*hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.*” The key to not drifting away is to remember who Jesus is and to follow closely after Jesus. Listen! If Jesus is better than anything life has to offer, then you can give him the best of yourself even in times of doubt and times of struggle.

Jesus is Better - The True Son

Central to the argument of Hebrews that Jesus is better or that Jesus is superior to all things is the fact that Jesus is the unique “Son of God.” So it says of Jesus in Hebrews 1:5, “*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.’*”?

I would submit to you that there is more being said here than simply affirming the deity of Christ. In one sense, when we talk about Jesus being the Son of God, we are often recognizing that he is the eternal Son of God. In fact the title, “*Son of God*” is not a title that makes Jesus less than God the Father. It is quite the opposite. In John 5 when Jesus called God his Father, we are told that the religious leaders wanted to stone Jesus for blasphemy because it says in John 5:18 that by calling God his own Father, he was “*making himself equal with God.*” So yes, Jesus is the eternal Son of God, the second person of the holy Trinity. I think that is how the word “*Son*” is being used in Hebrews 1:2-3. As the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, Jesus “*created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. And he upholds the universe by his power.*”

But in Hebrews 1:5, something more is being said about Jesus, the Son of God. On the surface, it may seem a bit confusing. How can Jesus be the eternal Son of God and at the same time read “*You are my Son, today I have begotten you.*” It implies that there was a starting point to Jesus being the Son . . . “*today I have begotten you.*” Something that is eternal has no starting point. So what is he saying here about Jesus as the Son?

The first thing you need to recognize is that in Hebrews 1:5 he is quoting two verses from the Old Testament. “*For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you’?*” That is a quote from Psalm 2:7. “*Or again, ‘I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son’?*” That is a quote from 2 Samuel 7:14.

Lets start with the second statement, “*I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.*” That comes from 2 Samuel 7:14. This is a very important chapter in the Bible because here God tells King David, “*I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.*” Indeed this happened. David’s son, Solomon was the next king over Jerusalem. And it is to Solomon and all the subsequent kings who sat on David’s throne that he uses our verse from Hebrews 1:5, “*I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.*” These kings who sat on David’s throne were not the “eternal Son of God.” And yet, here God calls them “*a son.*” In

what sense was Solomon a son and how was God his father?

D. A. Carson is very helpful here.⁶ He said that in Scripture the notion of sonship has less to do with DNA and genetic makeup and has more to do with function. He went on to say, “In the ancient world, if your father was a farmer, you became a farmer, if your father was a baker, you became a baker.” In fact 90% of sons ended up doing what their fathers did. Jesus went from being called “the son of a carpenter” to Mark 6, where he was called a carpenter himself. Or in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*” What he is saying is that God is the ultimate peacemaker and so when we start making peace we are acting like God and demonstrating that we belong to the family of God. So these kings in the line of David were “sons” in the sense that they performed the God-function of ruling over the people of God. As God is the supreme ruler over his people, these kings were likewise to rule and to rule for and like God; with integrity, justice, compassion, truth and so on. In this sense, these kings of Israel were sons and God was their father.

But we can't forget that in 2 Samuel 7 we get hints that there will be a descendant of David who will come and his throne and his kingdom will last forever. An ultimate “son” is coming and he will reign forever. The prophets slowly begin to add more information about this promise. We read in Isaiah, “*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.*” A son? What kind of son? “*He shall reign on the throne of his father David. Of the increase of his kingdom there will be no end.*” Furthermore, divine titles of *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace* are given to this coming “son” who demonstrates his sonship by reigning in God's place.

This brings us to the first part of verse 5 and the quote from Psalm 2:7, “*You are my Son, today I have begotten you.*” This is a psalm that recognizes the good rule of God and his anointed one over Israel and the nations. The hope of blessing for the world and for the nation of Israel is now tied to the house of David. And so on the day of coronation, when the king would assume the throne of David, he would hear these words, “*You are my son, today I have begotten you.*” The king is now performing the God function of ruling over the people of God. And yet again, there is a sense that there is a future king that all of this is pointing to. So Psalm 2 ends by saying, “*Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*”

Psalm 2:7 is also quoted in Acts 13:33-34. Here it says of Jesus, “*You are my Son, today I have begotten you.*” And then it speaks of his resurrection from the dead and it says in

verse 34 that as a result, *“I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.”* In other words, Jesus is the promised Davidic king and his coronation day was when he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. *“Today I have begotten you.”* And so it says of Jesus in Hebrews 1:13, quoting from Psalm 110, *“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.’”* To recognize that Jesus is the Son is to recognize that Jesus is the supreme ruler over all things for he sits on the throne of David forever and he reigns in God’s place. That is what we are confessing in our confession when we say of Jesus that “he arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father.” *“Today, I have begotten you.”* Jesus is King and he reigns over all things and so we read in Philippians 2 that *“every knee will bow . . . every tongue confess.”*

And so we come to Hebrews 2:1 and we find our first *“Therefore.”* We read, *“Therefore we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.”* In Hebrews 1:2 we learn that God has spoken to us through Jesus. We have just discovered that Jesus is the *“Son”* and by that we mean that he is the supreme ruler of all things. And so, it is a given, we must pay close attention to him.

Now here is where the comparison to angels comes into play. Notice what it says of angels in Hebrews 2:2, *“For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just retribution.”* It was commonly held by first century Jews that the Law of Moses was given to Moses by angels. Josephus, a Jewish historian wrote, *“We have learned the noblest of our doctrines and the holiest of our laws from the angels sent by God.”*⁷ When Stephen was being martyred in Acts 7:53, he said that his people had *“received the Law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.”* Paul says in Galatians 3:19 that the Law *“was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.”* Now it is hard to find mention of angels at the top of Mount Sinai in the book of Exodus. It may be the case that Paul and Stephen and the writer to the Hebrews are simply playing to the Jewish view of the day to make their point. Or, why should we be surprised if angels were involved in serving at God’s bidding in this manner?

But here is the point. If the message given by angels—that is the Old Testament Law—was reliable and those who rejected it received retribution, **HOW MUCH MORE SHOULD WE PAY ATTENTION TO THE WORDS OF JESUS!** *“How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?”* These angels were mere ministers and servants of God. But we now have revelation from the Son of God, the one who sits on David’s throne and reigns over all things. He is Lord. He is the King. Fear Him and no one else. Bow to Him and no one else. Since Jesus is *“the Son”* we need to pay close attention to

him. We must not drift away. We must not neglect such a great salvation. I wonder if this is the point where the *drifting away* begins. It begins when you lose sight of the absolute majesty and glory of Jesus. Don't diminish or domesticate Jesus. I think of that famous line in C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*." Describing Aslan, the Christ figure, Mr. Beaver says to Susan, "Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"... "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver ..."Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."⁸ And so we read at the end of Psalm 2, "*Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*" He is the "Son." He is the Davidic King who reigns!

Jesus is Better - The True Man

Now let me make a few comments about Hebrews 2. In Hebrews 2:5 again we find angels at the focal point of comparison to Jesus. We read, "*For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come.*" We have already discovered from Hebrews 1 that it is Jesus to whom all things are in subjection. It even says so much in Hebrews 2:8-9. "*Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor.*" That is what we saw in Hebrews 1 with the statement, "*You are my Son.*"

To prove that it was not to angels that God has subjected all things, the writer of Hebrews refers to a very familiar psalm. If you have been in the church for a long time, Psalm 8 is very familiar to you. In verse 6 he quotes from this psalm, "*It has been testified somewhere, What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels, you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.*" This psalm is talking about us. It is talking about man in general. It asserts the fact that when God created the world, we were made "*a little lower than the angels.*" And yet it is to us that the function of ruling in this world was given. In Genesis 1 and 2, as image bearers of God, we were to rule and subdue the earth. But something bad happened. We chose to rule the world apart from God and God gave us over to ourselves and we have made a "royal" mess of things. In rejecting God as the ruler of our lives, we can't rule anything well. Just read the headlines and see for yourself. We have trouble rulings our families, and our own lives for that matter. But there is also consequence in rejecting God as our

ruler, we face the curse of death and judgment.

But this is where Jesus comes in not only as “*the Son*” but also as “*the True Man.*” Jesus, we are told in verse 9, the eternal son of God, “*for a little while was made a little lower than the angels.*” In other words, Jesus, the second person of the holy Trinity, became like us. This passage goes on to talk about the cross and how Jesus suffered and died for us on the cross. In verses 14 and 15 we find a great statement of what Jesus did for us on the cross, “*Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*” At the end of the chapter it goes on to say, “*Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*” In other words, through the cross, Jesus brings us back to God.

And so what he is saying here is that the promise of Psalm 8 is not completely lost to us. Fallen man can now be restored to what God intended for us to be when he made us. That is the point being made in verse 10 when it says of Jesus that he is “*bringing many sons to glory.*” He is not talking about “heaven” in this verse. Instead, Wellum says, “the word ‘glory’ . . . is a term from Psalm 8 referring to God’s intention to restore us to what he originally created us to be.” Jesus became the “True Man” to restore the lives of fallen man. Right now, even in this fallen world through Jesus reigning in our lives, we are able to rule our lives and our homes and our relationships under the power of the Holy Spirit. Through the power of Jesus, the True Man, we can bring the good of God’s kingdom wherever we go. You are not helpless.

And so here is the implication. Jesus, who became like us and who now rules over all things, tasted suffering and experienced the temptations that tend to draw us away from Christ. But don’t allow the temptations to lead you away from Jesus. Because in Jesus you have one who understands and one who can help. That is what it says at the end of the chapter. “*For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*” Your helper is no slouch! Not only does he know what suffering and temptation are like, but he conquered Satan and he reigns over all things.

Jesus is Better - Give Jesus Your Best

So can we put it all together? Because Jesus is the “Son” who reigns over all things and all things are subject to him, we must pay careful attention to what Jesus says and it

would be a grievous thing to neglect the developing of our faith. And since Jesus is the “True Man” who understands what it is like to experience temptation, we should turn to him for help, because he has conquered Satan, sin and death through the cross. One is a negative statement and one is a positive statement, but they are both saying the same thing. Negatively, don’t neglect such a great salvation and drift away. Positively, turn to Jesus for help. You have all you need with Jesus sitting on the throne of your heart to overcome temptation.

What does that look like? What does it look like to not drift away and to turn to Jesus for help? Consider Rosaria Butterfield’s answer to these two questions.¹⁰

What have been helpful practices for you in following Christ? Let me put this question in the context of this sermon. What do you do to keep from drifting away? Here is what she said. “Daily and long Bible reading, worship, prayer with other believers, fellowship of the saints, rolling up your sleeves and helping people who cannot help themselves, worshipping the Lord, memorizing the Westminster Shorter Catechism (doctrine) and taking communion as often as possible.” This is what it looks like to “*not neglect such a great salvation.*” Remember, if Jesus is better, he deserves our best.

What are some good Christian practices to mortify all sin at its root? Let me put this question in the context of this sermon. How do you turn to Jesus for help? Here is what she said, “Live as a faithful member of a Bible-believing church, meeting for worship, prayer, fellowship, and Bible studies. Cultivate honest accountability in your church, asking for prayer and checking in with someone for accountability.” This is what it looks like to turn to Jesus for help.

Here is how we are looking to do it here at WEFC.

Worship: Make this time on Sunday morning a high priority as we come to worship Jesus, the Son who reigns and the True Man who made a way to restore our broken lives. It involves singing, prayer, Word, confession, communion and fellowship.

Community: Become part of a Community Group where we pray together and fellowship and encourage and hold each other accountable and experience the love of Jesus around God’s Word and in the context of the love of God’s people.

Service: Consider how you might “roll up your sleeves and help people” by using your abilities and gifts to help us make disciples.

This is what keeps us from drifting from the one who reigns over all things and this is how we turn to Jesus for help in the time of temptation. Don't forget who Jesus is! He is the Son who reigns over all things. He is the True Man who died for you and rose again to be your priest and your advocate. He is worthy of your best. If you find yourself drifting this morning, take a good look at Jesus. Remind yourself who Jesus is. Come back! No matter how far down stream you have drifted, he holds out his hand to you.

¹Alisa Childers "3 Beliefs Some Progressive Christians and Atheists Share"
www.thegospelcoalition.org November 13,2018

²Carli Moses "Purity Culture: Thoughts on The Evolving Message of Joshua Harris"
www.studybreaks.com August 11, 2019

³Donald Guthrie *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,1986) 81

⁴Stephen Wellum *God the Son Incarnate* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016) 183

⁵Ibid., 183

⁶D. A. Carson "The Book of Hebrews: Part 1 of 4 Lecture Video Transcription, Trinity International University 2013

⁷*Antiquities* XV:136 or XV, 5:3 in Whiston's translation

⁸C.S. Lewis *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* published by Geoffrey Bles, 1950

⁹Wellum, 220

¹⁰Rosaria Butterfield, <http://rosariabutterfield.com/#resources>

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COMMUNITY GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Have you ever experienced a “crisis of faith” or a “falling away” from your faith? What were the circumstances around that and what brought you back and held you during this time?
2. What observations do you have of our statement of faith for this week?
Jesus Christ: We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. Jesus—Israel’s promised Messiah—was conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontus Pilate, arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate.

Diving Into The Word

3. Read Hebrews 1:1-3. How do these verses describe the deity of Jesus. How is this truth reinforced in the doctrinal statement above? Why is it important to affirm the deity of Jesus?
4. Read Hebrews 1:5; 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7 and Acts 13:33-34. What is the implication of the phrase, “*You are my Son, today I have begotten you.*” How does this impact your view of Jesus and how does it impact your faith?
5. Read Hebrews 2:5-9. How do these verses describe the humanity of Jesus. How is this truth reinforced in the doctrinal statement above? Why is it important to affirm the humanity of Jesus?

Taking It Home

6. Read Hebrews 2:14-18. How does Jesus help us in our time of temptation?
7. Read Hebrews 2:1-4. In what way do you need to heed the warning of this passage?