

2018 9 16 **Beware Drift!**

Hebrews 2:1-4

The sign you see here is located at a beachfront in San Francisco. It reads: “Danger: rip currents. People wading and swimming here have drowned here.” You can find similar warnings at beaches on Lake Michigan—yes, a lake! You can find signs like this in coastal New York, where I was caught in a rip tide as a teenager and rescued by lifeguards.

Rip currents or rip tides are the cause for 8 out of every 10 beach rescues. The United States Lifesaving Association estimates that more than a hundred swimmers die in the U.S. each year due to rip currents.

They typically flow at 1 to 2 feet per second, but can flow as fast as 8 feet per second. To put that in perspective, it means getting pulled out to sea at a rate faster than Olympian Michael Phelps can swim at his best! An Australian study revealed that riptides take more lives there every year than shark attacks, wildfires, floods, and cyclones combined.

As riptides pull people away physically, so laziness pulls people away spiritually. As riptides risk your well-being physically, so laziness puts you at risk of drifting spiritually. More than any other New Testament book, the letter to the Hebrews addresses the danger of failing to persevere by faith all the way to the end.

In this our 7th talk in a series titled “I have a question for you,” we come to the most sobering question so far, one that reads like a warning sign on the beach. It is found in the second chapter of Hebrews. There we read...

“We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”

Hebrews 2:1-4 is a warning not to drift away from Jesus and from fellowship with others who love him. This passage—indeed the whole letter to the Hebrews—is a sign warning, “Don’t become a spiritual casualty.”

The original recipients of this letter were Jewish believers in Jesus living in Rome during the time when Emperor Nero was persecuting Christians. The heat of persecution made it hard to stay openly a follower of Jesus, with the trouble that would bring you. So many were seriously considering pulling back into traditional Judaism. Just melt back out of the spotlight and into the shadows.

That was the situation then. Drift still happens today. I remember the excitement when a college student known as the campus Marxist, a guy very bold and outspoken, came to faith in Jesus. It was amazing! We knew he had people’s attention. He went home and told his parents about his

decision. They let him know in no uncertain terms that no Christian was going to live under their roof. He fell away, immediately, and later fell into a cult. Drift is real. This isn't theoretical any more than riptides.

I assume you know and care about people who once had vibrant faith and deep commitment to Jesus, but somewhere along the line, they...stopped showing up.

Charles Darwin is one. In his autobiography he wrote: "I came to gradually disbelieve in Christianity as a divine revelation Disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but at last it was complete. The rate was so slow that I felt no distress and have never since doubted even for a single second that my conclusion was correct." The tide pulled him out and away not quickly but slowly, imperceptibly.

We need to talk about **what it takes to thrive, not take a dive, spiritually**. What it takes to run the race to the end, eyes fixed on Jesus, cheering one another forward. In this passage, the Lord urges us to take two critical actions in order to thrive, not take a dive, spiritually.

The first is...

- **Listen like your life depends on it—because it does.**

These 4 verses are peppered with alerts to listen. Look at it with me:

- “We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard... (What have we heard? The good news of forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus.)
- the message spoken through angels... (What is that? OT law, God's commands announced to Moses atop Mount Sinai by 'the angel of the Lord')
- which was first announced by the Lord, (that is, Jesus himself was all about announcing the good news of the kingdom of heaven)
- was confirmed to us by those who heard him.” (Who is that? The apostles, who were eyewitnesses and earwitnesses of Jesus, whose record is preserved for us in the gospels)

There's a lot of Jewish language here that depends on you knowing a bit of the Bible's OT background. So flip back in your Bible to Hebrews chapter one. The opening verse is crystal clear about who it is that is speaking to us. Hebrews 1:1-2 launches the whole letter with this:

“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.” Hebrews 1:1-2

Jesus who has come to us and spoken to us, whose words and life are recorded for us in the Bible, is God's Son. He is the Co-Creator of all things. And he is the heir of all things. That is, this is all for him. You. Me. Everyone. We were created to know and love the God who made us. To hear and heed his wise counsel. But we haven't. We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has gone his own way. So what has God done about that?

He personally came down to us, became one of us, spoke to us, then died and rose for us, today reigns over us, and one day soon is returning for us. So we are to pay attention!

Hebrews 2:1:

“We must therefore pay even more attention to what we have heard, so that we will not drift away.”

Listen very carefully.

Listen at full attention.

Listen with the utmost care.

The alarm sounding here is, “Hey, you started out listening attentively to the good news and to God’s Word. What changed? Wake up! Listen up even more than before!”

A few years back came a succession of crashes involving single-engine planes occurred across North America. It was confusing, to figure out why. So a comprehensive study was conducted of 44 recent fatal accidents involving one type of single-engine aircraft. Two findings stood out in particular.

The first was that 43 out of 44 fatal accidents were caused by pilot error. The second and most surprising finding was that, the majority of fatal accidents took place at the hands of experienced pilots, seasoned pilots. More than 75 percent of the accidents were caused by pilots who had over 400 hours of flight time each. The conclusion, then, was that these pilots assumed that because they already had a lot of experience under their belts, they could...relax. Not take things so seriously.

Whereas by contrast, beginning pilots were extremely careful. They flew by the book. The study concluded that pilots who get overconfident and stop pursuing ongoing safety training are four times more likely to have a fatal accident.

Adapted from Wayne Cordeiro, *Jesus: Pure and Simple* (Bethany House, 2012), pp. 121-122; Dave Hirschman, "Surprising Cirrus Stats," AOPA Pilot blog (12-10-09)

Here’s the point: if you’re feeling like an experienced pilot who can start slacking off, beware. Come back to full attention. Revel in the gospel.

And what is the message the Lord declares? Take the most famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16: ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”***

Now don’t stop there. Read on:

“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? What could ever be better than knowing Jesus?

So pay attention! Hold on to this message! Don't drift! We gather and hear the Word of God, through which we learn that salvation comes through Jesus, that there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.

Listen to Jesus like your life depends on it—because it does. And see people as he does: created

in God's image, fallen in sin, needing to hear the good news that peace with God comes by trusting in Jesus.

The second critical action is takes to thrive, not take a dive, spiritually, is...

- **Look for your Savior changing lives—because he is.**

Listen to Christ like your life depends on it, because it does. And look for Christ changing lives —because he is! Hebrews 2:4 reminds us...

“God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” Hebrews 2:4

When your faith is leaking, look back to the miraculous signs and wonders Jesus performed as recorded in the gospels.

- A wedding reception runs out of wine, putting the family at risk of public shame. Jesus steps in and performs his first miracle, water to wine, to bless them, to restore joy.
- Thousands who are hungry to hear from God follow Jesus into the countryside but are out there long enough that their stomachs begin to growl. Jesus takes what little a young boy offers him, and performs another miracle, feeding all of them, with leftovers, so that they can continue with him.
- Jesus' dear friend lays four days dead, his family devastated that it seems God has abandoned them. Moved to tears, Jesus cries out, and the dead come back to life.

Story after story, look back to the signs, wonders and various miracles Jesus performed, all to bless and uplift average people amidst their pains. Let them fan the flames of your faith.

Secondly, look around today at the work of Christ's Spirit around the world. And use your spiritual gifts to the max, to see your faith fanned into flame.

Romans chapter 12 fills in the color a bit, telling us:

“For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.” Romans 12:4-8

Everything Jesus did while he was here on earth in the flesh, he is now doing by his Spirit through us, through everyone who believes in him. You have a part to play! He has given you spiritual gifts to be invested in people in Jesus' name and for Jesus' sake, so that we build one another up in faith, and so that we can effectively invite others to place their faith in Jesus and be reconciled to God.

It's an amazing plan! What Jesus alone did for a time, he then trained a dozen men to do empowered by him. When he ascended to heaven, he then sent his Spirit. And from that point on, all the way to today, Jesus is changing lives through us, ordinary people filled with his Spirit.

The Hebrews needed to be reminded of this, the wonder of belonging to Jesus and participating

in his good plan for the world. This world has nothing better than this. BTW, this is our 3rd C here at yChurch: Celebrating Christ, Connecting people, and Contributing meaningfully. How can you do that? Use your spiritual gifts as far as you can!

Let me give you a couple of places you can look to see Jesus changing lives:

- ChristianityToday.com has up to date stories of Christ at work here in the U.S. and around the world.
 - The latest issue includes stories of how Christians are getting involved in helping opioid addicts find freedom from addiction and find hope in Jesus.
 - There's a story about how Christians coming from many nations to America are reviving and enriching the church, something we have definitely experienced in our midst. There's a richness in rubbing shoulders with believers from other cultural backgrounds.
- cmalliance.org/news/ Gives quick news stories of Christ at work through our international workers in the Christian & Missionary Alliance.
 - The latest news describes the spiritual greening of Spain, a land known as very much hardened against the message of Jesus because of their history. But Christ is at work, changing lives one at a time there!
 - There's a touching story of 6 West African men coming to a weekly Bible study, none of them believers in Jesus. When they were discussing Jesus' baptism, one man said, "You know, when Jesus went to the cross He took our sins with Him so that we can have our sins forgiven. In the same way, Jesus' baptism represents taking sin under the water. When you come up out of the water, your sins are left behind. You are clean, and God is pleased." He's getting close! Christ is at work!

Look and learn what Christ is up to around the world. Your faith will be warmed, enlarged, emboldened!

- More Muslims are coming to faith in Jesus in the past 50 years than in the previous 1,500 years!
- More Christians gather in Anglican churches in Nigeria any given Sunday than Anglicans combined in every other country around the world!
- Countries that for the past hundred years were receiving missionaries are now sending missionaries out with the good news of Jesus, including to America: from Brazil, from South Korea, from Africa, and more.
- You see from your insert that Christ is at work calling Christians to reach out with the good news of Jesus through the wineskin of local YMCAs: last month was a global gathering of leaders in Thailand, at which African Christians for the first time in history formed an African coalition that will work together on reaching their continent.
 - And most importantly, at that gathering, a Korean woman had been praying for many years for her Mom to come to know Jesus. It was at that gathering, when her Mom visited and heard and saw Jesus at work, she became a follower of Jesus. Christ is at work!

Friends, this is why Jesus came. The driving heartbeat throughout the letter to the Hebrews is that **Jesus is better**. Whatever tempts you, pulls on you, lures you, Jesus is far superior. Don't let

yourself drift from so great a Savior. Like the steady beating of a healthy heart, Hebrews keeps pumping out the message that Jesus is better. It reminds us that...

- Jesus is better than the prophets: he is far more than just a prophet (Heb. 1:1–2).
- Jesus is better than the angels (1:5–14), higher and greater.
- Jesus is better than Moses, who spoke with God face to face as a friend (3:1–19).
- Jesus is better than any earthly priest who might try to help you to God (4:14–5:10; 7:23–28).

Hebrews' heartbeat keeps beating, with all the better things we find in Jesus:

- In Jesus we receive a better future. Hebrews 6:9
- In Jesus we receive a better hope, one that is sure. 7:19
- Jesus brings us into a better covenant. 7:22
- We receive better promises from Jesus than anyone else can deliver on. 8:6
- Jesus is the better sacrifice for sin, his death forgiving all sin for all who trust him—forgiving the sins from your past, forgiving any sin that you wrestle with in the present, and whatever sins you may fall into in the future. When he cried out from the cross, “It is finished,” he meant it. He is enough. 9:23
- Through Jesus we receive better possessions, which even death cannot and will not steal from us. 10:34
- And all who trust in Jesus will be welcomed to a better country—one that will be unstained by divisiveness and animosity, war or competition. 11:16

Given all that Jesus is, and all that Jesus does, in the end we are left with the question of verse 2: ***“How shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?”***