

Loving angels instead?

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[0 : 0 0] So, Hebrews chapter 1, verse 5. For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my son, today I have become your father.'

! Or again, 'I will be his father and he will be my son.' And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, 'let all God's angels worship him.'

And speaking of the angels, he says, 'he makes his angels spirits and his servants flames of fire. But about the sun, he says, your throne, O God, will last forever and ever.'

A scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore, God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.

He also says, 'In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain.'

[1 : 0 5] They will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe. Like a garment, they will be changed. But you remain the same. And your years will never end.

To which of the angels did God ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet? Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?'

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 the 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks so much, Catherine, for reading the word to us this evening. And let me add my welcome.

[2 : 2 3] It's really great to see you all here. And if you are here visiting, or if you are new to St. Silas, then we are just so glad that you're here with us. And we hope that you're able to just stick around a little bit afterwards so that we can get to know you a little bit better like that.

Well, this morning, if you were here this morning, we were hearing about how the new wine of the gospel is better by far than the old wine of the old covenant.

And this evening, in some ways, it's more of the same. But we're looking at it through the lens of Hebrews, a series, a new series we started last week.

So let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we come to study his word together. So Lord God, may this word from Hebrews become to us a living reality.

May the Holy Spirit be at work in our lives, transforming our hearts, our affections, and our actions. For we pray this in Jesus' name and for his glory.

- [3 : 30] Amen. Let me tell you about Elizabeth, not her real name. But Elizabeth didn't grow up in the Christian faith.
- But her conversion as an adult was dramatic. She was on fire for Jesus. But over time, the fire cooled.
- Church felt dull. She longed for the buzz she felt at first. For years now, she hasn't gone at all. She tried other churches but never settled.
- It's just me and Jesus now, she says. But her faith is stagnant. She's drifting further than she realizes.
- Well, think of Nathan's story. Nathan was raised in a Christian home. As a teen, if you'd asked him, he'd say, yes, I'm a Christian. Although he'd kept it pretty quiet at school.
- [4 : 34] In his last year of school, he started dating a girl who wasn't a believer. He told himself it didn't really matter. And when he left home for uni, he went to a city to be closer to her.
- For a while, he went along to church with a friend from his course. But then he stopped altogether. Soon enough, the romantic relationship ended. But so had his walk with Jesus.
- Nathan has been drifting for years. And then there's Martha. Martha. Martha's been in church all her life. Admittedly, from Monday to Saturday, she doesn't prioritize spiritual growth as much as she used to.
- Other things have crept in. But she still comes along almost every Sunday. If you'd ask her why, she'd say, it's just my thing. It's what I do on a Sunday.
- She sings the songs, hears the sermons, prays the prayers. But inside, she's empty. Martha is drifting.
- [5 : 43] And no one sees it. Friends, it's possible to be coming to church regularly and still be drifting.
- It's easy to drift. And it's dangerous because it's subtle. No one says, that's it. Today, I'm chucking it in with Jesus.
- No one sits down to make a life-changing decision to abandon their faith in Jesus. It's a hundred tiny little choices. And before you know it, you're far from safety.
- Hebrews chapter 2, verse 1 says, and if your Bible's fallen shut like mine, just reopen it back to page 1201.
- Hebrews chapter 2, verse 1 says, God has spoken finally and definitively through his son, the Lord Jesus.
- [6 : 53] That's what we heard about last week. So you'd think, wouldn't you? If God has spoken so finally through his son, everyone would give their full attention to what Jesus has said, what God has revealed in the person of Jesus.
- But evidently not. You see, the writer of Hebrews is addressing people who began well, to those who'd started off on the right track, who'd been committed Christians for some time.
- But now, they're slipping away from their original commitment and enthusiasm. They're drifting. They're going back to what they used to believe.
- And the picture here in Hebrews is of a boat that's come away from its moorings. It's being swept out to sea and lost. And it's a super urgent warning, chapter 2, verse 3.
- How shall we escape? How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? See, the stakes couldn't be higher. It's a matter of life or death situation.
- [8 : 04] Our eternal destiny is on the line. Now, I don't have a boat. But I'm guessing if you have a boat in harbor, you want to ensure that it doesn't drift away.
- It doesn't get swept away by the currents and the tides and the storms. And you're going to want to pay careful attention, therefore, to the ropes that are holding it safely to harbor.

Always checking the moorings to see that they're in place. Now, when it comes to our personal salvation, the remedy, according to the author, is to pay the most careful attention to what we've heard.

So careful attention, careful listening is what's called for and listening to the message of Christ that they already heard. They need to hear it again.

They need to hear the gospel again. Now, we're going to come back to that at the end of the sermon, the last part of the sermon. But first, it's important that the writer should show them that Christ, who's the very center of the gospel message, that Christ is better than angels.

[9 : 16] Now, this might seem strange to us. Most of the time, we don't think much about angels. Unless, of course, you're Robbie Williams, down the waterfall, wherever life may take me, something about how she won't forsake me.

I'm loving angels instead. Or Abba, perhaps Abba's your thing. I believe in angels. But according to the Bible, angels are real.

They're spiritual beings, part of the unseen realm. Yet sometimes they appear in visible form. And when they do, people are terrified.

They shine with glory. And when we read about them in the Bible, the very first thing they often say is, don't be afraid. Angels are also God's messengers.

That's what angels means. Angels means messenger. They carry his word to his people. And nowhere was that more important than at Mount Sinai, when God gave his law through angels to Moses.

[10 : 31] And that's what Hebrews 2 verse 2 is on about, when it says, the message spoken through angels was binding. Now that idea might be a little bit unfamiliar to us, that God gave the law through angels.

But that's how it's described in Acts 7, when Stephen, who's about to be martyred, describes the Ten Commandments as the law that was given through angels.

And the apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians, says, the law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator, Moses. So here's the point.

The most important word that God had ever given to his people up to that moment came from God through angels to Moses.

That's how exalted, that's how weighty, that's how glorious these angelic beings are. But now, in these last days, God has spoken by his Son.

[11 : 38] So I think the issue in Hebrews isn't so much that the readers are somehow starry-eyed about angels in some kind of mystical sense. Though you do come across people like that occasionally.

I don't think that's the issue here. It's that they were tempted to give up on Jesus and retreat back to the old covenant. Retreat back to the life under the old covenant. Return to the old wine.

And the writer wants us to see that if the law that came through angels was binding, then how much greater is the word that comes through his Son himself?

Or as chapter 1, verse 4 puts it, Jesus became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

And the way that the writer shows us that Jesus is greater than angels by far is that he lines up seven tracks from Israel's songbook, the Psalms.

[12 : 42] Except one of them, which is from 2 Samuel 7, but even that one's quoted in Psalm 89. So he lines up a playlist from the Psalms and shows us three ways that the Son outshines the angels.

That's the three subheadings in the service sheet if you want to follow along like that. But firstly, the Son is the one they worship. So we could think of it a little bit like a game of top trumps.

Category 1, identity. Jesus versus the angels. My son's got a pack of top trumps from Star Wars edition.

This is the Hebrews edition. If we were playing it last week, Jesus trumps the prophets when it comes to God's revelation. This is Jesus versus the angels. Who is Jesus?

Who are the angels? Well, verse 5 tells it straight up. First he quotes from Psalm 2 and then from 2 Samuel 7. You are my son.

[13 : 45] Today I have become your father. I will be his father and he will be my son. So which of the angels did God ever say that?

Answer, none. Ever. No contest. The Son trumps angels every time. And it's a random number generator for the angels so I wouldn't pay too much attention to the exact figures.

But we said last week that this is the author's favorite title for Jesus. But that Jesus bears that name, the Son, in two different ways.

Jesus bears the name, the Son, in two different ways. First, Jesus is the divine Son. God the Son. The second person of the Trinity.

Always has been, always will be. You can see that in verse 3 of chapter 1. But secondly, Jesus is also the promised Son, descended from David, the Messiah, the King who would inherit God's throne.

[14 : 52] Jesus is both. And when Jesus rose from the grave and ascended and was crowned and enthroned, it was as that King. That's when the Father publicly declares that Jesus is that Son.

He's the Son who became the Son. And verse 6, verse 6 of chapter 1 adds another layer. He is the firstborn.

He's the firstborn. Not in the sense that He's created, but in the sense that Jesus is the heir, the one that will inherit everything.

Now, Psalm 89 helps us here. It should be on the screen to save you looking it up. But God is the one speaking here and God says, I will appoint Him, Jesus, to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.

And then, picking up the language of 2 Samuel 7, He says, I will establish His line forever, His throne as long as the heavens endure. And so what happens?

[15 : 59] What happens when the heir, the firstborn, sits on the throne, takes the throne? Picture the scene in the throne room. The whole heavenly court bows down.

Just look with me at Hebrews 1, verse 6. When He presents the firstborn, He says, let all God's angels worship Him. So, top trumps category two, glory.

Angels, shining, dazzling, brilliant, glorious beings. If it's angels versus humans, angels win. But Jesus, He's the one they're worshipping.

Again, no contest. That's the point. Even though Jesus came as a man, that doesn't put Him below the angels.

Quite the opposite. In His glorified humanity, Jesus is enthroned as the King who God calls His Son. His throne, His glory, His identity demands their worship, demands our worship.

[17 : 04] Okay, so next. The Son is the one who made them. The Son is creator. Angels are created.

That's the big point in verses 7 to 12. So just look at verse 7, first quoting Psalm 104. In speaking of the angels, He says, He makes His angels spirits.

That's literally winds. He makes His angels winds and His servants flames of fire. Psalm 104 is a hymn of praise to the Creator and angels are listed here in that psalm as part of creation.

They are like the wind, like fire, forces of breathtaking power. Think of a storm that sweeps in from the sea. Perhaps with a little bit more oomph than Storm Amy.

Amy. My colleague Amy was saying this week that she's been spending her whole life building up to this moment that a storm is named after her. And then, I don't even think that the Met Office have officially named it Amy, but anyway, it didn't come with quite as much force as was expected.

[18 : 15] But you have to think of a great storm here, the devastating force of a wildfire. Awesome, terrifying creatures, but still, angels are created things, creatures made by God, servants in the same way that the fire and the wind are instruments in God's hands.

Now look at the contrast in verse 8. About the sun, he says, your throne, O God, will last forever and ever. A scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.

So we're back in the throne room. And who is seated on the throne in verse 8? God is seated on the throne.

God is. The sun is addressed as God. The anointed sun is none other than God himself on the throne. His reign is eternal, his rule marked by righteousness and justice.

And just in case we've missed it, verses 10 to 12, drive it home. In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands.

[19 : 33] They will perish, but you remain. They will all wear out like a garment, but you remain the same and your years will never end. One of my friends works in the costume department of films, big Hollywood blockbusters, big budget Netflix series, things like that.

I was catching up with her and some other friends from the art school yesterday. Her job sometimes involves costume breakdown, making things look old and worn.

And she uses all sorts of things, all sorts of techniques to make that happen. Cheese graters, dyes, sandpaper, anything to distress a fabric and show the passage of time.

That's what creation is like, a garment that wears out, grows old, breaks down, becomes like one of Callum's Mothetan t-shirts that we heard about this morning.

Not that he's wearing it tonight. But the son, he is eternal, he's unchanging. He will one day roll up creation like an old robe and replace it as something better by far.

[20 : 46] So who's greater? If we go back to top trumps, the category is order. Angels, dazzling though they may be, they're part of the created order.

The son, he is of a different order altogether. He's the eternal, changeless creator God and the angels don't even come close. And so then on to our last comparison, the son is the one they serve.

So verse 13, to which of the angels did God ever say, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet? Now that's Psalm 110.

Hebrews absolutely loves Psalm 110. It got a sneak preview last week back in 1 verse 3, Jesus sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

And if you want to do some homework this week, you could go and read Psalm 110 and see how many times it comes up in Hebrews. It comes up a lot in significant places.

[21 : 51] So Psalm 110 in summary, it promises a king who's descended from David but greater than David who rules victorious from God's throne.

And no angel has ever been told to sit there. but the son has. Jesus is seated at God's right hand right now.

That's where he is right now, waiting for the day when all his enemies are crushed beneath his feet. So what about the angels?

Verse 14, are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation. That's us by the way. We're the ones who will inherit salvation in Christ.

So the son commands, the angels obey, and they serve the son by serving us, those of us who are trusting in Jesus for our salvation.

[22 : 57] How exactly do the angels serve us? truthfully, the Bible doesn't give us a whole lot of information about that.

It's usually behind-the-scenes work, carrying out God's will, protecting his people, delivering messages. Often it's unseen, occasionally it's spectacular, like the angel who opened Peter's prison door in Acts chapter 12.

But here's the point. Angels are servants, created spirits, on assignment for the Lord Jesus. They serve at Christ's command and their mission is to serve you.

So what's the top trump's scorecard here? Angels, servants, Christ, sovereign. No contest.

Which leaves us with the obvious question. Why on earth would you trade in Jesus for a religion that centered on angels?

[24 : 03] It would be like this. Imagine you get a letter from Buckingham Palace. It's got a heavy embossed envelope, a royal crest on it, and it's hand delivered by a courtier in full uniform.

You'd take that seriously, wouldn't you? But what if instead of the courtier, the king himself shows up and knocks on your door and speaks to your face to face? You wouldn't just smile and nod and return to your sofa and keep watching, dancing on ice or whatever.

If a message through messengers matters, how much more the message through the son himself? So pay careful attention to the son.

Let's circle back to that warning in chapter 2, verse 1. We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we've heard, so that we don't drift away.

that's the headline. God has spoken his final word through his son in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if we don't want to drift, we've got to pay careful attention to that message, the message of Jesus.

[25 : 13] Two reasons. Two reasons are given here. First reason, we want to pay attention because the gospel is utterly reliable. Just look at verse 2 of chapter 2.

The message spoken through angels was binding. That's Sinai, the Ten Commandments. We thought about that, the law that came to Moses. The first readers didn't doubt that that message was reliable.

But look at verses 3 to 4. How much more reliable is the gospel? You can think of it a bit like a courtroom scene. The gospel is in the dock.

Is it reliable? Can you trust it? The Son is the first to take the stand. The Lord first announced it. It says, then the eyewitnesses are called.

Those who heard him confirm it. Then God himself adds corroborating evidence, signs, wonders, gifts of the spirit. You want reliability.

[26 : 17] What more evidence could you possibly ask for? That's the first reason. The gospel is utterly reliable. So we need to pay attention to it. Second reason, because, friends, the consequences are devastating.

Look down with me to the end of verse 2. Every violation of the law and disobedience received its just punishment. Under the old covenant, you ignore God's law and you face exile.

But look at verse 3. How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? The logic is crystal clear.

If neglecting the law of Moses led to punishment, how much worse to neglect the gospel of the Son? God's love to ignore it, we ignore him, and we face eternal exile, shut out from God forever.

picture a person on a ship ignoring repeated warnings about a fire beneath deck, shrugging it off because it just doesn't look that serious from up here at the moment.

[27 : 42] But when the vessel finally is engulfed in flames, the neglect is fatal. that's what drifting from Jesus eventually leads to.

So do you see what that means for us, friends? The warning isn't abstract. It's aimed at us, it's aimed at me, it's aimed at you.

We need to be examining ourselves and searching ourselves and asking, am I drifting? I look back over the past few months and years, am I closer to or further away from the Lord Jesus?

How do you know if you're drifting? You don't drift by making a conscious decision to do so.

Rarely does it pan out like that. As I said earlier, nobody wakes up one day and says, today I'm going to jack it all in and walk away from Jesus. Drifting is always subtle.

[29 : 01] It's always subtle, it's always little things. It's the prayers we meant to pray but never quite got around to. It's the sin that we gave up fighting as we tell ourselves.

It doesn't really matter all that much. It's the Bible that's gathering dust on our shelves because every time we think about opening it, something more pressing or urgent or interesting confronts us.

It's the Sunday gatherings that you seem to attend less and less frequently until before we know it. They hardly feature in your diary at all. That's how drifting works.

And that's why really it's so dangerous. Because drifting, it doesn't seem dangerous. It doesn't seem all that bad. It feels small at the time.

It's little things but it carries you further and further and further and further away from Jesus, away from safety. So the warning in this passage is really God's kindness.

[30 : 04] It's not designed to rob you of hope. It's designed to steer you away from danger. It's God's kindness that he warns us.

And verse three I think is a bit like a flare shot across the bow of your boat. Don't keep drifting in that direction. You won't escape if you keep on ignoring such a great salvation.

But here's the good news. The warning is never the last word. The God who warns us is also the God who secures us.

The Son who speaks is the Son who saves. And later in Hebrews we're told that our hope in Jesus is an anchor for the soul.

Firm and secure. In him we have a safe haven. So yes we need to check our moorings. Yes we need to be paying attention.

[31 : 08] But our confidence isn't in how tightly we hold on to Jesus. It's in how firmly he holds on to us. To those who belong to him.

How firmly he holds on to his. So in closing, what does paying careful attention to Jesus look like practically in our lives?

Well let's get concrete. We're good at paying attention when something matters to us. We are good at paying attention. That's one thing that we are good at.

Think about it. We've got personal fitness trackers so that we can pay attention to our steps, calories or workouts. And naming no names, two of the members of my roots group last year paid very careful attention to their step count.

You could say that they were obsessed with it. Julia in particular. I said I was going to name no names. Never mind.

[32 : 13] But we check our bank balances, we check our calendars. And how many times a day do you check your social feeds? So you see, we are good at it. We're good at paying attention to all sorts of things.

So the question is, will you pay the most careful attention to Jesus? Will you pay the most careful attention to the Lord Jesus, to your relationship with Jesus?

Will you listen carefully to him? Will you remind yourself day by day of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, that though you are sinners, that you are saved in him?

This should be the easy bit. You see, the old covenant was all about keeping the law. The new covenant is all about keeping our eyes on Jesus.

What might that look like for you this week? Here's a few ideas. You can take them or leave them. Why not write down what you've seen about the Lord Jesus Christ in Hebrews 1?

[33 : 23] Why don't you journal it, write it down, pray it back to Jesus? Fix your attention on Jesus that way. What about meeting up with a friend this week to talk about your faith and to encourage one another like that?

Maybe you could even make arrangements after the service this evening to do so. Why don't you encourage one another so that you're not drifting like that? Or what about starting or restarting a daily habit of opening God's words?

Even if it's just a short passage to begin with, read it, pray about it, chew over it over the course of the day. Fix your attention to Jesus. Getting stuck into a roots group or a growth group here at St.

Sias would be a brilliant way of strengthening the ropes and ensuring that you're not in danger of drifting alone. The details will look different for each one of us but the aim is the same.

Make sure your life is moored securely to Jesus. So brothers and sisters, don't drift. Cling to Christ.

[34 : 33] The angels serve him. The universe was made by him. His throne lasts forever and he offers you a salvation so great that to ignore it would be foolishness indeed.

Hold firm to him, the anchor of our souls. Amen. And let's pray. Lord God, we praise the Lord Jesus who is superior to the angels who is the most glorious being in the entire universe for he is your eternal son who made the heavens and the earth and he is your son the anointed king who left his heavenly throne born a man and yet a king, the king who conquered sin and death, the king of kings who is sat down even now at the right hand of your majesty on high.

It is him we're here to worship, the firstborn and heir who reigns and rules. And so we ask you, heavenly father, would you send your holy spirit to prompt us this week to pay the most careful attention to our relationship with your son so that we don't drift, so that we don't neglect such a great salvation.

And Lord God, if this evening there are any here who have been drifting from Jesus, and if there are any here this evening who are in danger of drifting, Lord in your mercy would you draw them back to the safe harbor of your open loving arms.

We ask it in the name that is more excellent than angels, the name of the son. Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. We're going to respond.