

## Drifting • Hebrews 2:1-4

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Parry

1. When William Parry and his crew of intrepid adventurers were charting the Arctic Ocean, something interesting happened.
2. They wanted to go farther than they'd been before so they calculated their location by the stars and started a treacherous march north.
3. They walked for hours, and finally, totally exhausted, they stopped.
4. Taking their bearings again, they discovered that they were farther south than they had been when they started.
5. It turns out they'd been walking on an ice floe that was moving south faster than they were walking north.
6. The ocean currents had unknowingly worked against them and they had drifted far from their goal.

#### B. Drifting

1. The writer of Hebrews warned his readers about the danger of drifting.
2. Like Parry and his crew, we live our lives in the midst of subtle currents that work against our course in Christ.
3. There's a way to make sure we arrive at our intended destination.

### II. TEXT

#### A. Set The Scene

1. Before we begin, let's set the scene for our text.
2. Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were being pressured to renounce their faith in Christ and revert to the Judaism of their past.
3. Some had already done so, while others were in danger – so the writer lays out a brilliant and masterful defense of the Gospel and shows it's total superiority.
4. What he writes here is a sober warning to those who weren't necessarily thinking about renouncing Christ *outright*, but who

- had pulled back a bit from their fervency of faith in Him.
- a. stiff opposition and in some cases outright persecution, had move many to *stifle* their witness
  - b. they'd pulled back and *shelved* their boldness in favor of a more reserved and quiet kind of faith.
  - c. the passion and fervency that had marked their first days in the Faith had been quenched by the hostility of their Jewish countrymen.
5. The writer knew that unless they rekindled this zeal for the Lord, there was a danger their spiritual retreat would *progress* and take them in to dangerous territory.

## **B. V. 1**

### **1 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.**

1. The writer uses colorful terms when he says – “lest we drift away.”
2. This was a *nautical* image: It pictured a ship that had slipped it's mooring and was slowly being caught up and carried along by the current.
3. Ancient ships used large stones as anchors.
  - a. they would tie a rope round a boulder and lower it over the side,
  - b. fixing the rope to a cleat on the rail of the ship
  - c. sometimes the tide would rise – and the anchor would lift off the sea floor.
  - d. then, slowly but surely the ship would drift as the current took hold of it.
4. This term was also used of a ship that was trying to enter a port, but because the pilot wasn't paying attention to all the forces acting on the ship, it would miss the entrance.
  - a. he had to think about the current, the wind, the tide, and the attitude of his vessel.
  - b. any one of these, if not considered, would lead to its being carried away.
5. One of the earliest symbols for the Church was a boat.
  - a. we find this symbol throughout the art of the Early Church.
  - b. it's a frequent image on the walls of the catacombs in Rome.
  - c. the Church was likened to Noah's Ark

- 1) it was a place of refuge and salvation
- 2) and while it might be stinky and cramped on the inside –
- 3) it's certainly better than the alternative on the outside!
6. Like a ship, the Church has a crew, and a destination.
7. And like a ship on the open sea, the Church faces many forces that act upon it to affect its course.
8. If we're to arrive safely in port, we have to pay careful attention – or we'll find ourselves drifting about, and may end up on the shoals of some deadly shore.
9. This is what the author is saying.
10. He's warning them about the danger of drifting away from their faith in Christ.
11. The danger he cautions them about isn't the danger of *outright apostasy* – it's the danger of *slowly wandering away*.
  - a. most people don't wake up on a Monday morning after a great day at Church and say to themselves – “Today, I will forsake Christ.”
  - b. they don't say, “We'll, I've been a Christian for 30 years, but now I want to be a Buddhist.”
  - c. it doesn't happen that way
  - d. almost no one chooses to go headlong or intentionally into hell.
  - e. they just drift there.

### **C. Their Pressures –**

1. The author knew the *pressures* his readers were facing had combined to cool their passion.
2. What were those pressures?
3. First of all there was the open hostility of their Jewish countrymen who considered Christians to be heretics!
4. The religious establishment had endorsed a policy of persecution for the followers of Christ
  - a. Christians had lost their jobs
  - b. some had lost their homes and families
  - c. anyone charged with being a disciple of Jesus was banned from the synagogue – which was the heart and soul of Jewish social life.
  - d. the persecution was real and intense – some had even been put to death!

5. Then there was the pressure they faced from the Romans who considered the Christians a dangerous sect of political revolutionaries
  - a. don't forget that the Romans had executed Jesus as an *insurrectionist*
  - b. the charge they condemned Him with and placed above His head on the cross was that He was "King of the Jews"
  - c. his followers were seen by the Romans as a potentially dangerous group of Jews who followed a Messianic deliverer.
  - d. the reason why the Romans looked with such concern at them was because they'd already had to deal with such Messianic groups in the past – and would have to yet in the future.
  - e. many soldiers had lost their lives fighting the followers of some guy who rose up claiming he was the Jewish Messiah
  - f. in their eyes, Jesus was just one more of these, and the Christians just one more group of potential trouble-makers.
6. The pressure from both sides had resulted in the Christian community backing off from the bold public witness that had marked it's earlier days.
  - a. when confessing Christ might result in losing your job –
  - b. you tend to think twice about opening your mouth
  - c. when being publicly branded as a Christian may result in your name being put on a list of people your neighbors and friends are obligated to shun –
  - d. it makes it real hard to be vocal and open about your faith.
7. The result was the *fervency*, the *passion*, the *boldness* that had marked the earlier days of their faith had cooled and been submerged.
8. They hadn't renounced Christ outright, but the writer knew that unless they kept the fires of faith burning brightly, there was the very real possibility they could cool into mere ashes and leave nothing but cold, gray soot.

#### **D. Our Pressures!**

1. We don't face the pressure the readers of this letter faced –
2. But the warning the writer issues here is as insistent and urgent as it was for those who first read these words.
3. You see, while we may not face the same pressures, we do live our

- lives in the midst of a multitude of subtle currents that would cause us to drift away from Christ.
4. If we were living in Sudan, we could easily relate to what these people were enduring.
    - a. a 17 year old civil war in Sudan has seen the Muslim North brutally oppress and persecute the Christians in the south
    - b. entire villages have been wiped out as the Muslims have practiced a policy of *jihad* –
    - c. which is the *forcible conversion* of non-muslims to Islam.
    - d. tens of thousands of Christians have been put to death
    - e. possibly hundreds of thousands have been sold into slavery.
  5. You and I, living in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America, do not face *that* kind of pressure.
  6. The pressure we face is far more subtle – but just as effective in its ability to cause us to drift.
  7. Think about some of the forces that work on *us* and try to lift our anchor off a solid grasp of Christ.
  8. There's the current of *time*.
    - a. just the passage of the years can work to cool our affection
    - b. many who were at one time, zealous disciples of Christ have just drifted away.
    - c. they may keep up appearances, but the fact is, their hearts are far from the Lord.
    - d. we probably all know those who made bold confessions of Christ and took vows to serve Him – who today are wandering in some spiritual wilderness.
    - e. where they are today comes as a result of an imperceptible drift away from Christ years ago.
  9. Then there's the current of *familiarity*.
    - a. we all know the phrase, “familiarity breeds contempt.”
    - b. that's all to true as it concerns *truth*!
    - c. most of us can remember how it was when God first opened our eyes and we realized this whole gospel thing was true!
    - d. suddenly it all made perfect sense!
    - e. we were blown away by both the simplicity and depth of it all.
      - 1) we saw our sin for the big ugly blot it was
      - 2) we saw Christ as the remedy
      - 3) and we realized all we had to do was reach out by faith and

take it.

- f. the sense of peace and forgiveness – the feeling of being clean before God – of being right where He wanted us – was so powerful, so real it defied description!
  - g. then the bible became a new book to us
  - h. worship was far more than just boring songs
  - i. prayer became a two-way communication with God
  - j. going to church became the highlight of our week,
  - k. and every sermon or bible study was like opening your checkbook to find someone had just deposited more money in your account.
  - l. but after a while, it happens – a sermon sounds a lot like one you've already heard
  - m. in fact, most of what you hear at Bible study is stuff you already know.
  - n. you've heard all of Pastor Lance's jokes, stories, and clichés.
  - o. you find it harder and harder to stay awake
  - p. church seems less rewarding – so you start skipping it
  - q. the drift is well under way.
  - r. there are tour guides in the Sistine Chapel
    - 1) and believe it or not – some of them have grown inured to the glorious spectacle around them!
    - 2) if you've been there, it's hard to imagine that possible
    - 3) but they have been in the chapel so many times, and given their little speech so often,
    - 4) the glory above and around them has become little more than duty – the means of earning a paycheck.
    - 5) the wonder of the masterpiece has been lost in the details of describing it.
  - s. all too often, our familiarity with the glorious truths of the Gospel has led to a cold kind of disinterest.
  - t. like a scientist who dissects a frog to see it's parts –
  - u. we've gutted the life out of Truth by failing to see how it brings us hope and purpose.
  - v. truth ought to result in worship – not debating and arguing!
10. Or how about the current of *daily life*?
- a. to live in modern America is to know the pressure of the clock!
  - b. we live at such a frenetic pace, there's little time left for God.

- c. it isn't enough anymore to have a monthly calendar on the wall – we need Day-Timers
- d. no, a paper-based organizer isn't even enough – we need PalmPilots to go off in our pockets and signal us it's time to wrap up what we're doing and head off to another appointment in 15 minutes!
- e. no – now *that's* not even enough – we need to put our PalmPilot and our cell phone *together* so we can be at everyone's beck and call 24 hours a day!
- f. we're so important, that if we can't be reached – who knows what might happen?!?
- g. really, as we look at the details of daily life, we realize that none of them by themselves is all that urgent or critical.
- h. but all together – they unite to apply a powerful pull on us.
- i. one snowflake is a tiny thing and has little power to effect us
- j. but many snowflakes make a blizzard that can bury us
- k. so it is with the cares and obligations of daily life.
- l. unless we prioritize the life of the Spirit, the busyness of daily life will leave us no time to pursue it, and we will drift away.
- m. Robert Robinson was the man who wrote the hymn “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.”
  - 1) he was converted under the mighty preaching of George Whitefield,
  - 2) and was so moved that he became a pastor.
  - 3) caught up in the daily chores of his ministry, he neglected his own walk and ended up drifting away.
  - 4) in an attempt to find peace, he began to travel.
  - 5) during one of his journeys, he met a young woman who was deeply in love with Christ.
  - 6) she asked Robinson, “What do you think of this hymn I have been reading?” then handed him a hymnal opened to his own composition!
  - 7) he tried to avoid her question but she was insistent he read it.
  - 8) finally, he broke down and confessed whom he was and how he had been living away from the Lord.
  - 9) she said, “But these ‘streams of mercy’ are ‘never ceasing,’ just as you wrote.”
  - 10) Robinson was restored to fellowship with the Lord.

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11. Besides the currents of *time*, *familiarity*, and *daily life*, we face the constant pressure of living in a fallen world that's hostile to our faith.
    - a. this hostility manifests itself in the hatred and opposition of non-believers.
    - b. it raises it's ugly head in a world system that constantly challenges us to lust in the areas of greed and sex.
    - c. but there's one area that *our* age seems to *excel* at pressuring us in
    - d. just as the Hebrew Christians faced a unique pressure – so do we.
    - e. the unique current we face that would subtly cause us to drift from Christ is good ole' American *materialism*!
    - f. it seems every where we turn, we're confronted with the message that life consists in the abundance of one's possessions.
    - g. every 12 minutes on TV & Radio we're treated to 3 minutes dedicated to telling us that if we will just get this, do that, and go there, then life will be sweet.
    - h. happiness comes wrapped in cellophane and costs just 3 monthly payments of \$39.95, plus shipping and handling.
    - i. if we aren't bombarded by this message through the tube or speaker, then it's on a billboard, or in a magazine or newspaper advertisement.
    - j. you can't get away from it!
    - k. and if you don't think it has an impact on how you view life, then chances are you haven't had a young child around you lately!
    - l. children are constantly saying to their parents, as they see some ad, "Mom, Dad, can we get one of those?"
  12. Like a ship's pilot who's trying to enter the harbor, we need to be aware of all these forces that work upon us and would seek to carry us away.
  13. In fact, that's exactly what the writer says . . .

### ***E. The Remedy - Pay Attention! Vs. 2-4***

- 1** Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.



1. The remedy to drifting away, the guarantee that we won't slip away is that we're *paying attention!*
2. He says, "Give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard."
3. Here he uses another nautical image here.
  - a. it pictures the pilot bringing the ship in to the dock at the right spot and then mooring it securely to the shore.
  - b. every bit of his attention is focused on one thing – safely negotiating the currents to bring the ship to land.
4. And here the writer tells us what it is we're to pay attention to – here's how all of us can make sure we don't drift away from Christ . . .
  - a. we must pay careful attention to the things *we've heard* – meaning the gospel.
  - b. this is what he goes on to say in vs. 2-4 . . .

**2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward,**

**3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*,**

**4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?**

5. What he's saying here is this –
  - a. if God was serious about the Old Covenant, which was delivered to by angels
  - b. then how much more serious is He about the New Covenant which was hand-delivered by His own Son?
  - c. God *proved* He was serious about the Old Covenant in that people who disobeyed it were punished severely.
  - d. okay then – how much more seriously should we approach our relationship with God through the New Covenant?
  - e. God has placed His seal of approval on the Gospel of Christ through an abundance of signs, wonders, and miracles.
  - f. to treat the Gospel *carelessly*, to ignore it or treat it as something common is the height of arrogance and foolishness.

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. *The Danger*

1. Every Christian in this room this morning faces the same danger – the danger of *drifting away*.
2. While we wait for the Lord to come, we live in a world that's hostile and opposed to our faith in Christ.
3. It's not content to leave us alone!
4. Sure we may not be facing *outright persecution* as in other times and places; but that doesn't alter the fact that the world is at work – even now - to undermine our faith and pull us away from Christ.
5. It starts the moment we walk out that door!
6. There's only one thing that ensures we don't succumb to those subtle currents –
7. We must pay careful attention to the Gospel of Jesus Christ!
  - a. friends – there is no substitute for the Word of God in your life!
  - b. I hope you're in the habit of *regular devotions*.
  - c. I hope you're in the habit of *attending a bible study*

#### B. *Press On!*

1. There's a principle of spiritual growth that is absolutely certain – if you aren't moving forward, then you're moving back!
2. There's no standing still in the things of the Spirit.
3. And spiritual growth doesn't *just* happen.
4. He have to be purposeful about it – we have to, as we read here – pay attention!
5. We must give the more earnest heed to our walk with Christ.
6. If we don't heed it, if we don't pay attention to it, then as sure as night follows day, we will drift away.
7. Noel Borja of Malaybay in the Philippines would have been the youngest Philippine multimillionaire on record. Alas, it was not to be.
  - a. Borja had thirty days in which to appear before the executor of his grandfather's estate so that he might receive the \$116 million that his grandfather left him as his sole heir.
  - b. unfortunately, the letter from the executor ended up in the dead-mail section of the post office, and the deadline expired.
  - c. Borja never appeared.

- d. he had moved from the boarding house in Manila where he'd lived for years without leaving a forwarding address.
  - e. his *negligence* cost him not just a lot of money, but a completely different life.
8. How different might *our* lives be *today* if we'd only paid closer attention to our faith in the past?
    - a. how different our home?
    - b. how different our financial situation?
    - c. how different the lives of our children?
    - d. if we'd only paid closer attention!
  9. Regret is a hard thing to deal with – but what makes it worse is that regret is totally unnecessary!
  10. Today – no matter where you are in your spiritual pilgrimage – renew your commitment to follow Christ with passion and zeal.
  11. And if you've never begun that journey – today is your day to take the first step.