

Text: Heb 2.1

We open Hebrews 2 now and find a new style of writing in the first four verses.

Read Heb 2.1-4

If you recall the first chapter, we had an opening paragraph with bold proclamations, a sort of “proposition” on which the book is based.

Then we had an extended section citing many OT passages which proved several points the author is making concerning the person of Christ and his supreme position.

What we have now is a section of “exhortation.” This is a pattern in Hebrews, alternating “exposition” and “exhortation” sections.

One other note: since we don’t have a deadline of Christmas staring in our face, I can slow right down and go back to my usual pace for preaching through passages! (Well, as in Heb 1, there is a *lot* of material to think about, though I can’t possibly simply tell you everything I’ve learned about each passage. I have six pages of notes on verse 1 by itself.)

Look again at verse 1.

- The verse rests on what went before: “for this reason”
- The verse lays on us a *necessity*: “pay much closer attention”
- The verse offers a warning: “so we do not drift away”

The verse offers us a challenge, which forms our title:

Paying Closer Attention

The implication of the challenge is that the readers (at least) are not paying close enough attention to what they had heard.

I’ve made the observation, as we went through chapter 1, that we tend not to make Jesus high enough.

There are two heresies when it comes to Jesus:

1. The first one denied his humanity (Docetism, he *seems* like a man)
2. The second one denied his deity

What would we say? We would affirm both humanity and deity. We are comfortable in our orthodoxy.

What I am saying is that may be so, but... we don’t put Jesus high enough.

What I mean is that we tend to emphasize the humanity of Jesus *primarily* while acknowledging his deity *doctrinally*. For us, God is our friend, but we can build a picture in our minds that emphasizes *friend* over *God* in that statement.

There is an additional danger, not just making Jesus “too human” but also the danger of, once having achieved orthodoxy, we move on to other interests.

Westcott says:

“There is always in men a tendency to forgetfulness of a past message under the influence of new forces.”¹

So many things capture our attention, some of them important, some of them necessary, but often we allow them to take on the wrong proportions and the trivial or lesser things pull us away from the most important things.

That is what the writer of Hebrews is recalling for us: Pay attention! Don’t drift!

Proposition: The persistent focus of our thinking must be on the message of Christ, both what he has said and who he is.

I. The reason: the position of the Son

The opening words of the chapter point back to what has just been said, especially 1.5-14, the *exposition* preceding this *exhortation*.

A. Reviewing the exposition

1. The preeminent Person of the Son (1.5-6)
2. The eternal nature of the Son (1.7-12)
3. The expectant Kingdom of the Son (1.13-14)

We just touch on these ideas briefly, but the Son is supreme. That is the message we turn back to with “for this reason”

B. Personalizing the stakes (two aspects)

1. Through direct address, “we,” “us”
 - a. “We” – three times in v. 1, twice in v. 3
 - b. “Us” – once in v. 3

¹ Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1903), 36.

The message of the Son, of the King, is not meant for the head but the heart.

2. Through “contemporary” language

- a. This one isn’t obvious to us in English (or perhaps from the following quote)

“The most striking feature of the vocabulary is the turning away from language sanctioned by the LXX toward an idiomatic hellenistic diction. ... The number of unusual words and idioms and the avoidance of the vocabulary of the LXX suggest that in this paragraph it was the writer’s intention to confront the thought and life of his readers in a more arresting way than reliance upon familiar words and phrases would foster.”²

- b. The exhortation comes in language familiar to those who hear

God’s word is meant to meet us on our own ground. The whole idea of the incarnation is God coming down to our level.

- “The Value of a Distributed Communion” – a communion message some years ago still comes up in my mind (one of the few of my own messages I remember)

The position of the Son ought to stir up our spiritual lives, that’s the message.

II. Our object: closer attention to what you have heard

- A. The unusual word combination intensifies our necessity

1. Must: a strong necessity

- a. It is an impersonal verb, never used in first or second person, always third person

² William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), 35.

- b. Meaning: “it is necessary, there is need of, it behooves, is right and proper”³
- c. “it denotes any sort of necessity” (Thayer)
- d. Here it implies a “*moral* necessity and not mere obligation”⁴

2. Much closer: comparative adverb, “more careful”

3. Pay attention to

- a. It can be translated “beware” as in: “pay close attention to X teaching” or “X danger”
- b. “to pay close attention to something, with the possible implication of agreement”⁵

A father writes to his son [in the Greek papyri] “give your undivided attention to your books, devoting yourself to learning”⁶

- c. The word has a technical meaning as a nautical term: “fasten the anchor”

B. Later exhortations in the epistle reinforce the meaning

Heb 5.11-12 ¶ Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

C. The message you have heard

- 1. This points back to the propositional prologue (1.1-4)

³ Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (International Bible Translators (IBT), Inc., 1889), BibleWorks, v.8.

⁴ F. W. Farrar, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, With Notes and Introduction.*, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), 41 emphasis added.

⁵ Johannes E. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 30.35.

⁶ J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), 548.

- a. God spoke in the prophets
 - b. Now God has spoken in His [matchless] Son
2. The message in the Son is what we must focus on

We are basically filling our sermon with a lot of words to put this exhortation in bold, ALL CAPS, underscore, and italics... making a big deal out of this necessity: **PAY ATTENTION!**

III. Our worry: drifting from our anchorage

A. The warning puts the whole emphasis in the “nautical sense”

1. An unanchored ship is adrift
2. An unanchored ship runs with the current, follows the tide
3. An unanchored ship has no fixed moorage
4. An unanchored ship doesn’t stay put

“Whatever be the precise metaphorical force of the verb here, our author is warning Christian readers, who have heard and accepted the gospel, that if they yield to the temptation to abandon their profession their plight is hopeless.”⁷

B. The warning assumes the readers are believers

1. Some question on this point
2. But consider the word “we” — the author includes himself
3. Consider other scriptural warnings

Dt 4.23 “So watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything *against* which the LORD your God has commanded you.

Pr 3.21 My son, let them not vanish from your sight; Keep sound wisdom and discretion,

⁷ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 66.

Heb 12.25 ¶ See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned *them* on earth, much less *will we escape* who turn away from Him who *warns* from heaven.

C. The warning encompasses everything from inattention to apostasy

The word picture is of “a drifting ship, carried by the current beyond a fixed point ... The writer warns his readers that they are in danger of losing sight of the reality of Christian salvation.”⁸

Westcott: “We are all continuously exposed to the action of currents of opinion, habit, action, which tend to carry us away insensibly from the position which we ought to maintain.”⁹

1. What kinds of things occupy your attention?

We are preoccupied by many things: news, current events, family concerns, our jobs, our hobbies ... even our ‘theological hobby’ – learning Christian doctrine

2. Everything in our life must be anchored on the Son, be preoccupied with the Son, with his Word to us

Every interest in life (and many interests have legitimate uses) must revolve in this central interest for the Christian: Jesus Christ and our hope in Him.

Conclusion:

Proposition: The persistent focus of our thinking must be on the message of Christ, both what he has said and who he is.

Worship Him with your whole heart, mind and strength, every day, all the time.

⁸ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 37.

⁹ Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 37.