

24.10.07 Hebrews 1 midweekchurch Hebrews1(mid)

I wonder, what sorts of things do we have, that we take for granted? What blessings do we have on a daily basis that because they are always there, we no longer have eyes to see them? I was reading recently an interview with a crewman on a submarine in the Australian Navy. A man who can be underwater in confined spaces for many days at a time. A person who can be at sea, away from loved ones, for months in a row. He was asked what did he most look forward to about being back on dry land?

His answer? *“Fresh air!”* After months of breathing an atmosphere heavy with grease and oil and sweat he found it wonderful to simply inhale a lung full of fresh air. *“I guess fresh air is just one of those things we take for granted,”* he went on to explain, *“You don’t really appreciate it till you have to live without it.”*

Life is full of these sorts of things, isn’t it? Family, friends, health, sleep, fresh fruit and vegies, hot showers. Things we don’t appreciate when we have them. But when they are gone That’s when we truly understand how wonderful they are.

That’s interesting, for the book of Hebrews is written to remind us of something that we often fail to appreciate. Jesus Christ. You see the Church who first received the letter to the Hebrews were in danger of drifting away from Jesus. They were becoming spiritually apathetic. Jesus was becoming a little bit ho hum, and they were thinking about moving onto something bigger and better. And the writer says, “Stop, everything. Remember Jesus. Don’t go onto something else!”

Now I think that is what our society is danger of doing. In the last 50 years we have seen a generation or two of people who have moved on from Jesus. Who have looked for something different. And who in the process have lost touch with God. And it is important that we don’t follow the crowd on this one.

So lets turn to the start of the book, for it starts with a bang not a whimper. The writer, whom we are not sure who he is, brings out the heavy artillery right from the start. The situation is so dangerous, that there is not time to beat around the bush. He begins, *“In the past God spoke to our forefathers 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 he made the universe.”*

1. God Speaks. The opening lines of the letter, brings us face to face with the God who speaks. Now we live in a society that recognises the need for good communication. Companies spend billions of dollars on persuasive advertising. Politicians know the importance of the 20 second grab. We all know that in our marriages, in our families that

without good communication, relationships fall down.

And the writer to the Hebrews says to his friends who are troubled with the apparent silence of God, don't forget, God has spoken. He is a God who speaks. *In the past, he spoke in many and varied ways.* At first he spoke and creation came out of nothing. Then he used dreams and angels and prophets and priests and kings. In hundreds of ways and thousands of times, God spoke and kept on speaking so that we might know what he is like and what he demands from us.

God has spoken. God has taken the initiative. God has made himself known in OT through history, through poetry, through direct speech, through pictures, through illusions. God has not been silent. He is not withdrawn and uncommunicative. There are *many* places and *many* ways that he has spoken in the past through the prophets.

But the writer acknowledges that the Old Testament message is still partial, fragmentary, preparatory and incomplete. And that is why he contrasts the message of the Old Testament with the message of the New. *For in these last days, God has now spoken to us through His Son, Jesus, the one through whom he made the universe.*

Before God spoke, now he has spoken. And this is his final word, the word for the last days. This is his ultimate word as he draws together many of the loose ends of the Old Testament. This word through the Son is now so decisive, and so full that there is no third phase of God speaking. Now God has said all that he needs to say.

So do you want to hear God's voice? Have you ever said in a moment of desperation, "O God, if you would only just speak! If I could only hear your voice. If you would only talk to me and not be so silent!" What these two verses teach very loudly and plainly is that God is *not* silent. God is not withdrawn and uncommunicative. God has spoken and before we demand that he speaks again, we had better be sure that we have listened to what he has already said!

2. Sat. Jesus has spoken and then according to verse 3, *he provided purification for sins and he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.* Now how do you make something pure and clean again? Well if you put a water purifier onto your tap at home, then it will remove all the impurities from the water. And in the same way Jesus sacrifice on the cross removes the impurity of sin from our bodies. His perfect life, cut short for ours, is a sacrifice that cleanses our lives of sin. It forgives us our wrong doing. It enables us to be clean, holy, just as if I have never sinned.

And that is why the author uses that simple word, "sat". Jesus "sat" down at the right hand of God. You see in the Old Testament a priest had to continually offer his sacrifices to God. He had to go in there each day. The task was never complete. The job was never done. But

Christ offered for all time one single sacrifice for sins. His work was eternally effective. It didn't need to be repeated again and again. That is why he sat down in God's presence to indicate that his work was complete. That is why on that first Good Friday when he bore our sin in his body, he cried out on the cross, "It is finished."

When you think about it, the sacrifice of a bull or a dove or a lamb could never take away ones sins. How could an animals life be on the same level as a humans? But the Son is the exact representation of God being. So when the Son of God, takes on flesh & dwells amongst us, then his sacrifice is good enough for us, for all of us. For God takes our place. It is His blood, His death, which he swaps for ours sins.

Do you wish that something could be done about your sins? Do you wish there was a way to get rid of the impurities in your life? Do you wish that God would do something about the world that we live in? Do you have a hope within you that a way could be found to deal with our petty jealousies, our tendency to fight and take revenge, to lie, to murder, to spoil, to wreck the good world that God has given us.

Well God has done something decisive. God has already provided his answer. Jesus, God's Son has found a way to purify our sin, our world, ourselves. Its done, its complete, its finished. For Jesus has now done what he was called to do and is now seated at the right hand side of God.

3. Superior. And what he has done, shows how superior he is to everyone and everything that is around us, including the angels. That is why the writer next compares Jesus to these heavenly bodies, who have always been held in such high esteem. Who always seem to have the ear of God. For even when God gave the Israelites the ten commandments, they were accompanied to this earth by angels. But Jesus is superior to them. But how is he superior?

Well their name is angel or messengers. His name is the Son. *God Himself* tells us that Jesus is His Son. Remember when John the Baptist baptises Jesus in the Jordan River? The Spirit comes down on Him like a dove and they hear a heavenly voice, *this is my son, listen to Him*. The Son is a title that show's Jesus uniqueness. He is not just a messenger like an angel or even a messenger like other religion's claim that Mohammad or Confucius are messengers. Jesus is the one and only Son of God.

But not only is his name superior to the angels, but his dignity is superior to theirs as well. For in verse 6, we find that the angels actually worship Jesus. Now we should worship none other than God *Himself*. But when Jesus was born, the angels appear to the shepherds & give worship to the babe in the manger. Obviously Jesus must be superior to them if they give him the adoration and glory that alone

should belong to God.

And he is superior because his status is greater than theirs. They are servants, he is seated on the throne. They will perish, he will remain King forever. They like a garment will wear out and be replaced, he is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

I once read the story of Marie Monsen, a Norwegian missionary, serving in North China. At one occasion, she and her mission were in great danger as soldiers started to loot their compound and there they were holed up in a flimsy two story house. And suddenly the soldiers left. A few days later Marie found out why. The soldiers had seen a number of well armed men standing on the verandah warning them not to come inside. *But there was absolutely unequivocally no one there*, Marie replied. *They must have been angels protecting us.*

Angels are real and powerful, but Jesus is superior to them in name and dignity, in status and in function. So would you like a spiritual experience? Do you wish to be touched by an angel, ministered to by the supernatural? Well don't chase after the messengers, chase after the Son. Don't look to the worshippers, look to one being worshipped. Don't look for a one off experience, look for an ongoing relationship with Jesus. That is why Jesus spoke and sacrificed and sat. That is why Jesus is superior to the angels. And it is why he is our Saviour.

4. Saviour. Because it is through Jesus that the writer reminds us that we can experience this *great salvation*. A salvation announced by the Lord. Explained by his teaching. Demonstrated by his power and his love. Backed up by miracles and wonders over death, disease, storms and demons. And it is confirmed by Jesus leaving and sending us his Spirit to empower us to continue on his ministry into all the earth.

God has rescued us. He has sent us a Saviour, Jesus. Who spoke, who sacrificed himself, who rose again, who is seated at the right side and who is worthy of our worship. This Saviour wants us to know Him. This Saviour wants us to trust Him. This Saviour and what He has done, is the basis, the only basis for us knowing God.

I love the story of what happened one year at the University of Chicago Divinity School. You see each year the university invited people to bring along a cut lunch and sit outside as they hear some of the smartest minds around talk on the latest studies in religion. This year they invited Dr Paul Tillich who spoke for 2 and ½ hours trying to prove that the resurrection of Jesus Christ never happened. He quoted scholar after scholar, book after book. He concluded that since there was no such thing as the historical resurrection, Christianity was just a load of mumbo jumbo, because it was based on a relationship with a risen Jesus, who, in fact, never rose from the dead.

At the conclusion of his lecture he asked if there were any questions. After 30 seconds of silence an old preacher with a head of white hair stood up at the back "Docta Tillich, I got one question," he said as every eye in the place turned toward him. He reached into his lunch bag and pulled out an apple and began eating it. "Docta Tillich ... my question is a simple question ... Now I ain't never read them books you read ... I can't recite the scriptures from the original Greek ... I don't know nothin' about the scholars you have quoted."

He finished his apple. "All I wanna know is: This apple I just ate, was it sour or sweet?" Dr. Tillich paused for a moment and answered "I cannot possibly answer that question, for I haven't tasted your apple."

The white haired preacher dropped the core of his apple into the crumpled paper bag, looked up at Dr. Tillich and said calmly, "Neither have you tasted my Saviour Jesus."

So, says the writer of this letter, **so** those who have tasted Jesus, need to be careful that they pay careful attention to Him. To forget to do so, to be drawn on to something else, to neglect Jesus can have disastrous effects.

Now people find it hard to understand that simply doing nothing is so dangerous in the spiritual realm, but it is really only a reflection of our normal, daily experience. Relationships fall apart because we don't work at them. A beautiful garden is destroyed by neglect; a house crumbles around you if you don't maintain it. If you are in business you don't need to take a machine gun to your customers to kill it, simple neglect is enough.

It can happen very easily, too easily. You get too busy to spend time in prayer or reading God's word. There's your job and your family and your friends, and I do need to spend time shifting that weight in exercise or relaxing by playing some sport with my mates. We run out of time and we neglect our relationship with Jesus. Suddenly there is no time for Church, for the Bible, but we might find a bit of time for prayer. And bit by bit, we don't mean to but we drift away from Jesus.

So we must pay careful attention to what we have heard, so that we don't drift away. For there is no standing still. The life of this world is not a lake. It is a river. And it is flowing downward to destruction. If you do not listen earnestly to Jesus and consider him daily and fix your eyes on him hourly, then you will not stand still. You will float on by.

Are you in danger of drifting? Have you taken your eyes off Jesus? Have you begun to take him for granted? Is he still what drives you, what makes you passionate about life, is he the one that really is at the centre of your being and the middle of your faith?

If you were drifting out to sea, you'd be crazy not to put your hand up for help? If you are drifting away from Jesus you would be crazy not to put your hand up and ask for your Saviour's help. To send out an SOS. To find someone who would SAVE OUR SOULS and that person is Jesus.

So pay careful attention to the word about Jesus. Write notes in the sermon. Find some way of reading God's word each day. Spend time in prayer. Join a Bible Study group. Ask questions. For if you do none of these things, you are in danger of drifting away. And that would be disastrous.

Friends, this letter has already started with a wake up call. God has spoken through Jesus. He has sacrificed himself, his work is finished, he is seated at God's right hand side. He is above all angels and spiritual creatures. And he wants to be your Saviour. Without him you will drift further away from God. Without him you will be drowned in your sins. He is the one you need to send out an SOS call to. So put up your hand. Pay more attention. Don't drift away. And don't put it off until tomorrow.