

Hebrews 2A (2014)

- People tend to judge the value of a message - at least in part - by the reputation or importance of the messenger
 - We prefer that important news comes from important and reputable sources
 - If you hear that something big has happened in the world, you turn on a respectable TV news channel to get the details
 - You probably don't flip over to WWF channel
 - And so it was for the Jewish Christians in the early church
 - The Jewish church remembered the importance the Lord placed on angels throughout the course of Jewish history
 - Time and time again, the Lord delivered his messages to Israel by way of angels
 - Many time, that "angel" was actually a preincarnate Christ, called the angel of the Lord
 - But nevertheless, the people of Israel saw good reason to hold angels in high regard
 - And Jews respected angels all the more reason because the angelic realm exists above the earth-bound existence of mere mortal men
 - Angels came in brilliant light or mysterious dreams
 - Angels had powers and knowledge beyond men
 - And angels didn't die, or get sick, or suffer in all the many ways that sinful man must endure
- So when the early church received teaching on the New Covenant doctrines of Christ, some Jews struggled with where to rank Jesus as a messenger of Christ
 - That struggle centered on Jesus' form
 - Jesus of Nazareth was a man, fully human yet fully God
 - And His humanity presented a dilemma for many Jews in the early church

- Where do we rank Jesus as a messenger if He came in a form lower than the form of angels?
- Can a message delivered by a man be greater than the message God entrusted to angelic beings?
- For some in the early church, the answer was no
 - Jesus was an important prophet, and perhaps even the Messiah
 - But his form as a human being meant that His message must be considered secondary to the messages delivered by angels
- In chapter 1, the writer has worked carefully to explain from Old Testament scripture that the Father has always declared his Son to be superior to angels
 - In fact, the OT scripture demonstrated that Jesus occupies a unique place in God's plan
 - He is Son, Creator, Lord and Judge
 - He is eternal, while angels were created
 - All angels work for Him, not the other way around
 - And in fact, angels aren't just working for the Lord, as His ministers of fire
 - They are also working for you and I
 - Look at v.14 where we pick up today

Heb. 1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

- Angels are ministering spirits sent out to serve us
 - They are not ruling agents
 - They are not judging agents
 - Only Christ rules and judges
 - They are ministers, which is the Greek word for servants
- Angels are agents God created as heavenly servants, and their principle mission is to serve those who are appointed to inherit salvation

- In other words, among all the duties God gave to angels, the most important duty the Lord assigned was the responsibility of serving you and I
 - When we understand angels in this way, we keep their importance in a proper perspective
 - God didn't choose angels to deliver important messages in past days because angels themselves were important
 - God used them because that was their job
 - They were created for that very purpose
- But then the time came for the Lord to reveal the Person at the center of those messages, then no ordinary servant would suffice
 - Which is why the writer opened the letter explaining the many ways in which Jesus was superior to angels
 - And with that analysis, the writer has left his audience at a juncture - a decision point
 - We can choose to disagree with the writer's argument that Jesus was greater than angels
 - But if so, then we must go back to the OT texts and show the errors in the writer's conclusions
 - Or we can agree with the writer's teaching, and if so then the conclusion must follow naturally
 - Jesus is superior to angels, and therefore anything Jesus delivered was superior to anything delivered by angels
- The writer's point is simple...who do you say Jesus is?
 - It's the very same question Jesus Himself asked during His earthly ministry

[Matt. 16:13](#) Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

[Matt. 16:14](#) And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

[Matt. 16:15](#) He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

[Matt. 16:16](#) Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

- Our opportunity to be reconciled to God and to obtain the salvation He offers hinges on our answer to Jesus' question
 - Who do you say that I am?
- Who is Jesus?
 - Prophet? Teacher? Criminal? Maniac?
 - Or the Son of the Living God? The Messiah?
- It serves no purpose to debate the merits of His teaching or even to seek to imitate His exemplary life if we don't believe His claims
 - He claimed to be the Son of God, the Messiah sent to proclaim the Kingdom was at hand
 - He claimed to be equal, one with the Father
 - He claimed to be the Creator
 - If He was not these things, then Jesus is clearly a liar or at least seriously disturbed
 - And how could we commend the teaching of anyone under those circumstances?
- The writer is making this same argument to the Jewish members of the early church, asking them to consider this central question: who do you say Jesus is?
 - The very fact that some in the church thought angels to be superior to Christ was of serious concern to this writer, because it calls into question their claims to faith
 - Saving faith requires an acceptance of Jesus as Lord
 - Paul says:

[Rom. 10:9](#) that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

- Confessing - that is agreeing - that Jesus is the Lord is at the core of saving faith
- Any church confused on the importance of Jesus in comparison to the rest of the Heavenly host is a church without saving faith

- And this concern leads the writer into the first of five important warnings issued to his readers
 - These warnings form the rhetorical high points in the letter
 - In fact, we can divide the letter into five sections, each leading up to a warning to the reader
 - Chapters 1 & 2 comprise the first of those five sections and include the first warning of the letter
- The writer issues the warnings to stir his audience to action because he's concerned over things they are thinking and doing
 - And all five warnings work to correct an aspect of Christian doctrine or duty
 - This first warning addresses the first and most important issue of Christian doctrine: the doctrine of Christology
 - That is, who is Christ
 - And so the warning is naturally that of the need to receive Him for salvation

Heb. 2:1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.

- At the opening of chapter 2, the writer begins to transition to the warning
 - And this warning is built on the premise he's presented in Chapter 1, that is the superiority of Christ to anything in creation
 - The writer calls his audience to pay much closer attention to what they have heard from Christ
 - Given Christ's supreme importance as a Messenger, then we must give the utmost attention to what He says
 - Let's take a moment to understand the writer's statement
 - The phrase "pay much closer attention" is contrasted with "drift away"
 - These phrases in Greek create an image of moving water

- In fact, the Greek word for drift is literally the word to describe the flowing of water
 - The writer is drawing a picture of someone floating in a boat down a slow moving river
 - And at the edge of the shore is a firmly planted rock
 - As we float by the rock, it catches our attention
 - We consider it carefully, but we never reach out to grasp it and stop our movement
 - Instead, we just watch it at a distance as we continue to drift
 - Until we drift so far away, it's no longer in sight
- That rock is the message of the Gospel, the Gospel that declares Jesus as Lord
 - This is the rock we must embrace to be saved
 - Yet some in the early church had heard the Gospel and even considered it for a time
 - But they hadn't embraced it
 - And so they were in danger of flowing by and drifting away entirely
 - And the evidence of their unbelief is found in their unwillingness to consider Jesus as above the angels
 - Their continued preference for angels and the messages delivered by angels betrayed their lack of faith in Jesus and His claims to the Messiah
 - At the very least, they weren't clear on purpose of the Messiah
 - And so they were letting the truth of the Gospel pass them by
 - They may have been assembling in the church but they were not yet part of the church spiritually speaking
 - There is nothing shocking or even usual about suggesting that some in the church are not truly believers
 - This has always been a reality in the church

- Everyday, men and women walk into congregations and join themselves to the gathering without actually knowing Christ as Lord
- Hopefully, they soon come to know the Lord, but some never do
- They hang around the faithful and mimic the church culture, but they have never come to understand and agree that Jesus is God
 - The essence of the Gospel escapes them
- The writer begins his letter calling out those in the church who continue to live in unbelief, citing as his proof their continued reliance on angels over a reliance in Christ
 - And to that group, the writer issues a warning

[Heb. 2:2](#) For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty,

[Heb. 2:3](#) how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,

[Heb. 2:4](#) God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

- The writer again draws a comparison to angels and the messages they delivered
 - The word spoken through angels is a reference to the Law of Moses delivered by angels as part of the Old Covenant
 - That word was unalterable, the writer says
 - The Law of God never had a clause for amendment
 - Our nation's constitution has a provision allowing the people to change the law of the land through amendments
 - So our law is not unalterable
- But God's Law for Israel was unalterable
 - No amendments, no adjustments
 - As Jesus said:

[Matt. 5:18](#) “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

- All the Law must be accomplished, according to Jesus
- So if someone in the nation of Israel failed to heed the instructions found in the Law, they were subject to the death penalty
 - There is no provision in the Law of Moses for intentional sin
 - If someone in Israel intentionally disregarded the instructions found in the Law, then there was only one remedy under the Law
 - They were subject to the death penalty
 - Their earthly lives were in jeopardy
 - So likewise, the writer asks in v.3 what kind of penalty should we expect if we neglect so great a salvation as the one delivered by the Lord Himself?
 - The word for neglect in Greek is *ameleo*, which means to pay no attention
 - In other words, if we ignore the salvation offered in Christ, what penalty awaits us?
 - If the penalty for ignoring angel’s instructions was physical death, then what might we expect to receive for ignoring the instructions of the Messiah?
 - Though the writer doesn’t answer the question, the answer is obvious: spiritual death
- Rather than dwell on that possibility, the writer moves quickly back to reaffirming the truth of the Gospel revealed in Christ
 - In the second half of v.3 the writer testifies that this salvation, the Gospel, was the word spoken by the Lord Himself
 - And it was confirmed to the church by those who heard the Lord
 - Those who heard were the apostles, and they confirm the words of Christ in their writings
 - This writer speaks as one who knew and accompanied the apostles, but perhaps was not an apostle himself

- So the church has the Lord's appearing and words, and we have the confirming testimony of the apostles
 - But then we also have the Lord testifying to the truth of the Gospel through signs and wonders in the early church
 - Miracles were proof that the claims of Christ and the apostles were trustworthy
 - And from then until now the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the church according to the Lord's will continue to testify the truth of the Gospel
 - In other words, the claims of the Gospel are trustworthy
 - They came from a superior source and were thoroughly validated by God and men
 - We simply can't neglect such a great salvation
 - And yet some in the church were doing exactly that
- As we have already learned, their stumbling block was a preoccupation with angels, but it goes deeper than that
 - The real concern was His incarnation and what it meant that Jesus died in the end
 - For a Jewish believer, the superiority of Christ and His message was a tough pill to swallow when they reflect on their Messiah in a frail, human body crucified by their Roman enemies
 - This image of Jesus contradicts their expectation of a conquering, all-powerful Christ coming to rule on earth
 - And so by comparison, angels appear far more majestic and important
 - And therefore, their message found in the Law of Moses appears to trump the message delivered by Christ
 - So to these wavering members of the early church, the writer moves his discussion of angels to an explanation for why the Messiah needed to take the form of man and die