**Series: It’s All About Jesus**

**Sermon: Change your behavior or change your name.**

Alexander the Great was born in July of 356 BC and lived only 33 years. He became king of Macedon when he was 20 years old, then spent most of his ruling years on an unprecedented [military campaign](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_campaign) through Asia and northeast Africa creating one of the [largest empires](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_largest_empires) of the ancient world by the age of thirty.

Undefeated in battle he is considered one of the greatest military commanders of all times. Alexander established his power with ruthless efficiency ordering the execution of any potential rival. He also led his forces with strict discipline.

One night, unable to sleep he went for a walk around his encampment. He came upon a guard who was fast asleep. The punishment for sleeping on guard duty was death. Often the commander would pour kerosene on the individual and burn him.

This particular soldier awakened and recognized who stood before him.

         *Do you know the penalty for falling asleep while on guard duty?* Alexander asked.

         *Yes sir*, the soldier replied with a shaking voice.

         *What is your name?* demanded the great general.

         *Alexander sir!*

         A second and third time the same request was made with the same answer, *My name is Alexander*.

         Finally the general said, *Either change your conduct or change your name!*

As Jesus followers we wear the name “Christ”. We are Christians. Sometimes people who wear that name have fallen asleep. A believer who has fallen asleep perhaps ought to change his name. Or better, wake up and get serious about faith. As Alexander said, *Either change conduct or change name*.

We’re going to cover 3½ chapters of Hebrews today. We won’t read and dissect every word. I’m going to trust you to read the text for yourself. What I want you to see this morning is that the author is concerned. He’s concerned that his readers are drifting away from faith in Jesus.

A theme that runs throughout the letter is that Jesus is superior to all other religious concepts. Jesus is not just a nice guy or great teacher. He’s not one among many. He’s not a feel good figurehead of religion. He is superior to every other aspect of faith because He is God.

The word translated superior - κρειττων, used 13 times in the letter means that something is of more importance or higher rank. Your translation may use “better”. It’s like a Rembrandt painting. Someone might make a copy or forgery, but only a Rembrandt is a Rembrandt. Jesus is the real thing. All others are fakes.

Introducing Jesus he wrote that the real Jesus is superior to angels. He then contrasted things about Jesus with things about angels.

Jesus is the revelation of God to men, He is the creator and sustainer of everything and the author of eternal life in Heaven. He sits at the right hand of God, meaning He is equal with God. Angels worship Him and serve Him.

Even His name is superior to angels. Have you ever heard anyone use an angel’s name as a curse? “*Oh Gabriel*”. There was one time that Mike hit a bad golf shot and said, “*Michael John”,* but that wasn’t about the Arch angel Michael.

Jesus’ name has power. Not so the angels, but the author fears that these Christians are being distracted from Jesus.

We don’t concern ourselves with angels as much as the ancient Jews did, but we have Christian celebrities and it’s easy to get distracted from Jesus by their great teaching. Jesus is superior to our Christian celebrities, guys like Chuck Swindoll and David Jeremiah and Rick Warren.

Who doesn’t love Francis Chan and Lysa Terkeurst, Max Lucado and Priscilla Shirer? These are great people with lots to teach us, but Jesus is superior to all them. However much we respect and love our Christian celebrities, they’re subordinate to Jesus. Lysa Terkeurst can’t save you. Chuck Swindoll can’t save you. Jesus can. At least the real Jesus presented in the Bible can.

Jesus is also superior to Moses. Moses was faithful as a servant in God’s house; Jesus is the Son who rules in God’s house.

Moses was the supreme prophet of God. A prophet is one who carries forth God’s Word. Moses faithfully served God, speaking for God as leader of God’s people. Their reverence for him bordered on worship.

We don’t assign that much importance to Moses, but we often similarly revere our preachers who carry forth God’s Word.

Most of us have our favorites that we hear on the radio or we read their books. We trust what they teach.

Some people even like me. I appreciate it. I appreciate that you trust me, but I’m just a teacher of the Bible. Jesus is the source of the Bible. He is the Word.

As Jesus is superior to Moses, He’s superior to Ben and me. We want you to know Jesus so that you can follow Him absolutely.

The problem for the Jews of the New Testament era was that they relied so heavily on their leaders that they missed the Word. It’s not unusual today for Christians to follow every word of a trusted preacher but never read and study the Bible for themselves.

The point of these first three chapters of Hebrews is that these earthly structures of religion often get in the way of Jesus. Jesus is superior to our Christian celebrities, our radio and TV Bible teachers, our authors, and our local preachers.

John 3:16 says that…*God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life*. Salvation is for people of faith, *whoever believes.*

With that in mind our author, concerned that believers are drifting away from the Gospel, warned of persiflage, treating faith frivolously. Three times in these chapters he offers advice.

**First** **bit of advice**, *We must* ***pay more careful attention****, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.* 2:1

He used a forceful word “*must*” indicating the seriousness of this discussion. *We must pay closer attention*. Closer than what?

The author apparently thinks some Christians are a little slack in the spiritual department. Maybe the extent of their Christian faith is that they go to church most or some of the time. Obviously he thinks there should be something more.

*Pay closer attention to what we have heard*, the Gospel of Jesus. The readers have heard and accepted the Gospel, so he warned about the danger of drifting away.

That’s an interesting word, παραρρεω. I’ll illustrate it in three ways.

1.    It can describe evaporation. You’ve witnessed it. A container of water sits on a shelf in the kitchen. No one takes any out, or spills it, but over time it just disappears. One day you reach for it and it’s gone.

Your faith, if not attended can slowly and over time evaporate. Then one day when you really need it, there’s nothing there.

2.    Παραρρεω can describe a container with a hole in it. Imagine you have a can of gas in your shed. One day it snows heavily and you want to use your snow blower. You grab the gas can but it’s empty. Because of neglect, the fuel you counted on is unavailable. Now you have to shovel.

Again, faith that is neglected will leak until it is lost to you.

3.    Consider a fisherman who moors his boat on a pier in Lake Michigan at New Buffalo, has dinner at Redamak’s or Stray Dog, then spends the night in a B&B. Maybe he was a bit careless and didn’t tie the knots like a good Navy man.

During the night the waves gently and slowly loosen the knots and the boat slips from its mooring and drifts away.

The fisherman returns in the morning ready to catch some salmon but he has no boat.

That can happen to faith. A believer can get preoccupied, distracted, or busy. Or maybe he simply loses interest in church stuff. His commitment dissipates, but so slowly that he doesn’t notice. He thinks he’s OK.

It’s not that he rejected faith but it was too burdensome for him to pay close attention. Unable to explain even the simplest Biblical concepts he can’t define sin and why we need redemption so he allowed society to determine truth.

I stressed in our Room4Doubt class that we live in a post-truth era. By that I mean that truth no longer matters. What matters is how something makes you feel. If it makes you feel good it’s good. If it doesn’t make you feel good or worse, makes you feel badly, it’s evil. Even faith is only good if it makes you feel good.

Our hypothetical believer, having been careless with faith can’t compete with secular dogma. In a crisis when he really needs the strength of faith he finds that it has drifted away. It doesn’t make him feel good so he turns to something else.

Look at the sentence again, *We must pay more careful attention…so that we do not drift away.* It’s more than that our faith might be weak. We ourselves might drift away.

I know that goes against the teaching of the “*once saved, always saved*” crowd but that’s what it says. (We’ll see more stuff like this in this letter.)

Having instructed believers to pay close attention to faith the **second bit of advice** is a preventative action. Many of us here take preventative medicines. I take a daily pravastatin to prevent cholesterol trouble. It’s not that my arteries are blocked but I am a candidate so I take the pills.

Because every Christian, and especially the recipients of this letter, are candidates for drifting away we get this preventative measure…*holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling,* ***fix your thoughts on Jesus***. 3:1

This is written as a command so I think we can take it as an absolute “ought”. We absolutely ought to fix our thoughts on Jesus. The verb κατανοεω means to think carefully about something, in this case Jesus.

I told you this letter is all about Jesus. To prevent drifting away from our faith we should concentrate on Jesus. Does “concentrate on Jesus” describe your approach to faith?

The author illustrated this idea for us by looking back to Israel’s history (remember the original readers were primarily Israelis). Quoting Psalm 95:7-11 he reminded us of what happened.

*As the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested in trying me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’”* 3:7-10

You read about this. When the Israelites were wandering for forty years they rebelled against God because they had hard hearts. They didn’t love God. They used God.

They tested Him in trying, επειρασαν εν δοκιμασια. In other words they pushed and pushed until He had enough. Every parent has probably experienced that with your kids.

God described their behavior as *going astray*. They’re always “planeting”, πλανωνται. We get our word “planet” from this because a planet is a wandering star. Their hearts were wandering, “*drifting away*”.

How can we prevent drifting? Fix our thoughts on Jesus. Concentrate on Jesus.

In case anybody thinks I’m exaggerating the importance of this teaching, notice what God says of those whose hearts drift away…*“So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’”* Verse 11 Is that serious enough? Believers who drift away will never enter His rest.

The author wasn’t done. Verse 12, *See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.* “*Turns away*” is to “*stand against*”. This isn’t what we call being a nominal Christian. This is about moving away from God so that you are actually standing against Him.

Being a nominal Christian who isn’t paying close attention and is not fixing his thoughts on Jesus results in drifting away.

We’re challenged (actually commanded) to encouraged each other to prevent drifting away…*encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.* Verse 13

Notice the caveat he slipped in here, *as long as it is called today.* There’s a time limit on responding to the Gospel. You have until you die or until Jesus comes back to believe unto salvation. After that it’s too late.

The context here is important. He was writing about Israel who rebelled against God, drifted away, and as a result God was angry with them and promised that they would not enter His rest. In chapter 4 the author applied “the rest” to our reward for believing and of course that means eternal life in Heaven.

Don’t miss verse 14, *We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end.* If we hold firmly to the end, inferring that if we don’t, if we drift away, we’ll not share in Christ.

All that being true he offered this **third bit of advice**, *Therefore, since the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us* ***be careful*** *that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.* 4:1

Does anything in that sound familiar? Perhaps you’re thinking of Romans 3:23, *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. Everybody falls short because of sin. The Gospel is that through Jesus our sins are forgiven and we’re no longer falling short.

Now verse 2, *For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.*

God’s message to the Jews wandering between Egypt and the Promised Land was the same as His message to us, the Gospel. In their case they didn’t believe God, they *didn’t combine it with faith.*

Verse 3, *Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said.*

Verse 6, *those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience.*

The disobedience in question is their refusal to believe. (Obey and believe are used interchangeably as are disobey and non-belief.) The same would be true today. Whoever does not believe will not enter God’s rest. So we’re warned, *be careful that no one is falling short*.

Be careful is φοβεω. Φοβεω means to fear, and can suggest fright or respect. We should be consumed with deep concern that our faith is true so that we don’t fall short.

Verse 11, *Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following the example of disobedience.* Make every effort is σπυδαζω, be eager or zealous. Do the people who know you see that you are zealous about faith in Jesus? They should!

Summarize: Let’s see if I can bring this all together.

The author’s concern is that some, maybe many Christians just don’t take faith seriously. They go to church but that’s all. They don’t participate in any spiritual growth activities. Their knowledge of Jesus is sadly, quite superficial.

I believe the doctrine that we’re saved by faith alone has hurt many Christians. It’s true. We are save by grace through faith alone. Unfortunately many seem to think, *I believe. That’s all I need to do*. They stop right there as if there are no further expectations of a believer.

Then one day they face a crisis. Maybe they get downsized at work and don’t know how they’re going to pay their bills, or they experience serious and chronic health problems. They pray and pray but they don’t get better and they begin to struggle with God.

         Their faith has become weak through neglect.

         They let it drift away.

         Some no longer have faith at all. They have drifted away.

With the author of Hebrews I urge you:

         Pay close attention to your faith

         Concentrating on Jesus

         Be very careful to protect your faith so that you aren’t falling short.

If you’re serious about your faith, you’re constantly getting to know Jesus, growing in faith, congratulations! Keep it up. If you’re not, I think any of the Apostles would say, *Change your behavior or change your name.*