

Mid Week • Hebrews 3

INTRODUCTION

As we've already seen, the writers of Hebrews makes a masterful case for the superiority of the Gospel to it's roots in Judaism.

In chapters 1 & 2, we've watched him demonstrate the surpassing excellence of Christ *over* the ministry of angels.

In chapter 3, the author turns to show Christ's *superiority* to Moses. In the Jewish mind, there was only one man greater than Moses – Abraham.

These two men were the pillars of their nation – the men *demonstratably approved* by God.

In their thinking, there was only *one candidate* for equality to Moses and Abraham – the Messiah!

After showing that Jesus is superior to angels, the author moves to show that He is even superior to *Moses* – not *just equal* to him.

CHAPTER 3

Vs. 1-6

1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus,

2 who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also *was faithful* in all His house.

The word “therefore” at the beginning of v. 1 means that what follows is a conclusion to what's come before this.

We've already seen that Jesus is superior to angels, God has spoken finally and fully through Him, He died and rose again, and is now our heavenly High Priest.

Now, he calls his readers to stop and take *careful consideration* for just how great Jesus is!

Notice how he addresses them; he calls them *holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling*.

This ought to make it abundantly clear that he thinks of his readers

as those who are genuinely saved.

Because of what he says at several points in this letter about *falling away*, some commentators say that this letter was written to only *nominal followers* – to people who weren't genuinely converted but who only made a *profession* of faith.

V. 1 ought to be enough to dispense with that idea – this is written to genuine believers – people who have been made the *children of God*, and so *brothers* and *sisters* in Christ.

They are “*partakers of the heavenly calling*,” meaning they've been *born again* and are *indwelt by the Spirit of God*.

To these believers – the writers urges them to take a good hard look at who Jesus is.

He is the *Apostle and High Priest of our confession*.

This is the only time in the Bible that the word *Apostle* is ascribed to Jesus.

It's usually reserved for those 12 men who Jesus hand selected to be His disciples and to carry on His work after His resurrection and ascension in to heaven.

But here it's given to Christ Himself; and as it is, it's used in its most strict sense.

The word “*apostle*” means “*sent one*.”

The word was used in that day to mean someone who was *officially authorized* and *empowered to represent another*.

Their specific task was to *speak* and *act for* the one who sent them, much like an *ambassador*.

Often in Jesus' ministry He made reference to the fact that He said and did *only* what the Father told Him.

Even as a 12 year old child, when His parents found Him in the temple and asked Him why He hadn't followed them home, He said, “Did you not know I had to be about My Father's business?”

While we may call any one of the 12 disciples, “*an* apostle” – Jesus is **THE** *Apostle* of our confession.

It is He we look to and call on.

We don't call on Peter or Paul or John – we call on and believe in Jesus Christ.

He is also our *High Priest*.

The writer has already mentioned this in 2:17-18 when He said

Jesus offered Himself as the final sacrifice for our sins.
In this mention of Jesus as both Apostle & High Priest, the writer is probably thinking of the history of the Jewish people.

When the Jews came out of slavery in Egypt and camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai, God revealed Himself to them and called them into covenant.

Moses was God's representative – he spoke on behalf of the Lord.
As such, he was an *apostle*.

Aaron, Moses' brother, served as the *high priest*, and by doing so, represented the people before God in the offering of sacrifices and worship.

The author is saying that in Jesus, the offices of Moses and Aaron, of Apostle and High Priest are combined into one person.

Jesus both represents God to man, and man to God.

Today, if there's a labor dispute, representatives of the union will sit down with representatives of the company and they will try to hash out the differences and come to a compromise.

The problem is, oftentimes one side or the other remains resolute and unwilling to compromise - There's a stalemate and the talks breakdown.

The key to breaking the deadlock is for the representatives for both sides to arrive at some mutually agreeable position.

They arrive at this position by talking, by communicating and striving for understanding on *why* each party has to accomplish certain things in the final agreement.

In the seeming deadlock between God's demand for holiness and man's penchant for sin, Christ alone intervenes and pleads both sides.

He resolves the dilemma by paying the price for man's sin while at the same time changing man's heart from sinful to pure.

God's standards and demands are never compromised; rather, Christ enables man to rise to the standard.

The writer urges his readers to stop and consider just how great Jesus, our Apostle and High priest, is.

He was faithful to the Father who commissioned Him.

Though the author is about to reveal Jesus' *superiority* to Moses, he begins by drawing on the classic Jewish elevation of Moses

as the most faithful and godly man who ever lived.

In v. 2 he says that Jesus' faithfulness is *on par* with the faithfulness of Moses.

This may not sound too provocative to us – but it would stand out strongly to those first readers.

Let me use an example – prior to the Crusade, we showed the Harvest video many times.

There was one comment toward the beginning in which Billy Graham says that he doesn't know a finer preacher in the world today than Greg Laurie.

Now – for a lot of people – that's an incredibly provocative statement.

There are some well-known and well-respected preachers today:

John MacArthur, Chuck Swindoll, David Jeremiah, and Alistair Begg, to name just a few.

For someone as skilled and respected as Billy Graham to put Greg Laurie on par with these guys, and maybe even a notch above them, is – well – a bit shocking.

That's what the writer is doing here; but he takes it even further.

You see, he wasn't just comparing Jesus to the heavyweights of *that* day; he was comparing Him to the standouts of the past.

Would Billy Graham set Greg Laurie on par with Charles Spurgeon, G. Campbell Morgan, or D.L. Moody?

Or how about this – how would this be for provocative – what if Billy said that Greg was as powerful a preacher as the Apostle Paul?

Why, we'd think that Dr. Graham was given to the worst kind of exaggeration!

Again – when the writer of Hebrews puts the faithfulness of Jesus on the same level as Moses, he was taking the reputation of a man enshrined in the Jewish mind and heart as nearly superhuman, and saying another had attained that same level.

This was sure to cause many of his readers some discomfort.

But that was the point – they needed to realize that Jesus wasn't just on par with Moses – He was *superior* to Moses – vastly superior.

In fact, Jesus was the One Moses served and pointed to!

That's why the author makes reference here to a *house* – to *God's*

house.

Moses was merely a servant *in* God's house.

He was faithful – yes – but he was *only a servant*.

Jesus on the other hand, *owns* the house.

Vs. 3-6

3 For this One [meaning Jesus] has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house.

When we look at a beautiful building, we marvel at the architecture.

The first question we ask is – “Who designed it?”

Frank Lloyd Wright designed some incredible buildings and stands as one of the best known architects of all time.

When you look at a Wright building – you don't give honor to the building itself, but to the genius behind it.

Bramante and Michelangelo are greater than the dome of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome they designed.

Sir Christopher Wren is greater than St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

God is constructing a house, a living temple.

While the temple is a thing of incredible beauty, it's God we honor, not the temple He's building.

Moses was the servant of God, whose honor is due to the fact that he served by **helping to build God's house**.

Though he was a great man with a unique mission, Moses was nevertheless *just one of God's covenant people* and so a part of that house.

Jesus, on the other hand, is the homeowner and builder.

Therefore he is counted worthy of more honor than Moses.

Moses was certainly honored with glory.

The Lord allowed him to see His glory.

Moses' face even radiated with light after spending time with God.

Then, God Himself honored Moses by burying Him on Mt. Nebo.

But Jesus is counted worthy of even more honor, more glory than Moses.

The transfiguration and the resurrection and ascension into heaven are all demonstrations of the surpassing glory of Christ.

4 For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things *is* God.

5 And Moses indeed *was* faithful in all His house [meaning *God's* house] as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken *afterward*,

6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

See the comparison that's made here?

Moses was a faithful *servant* -- **IN** God's house. = Jesus is a **SON** -- **OVER** His *own* house.

As I said a moment ago – in the Jewish mind, Moses was THE MAN!
In fact, for some, he was even a tad superior to angels.

The writer has already made the case for the superiority of Jesus to angels.

Now he moves to show the superiority of Jesus even to Moses!

Stop and think about *why* the Jews would so revere and honor Moses.

1) He was divinely chosen for his role as leader of the nation
His life was preserved by the whole basket in the Nile thing.
He was raised in the palace of Pharaoh and given an education as a prince of Egypt.

Then God appeared to him in the burning bush and commissioned him to lead His people.

2) He was given incredible power to perform signs and wonders
Think of the power demonstrated in the 10 plagues!
Imagine standing there and watching him as he lifted his staff over the Red Sea and it divided in two!

Or when he struck the rock and water flowed.

3) He spoke with and for God, and in a manner no other human being in all Israel's history experienced.

Listen to Numbers 12:6-8 . . .

6Then God said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, *I*, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. **7** Not

so with My servant Moses; He *is* faithful in all My house. ⁸ I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the LORD.”

Moses was *so intimate* with God that when he came down from the Mount after spending 40 days and nights there with the Lord, His face glowed!

4) Moses was the *lawgiver* – and the Jews held the law in such esteem they considered all earthly treasure to be but dust compared with it.

From the smallest rule to the weightiest commandment – it was all called, “The Law of Moses!”

5) Moses was Israel’s *historian*.

He recorded the origins of the universe and described how the nation had come in to being.

6) Numbers 12:3 says that Moses was the most *humble man* who ever lived.

Despite his privileged position, it never went to his head – probably because *he did spend so much time in God’s presence!*

It’s pretty hard to be proud when you stand in the presence of the epitome of perfection and holiness!

Let that be a lesson to us all – the presence of pride is evidence of a lack of the presence of God.

All too often Christian celebrities carry themselves with an arrogance and pride that’s embarrassing!

Their gift of communication has led to a measure of fame and as they become more and more sought after, they become proud.

It gets to the point where they hire an agent and charge a fee.

They require extensive preparations and plush travel arrangements.

They sequester themselves until it’s time for them to come out and wow the crowds with their dynamic gifts.

Then as soon as it’s all over, they climb into the back of a limo and are whisked away to their hotel suite for a massage and chocolate strawberries and chilled Evian.

A man or woman who spends any time at all in the presence of

God will realize any gifts they have come as the result of God's grace.

To spend even *one second* in the conscious presence of a holy God will deflate pride and cause anything that even *hints* of arrogance to be loathed.

Christian celebrities who promote *themselves* have made merchandise of their spiritual gifts and will have much to account for in the judgment.

The presence of humility in our lives is in direct proportion to how much time we spend in God's presence.

In any case, the writer here takes the classic Jewish elevation of Moses, and shows how even if he is a level above angels, Jesus is still superior!

Remember that this letter was aimed at Jewish Christians who stood in danger of renouncing their faith in Christ to go back to the Judaism of their past.

To that thought, the writer aims the last part of v. 6 -

6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

The house that's referred to in these verses is the spiritual, living temple the Apostle Paul describes in Ephesians and Peter refers to in 1 Peter 2.

Here the writer says that we're a part of that spiritual house, IF we hold fast to the end.

Does this mean it's possible to lose our salvation – or are we eternally secure?

This is an age-old debate that good people have argued over without end.

The reason why there's a debate is because while some verses seem to say we are secure, others, like this one, seem to open the door to the very real possibility of a person falling away.

I'm not going to get in to all the nuances of this debate tonight.

But I do want to point out how this passage resolves the issue.

In fact, what we see here is in fact how anyone can give a

biblical answer to the whole debate over the security of the believer.

What does it say – what’s the condition the writer puts on security?

We’re in the house – IF we hold fast, TO THE END!

Hold fast to what? The confidence and the rejoicing of the hope.!

Who gives us that? Christ!

So – who are we to hold fast to? Jesus!

Where is security? In Christ!

As long as I am abiding in Christ – I’m absolutely secure!

If I’m not abiding in Christ – can I be secure?

Are you abiding in Christ tonight?

If you are then you’re secure – if you’re not, then you aren’t.

If you’re not, then return to Him now!

Vs. 7-11

7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says:

“Today, if you will hear His voice,

8 *Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness,*

9 *Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years.*

10 *Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.’*

11 *So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’”*

The writer quotes Psalm 95.

These words were well known to the people of that day as they were read every Sabbath evening to start the Sabbath service.

“Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.”

Psalm 95 speaks of the rebellion of the Jews against Moses’ leadership and calls the people to not repeat that mistake.

The writer of Hebrews takes up the Psalm and uses it here.

His argument goes like this:

You honor Moses above all others and think no one is greater than he.
You're right to do so for he was a faithful servant of God.
You're also right in your condemnation of the people of Moses' day who refused to follow his lead and obey the Word of God that he brought to the people.
He led them out of bondage in Egypt through dramatic miracles.
He led them right up to the border of the Promised Land and said that God would be with them and help them take possession of it.
But the people were spooked and refused to believe.
Instead, they wandered round the desert for 40 years.
Unbelief barred the way to blessing.
Okay then, he says – don't make the same mistake they did!
If you honor Moses – then you have to honor Jesus Christ because He is superior to Moses!
Don't make the same mistake your forefathers, whom you condemn, did.
They refused to listen to the Word of God through Moses – don't *you* fail to heed the Word of God spoken through one greater than Moses!
?Which would be worse – to reject Moses, or one greater than Moses?
The Jews of Moses' day failed to enter in to what God had for them because they refused to believe.
In the same way, the readers might fail to enter in to all that God had for them if they now shrunk back and fell into the same spiritual trap of unbelief.

Vs. 12-13

- 12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;**
- 13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.**

He says, let the past be a lesson to you now and BEWARE lest you

follow the example of those who rejected God and His servant Moses.

The writer of Hebrews is here *applying* the exhortation of Psalm 95 that's quoted in vs. 7 & 8.

Look at it again . . .

7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you will hear His voice, 8 Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness.

God is speaking –*today, right now!*

He's spoken through Moses and the prophets, and now in these last days He's spoken to us by His own Son.

That word is repeated by the Holy Spirit through the servants of God who faithfully preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and teach His Word.

The Word is going out today!

The exhortation is to listen to it – to heed it; to pay attention to what's said.

This is going to be the text for my message on Sunday, so I'll leave further comment till then.

Vs. 14-19

14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,

Again we're faced with the call to hold fast to Christ.

The Christian life isn't a sprint, it's a marathon.

It isn't a hundred yard dash – it's a cross country race.

There are many who seem to make a start, but they fall away.

It isn't going forward at an altar call that secures a place in heaven but a going forward in faith in Christ day by day, week by week, month by month, and year by year.

If the glory days of your Christian life are all in the distant past, then there's something desperately wrong for as Paul says in 2 Cor. 3:18, the life of faith is *from glory to glory*.

Being born again means a new life that *grows*, not *shrinks*.

15 while it is said:

“Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

When those first Jews heard the Word of God from Moses, they had a choice to make – obey it, or disobey it.

They chose to disobey – and as a result, their hearts were hardened.

Every time we are confronted with truth, and we reject it, it’s like searing our skin with a hot iron – it makes it more and more insensitive until we lose the ability altogether of being able to feel or discern the truth.

The writer says that we must be careful to give our ear to listen to the voice of God, and then promptly comply with what we hear.

If we don’t then we run the risk of following in the footsteps of the Jews who rejected Moses.

16 For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was *it* not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses?

17 Now with whom was [God] angry forty years? Was *it* not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness?

18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey?

19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

In order to enter in to all God has for us, we must listen and believe.

The Jews of the Exodus didn’t!

Oh they made a good start!

They endured the 10 plagues quite well and followed through on the Passover which brought their deliverance.

They even went through the Red Sea and stood with their feet on the necks of their enemies on the far shore.

They followed the pillar of fire and smoke.

They camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

They built the tabernacle and offered their sacrifices to God.

But just 2 years after they left Egypt, as they approached the borders of the Promised Land, they balked.

Even though they had seen the evidences of God's power time and again, they resolutely resisted and so were left to wander in the wilderness till they died off.

God said, "Go in." They said, "No!"

What barred their way was unbelief.

What kept them from enjoying all the fullness and blessing God desired for them was a refusal to believe.

CONCLUSION

Let's end on that point tonight – it's one that we'll dig deeper in to this Sunday –

The Christian Life is a walk of faith.

But that faith isn't simply some fanciful fiction of dreaming up something out of our own hearts or heads.

Faith means to take God at His word and live in compliance with it.

Why is it that we are so ready to believe God when He says that our entrance into heaven is secured by our faith in the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross, but when He gives us direction for how to live in the here and now, we think we know better?

Oh sure – trust in Christ for *eternal* life.

But for *this* life – we don't want to listen to God.

God's good for fire insurance, but for auto and home we look to the world or our own desires.

God has far more in store for us than just "getting us in to heaven."

He wants our lives to be full and blessed *now*!

So He speaks His counsel to us.

Are we listening – or are we hardening our hearts?