

Sermon 8: Hebrews 3:1-6: Considering Jesus in Order to Hold Fast

OUTLINE

Consider Jesus faithfulness
Consider Jesus glory
Consider Jesus people

INTRODUCTION

The text we are considering today presents to us the cure for apostasy—considering Jesus. If considering Jesus is the cure for apostasy, then this helps us think about what causes apostasy, not considering Jesus. We can take our eyes off of Jesus and put them on many things. We can have our eyes, and minds and hearts filled with vanity fair, the pleasures of this life. Today a new and controlling way we do not consider Jesus is by technological addiction where we spare no thought for Christ as our minds are ensnared through dopamine addiction to our devices. We can take our eyes off of Jesus as we fixate on our pain, maybe the death of a loved one is a grief we turn into an idol; or our loneliness; or the desperate state of the world; or the state of our health as we age or might have a debilitating condition. One of Satan's main ways to take our eyes off of Christ is through deception and lies. There are many false religions to contend with Christ, many deniers who multiply reasons for not believing, there are many who have made a living simply denying Christ, trying to outsmart God. Some have taken their eyes off of Jesus because that unsaved boy or girl has taken an interest and all those arguments that once held no power are convenient excuses to soothe a troubled conscience. The Jewish Christians that the letter to the Hebrews is written to were under the pressure of persecution. And we all know that it does not take much to look for excuses to leave an uncomfortable situation. But more than just seeking relief, there must have been a tremendous pressure to unbelief that was upon them. Put yourself in their shoes for a moment. You would remember the sincere faith of your parents; you would think back to those times you went to Jerusalem, to the temple and prayed with those thousands of other Israelites; you would see the obvious superiority of the moral code of the OT to all the other Gentile nations; you would see God's providences in preserving Israel; you would think of the OT itself as the word of God; and then there is Moses to consider. For many a Jew Moses would be the greatest human being who had ever lived, Num. 12:3, 'Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.' Moses wrote the Pentateuch; he was the builder of the tabernacle; the one who led Israel out of Egypt; who parted the Red Sea; who handed over the 10 commandments; who shepherded Israel in the wilderness; who interceded for her safety. You can imagine how any Jew would feel pressured to go back to Moses as something attractive. So in the portion before us, our author enters into a comparison of Moses and Jesus. You might think that this is redundant because the author has already shown that Jesus is superior to the angels, who are in turn superior to Moses. But there would be an emotional argument in Moses that the author seeks to answer.

So as we look at Hebrews 3:1-6 we see three key points, consider Jesus faithfulness; consider Jesus glory; consider Jesus people. These considerations are fuel for holding fast which is the main need for these persecuted Christians.

Consider Jesus faithfulness

V1-2, 'Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ² who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house.' Our portion begins with a therefore. And here the author is continuing to get us to think about Jesus as our Highpriest, who he has described as faithful and merciful, who was a propitiation for our sins, and who is able to help in the last part of chapter 2. Before continuing drawing our attention to Christ he does remind us of two things concerning ourselves first, which all come together to help us stay fast in the truth. Firstly, he identifies these believers as 'holy brothers.' This of course includes the females, but that word holy is important. It does not mean that we are living lives of perfection; no these are struggling saints who are tempted to abandon Christ. It is not describing their achievements, but rather identity, they are 'set apart' ones; consecrated ones; put aside by God as His own people and to fulfill His purposes. This is the identity that they already have in Christ. They do not have to return to Judaism to gain this identity. Secondly, he reminds us that we have a heavenly calling. That word calling means summons or invitation. Now, is this a calling from heaven or to heaven, and the answer is yes. The source of the call is from God; and the goal of the call is an upward call of God in Christ Jesus, into fellowship with God beyond death and sin. How have they come to share in this heavenly calling? Jesus tells us how, John. 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' Those who have put their trust in Christ have received eternal life; are adopted.

So the next time you have a moment where you think you might want to chuck in the towel, think about your identity as a set apart one with an identity, a purpose, a way that you are supposed to live; think about God who has called you into a relationship with Himself; think about Jesus as the way to that heaven where we will have fellowship with God. You have heard the voice of the true shepherd another's voice you need not heed.

But the heart of the author's concern and his cure for apostasy is considering Christ. 'Consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.' If you are looking for the main verb to get at the main application this is the main verb, consider Jesus. The word 'consider' does not mean to merely notice or remember, but to take in facts about. This is not describing mere intellectual acknowledgement, but intellectual enquiry. The book of Hebrews itself is a wonderful example of what it means to consider Jesus. When you do you are immediately overwhelmed with His superior glory and sufficiency. He is the divine Son, who is the heir of all things, who made all things, sustains all things, who is greater than and served by angels. He is God's greatest and final communication of Himself. He is the Saviour of sinners, a perfect priest and perfect sacrifice offering final God satisfying propitiation that by one offering pays for all of our sins. He is worthy of worship, and being human He is sympathetic; and right now He is exalted at the right hand of the Father in a position to continue to help us while we are under enemy fire providing all we could need to be sustained. Take your problem and temptation, take the pleasures it is promising, the lies it is telling, the future it is offering you and compare it to Christ and His benefits. This is what it means to consider Jesus in all of His person and in all of His work; in all that He is for us.

In particular we are called to consider Him as an apostle and Highpriest. Now the rest of this section offers a contrast between Jesus and Moses, there are 3

comparisons, Jesus faithfulness, glory and status trumps Moses. And these descriptions of apostle which means sent one; and Highpriest, are likely put forward because Moses was sent of God and served in a type of priestly way. In other words, if you take the very best that God has sent, an apostle, and who has done the greatest priestly works, building a tabernacle, Christ is greater by far.

It has been suggested that we could see apostle as Jesus representing God to man; and Highpriest as Jesus mediating role of representing man to God. In both Christ cannot be exceeded. Regarding Jesus as an apostle, this is the only reference to Jesus as an apostle in the NT. But throughout John's gospel Jesus speaks of Himself as sent by the Father. He was with God, and became flesh—Moses did not; He was born of virgin and preserved from Herod; Moses was only preserved from Pharaoh; He was sent to deliver us from satan, sin and death; Moses only delivered from Pharaoh and Egypt; Jesus parted the waters of death; Moses the waters of the Red Sea; Jesus wrote the law upon our hearts in a new and greater covenant; Moses wrote the law on stone. Moses brought Egypt to the brink of the promised land but it is Jesus who secures our rest. The NT is full of comparisons showing the greater reality and deliverance we have in Christ. John 1:17, 'For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.' Moses had glory but hid it under a veil; Christ has a greater glory and in Him we see the glory of God unveiled, 2 Cor. 3. Moses delivered the word of God to the Jews, but Jesus is the greater word and the substance of Moses writings, John 5:46, 'For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.' God gave bread through Moses, but Jesus is the bread of life come from heaven, John 6:32-35. Moses struck the rock in the wilderness and gave water; Jesus was the rock 1 Cor. 10:3.

Moses was a godly man and the text is in no way detracting from the important role he played, this portion is using him as a foil against which to show the superior Son. Moses was obedient for the most part and God did great things through Him. But even Moses prophesied of another like himself but after him, Deut. 18:15, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.' The Seed; the Son; the Servant; the Prophet; the King; the Priest who would be sent by God, has come. He is Emmanuel.

But Jesus is also the Highpriest. Moses was of the tribe of Levi, though his brother Aaron became Highpriest. Moses did play a mediatorial role. In particular think of those times that Moses interceded and prayed for Israel. There was Exodus 17 when Moses was atop the mountain keeping his hands in the air signaling God's presence and blessing until He gave the armies of Israel the victory. But a more powerful way we see Moses in his priestly intercession is in the sad story of the golden calf. Moses was on the mountain for 40 days and the people grew restless. While God was giving Moses the 10 commandments, they rose to play, pressured Aaron to make them another god. Aaron took their gold and made them a golden calf, trying to make their sin a little better by calling it YHWH who had brought them out of Egypt. God revealed what was happening to Moses who descended the mountain, smashed the original 10 commandments and rallied the sons of Levi to punish the offenders. Remember Moses intercession before he descended. Ex. 32:9-14, 'And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰ Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you." But Moses implored the Lord his God and said, "O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot

against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. ¹³ Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.' " ¹⁴ And the Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.' The greatness of Moses intercession is further magnified in v31-32, 'So Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. ³² But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written." Moses was faithful. But God did not receive Moses life for the Israelites, God did punish Israel for their sins. Moses intentions were good but Moses actions fall far short of the one who did offer Himself, and who offered Himself not only to divert the wrath of God, but to suffer the wrath of God in Himself. The one who was 'a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.' The author is going to show in the rest of this letter that any sacrifices of the OT only covered over sin but could not properly deal with them, and that it was by Jesus greater priestly service that our sins are finally fully dealt with.

Consider Jesus glory

V3-6a, 'For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. ⁴ (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) ⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, ⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son.' The author turns our attention from what Jesus has done back to who Jesus is. Moses is worthy of honour, he should hold a privileged position as a human being in the hearts of the Israelites. Jesus is more than merely human. Firstly, we see that the author appealing to the logic of the ancient mind that the architect is more important than the building. Just as Leonardo Da Vinci is greater than the Mona Lisa, Jesus is greater than the house of God. How is Jesus the builder of the house of God? You will remember that part of the promise to David is that he would have a Son that would build God a house. Solomon was a type of Christ who would come and build not a house of literal stones but spiritual stones, 1 Pet. 2:5, 'you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.' Eph. 2:19-22, 'So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.' You will notice that there is an ambiguity around the word 'house' with regards to Moses, 'house' means the tabernacle and at a stretch maybe the people of God as a type of temple; but when we speak of 'house' with regards to Jesus, it is the living temple of God's people made up of believing Jews and Gentiles. The author readily moves between the type and the fulfillment, the earthly tabernacle to the people of God. This is one of the reasons why we are not waiting for a rebuilt temple in the future. The temple of living stones was what those promises speaking in earthly types were pointing to. Please notice the important statement that the builder of all things

is God. This statement informs the earlier one where the Son is said to be the creator of all things in 1:2 and v10. Jesus as God is in the background here.

But not only is Jesus the builder of the new temple, He is the Son over it. He humbled Himself, became a little lower than the angels and due to His obedience has been raised up and given the name above all, holding all authority, even over God's house. Moses is a servant, Jesus is the cornerstone, the architect, the builder, the owner and the One over God's people. Technically Moses is part of the house of God's people Jesus is over. If it a question of bringing revelation from God, Jesus is greater than Moses; if it is a question of faithful service, Jesus is sinless, Moses lost his right to enter the land; if it is a question of building God's house, Jesus builds the greater house; if it is a question of greater sacrifices, priesthoods and covenants, Jesus is greater than Moses. If it's a question of authority, Moses is a servant but Jesus the Son of God. Moses himself serves the Son, and so should everyone else, including Jews.

Consider Jesus people

V6b, 'And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.' The author circles back now to our identity and duty. He underlines what he has been making it explicit, we are His house. As someone has said, why do you build a house? To dwell in it! The theme of God making a dwelling with His people is a bible long one. This is not the place to open up the whole theme in the Bible but certain things can be highlighted. In the Garden Adam and Eve were kicked out, estranged from God, angels and flaming swords guarded the way preventing our return. In the tabernacle God made a way that He could dwell with His people, a tabernacle was built where a priesthood, and a Highpriest would offer sacrifices to cover the sins of God's people every year so that God would not punish them, so that He could continue to dwell with them. We are the next stage where because Jesus became a human priest and offering and He has torn down the dividing curtain into God's presence, the Spirit of God has been poured out and God now dwells in the hearts of His people. Individually and collectively we are temples of God. The day of Pentecost with fire over each disciple is a mini-shekinah glory-cloud hovering over the new temple of God, His people. This is monumental, it is a great reversal of what Adam and Eve caused, we are once again able to abide in the presence of God, reconciled to Him. God has made His dwelling with us. This means that we live in the presence of God, our lives are lived in the presence of the Holy One; we are consecrated ground. We should conduct ourselves as if we were those priests offering sacrifices in the OT, with a deep sense of reverence and privilege.

But all of this opening up of Christ's superiority to Moses; all of this talk of considering Christ is so that we will hold fast our confidence, and our boasting in our hope. We have reason to be confident, but we don't think about it, so we do not feel it. We have a hope to boast in, but because we do not consider the effectiveness of the person and work of Jesus on behalf of His people, we don't feel it. Now we must say something about that word 'if.' What is the meaning of this? We have two options. The first way to read it could be conditional. We are God's house 'if' we hold fast to our confidence. In other words, we will not be God's house if we do not meet the conditions, fulfilling the conditions causes the outcome. Or a second possibility is descriptive, in other words, if the evidence of holding fast is present, then the inference of our being His house is true. Most commentators prefer the second option because otherwise we are the housebuilders and not God. This conditional language has confused a lot of

Christians making it sound as if their salvation is started by Christ but finally depends upon them to finish it. This contradicts the idea that Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith; that He works in us to will and to do for His good pleasure. There is a lot more we will be saying about these sorts of warnings moving forward but at this point we can say this. Those who are truly born again will produce good fruit, they will persevere, they will heed these words of warning and God will use them as His means to bring about their perseverance. Those who do finally fall away do not prove that true believers can be lost, they merely prove that they were never truly born again, for good trees bear good fruit, and a tree is known by its fruit. If a tree does not produce fruit and persevere then it reveals it was never a good tree. As Jesus Himself said to the lawless, depart from Me, I never knew you.

The cure for apostasy is considering Christ, through seeing Him in His glory, and having our hearts moved by what we see, we are reminded of our confidence and our boast and are able to continue to hold fast to Him seeing other offers as empty, other saviours as lies, other promises of safety and salvation as false. Atheism, agnosticism, Islam, any works oriented religion, etc they all become colourless burdens when we see His glory!