
The Steadfastness of a Firm Hope

Hebrews 3:1-6

Introduction What difference would it make in your life if you did not believe in Jesus? What difference would it make if you did not believe that He is superior to all other gods, philosophies, sciences and religions?

Our author speaks eloquently to powerfully persuade us of the Superiority of Jesus. He is Superior to the Prophets, to the Angels, to Moses (3:1-6), to Joshua (3:7-4:13), to Aaron (4:14-5:10). He writes to a people who were being pressured and persecuted into returning to Judaism or pluralism. They had to say that Jesus was no greater than the heroes of Old Testament, that He was just another prophet, another leader in the long line. Or, they had to say that Jesus was a King, but He was not the Sovereign and sole authority over all.

Today, the superiority of Jesus needs to be asserted against the rise of Ecumenicism and Pluralism. People tell us that it is OK to believe in Jesus and the Bible, *as long as we do not insist that believing in Jesus and the Bible is the only way*. And it may well be that we will one day suffer loss for a faith that insists on the exclusive authority and superiority of Christ. That is why the Chapel exists. We exist so that *by God's grace and through His Word, we will cultivate in the hearts of God's people a passion for the supremacy of God magnified in love for Him and manifested in love for one another*. In other words, we exist as the covenant people of God to proclaim the superiority of Jesus Christ.

To many, that might sound arrogant. To God, this is the sweet music whose text runs through the paragraphs before us. For when Jesus is magnified, saints will be matured.

Christ Centered Design

(v.1)

So what is it that we need? We as humans need to know what it is that God requires. We need revelation. We need a word from God. And, we need to know how we can come to God to worship Him and to fellowship with Him. We are very far from God as we all well know deep in the depths of our souls. So we need a way to God. That is why the author of Hebrews now presents Jesus to us as our Apostle and our High Priest.

For, as one writer stated, "Jesus is our Word from God and our Way to God." [Piper] That He is the Word from God means that we must fight unbelief (3:7-13). That He is the Way to God means that He is our great High Priest (3:14-10:18).

So Christ is the center of a true Christian's attention.

Our Calling

We are partakers of a heavenly calling. Here is God's Divine initiative to bring us to Him. We share in God's summons to salvation with the effect that we are now holy in standing before God and brothers in our relationship to one another.

Our Consideration

Though we have been brought to salvation, we must go through a process of transformation to turn our position of being holy in Christ into the practice of holiness in life. This process *begins* with fixing our thoughts on Jesus. The constant appeal of Hebrews is for us to “see Jesus” (Heb. 2:9), to “fix our thoughts on Jesus” (Heb. 3:1); to “fix our eyes on Jesus” (Heb. 12:2). This appeal rings out to us from Colossians 3:1-2 where we are to “set [our] hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set [our] minds on things above” so that we “have the attitude of Christ” (Phil. 2:1) can say with Paul, “I want to know Christ” (Phil 3:10).

Fixing our thoughts on Jesus is faith acting. We cannot see Him, yet we love Him now and in believing in Him we are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy (1 Peter 1:8). We must understand how important it is to fight against unbelief. We tend to think that believing in Jesus is a once for all act that takes on a life of its own. We constantly talk about when we believed. Brothers and sisters, you had better be believing now with greater clarity and a stronger embracing of Christ. You have to discipline your mind to turn its inner gaze again and again to what you know to be true of Him.

So, do we set our minds on Christ? Let me suggest to you a few practical suggestions that believers over the years have found in their Bible and in their experience to be helpful.

- *FIXED TIMES OF BIBLE READING.* It is quite impossible to set your mind to thinking about something or someone of whom you are ignorant. I can think about my German friend, Diethelm, you cannot. Without regular reading of the Bible, you frankly will find it very difficult to think about Jesus.
- *FIXED TIMES OF PRAYER.* We must fix for ourselves regular times when we set our minds and hearts to talk to God in prayer. Think of it as a conversation where you hear Him through His Word and you respond to Him in prayer.
- *DISCIPLINE OF MEDITATION.* We must hold our minds to the task (and it will become a delight from which you will turn with real pain) just to think about and reflect on Christ. These may be quiet times when you sit or kneel. They may be times in a car. But make time to meditate. Now I am not talking about emptying your mind; Bible meditation is to be engaged in a process of thinking about the truth of God, the person and work of Christ and so on.

You cannot be deeply affected by something you do not think about. You cannot think about something you do not know.

And this is precisely our problem. We are being deeply affected by the world because we think about it; spend a great deal of time pursuing and a great deal of our treasure investing in it. So our hearts go running after our treasure. That is why we must pursue the Kingdom of God first. **FIX YOUR THOUGHTS ON JESUS.**

Our Confession

What then is the link between our heavenly calling and our earthly considerations? It is our confession of Christ. Since we have been called by God, we then confess Christ. The word *to confess* means *to say the same thing about, to agree*. So Jesus is the one about whom we say the same thing as God does. We agree with God. No one—and I mean absolutely, no one—can claim to be a holy brother sharing in God’s heavenly calling who does not agree with all that God the Father says about Jesus the Son.

The heart of our confession is that Jesus is our Apostle and our High Priest. Jesus is our Word from God and our way to God. And since God has said that Jesus is *the only Word from God and the only way to God*, then we must confess—that is to say, we must completely agree with God about that.

Just as Christians cannot exist without confessions, neither can Christianity. We are confessing Christians and we are a confessing church. We have a body of belief that we confess. We confess that what the Bible teaches is absolutely certain and true. Thus, we as a church confess the Word from God as the Way to God. And this whole body of truth and belief rests in the truths about Jesus Christ.

Maybe the reason we struggle to fix our thoughts on Jesus is because we have never agreed with God about Jesus.

So, what features of God’s declaration about Christ are brought to the fore for us to agree with?

Christ Honoring Declaration

(v.2-4)

The Apostle, in writing to Hebrew Christians, asserts the Superiority of Jesus over Moses. In doing so, he does not say that Moses was nothing and Jesus is everything. He asserts that Moses was great, but Christ is immanently superior. Verses 2-4 tell us *that* Jesus is superior while verses 5-6 tell us *how* Jesus is superior.

How They Are Alike

(v.2)

We have here a comparison of Moses and Jesus. I get that from the words “just as” in the center of the verse. We are brought then to what will be a growing emphasis on *faithfulness*. What is meant by Jesus being faithful to God (the One who appointed Him) unfolds in how Moses is faithful in God’s house.

This statement is a quote from Numbers 12:6-8. I believe this text is so important for us to understand the point the author is making that we need to turn there and that we read Numbers 12:1-8. This is God’s declaration to Miriam and Aaron when they rebelled against Moses’ leadership. They challenged Moses as the only one who represented the word from God and the way to God for Israel. What they put forward as the problem really hid the real reason—they were bigots. They did not think that Moses could truly represent God since he had taken a Cushite wife who would have been black. And God heard it.

Here is God’s point to Miriam and Aaron in verses 6 to 8. “With everyone else, I reveal myself indirectly. But Moses is faithful in all my house; to Moses I speak face to

face and he sees my form.” Don’t miss it now—God is saying that Moses’ faithfulness is part of his speaking with God face to face and seeing God’s form.

How does that relate to Christ being faithful? Moses faithfully spoke and showed who God was and what God wanted—the Word from God and the way to God. So is—not does, *is*—Jesus.

How Jesus is Greater

(v.3-4)

Moses and Jesus are alike in that they faithfully spoke and showed the Word from God and the way to God. But Jesus is greater than Moses. You see, Moses was a part of God’s household. Moses was a sinner saved by grace. He was a part of God’s people. He was a living stone in God’s building. But Jesus is worthy of greater glory because of two related facts:

- *HE IS THE BUILDER* (v.3). Jesus is not the house. He is not a sinner saved by grace. He is the builder of the house. He is the one who builds up the people of God into a household and He is the one who put Moses into it. He is the Savior
- *HE IS THE CREATOR* (v.4). It would be like sitting around in a locker room arguing over who is the best runner. Each one can put forward their achievements. Yes this one is good and that one is great. But when we come around to Jesus, He simply says, “I selected you for this team. And I made each one of you. I made your arms and legs and feet and brain—I made you.” The question of who is superior is over. He is the Sovereign. (Piper)

It is not just enough for the Apostle to show us *that* Jesus is superior, but he goes on to show us *how* Jesus is superior to Moses.

Christ Exalting Demonstration

(v.5-6)

The Apostle exalts Christ by elegantly demonstrating the greatness of Christ. He makes a statement about Moses and a statement about Jesus and the difference is those statements is how Jesus is superior.

The Presentation of the Argument

(v.5-6a)

Moses is faithful, and so is Jesus. That we have already seen.

Moses is faithful as a servant; Jesus is faithful as a son. Moses stands to the house as a servant, owning nothing but humbly serving the master’s wishes. Jesus stands to the house as a son. Jesus is greater as the owner of it all. It will all be His by inheritance.

Moses is faithful as a servant *in the house*; Jesus is faithful as son *over the house*. Moses is faithfully serving as a part of the household. Jesus is greater as the ruler over the house

So, Jesus is superior to Moses for He is the builder, the owner and the ruler of the household of God. In the moments we have this morning, I can only say to what Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:7. “Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.” Set your mind to think about Jesus. Think about what it means that He is the builder. Let your mind reflect on 1 Peter 1-2. Think about Jesus

bringing each living stone to that which He is building and fitting it perfectly so that in the end He has the Temple *of His own people* in which to live. Think of Jesus as the owner of the house. He has the sovereign right to do as He pleases with His own for we are not our own, we have been bought with the price of His blood. Think about what it means for Jesus to be our ruler. We cannot make the laws on our own. We must obey His rule, no more and no less. We must submit the greatness of His Word from God and embrace Him as the only way to God.

Loved ones, let us think about Jesus.

The Conclusion of the Argument (v.6b)

So what conclusion does the Apostle draw from what he has said. If Moses was faithful in the house, and Jesus is faithful over the house, then we will be faithful as the house.

This sentence is the first of a cluster of sentences in Hebrews that have become very controversial. We are confronted with the second of a series of warnings to the hearers. Each of the warnings escalates in tone and terror, in how sharply it words its warning and how great it frames the consequence. We have already come through the first one in Chapter 2 which warns us against casual drift from what we have heard. The last warns against defiant refusal to heed Christ speaking now.

At one level, we can deal with these exhortations and warnings without dealing with their thorny theological implications. The effect then is like hearing a siren while we are driving – we pull over because we know something is wrong and we need to pay attention and pull over and get out of the way. But it seems to me that we need to understand these warnings a bit better than that if we are going to profit from them and respond to them in faith.

There are two classic positions taken and they tend to reflect the theological framework brought to the text.

THE FIRST POSITION reads this to say, “We will continue to be God’s house if, and only if, we do not lose our confidence and our confession.” In other words, some have used them to teach that it is possible, once having become a son of God, the house of God, the people of God, you can lose that standing. Those who say that make this verse say this, “If we do not hold fast on to our courage and the hope of which we boast, then we will not be God’s house anymore.”

THE SECOND POSITION reads this to say, “Holding fast our confidence and confession shows whether or not we are God’s house.” In other words, some have used this primarily as an evidence of those who are truly a son of God, the house of God, the people of God, since you cannot lose that standing. Those who say that make this verse say this, “We know that you are truly one of God’s own, if you hold fast and if you do not, you were never one of God’s own to start with.”

Now, before I go on, let me make something very clear –I do not believe it is possible for a person to lose their salvation, to lose their standing as sons, to be ‘unborn’. I believe that the Bible teaches that faith or belief is an ongoing action (not a one time de-

cision) that is sustained by the Spirit of grace through the Word. In other words, you must persevere and God is enabling your perseverance.

This raises an important question that is directly related to these warning texts. How does God enable your perseverance? Does it depend entirely on you or entirely on God? The answer of the Scripture is both. You persevere because God causes you to persevere. How? By giving you the enabling grace to persevere through the inward work of the Spirit using the Word of God. God enables you to hold fast your confidence and your confession by your hearing the Word of God.

But, He has also designed certain types and parts of the Word of God to be particularly suited to produce perseverance. These are His promises and His warnings. You will be able to see this so very clearly through the rest of Hebrews. But here, we have a warning whose function is to enable perseverance. In other words, through hearing a warning and an exhortation to hold fast to your confidence and your confession you actually do hold fast in the midst of great distress, difficulty and trial.

So here is the way God has ordained that it *function*: He intends for his own to persevere ⇒ He gives them warnings to persevere ⇒ they hear the warnings to persevere and thus ⇒ are enabled and do persevere.

So, Russ, you have not answered whether or not Hebrews 3 (and the other warnings) teaches that we can lose our confidence and confession and thus not be his house anymore. My response: you are asking a question this text does not answer nor is its **purpose** to answer. So, we must not use this text that way at all. When I come to these warning texts, I hear them with joy and faith and cling to Christ, keep my confidence in Him and keep on confessing my hope in Him with the result that I persevere through a faith God gives and enables.

So again, when one of God's own, threatened to drift, doubt, disbelieve and despair, hears the exhortations and warnings to hold fast their confidence and their confession, they are strengthened *by the very warning itself to keep on and not fail*.

I pray you see this – God has provided an unfailing resource so that we will never fall. It is not only His grip on us, but His grace to us through the means He has ordained. Is there a danger? O yes, my brothers and sisters. The great danger is that I am not His house and then I will drift from what I have heard and will not hear the Word and do not listen to these exhortations and warnings. Then trials and hardships and threatening come to one who is not freed from the fear of death and I lose confidence and I give up my confession. But I am a part of God's house and God has purposed that I do persevere and therefore I hear the warnings and do persevere.

Now listen to me – let me give you the framework and the text.

- God's people are held in the grip of God – they cannot fall.
- God gives grace so they will not fall.
- God gives that grace through the exhortations and warnings not to fall.
- All those who are His own, respond to the exhortations and warnings and do not fall.

So, you are God's house, if indeed you hold fast your confidence in Christ and your confession of hope and thus, you hear the warning and do persevere.

So, when trials and testing and troubles come and you begin to slide and slip, then open to texts like this and hear them and run to Jesus and cling to Him and brag up your hope and you will persevere. You believe you are God's if you persevere and so you do persevere.

So to a people who were being persecuted into denying Jesus and to us who being pleased into it, comes this stirring exhortation. We stir up our faith and hope and courage through these warnings to hold firmly on because we are God's house. At the root of all this is faithfulness and the fight against unbelief. That is what we will see next week.

Conclusion Let us stir up our faith, set our minds to think about Jesus, fight with all our might against the unbelief that manifests itself in sin. Let us think about Jesus as the builder and the owner and the ruler of His house. Let us think about Jesus as building and owning and ruling us.

May these thoughts of Jesus build faith so that you will hold fast to your confidence and your courage as you wage war against self and sin. And may we fight the good fight of faith, right up to the end. May we be found faithful as servants in God's house until the Master comes.

May we set our minds and our affections on Jesus to magnify His worth and to mature us.

