

The Servant and the Son

Hebrews 3:1-6

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Good morning. For those of you who don't know, my name is Tobias. I'm the associate pastor here at Christ the King, and it's my privilege to get to open up God's Word for us again this week. I think it's a good week for this to happen. I got to alleviate some of the burden from Mr. Moderator, which, by the way, he did a great job at. But this morning, we're going to continue our study of the book of Hebrews, and over the last several weeks, as we've looked at chapters one and two, we've seen the author give us a picture of who Jesus is and what he's accomplished as the incarnate and exalted Son of God. And as he's done this, we've seen him spend a good bit of time demonstrating how Jesus, as the Son, is superior to the angels. And this is in part because, for whatever reason, some, at least in his audience, were preoccupied with angels, perhaps even venerating them, and they were in danger of taking their eyes off of Jesus.

And so a couple of weeks ago, we heard the author exhort not only his original readers, but all of us who claim to follow Jesus to pay much closer attention to what we've heard, that is to the revelation about Jesus that we've heard, lest we drift away from it. And last week, as we looked at Hebrews 2:5-18, we heard the author round out this argument as he demonstrated that it is Jesus, not angels, who reigns with glory and honor even now as the founder of our salvation. We ought then to have every confidence that he will come in full power and glory, just as he said he would, to usher in the world to come and to bring perfect deliverance from the pains of this life for all those who trust him. And yet, at the same time, we also heard the author make the paradoxical point that Jesus has been exalted because he was humbled. He willingly took on human flesh, and he suffered death on our behalf, and he did all of this in the service of God as our merciful and faithful high priest. Well, as we turn our attention to the next chapter in Hebrews, we're going to see the author pick up this theme of Jesus's priesthood, along with several other themes, as he continues to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus, not over angels, however, but over the Old Testament figure of Moses.

So I invite you to open up your copy of God's Word, if you haven't already, and we're going to be reading Hebrews chapter 3, the first six verses. It says this:

“Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God’s house. 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. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.”

Friends, this is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray.

Oh, heavenly Father, we bow before you, the one true and living God, the one who has revealed himself through Word and through the incarnation of his Son. Oh, Father, we thank

you for the portrait that we have been given so far through this wonderful book. Attune our ears to it, Lord. Open our eyes to what you would have us see. By your Spirit, Lord, we ask that you soften our hearts, and may the words of this book, these truths, be implanted deeply within us. Oh, Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight. Oh, Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

So, I'd like to begin this morning by asking you to reflect on a time when you felt like you had to make a difficult decision, a difficult choice, and I mean a truly difficult one. Not say the choice between right and wrong when faced with temptation. After all, in those situations, we know what we ought to do, right? We just choose to ignore it when we give in. No, what I'm asking you to reflect on is a time when you felt like you had to make a difficult choice between, say, two good or reasonable things, and it was a choice that was made all the more difficult because your decision carried real import for you. It was one that would affect your sense of being and your future, and one that would reveal the depth of your understanding of a given situation, and perhaps even reveal your deepest loyalties. I imagine that many, if not most, of us have experienced this at some time or another, whether it was a choice about where to live, or which job to take, or whatever it may have been. And what we long for in these situations, I think, is clarity. We want someone with wisdom and authority to swoop in and say, "hey, let me take this off of you. Here's what you need to choose." Well, in our passage this morning, the audience of the book of Hebrews seems to have been experiencing something like this. Only for them, it was a choice they felt they had to make between two people, Jesus or Moses.

So why was this the case? Well, let me share with you the way N.T. Wright frames up this situation, because I think it'll help us to understand what's going on here. Listen to what he says. He says, "the early Christians faced two equal and opposite pressures. On the one hand, traditional Judaism was quite clear that God had given Moses his law, and that this law was absolute and binding on God's people for all time. It was unalterable, inflexible, unchanging, uncompromising. If you took that line, then the best you could say about Jesus was that he was bringing some new insights into keeping the law. But Moses would remain the senior partner, and the law would continue to determine the shape of God's people. And that would mean that God's new age hadn't yet arrived. On the other hand, many early Christians were so excited to think that the new age had indeed arrived that they were eager to move as fast as they could in the opposite direction. They were with Jesus. Therefore, there was nothing good to say about Moses at all. Nothing good to say about the law, nothing good to say about Israel B.C., and hence they were in danger of cutting off the branch they were sitting on."

And you know, I think he's exactly right. And what we see the author doing in our passage this morning is entering into this situation with wisdom and with authority, so he can provide clarity for his readers. You see, he understood that this was actually a false dilemma. Jesus and Moses aren't on equal footing. It's not like their relative virtues are to be weighed in a sort of competition for our allegiance, not at all. What his readers needed to hear without any hesitation is that Jesus is supreme, full stop. But they also needed guidance in seeing Moses through the right lens, and so that's what he gives them. Almost as if he's saying, "look y'all, let me make something crystal clear. This decision you think you have to make between Jesus and Moses, it's a non-decision. It's a no-brainer. Jesus is the exalted son. He's the one who reigns supreme, and he's the one, the only one, who deserves your full praise and loyalty."

But guys, that doesn't mean Moses was insignificant. He had a key role to play in the service of God, and you can, in fact, you ought to appreciate him for who he was. Now, I imagine

that most of us here aren't wrestling today with the decision of whom we should choose, Jesus or Moses. And perhaps because of that, you might be wondering how the author's concerns here relate to your own walk with the Lord. But friends, I think we all know that even in our own lives, here and now, we're constantly pressured to choose things over Jesus in the pursuit of fulfillment and security. Whether it's money or prestige or power or comfort, you fill in the blank. And so I actually think what he says here is really important for us to hear. And in particular, I think he says three things that ought to fundamentally shape how we live as followers of Jesus. Number one, he tells us who we are in Christ. Number two, he clarifies who Jesus is and what he's accomplished, especially in relation to Moses. And number three, he calls us to respond faithfully to what we've heard. So let's turn to the first one.

How does he address who we are in Christ? Well, take a look at verse one. I want you to notice three things he says to his readers. He says that they're holy, that they're brothers and sisters, the words inclusive there, and that they're sharers in a heavenly calling. Now these three things, I think, are fundamental for us to understand. But in order for us to understand them correctly, we need to grasp why he says these things. Because they're not things that are true of all of us simply because we're human beings. And this is clear right from the beginning with the word he starts it with, therefore. You see that with that seemingly insignificant word, therefore, that we're so apt to rush past as we read. He's tying everything he's saying is true of them in this opening verse to what he's already said to them. And especially to what we just heard him say last week in verses 5 - 18 of chapter 2. And he's saying that these things are true because of what Jesus has done and only for those who have put their faith in him.

Think of it this way. Imagine we were having a conversation with the author and we asked him, why do you call us holy? What do you think he'd say? Well, I think he might point us back to verse 17 and remind us that although in and of ourselves we are unholy because we all have a sin problem, Jesus came as our high priest. He offered his own blood in place of ours through his death on the cross. And he's made forgiveness of sins and true holiness before a holy God the present reality for all those who put their trust in him. This is why I call you holy. If we were to ask him, "why do you call us brothers?" What then? I think he might turn our attention back to verses 12-13 and 16-17 and remind us that part of the reason Jesus came was to gather the true and promised family of God, Abraham's children. And that as he humbled himself, being made like us, his brothers, as he says in every respect, in order to suffer in our place, not only has he knit all of us together who call upon his name as brothers and sisters in the family of God, but he himself has become our elder brother. Who's not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters in the presence of God. This is why I call you brothers.

And if we were to ask him, "why do you say we're sharers in a heavenly calling?" What then? I think he might ask us to consider once again what he'd said in verses 10 and 14 and 15. And he'd explained to us that we're sharers because the eternal son willingly shared our flesh and blood as the person of Jesus. And what's more, he shared our humanity, not only to destroy the devil's power and to turn our earthly slavish fears away from death and upward to the hope of heaven, but he also did this to fulfill the father's desire, which comes to us as a heavenly calling to follow Jesus so that he might bring us as sons and daughters into his own heavenly glory. Friends, this is why I say you're sharers in a heavenly calling. You see, these three things that the author says here in the opening of verse one are profoundly beautiful truths, but they're not things common to all of us simply because we're human. No, they're rooted in the person and work of Jesus, and they're addressed to all those who recognize him

for who he is and who have put their faith in him. These beautiful things are our identity in him. And for the writer of Hebrews, as he prepares to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus in the following verses, it's vital at the outset that we hear and embrace this identity, but that we do so in connection with Jesus and no other.

The second thing I want us to see this morning is that the author clarifies who Jesus is and what he's done, and he does this in some pretty specific ways. So what does he say? Well, he basically says three things. He says in verse one that Jesus is both the apostle and the high priest of our confession, and in verse six he says that Jesus is a faithful son over God's house. Now there's a lot here that we could try to unpack, but we've already touched a bit on Jesus's priesthood, and since that's going to become a major focus of the author later in the book anyway, we'll leave that for a moment. Instead, I want us to focus our attention on Jesus's apostleship and his faithfulness. What does the author tell us here about who Jesus is and what he's done, and what does it have to do with Moses? Well, it might surprise you to hear Jesus referred to as an apostle, and that makes sense. After all, this is the only time in the New Testament that he's referred to in this way. We're used to hearing people like Matthew or Paul called apostles, right? But not Jesus. But in calling, Jesus an apostle. What the author's doing here is simply acknowledging that Jesus was sent by the Father for a specific purpose and with his authority. That's basically what the word apostle means.

But there's a wrinkle here. You see, from a Jewish perspective, this is something that could also be said of Moses. In fact, within Judaism, he's arguably the supreme model of apostleship. After all, listen to what we read in the account of Moses's call at the burning bush in Exodus 3. Moses says to God, "if I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'the God of your fathers has sent me to you', and they ask me 'what's his name', what shall I say to them? God said to Moses, 'I AM who I AM. And he said, say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" You see, in a very real sense, both Jesus and Moses had been sent by God for specific purposes and with his authority. And because of this, it seems that there was confusion and perhaps debate too within the community the author's addressing regarding who was worthy of their devotion.

And so what we see the author doing here and introducing Jesus as our apostle is he's setting up this comparison between these two men, these two sent men, Jesus and Moses, so that he can clarify their respective roles and ultimately exalt Jesus as supreme. And he does this by leaning into the imagery of a house, and he does it in two primary ways. First, in verse three, basically he says, Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses because he's the builder of the house. And by house here, he simply means the people of God. Jesus is more worthy than Moses. Of course, Moses wasn't the builder of the house. He's only a part of the house. And as everyone knows, the builder ought to receive more honor than the house itself. This is just common sense, right? But what's especially striking to me is what the author says in verse four, which our ESV sets off as a parenthesis. He says, "for every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God." And this is striking to me because he's already introduced Jesus to us in the opening of the book, in verse three, as the one through whom the Father had created the world. In other words, here the author's leading us in this seemingly inconsequential parenthesis to make a connection between Jesus the builder and God the Father the builder, as if to say, look y'all, it's obvious Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses. He's the supreme builder. He's God himself.

There's a second way the author leans into this imagery of a house, and it comes in verses five and six. And his argument is basically this. Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses

because he's the son over the house. Moses, on the other hand, was only a servant in the house. In other words, he's saying there's no comparison. As the son, the house is Jesus's. He owns it. And that's not to say that Moses was insignificant. Not at all. The author here affirms that he was faithful in his calling, but his calling was to be a servant, to testify, as he says, to the things that were to be spoken later. And this is simply to say that Moses's role as a servant in the house was that of a prophet, pointing us, particularly through what he'd written in the Old Testament, to the coming of the son, the owner of the house. And in this important yet limited role, he was indeed faithful. Jesus said as much when he said in John 5:46, "for if you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me."

But he isn't worthy of our praise and our faith. Only the son is. Well, as we come to a close this morning, I want to briefly draw your attention to the third thing the author says to us this morning. It's basically a call to respond, and it comes in the second half of verse six, right on the heels of all this house imagery. Notice what he says there. He says, "and we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and are boasting in our hope." Friends, did you catch that? He says, "we are his house." It's a beautiful statement, isn't it? And I wonder if it surprises some of you that I didn't touch on this verse when we were reflecting on what the author said about our identity. After all, he says right here that we're his house. That's who we are. And of course, that's absolutely right, and I believe it wholeheartedly. But that's not all he says, is it? He follows it with an if, which introduces the response he's seeking to elicit from us, that we hold fast. And you know, when we hear a statement about our identity in Jesus, like this one, followed by an if, it can be pretty unsettling, can't it? And it can throw all the beautiful things we've just heard about who we are and what Jesus has done for us into question. And I wouldn't be surprised if some of you are wrestling with doubts as we read this verse even now. There are two things that I'd like to say about this.

First, I want us to recognize that the author gives a warning here that he wants us to take seriously. In fact, we're going to hear him issue similar warnings throughout the book. And what he's basically warning us about in all of them is the danger, as he's mentioned before, of drifting away from Jesus. And really, I think he's warning us of the danger of false religion, a religion that doesn't see Jesus for who he is, but instead simply uses Jesus, kind of like a fire insurance salesman, someone we meet with once, who gives us peace of mind, but someone whom we never see or speak to or think about again. And friends, the author's point here is that this false religion, this self-centered and fleeting use of Jesus, this cannot be true of those who are his house. Sigurd Grinheim, he puts it this way. He says, "our status is not a one-time gift that is valid, even if it is forgotten." But friends, there's a second thing I want to say to you, which is equally important, and it's this. We misunderstand the author's point here if we think he's saying that our identity in Jesus is the result of our performance or our perfect faith.

You see, I think it's all too common for us to hear a verse like this, only to fall into a sort of, I've said it a bunch, but a sort of solo bootstrappa understanding of Christianity, a Christianity in which our identity and our security in Jesus are entirely dependent upon our own efforts. But friends, this understanding of Christianity is a misunderstanding, and it only leads us to despair because of our own weakness and failures or to intolerable legalism and self-righteousness. And it's not the author's point. And you know, I love how Amy Peeler clarifies his point here with compassion and with wisdom. She says, "it's not wrong to be frustrated or weary. That's not what he's getting at. It's not wrong to be frustrated or weary, nor to take honest questions and laments to God, all of which this community under fire was likely engaged in. The opposite of holding fast is to deliberately walk away."

And so friends, the author here isn't calling us to double down on our efforts. He's calling us, as he says in verse one, to consider Jesus the apostle and high priest of our confession. He's calling us to depend not on our own faithfulness when we experience temptation or suffering or doubt, but on his faithfulness as the builder and son over the house. Friends, he's calling us moment by moment to hold fast to Jesus, to the one who alone is the very source of our confidence and our boasting and hope in whom we have, as the apostle Paul says in Ephesians 3:12, boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. I think it was the hymn writer Edward Moat who said, "my hope is built on nothing else than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name." Brothers and sisters, may the words of this beloved hymn be true of all of us as we hold fast to Jesus.

Let's pray.

Oh Father, thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord, for your mercy and your grace. Oh Father, we ask that you will fix our eyes on Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, the faithful son whose house we are. May our eyes be fixed on him, Lord, by your spirit. And we ask this in his precious name. Amen.