

Hebrews 3:1-6
Numbers 12
Psalm 133

“Moses and Jesus”

January 24, 2021

Wouldn't it be nice if God always revealed who was right and who was wrong?
Okay, whoever is wrong, *you've got leprosy!!*

Given how often I have been wrong,
I would have spent my whole life outside the camp.

But God doesn't do this very often, because he knows that it would not help *us*
to do justice, to love mercy, or to walk humbly with our God.

In certain ways this story turns our modern notions of race upside down.

Moses has married a Cushite woman.

Cush is the region of modern Ethiopia and Sudan –
so Moses's wife is a black woman.

There are several Cushites in the OT – and there is an Ethiopian eunuch in the NT –
but the modern notion of “race” didn't really exist back then.

Cushites are not considered a separate “race” any more than the Edomites –
and the Edomites were descended from Jacob's brother Esau.

Every tribe and language has value in the kingdom of Jesus.

Now, that doesn't mean that they didn't notice skin color.

(There is the verse in Jeremiah 13 about how the Ethiopian cannot change his skin).

But there is no prejudice *against* a certain color –
well, except one: white.

When Miriam's skin turns leprous, it is said to be “like snow.”

You can be black skinned, brown skinned, pale skinned, pink skinned –
or anything else – but if you are *white* skinned,
get them out of the camp!

And yet, for some reason, people nowadays say that Europeans are “whites.”

But also notice that in God's dealings – there is mercy for the one who is excluded.

Miriam is excluded for seven days –

but then she is restored (on the eighth day – as Lev. 13 required).

There is an exclusion from the camp because of her shame –
but then there is also a restoration.

Some have also wondered about Aaron – why did he not get leprosy?

Simply put, it would appear that *Miriam* was the ringleader of this rebellion.
She is named first – which is rare for a woman when she is paired with a man.
And Aaron does not get off scot-free.
As high priest he is charged with bearing the sins of the people.

We sing of this in Psalm 133 – how the precious oil upon the beard of Aaron
symbolizes and reflects the unity of the people of God.

If that was true for Aaron in his weakness and frailty –
how much more is that true in the humility and suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Sing Psalm 133
Read Hebrews 3

Introduction: “Holy Brothers”

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling,

Do you hear that?!
Listen to how Hebrews addresses you!

"Holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling."

In chapter 2, we just heard how the Son became like us –
“since the children share in flesh and blood,
he himself likewise partook of the same things,”
In order to help the children of Abraham –
“he had to be made like his brothers in every respect...”
so that he might bring many sons to God.

He has just spoken of how Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers,
and so now he speaks to you and says-
"You are those holy brothers that Jesus came to deliver."

You share in that heavenly calling.

The message that you heard has called you out of darkness into light.
God has spoken not just through prophets and angels,
but now in these last days has spoken in his Son.

And because Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father –
and because he has united *you* to himself –
therefore, you share his heavenly calling!

So – as Hebrews says:

consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession,

And here – this word translated “consider” –
means *think carefully about this*.

Pay attention to this!

In chapter 2 he started by saying *hold fast* to the message.

Now he is saying – and *think carefully* about the message that you are holding fast to!

Consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.

Hebrews is concerned that you might drift away.

The temptation that he's dealing with here is especially the danger
of drifting back towards Judaism, back to Moses,
but it applies to any lure that draws you away from Christ.

Hebrews reminds us that God has subjected everything under the Son's feet.

We don't see everything under his feet –

we see a world that seems very much out of control:
a virus that keeps spreading – and mutating;
a political world that has lost any real sense of truth or honor;
and for that matter, the church doesn't seem to be much different from the world!

But how are things different – really – than they were in the early church?!

In the second century, smallpox ravaged the Roman empire.

And as for political instability – at one point there were 26 emperors in a 50 year stretch!

And even the apostles comment on how divided the church was!

That's why Hebrews admits – we do *not* see everything in subjection to him!

But we see Jesus.

We see *him*, crowned with glory and honor *because of the suffering of death*.

The kingdom of God does not come through the power and majesty of human conquests,

but through weakness – through the foolishness of the cross –

through the foolishness of the message that has been preached to you.

We see Jesus, the one who partook of our weakness – our flesh and blood –

so that we might partake of his glory.

So when Hebrews calls you to hold fast your confidence and your boasting in your hope,

he is reminding you to hold fast to Jesus.
When *you face* temptation and trial,
consider *him*.

We are starting the second major section of Hebrews, chapters 3:1-5:10,
and the focus is on the priestly character of the Son of God.
As we saw last time, Hebrews 2:17 sets forth the themes of chapters 3-5
first, Christ the faithful high priest (3:1-4:14),
and second, Christ the merciful high priest (4:15-5:10).

The first section is bracketed by 3:1 and 4:14:
Jesus is the apostle and high priest of our confession (3:1)
4:14 then echoes this language by again calling Jesus "a great high priest"
therefore let us hold fast our confession (4:14).

I mentioned a couple weeks ago that whenever the name of Jesus is used in Hebrews,
the grammar gets wonky.

It's not bad grammar – on the contrary, it is very elaborate grammar –
as if to point out *this is important!!*

“Consider the apostle and high priest of our confession, Jesus,”

The connection between "apostle" and "high priest" is particularly interesting.
An apostle is an official who is sent to speak on behalf of the king.
(Ambassador might be the best English word)
When the apostle speaks, you hear the very words of the king.

Jewish tradition referred to Moses as an "apostle"--
one sent by God to speak his word.

It also spoke of the high priest as an apostle on behalf of the people –
one who represented God to the people on the Day of Atonement.

As apostle, Jesus is the one who has spoken the Word of God (1:4, 2:3);
as high priest he is the one who brings the sacrifice to deal with sin.

In Jesus we have the ministry of both Word and sacrament.
The book of the covenant and the blood of the covenant always go together.

In Exodus 24 Moses reads the book of the covenant (the Law of God),
and through the sacrifice sprinkles the blood of the covenant,
before the elders gather for the covenant meal.

Think about how the book of the covenant and the blood of the covenant are related.

What does the book of the covenant do by itself?

In Exodus 20, God had proclaimed the book of the covenant – the Law –
and what happened?

Everyone fell on their faces and said, “Aahh – we’re all going to die!!”

When God says “do this and you shall live” –
the result is that we all die!

Because the *book of the covenant* is powerless without the blood of the covenant.

In Exodus 24 that was the sacrifices –

but Jesus says in Matthew 26:28, “this is my blood of the covenant,
which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Without the blood of the covenant, the book of covenant condemns us!

The cross is what gives the Word power: “we preach Christ crucified.”

But at the same time,

the blood of the covenant is meaningless without the book of the covenant.
 (“faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God”)

What is a “high priest”?

What is a “sacrifice”?

How could the death of Jesus be said to be “tasting death for everyone”?

This is why we need the *word* – the book of the covenant!

The Word gives meaning to the sacrifice;
just as the sacrifice gives power to the Word.

1. The Faithful Son and the Faithful Servant

The theme of chapters 3 and 4 is that the faithfulness of Jesus
should characterize our lives as well.

The words for faith/belief/unbelief/faithfulness are used 8 times in these 33 verses,
each time at the very heart of the exhortation.

And it starts here in the comparison between Jesus and Moses.

Jesus is said to be “faithful” (v2 and v6) – as also Moses was “faithful” (v2 and v5).

² *who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house.*

³ *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.)*

Hebrews has established that the Son is superior to the angels.
Now he turns to Moses.

Moses, of course, was the greatest of the prophets.
He was the great covenant mediator of the OT.

He was God's agent of the greatest act of redemption in the history of the world
(up to that time).

a) Moses-the faithful servant *in the House* (Numbers 12) (v5)

⁵ *Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later,*

And Hebrews says that Jesus was faithful to him who appointed him,
"just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house."

Hebrews could have said, "Moses failed."

Remember how Moses struck the rock?

Remember how God judged Moses by forbidding him to enter the land?

But he doesn't.

He doesn't want to compare Jesus to Moses *at his worst*.

He wants to compare Jesus to Moses *at his best!*

So he points out that Moses was faithful in all God's house.

This is a quote from Numbers 12.

In Numbers 12, Aaron and Miriam rebel against Moses.

In other words, the high priest and his sister rebel against God's prophet.

God strikes Miriam with leprosy, and it is only after Moses intercedes for her
that God restores her.

But in this context God declares of Moses, that he is unique among prophets.

God speaks to Moses "mouth to mouth"

Moses alone has seen "the form of God"

No other prophet is ever given such direct access to God.

In other words, you don't get any more faithful than Moses.

Nowhere in Hebrews are Moses' failures ever mentioned.

Because Moses' failures are irrelevant to the point.

Moses, whose face reflected the glory of Yahweh,

Moses, who alone was permitted to speak mouth to mouth with God Almighty,

Moses, who was God's agent and apostle of the great redemption from Egypt,
was but a servant in the house.

He was a faithful servant – he was the greatest servant-
but he was a servant.

And a servant is but a member of the household.

And in his service, Moses faithfully testified to the things that were to be spoken later.
Moses, the faithful servant, is also the faithful witness.

The whole of the Law testifies to the things that were to be spoken later;
(Jesus speaks of the Law and the Prophets and the Writings testifying of him);
but especially in Dt 18 Moses said that there was another prophet coming,
a prophet who would be greater than him –
who would speak the Word of God to the people.
So Moses is the faithful servant – the faithful witness.

b) Jesus-the faithful Son *over* the House (v6a)

⁶but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son.

But Jesus is the faithful Son.

He is not merely a servant in the house,
but a Son over the 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."

Moses face shone with the reflected glory of God –
a glory that was fading.

But Jesus' face shines with a glory that comes from within.

His is not a reflected glory –
he is the radiance of God's glory –
both because of the glory that he shared with the Father in the beginning
but especially because of the suffering of death

He shares in the glory of God both because of his eternal sonship,
and because of his inherited sonship.

He is one with the Father because he is the eternal Son –
he is one with us because he is the incarnate Son –
and as the exalted Son he joins us to the Father!

Hebrews is rightly viewed as the most thorough exposition of the high priestly work of Christ.
But notice how thoroughly this high priestly work
is grounded in his identity as the Son of God.

Jesus is the apostle and high priest of our confession.

Why?

Because he is the faithful Son.

Adam was created as the son of God.

He was supposed to live as a faithful reflection of his Father's glory,
but he did not.

And throughout the scriptures,

the plan of redemption is always geared around the theme of sonship.

Abraham is promised an inheritance.

Israel is called "my son, my firstborn"

God promises to make David's son his own son.

All of the covenants in the Bible are grounded in this filial relationship,

because covenant is the historical reflection

of the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son.

In every covenant, man is brought into an inheritance through conformity to the image of God.

(Incidentally, this is why I still use the language of "son" in my preaching.

I try to make sure that I connect it to "sons and daughters" –

because scripture is abundantly clear that women *and* men
both share in this *sonship* –

but if we are going to *listen* to what God is saying to us –

we need to hear *why* this story is gendered the way it is!)

Jesus is the Son who receives the promised inheritance.

Remember 1:4 –

Jesus has inherited a name more excellent than the angels.

He is the one who has entered God's rest,

and all things have been subjected under his feet.

He has received the inheritance that was promised to Abraham, to Israel, and to David.

Christ is faithful over God's house as a son.

The reference to a faithful Son over God's house also alludes to 1 Chronicles 17:14

where God tells David that his son will be "faithful in my house,"

as well as God's word to Samuel that there would be a faithful high priest
who would have a faithful house. (1 Sam 2:35)

Jesus is the faithful Son of David.

Jesus is the faithful high priest who establishes God's faithful house.

2. We Are God's House (v6b)

And we are his house,

But what is God's house?

You are.

The word "house" can mean either a physical house, or the "household."
And Hebrews is playing off this double meaning.

Verse 4 should not really be in parentheses.

The argument runs quite neatly:

Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses in the same way
that God has more honor than the universe he created.

Just as God has built all things (through the Son-1:2),
so also Jesus Christ has built God house.

God created the heavens and the earth as a house where he could dwell with his people.

In Exodus we hear how the tabernacle was designed
as the place where God would meet with his people.

But the purpose of the tabernacle was to point ahead to the day
when God would tabernacle in the flesh –
when the veil between God and man would be torn asunder.

And Jesus is the one who has built this house.

God built the house of creation (through the Son);
Moses built a replica (a scale model, as it were) of the Son's house;
but only the Son has built the house where God and man can dwell together.

And we are that house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

You are God's house.

And this has a twofold sense:

you are the *household* – those who dwell in the house;

but also you are the house –

you are the structure in which God has chosen to dwell

This building is not God's *house*.

God does not dwell in this building in any special way.

But you are the "structure" in which God dwells.

3. If We Hold Fast Our Confidence (v6c)

if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope

We can't gloss over the "if."

Because "if" you do not hold fast to Christ,
then you are not God's house.

Perseverance in faith and hope is part of what it means to be God's house.
And Hebrews knows that you need perseverance.
You need to hold fast.

Because you do face trials!

There is no route to glory except the same path that Jesus trod –
the path of tribulation and suffering.

In this world you will have tribulation,
but take heart, Jesus says, "I have overcome the world."

John speaks of 3 kinds of temptations:

the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. (1 Jn 2:16)

The lusts of the flesh refers to bodily desires – such as sex, food, or drink.

We're probably only aware of sexual and alcoholic temptations today.

Gluttony is now prized as a virtue.

Truly, food and drink (and sex) are gifts from God,
but I fear that our pursuit of "creature comforts"
very often drives us more than it should.

Do not hold so tightly to your delicacies and luxuries.

Hold fast to Jesus Christ – the true bread from heaven,
and our glorious bridegroom.

The lust of the eyes refers to man's autonomous quest for knowledge –
idle curiosity and vain speculation.

Knowledge can be an idol.

It, too, can wear the cloak of propriety-

"God gave us minds, so we should use them!"

Indeed, you should.

And so Paul says, "I want to know Christ!"

and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings!

In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

You may stuff your brains with all the knowledge of this age,

but it will only draw you away from the knowledge of Christ,
unless you hold fast to him.

The pride of life then refers to our quest for status and honor –
the desire to be in control.

Do you understand the folly of this quest?

What higher honor is there than to be God's house?
What calling is more desirable than to be Christ's brothers?

And yet you cannot be content in that calling!?

Hold fast to Christ!

Your boasting is not in your honor and glory,
but in Christ's honor and glory.

In the midst of temptation and trial,
hold fast to your hope,
because Jesus himself has suffered when tempted,
and he is able to help those who are being tempted.

How?

By building you into a house—a dwelling place for God.

One final thing.

This exhortation is addressed to "us" (plural).

"We" are his house.

Verse 13 will go on to make this explicit:

we are called to watch out for one another and exhort one another "daily."

We are not a bunch of different houses.

We are one house.