

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

Message #6

Hebrews 3:1-19

More and more as we journey through this book of Hebrews, we see that when it comes to our inheritance, a good beginning is not everything, but a good ending is! If we want to be honored and rewarded, we must finish the course and finish it right.

In Zechariah 3:7 we read these words, “Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘If you will walk in My ways, and if you will perform My service, then you will also govern My house and also have charge of My courts, and I will grant you free access among those who are standing here.’” Now in Zechariah 3:6, the one who is speaking is “the Angel of the LORD,” who is none other than Jesus Christ in His preincarnate state. **The prophetic promise is that faithfulness will mean some very special privileges when Jesus Christ reigns on this earth.** When Jesus Christ reigns on this earth it will be from Jerusalem. The Promised Land will be a literal physical place of the presence of God, and this will be the place one will want to be. You won’t want to be stuck in Michigan or Florida or Arizona when Jesus Christ is reigning in Jerusalem. Every believer will want to be in the land of blessing.

This text in Hebrews says it is possible to forfeit this privilege. It is possible for believers to become hardened and sinful to the point that they end up missing all of the blessings they could have had if they had remained faithful.

IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT JESUS CHRIST IS OUR HIGH PRIEST, WE MUST MAKE CERTAIN THAT WE KEEP OUR FOCUS ON HIM AND THAT WE DO NOT HARDEN OUR HEARTS IN UNBELIEF AND SIN BECAUSE THERE ARE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES AT STAKE.

God wants us pliable to the Holy Spirit. He wants us sensitive to sin. He wants us to realize that Jesus Christ should be the superior focus of our Christian lives. He deserves that focus.

In **verse 1** of the third chapter, the writer says that the High Priestly work of Jesus Christ on our behalf means we are “holy brethren” and “partakers of a heavenly calling.” Jesus Christ made us holy brethren and Jesus Christ made us partakers of heavenly things. **This is more than just a call from heaven to go to heaven; it is a call to live out a heavenly existence on this earth.**

In view of that there are two main admonitions:

ADMONITION #1 – The admonition to consider Jesus Christ. **3:1-6**

The first admonition calls believers to consider certain things about Jesus Christ. There are a couple of grammatical things to see in **verse 1**. **First** the word “consider” (κατανοεω) is a strong word that means to carefully perceive and take notice of Jesus Christ (Smith, p. 236). The aorist tense of the verb means God wants us to take a moment, a point in time to specifically consider Jesus Christ.

Second, the word “partaker” is critical to this book of Hebrews. This is a key word that shows up in Hebrews and it is the word “metochoi” (μετοχοι) (1:9; 3:1; 3:14; 6:4; 12:8). This word refers to one who is a partner or associate in partaking and sharing in the kingdom business of Jesus Christ (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 289). As one writer says this refers to a “real spiritual kinship” through Christ and with Christ (Ben Witherington III, *Hebrews*, p. 166).

This has some profound ramifications because from **verse 6** and **verse 14**, we learn that “if we hold firmly to our faith until the end,” we will actually share as a partner in wonderful Kingdom rights when He establishes His Messianic reign on this earth. We will actually have a share of His Kingdom reign. But these same passages also make it clear that we can throw this partnership away.

So God wants His holy brothers and His partners taking a moment to think very perceptively about the superiority of Jesus Christ.

These believers were in danger of turning from the grace found in Jesus Christ back to O.T ritualism and Judaistic legalism.

There are three areas of superiority that God wants us to carefully consider:

Area of Superiority #1 - Consider the superiority of Jesus Christ in our confession . **3:1**

There are two places in this book of Hebrews where the believer is challenged to “hold fast” to their confession of faith (4:14; 10:23). The word “confession” means to say the same thing. The point is, we are to hold fast to the fact that Jesus Christ is our superior God, our superior Savior, and our superior mediator. We are to hold fast to exactly what the Word of God says about Jesus Christ. So far in the book of Hebrews Jesus Christ has been called God’s Son (1:2); God (1:8); Lord (1:10); and High Priest (2:17). Now two more titles come into the composition of Hebrews, and we are to seriously think about them. When you find yourself struggling, fix your mind on Jesus Christ, who He is and what He did.

Jesus Christ is both the Apostle and the High Priest of our confession. The term apostle refers to one sent by God. Here is the only place in Scripture where Christ is called Apostle. God had other apostles, but no other Person was “the Apostle and the High Priest” at the same time.

What that means is that Jesus Christ was the Apostle; that is the One sent from God the Father to reveal God to man, and He also is our High Priest sent from God to represent man to God. Jesus Christ has been sent by God the Father to this earth in order that humanity might have access to God.

There is no other Person about whom we can make this confession. If we put this confession in the context of Hebrews, we are to hold fast to the fact that Jesus Christ, who is God and who is higher than any angelic being, came into this world to give us a great salvation as our Apostle and our High Priest.

Area of Superiority #2 - Jesus Christ is superior to Moses in His calling. 3:2-4

After it was proven that Jesus Christ was far superior to angels, the next topic the writer proves is that Jesus Christ was far superior to Moses.

Now Moses was a faithful man of God and a revered man of God, especially for Israel. In fact, if you were to ask many Jews today who is more important Moses or Jesus Christ, many would choose Moses.

There is no question that Moses was a great man of God. In fact, much will be said about him in the faith chapter of Hebrews 11:23-29.

- 1) Moses was divinely chosen by God (Exodus 2:1-10).
- 2) Moses was a national deliverer performing amazing demonstrations of the power of God (Exodus 7-14).
- 3) Moses was Israel's greatest prophet in that God spoke face to face to Him (Numbers 12:6-8).
- 4) Moses was the one who gave the O.T. law, including the famous Ten Commandments.
- 5) Moses was Israel's greatest historian (Genesis-Deuteronomy).
- 6) Moses was the most humble man on earth (Numbers 12:3).
- 7) **Moses was not a perfect man; in fact, he failed and didn't get to enter the Promised Land** (Numbers 20:8-12; Deuteronomy 1:37; 3:26; 4:21; 34:4).

He was chosen by God and He was faithful to the appointments of God, **but as good a man as Moses was, compared to Jesus Christ, Moses doesn't compare. Moses was faithful in everything God called him to do, but Moses doesn't even begin to compare to Jesus Christ, who perfectly finished the whole plan of God and then went back to Glory.**

Jesus Christ is worthy of more glory than Moses because Moses was part of God's work, Jesus Christ was the builder of God's work. Jesus Christ was so much more worthy of glory in what He did as much as a builder of a house gets the honor and glory way above the house.

This text does not read, consider Moses, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. The admonition is to consider One far greater than Moses, Jesus Christ. God wants our focus on Jesus Christ, not Moses. He wants our focus on grace, not law.

Area of Superiority #3 - Jesus Christ is superior to Moses in His Person. 3:5-6

Moses was a faithful servant in God's house; Jesus Christ was a faithful Son over God's house.

There is a huge difference between being a servant in a house and being a son in the house. Ray Stedman one time visited a ranch in Montana as a friend of one of the ranch hands. He stayed in the bunkhouse and helped his friend do some ranch chores the next day. Years later he went back to the same house as a friend of the son of the owner of the ranch. He said what a difference. He stayed in the palatial ranch house and had access to everything in the main house. He said that taught him there was a huge difference between a servant and a son.

The “house” imagery is used six times in **verses 3-6 (3, 3, 4, 5, 6, 6)**. This particular word “house” (οἶκος) can refer to God’s place of worship or God’s people (Smith, p. 313). In the O.T., the tabernacle is called “the house of God” some six times and the Temple is called the house of God some 43 times (*Ibid.*, p. 48).

The Mosaic reference comes in **Hebrews 3:2-5** from Numbers 12:7-8 and it is a reference to the tabernacle that was constructed by Moses and the Divine directions which were to be followed for worship. God said to Miriam and Aaron (Numbers 12:7-8) that He actually communicated to Moses in a way superior to the prophets, face to face, as opposed to visions and dreams. Moses listened to the assignment and followed directions of the Builder. Compared to the prophets, Moses was very high ranked; but in comparison to Jesus Christ, he doesn’t come close.

The Builder was none other than Jesus Christ. **Jesus Christ wasn’t just the Servant of God, He was the Son of God.** Jesus Christ came as a faithful Son, not just over a building of worship but over all the people of worship. It is clearly stated in **verse 6** that **we** are the house of God, if we hold fast to our confidence and boast in Jesus Christ to the end. **Notice what we are to hold fast to, our confession and confidence and our hope that is found in Jesus Christ, not the Mosaic Law and not our works. The true house of God will hold fast to Jesus Christ as their only hope. They will realize the superiority of Jesus Christ.**

We are introduced to a **third class conditional “if” clause**, which is the clause of future probability. This particular grammatical construction indicative mood in apodosis (independent clause) and εἰ plus the subjunctive mood in the protasis (the dependant clause) **means that this is what will probably happen in the future.**

The point of the “if” clause is this - if the believer holds fast to Jesus Christ as his confidence and hope rather than reverting back to Moses and the law and works, he belongs to the character and quality (anarthrous construction) of the house of God and will share as a partner in the house of God when He reigns on this earth. I take this to mean there will be a literal sharing in the house of God.

However, if the believer does not hold fast to Jesus Christ as his confidence and hope and reverts back to law and works, he will not be seen as being part of the (anarthrous construction) house of God and will forfeit His partnership share in His actual house when He reigns on this earth.

Moses was a great servant of God, but He was not the Son of God.

Jesus Christ is much more worthy of our believing in Him and following Him than even following Moses. God wanted the Hebrews to carefully consider Jesus Christ specifically in a comparison with Moses and realize Jesus Christ is far superior to anything Moses is or did.

ADMONISHMENT #2 – The admonishment to not harden our hearts against God and His Word. **3:7-19**

Hebrews 3:7-11 is a quote from Psalm 95:7-11. In that Psalm, God is warning His people not to stop worshipping Him and trusting Him. The danger for Israel was that she would relapse and want to go back to Egypt in their hearts. In **verse 10**, we see that this made God angry. Two things really made Him angry: 1) She continually was going astray from Him in their hearts: 2) She refused to learn the ways of God from the Word of God.

Now God takes this principle and aims it straight at a New Testament believer. **It is very certain that this is a warning to believers that does have consequences.** The danger for the N.T. believer is not a relapse back into Egypt, but a relapse that wants to go back into the world in their hearts (Ephesians 4:17).

It takes a lot to get God angry. God's anger is not quickly aroused. He offers plenty of time for grace and plenty of time for repentance and transformation and restoration. But there can come a time when God says you have crossed the line and I am angry, and when that happens it is serious business.

To make the analogy, Hebrews uses an illustration from O.T. Israel. It is an illustration of the classic failure of the believers to not measure up and develop. Israel's unbelief led to their 40 years of wandering in a wilderness and to a loss of Promised Land blessings that continue to this very day.

In verse 12, the writer takes this illustration and aims it straight at N.T. believers which he calls "brethren". Furthermore, in **verse 14** he uses the pronoun "we" and says they have become "partakers" of Christ. This is not language that relates to nonbelievers. The idea that this is addressed to false professors of faith rather than true possessors of faith is not found in this text and cannot be grammatically defended.

The warning here is that every single believer needs to carefully watch his own heart and make certain to guard against a hard, unbelieving, sinful heart that turns away from God and His Word.

According to **verse 13**, believers need to be reminded and encouraged day after day not to be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Sin can lure you away from God very quickly. There is a dangerous deceptiveness to it. Sin can deceptively harden your heart to the point that it lessens your will. There is a dangerous deceptiveness to sin and one of the responsibilities we have at church is to encourage and challenge one another about this "day after day." Why? Because the lure of the deceptiveness of sin is a day by day lure. You may get through one day, but you have no guarantee that you'll get through the next day.

Verses 16-17 warn us that we do not want to do things that will provoke God to become angry. We do not want to harden our hearts in sin and unbelief because we can so anger God that the consequence would be that we would lose the Kingdom partnership we could have had.

It is quite evident from reading these verses that the issue at stake is the issue of not entering a place known to God to be His rest (3:11, 18-19; 4:1, 3, 5, 10, 11). Multiple times God refers to this as “My rest” or “His rest” (3:11, 18; 4:1, 3, 5, 10). The real issue of consequence would be a non-entrance into God’s rest place.

In the book of Hebrews there are at least three places of God’s rest which are mentioned:

- 1) There is God’s seventh day rest in which God rested from all of His works - Heb. 4:4, 9-11. In regard to the N.T. believer, this is a salvation rest in which we cease from trying to work our way to God and trust totally and only in Jesus Christ; we realize our works do not save us, God’s work saves us and by faith we are saved.
- 2) There is Israel’s forfeited rest place - Israel should have lived in the Promised Land enjoying the blessings of God - **Heb. 3:11**.

For Israel, what this meant is that the generation who should have entered the Promised Land and should have enjoyed the blessings of God, were permanently excluded from doing so. The consequence for their unbelief and sin was that they were excluded from the land blessings that should have been theirs. For the N.T. believer, this would be the loss of a present Christian life in a close relationship with Jesus Christ that is peaceful and blessed.

- 3) There is a future Kingdom rest place, in which one is in the land and actually sharing and enjoying the blessings of God for faithfulness when Jesus Christ reigns - Heb. 4:1.

Of course, the real question for us is, what does it mean as a New Testament believer? What could we forfeit if we persisted in a hardness of heart that was given to unbelief and sin?

What exactly could the believer forfeit through hard-hearted sinfulness and disobedience?

The answer is inheritance rights in the millennial Kingdom. You cannot forfeit justification, but you can forfeit your inheritance rights to reign and rule with Jesus Christ.

This point is seen time and time again in Scripture (Colossians 3:23; II Timothy 2:12; Revelation 2:26; 3:21). One text in Hebrews that makes this point very clear is Hebrews 12:15-17. W. H. Griffith Thomas said you cannot ever lose your salvation, but you can lose your spiritual blessings and confidence (*Let Us Go On*, p. 45). We add you also can lose a great inheritance.

When Jesus Christ reigns on earth, entering the Kingdom and living in the Kingdom is a guarantee for every believer, but sharing in the ownership of the Kingdom and partnership of the King and ruling in the Kingdom can be lost through hard-hearted sin and rebellion.

The book of Hebrews says it is possible to go to church and look spiritual but have a hard heart. It is possible that a believer can have a heart that is hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, and that kind of heart can cost you an inheritance.