Jesus Christ, Greater than Moses
Scripture: Hebrews 3:1-6
Code: 1607

INTRODUCTION

A. The Addressees

The book of Hebrews was written to a community of Jewish people located outside the Jerusalem area. They had been evangelized by the apostles and prophets, and some had believed. Some were intellectually convinced but had never made the step of faith. Others had never been convinced. They had heard the gospel but had not responded to it. The letter to the Hebrews addresses all three groups, and in each context it is necessary to determine which group is being addressed to interpret the passage correctly.

1. Weak believers

Those who had received Christ were put out of the synagogue, ostracized from Jewish society, and persecuted relentlessly. Because of the persecution, their faith was very weak and they tended to hold on to the rituals of the Old Covenant. Paul exhorted a similar group in Galatia to "stand fast, therefore, in the liberty with which Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage [to the Old Covenant]" (Gal. 5:1). Although in the New Covenant there was freedom in Christ, they had not begun to experience it; they were still struggling with legalism. They were weaker brothers, like those Paul wrote of in Romans 14. The writer of Hebrews wanted to strengthen their faith and show them they could stop clinging to the outward rituals of the Old Covenant, because Christ is sufficient, and they have the New Covenant.

2. Intellectually convinced unbelievers

This group is warned to act on the truth they have heard, lest they fall away and never come to repentance. Because they knew the truth but willfully rejected it, the strong warning of Hebrews 10:29 is addressed to them: "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, with which he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

3. Unconvinced unbelievers

This group was not convinced of the truth of Christianity. The gospel is presented to them several times in the book of Hebrews.

B. The Announcement

The message to all three groups is the supremacy of Christ. The message to believers who are hanging on to the Old Covenant is that the New Covenant brought by Christ is superior. The message to intellectually convinced unbelievers is that Christ is sufficient. And the message to unconvinced unbelievers is Christ is supreme.

To prove that the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant, it is necessary to show that Christ is superior to all those connected with the Old Covenant. The writer of Hebrews proves that Jesus is superior to angels (chaps. 1-2), Moses (chap. 3), Joshua (chap. 4), the Aaronic priesthood (chap. 7), and the Old Testament sacrifices (chaps. 10-11). The theme of the book of Hebrews is summed up in Hebrews 3:1: consider Jesus. It is important for all men of all ages to consider Jesus. In chapter 3 the writer urges his readers to consider Jesus as he compares Him to Moses.

LESSON

To understand verses 1-6, which are the doctrinal foundation for the exhortation beginning in verse 7, we need to know something about Moses. If we're to understand why Jesus is better than Moses, we must know a little bit about who Moses was. The Jewish people held Moses in high esteem. In fact, he is the most highly regarded figure in their history. He was the man to whom God spoke face to face (Ex. 33:11). Moses saw the glory of God (Ex. 33:18-23), and the glow on his face reflected that fact (Ex. 34:30). He was the man God chose to lead Israel out of Egypt. But most significant of all to the Jewish people was that through Moses came the law. In fact, the law became so identified with Moses that it was commonly referred to as the law of Moses. The law was the heart of Jewish life; the Old Testament commandments and rituals were their highest priority. Paul mentions in Romans 2 that the Jews boasted in the law. Moses had not only given them the Ten Commandments but he had penned the entire Pentateuch. Some Jews believed that Moses was greater than the angels.

Moses had a remarkable life. The hand of God preserved him as a baby and dug his grave after his death. In between those two points in his life were numerous miracles. During the most memorable times of Israel's history it was Moses through whom God worked. It was Moses who lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. It was Moses who lead them through the wilderness. It was Moses who instructed them from the mouth of God. The whole Levitical system came through Moses. It was Moses who gave the plans for the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, and everything that went with it. As great as Moses was, however, the Holy Spirit in this section calls on us to gaze on Jesus who is

far greater than Moses.

The writer of Hebrews presents three areas in which Jesus is superior to Moses:

I. JESUS IS SUPERIOR IN HIS OFFICE (v. 1)

"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus."

A. The Terms

1. "wherefore"

That word indicates the writer is building on something he has said before this verse; it points backwards. We are to consider Jesus because of what he has just said about Him. In chapter 2 we read that Jesus was made lower than the angels (v. 9) and that He is the captain of our salvation (v. 10), the One who sanctifies us (v. 11), and the One who calls us His brethren (v. 12). Jesus destroyed Satan and death (v. 14), thus delivering us from bondage (v. 15). He is powerful, sympathetic, merciful, and faithful (vv. 16-18).

The writer of Hebrews is speaking to Jews who believed in Christ, but were still clinging to the outward forms of the Old Covenant. He urges them to focus on the absolute sufficiency of Jesus. They can drop the trappings and rituals of the Old Covenant; they are no longer needed. They have a new high priest sent from God. That was a very important message for them to hear.

Leaving the Past Behind

Most of us can't relate to the difficulties those Hebrew Christians faced in coming out of Judaism, and so find it difficult to understand why they were tempted to hang on to their old way of life. Even today it can be very difficult for a Jewish believer to make the break with Judaism. However, I think everyone finds it hard to let go of the idea that our works and our religious trappings are necessary to please God. And while Christians accept God's free grace in Christ, many tend to hang on to an artificial legalism rather than living the positive, Christ-controlled, Spirit-energized life. The statements of Christ's sufficiency shatter all legalistic efforts, whether those of first- century Judaism, or twentieth-century Protestantism.

2. "holy brethren"

Many people claim the entire book of Hebrews is addressed to believers since the author uses the word "brethren." However, "brethren" is sometimes used in the New Testament to refer to unsaved Jews (eg., Acts 2:29; 13:38). When the writer of Hebrews wished to make clear he was speaking to believers, he used the term "holy brethren." Only believers are holy brethren, since they are Christ's brethren (Heb. 2:11). Therefore this passage is addressed to Christians.

Believers are sanctified--set apart and made holy in Christ at salvation. Hebrews 10:10 says, "We are sanctified [made holy] through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Verse 14 says, "For by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified [made holy]." Verses 17-18 say, "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin." Because the believer's sin was removed at the cross by virtue of his position in Christ, there is no more need for a sin offering.

3. "partakers of the heavenly calling"

Many of the promises of the Old Covenant concerned earthly blessings, such as inheriting the land God promised. Christianity is a spiritual and heavenly calling with a spiritual and heavenly inheritance. As Paul says in Philippians 3:20, "Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Our home is in heaven, and we are citizens of God's realm, the heavenly places (Eph. 1:3). We're only strangers and pilgrims here (1 Pet. 2:11). We are in the world but not of the world (John 17:11, 16).

That is a powerful point for Jewish believers who were still clinging to the rituals of the Old Covenant. The writer exhorts them to let go of earthly things since their citizenship is in heaven. There is no point in hanging on to the earthly ritual once they have the heavenly reality.

4. "consider"

a) It's importance

This means to set your mind on something, or focus intently. Some may wonder why the writer tells Christians to consider Christ, since we already know Him. But we are a long way from understanding all that He is. Even the apostle Paul, the greatest Christian who ever lived, did not know all about Christ that he wanted to (Phil. 3:10). When trials or temptations come into our lives, we need to focus our attention on Jesus and keep it there until all that He is begins to unfold for us. Many Christians are spiritually weak and struggle with worry and anxiety because they don't know the depths and the riches of Christ. Jesus promised rest for our souls when we learn of Him (Matt. 11:29). Do you really enjoy your Christian life? Is it so exciting you can hardly stand it? That's how it ought to be. Does the fellowship and presence of Jesus Christ thrill you? If not, perhaps you don't know Him as well as you

might.

Learning to Appreciate the Masters

When I was in college, I used to go to downtown Los Angeles and pay fifty cents to hear the Philharmonic orchestra rehearse. I would take a couple of books with me and sit up in the balcony, listening to a whole concert by myself while I did some homework. I listened to the works of Bart[ac]ok, Moussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition, and other classical pieces. I enjoyed myself and began to gain an appreciation for the masters. However you take some people to hear that style of music and their reaction is, "That stuff is a drag!" Or you could take someone to an art gallery and show him the works of the masters, only to hear him say, "Who cares? I'm bored!" I say such people need to stay there until they learn to appreciate the masters. It's important to cultivate a love for good music and good art. We need to recognize beauty, genius, and virtue (Phil. 4:8). The same is true of our spiritual lives. If you want to enjoy Jesus Christ, you need to stay with Him until you learn how to, until your Christian life is filled with joy.

b) It's illustrations

(1) 2 Timothy 2

Timothy was having problems. He was young and he was being harassed by people in Ephesus who were teaching false doctrine. People were criticizing him and he got discouraged. He may even have been developing an ulcer, since Paul advised him to take a little wine for the sake of his stomach. Paul exhorted him to keep with it-- to be like a good soldier, a hard-working farmer, and a well-trained athlete. His main point is in verse 8, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel." ([sc]NASB) The most important thing Timothy needed to do in the midst of all his problems was to remember Jesus Christ.

(2) Hebrews 12

Verses 1-2 read, "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus." When we run the Christian race, we need to focus on Jesus. I used to run the 100-yard dash and the 220 in college. One thing I learned very quickly is that you can't run and watch your feet at the same time. If you do you run into something. When you run, just like when you drive, you've got to set your sights on something in the distance. When we ran the sprints we used to keep our eyes on the tape at the finish line. That was not only motivation but also kept us going in the right direction. In the Christian race, if we have our eyes on

ourselves, we will run into wall after wall. We need to keep our eyes fixed on "the author and the finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). He is the goal of the Christian race.

B. The Titles

Jesus is better than Moses in that He is both an apostle and the high priest. Moses was not. Moses was an apostle in the sense that he was sent by God, but Aaron was the high priest.

1. Apostle

An apostle (Gk., apostolos) is a messenger or ambassador. Jesus is the supreme ambassador from God sent to earth. An ambassador represents all the power and authority of the government that sends him. Jesus represents the power, justice, grace, love, and mercy of God. An ambassador also speaks with the voice of the one who sent him. That was true of Jesus, who said, "I have not spoken of myself; but the Father, who sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John 12:49).

2. High priest

Jesus is our High Priest, the supreme mediator between God and man. He brings God and man together.

So as Hebrews 3:1 says, Jesus is "the Apostle and High Priest of our profession." The writer is telling the believing Jews that since they have confessed Jesus as their Lord, they certainly ought to gaze on Him. Too many Christians even today have confessed Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, yet still run their whole Christian race without looking at Him.

II. JESUS IS SUPERIOR IN HIS WORKS (vv. 2-4)

"Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath built the house hath more honor than the house. For every house is built by some man, but he that built all things is God."

A. His Similarity to Moses

Since Moses was so highly esteemed by the Jewish people, the writer of Hebrews doesn't just bluntly state that Jesus is greater than Moses. He handles the matter more delicately. Before taking up Jesus' superiority to Moses, He points out the resemblance between the two.

1. The statement of faithfulness

a) Regarding Jesus

The first part of verse 2 tells us that Jesus was faithful to God. Jesus did the work that the Father appointed Him to do. In John 6:38-39 He says, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will who hath sent me, that of all that he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." Jesus says in John 7:18, "He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory; but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him." In John 8:29 He says, "He that sent me is with me. The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him," while in John 17:4- 5 we read, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine ownself with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." Jesus always did the Father's will. He was ever faithful.

b) Regarding Moses

The last half of verse 2 speaks of the faithfulness of Moses: "As also Moses was faithful in all his house." That thought comes from Numbers 12:7, where God speaks of Moses "who is faithful in all mine house." He led the children of Israel out of Egypt. He believed God, and God performed great miracles through him, such as the parting the Red Sea. He faithfully led the children of Israel during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Although there were times when Moses was unfaithful, such as when he killed an Egyptian, or when he struck a rock instead of speaking to it, as he was told, faithfulness was the overall pattern of his life.

2. The sphere of faithfulness

a) Moses in his household

The word translated "house" (Gk., oikos) refers to an entire household. Moses was a faithful steward over God's household. (The household of God in the Old Testament was the Old Testament believers: Israel and the Gentile proselytes.) A steward does not own the house: he manages it for the owner. God owned the house of Israel, and Moses managed it. He was in charge of dispensing the truths that God committed to his trust, and he was faithful to do so.

b) Christ in His household

Ephesians 2:19 tells us what Christ's household is: "Ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (cf. 1 Pet. 2:4-5). The household of God here is a reference to the church. Believers in the Old Testament were the household of Moses, and

believers of the New Testament are the household of Christ. Just as Moses was faithful to an earthly household, Jesus was faithful to a heavenly household. Like Moses, Christ was and is faithful to minister to his household.

Are You a Faithful Steward?

We are all stewards in God's house, though in a lesser sense than Jesus. All of us have spiritual gifts, which God has entrusted to us for the edification of others (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-31; Eph. 4:7-16; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). If you're unfaithful in ministering your spiritual gifts, you're being an unfaithful steward. You are responsible to share about Christ with witness to the people God has placed around you, and perhaps you've been unfaithful in doing that. Some of you have been given a position of teaching, but you've not been faithful to study diligently and sacrificially. That's being an unfaithful steward. The Christian life is a sacred trust given to you by God and it demands your faithfulness. The greatest thrill I could ever imagine would be to have someone say at the end of my life, "As Jesus was faithful to the Father, so was John MacArthur." That may sound presumptious--I'm not in the same class with Jesus, yet it was said of Moses in verse 2. I don't think we've begun to discover what God can do through us if we're willing to be faithful.

B. His Difference from Moses

Although Moses and Jesus were both faithful, there was a difference. In verse 3 we read that Jesus "was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath built the house hath more honor than the house." Moses was but a member of the spiritual household that Jesus built. Jesus created both Israel and the church. That is evidence of His deity, since verse 4 says, "For every house is built by some man, but he that built all things is God." Since Jesus created all things (John 1:3), He therefore is God.

III. JESUS IS SUPERIOR IN HIS PERSON (vv. 5-6)

"And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a son over his own house, whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."

Moses was a servant, but Jesus is a Son. There's a big difference between the two. In John 8:35 Jesus says, "The servant abideth not in the house forever; but the Son abideth forever." Servants come and go, but sons are sons for life.

A. The Servant

Verse 5 tells us that Moses was a faithful servant. "Servant" (Gk., therap[ma]on) denotes a dignified position. Moses was a faithful, obedient servant, a good steward of God's household. There are eight references to Moses' obedience in Exodus 40, while Exodus 35-40 contains twenty-two. As exalted as Moses was, however, Jesus was more exalted. Note that God compares Jesus with the very best of men, and He still is infinitely greater. Were He compared with the worst of men, that would be nothing. But He was greater than the greatest of men.

B. The Shadow

We learn from verse 5 that Moses' faithfulness was a testimony to greater things that were yet to come in Christ. Hebrews 10:1 says, "The law, having a shadow of good things to come and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make those who come to it perfect." The law was the shadow of good things yet to come in Christ. Jesus said, "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me" (John 5:46). It is impossible to truly believe what Moses wrote yet reject Jesus.

Luke 24:27 says of Jesus that "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them [two disciples on the road to Emmaus], in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself." Jesus explained what the Old Testament said about Him.

Paul also used Moses' writings to teach about Jesus. In Acts 28:23 we find that, "When they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging, to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening." That means there was a lot about Jesus in Moses' writings. So Hebrews 3:5 tells us that Moses was only a servant who pointed to something that would come later.

C. The Son

Unlike Moses, Christ was not a servant in another man's house, but a son over His own house. Christ's house is the church. In 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul writes, "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God." Believers are God's house.

D. The Security

1. The problem

How can we be sure that we're really of His house? Hebrews 3:6 gives the answer: "If we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." Some people have misunderstood that verse--they have thought it is saying we must keep ourselves saved, that we could lose our salvation. But since we couldn't save ourselves to begin with, how could we keep ourselves saved? What this verse is saying is that perseverance is proof of salvation. Those who are truly part of the house of God will not depart from the faith. Whoever leaves proves he never belonged in the first place (1 John 2:19). That truth is repeatedly emphasized in Hebrews because the Jews the writer was addressing were in danger of falling away. And those who fall away give evidence that they never did receive Christ. True saints persevere.

2. The passages

a) John 8:31

"Then said Jesus to those Jews who believed on him, if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."
The word translated "indeed" (Gk., al[ma]ethos) means "genuine" or "real." People often ask me about someone they know who once professed Christ, but now has fallen away and repudiates God. The explanation for such people is found in this verse. By not continuing in Christ's word, they give indication that they never were genuine disciples of Christ. They professed faith, but never possessed it.

b) John 6:39

"This is the Father's will who hath sent me, that of all that he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day."

One of the clearest truths of the New Testament is that the Lord keeps those who belong to Him. Jesus has never lost anyone from His household and never will.

c) James 1:22-25

"Be ye doers of the word not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a mirror. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whosoever looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth in it, he being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

d) Colossians 1:22-23

"In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unreprovable in his sight, if ye continue in the faith."

e) 2 John 9

"Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."

f) 1 John 2:19

"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

g) Hebrews 10:38-39

"Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."

CONCLUSION

Hebrews 3:1-6 says two very important things to us. First, we need to examine ourselves and make sure our faith is genuine (2 Cor. 13:5). Our Lord gives a sobering warning in Matthew 7:22-23: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out demons? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity."
Second, it exhorts those of us who are Christians already to consider Jesus. We need to live our whole life focusing on Him. He is all we need. Paul said it well when he said this: "Ye are complete in Him" (Col. 2:10).

Focusing on the Facts

1. Describe the three groups of people to whom the book of Hebrews was addressed.

2. What is the message of the writer to all three groups?

3. How did the writer of Hebrews prove that the New Covenant is superior to the Old?

4. The theme of the book of Hebrews may be summed up in the words _____ _____ .

5. What was the main reason that the Jewish people held Moses in such high regard?

6. Does the writer's use of "brethren" indicate that the entire book of Hebrews was written to believers? Why or why not?

7. Since believers already know Christ, why does the writer of Hebrews tell us to consider Him?

8. What was Paul's most important exhortation to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2?

9. What are two characteristics of an ambassador?

10. What quality did Jesus and Moses have in common?

11. The household of God in the Old Testament consisted of _____ and _____ _____ .

12. What is Christ's household? Support your answer from Scripture.

13. How does Hebrews 3:4 support Christ's deity?

14. Jesus is greater than Moses because He is a _____ while Moses was a _____ .

15. Name three verses that show Moses wrote about Christ.

16. Does Hebrews 3:6 teach that a Christian could lose his salvation? Explain.

17. How would you explain someone who once professed faith in Christ, but then fell away from the Christian faith?

18. What are two important things we learn from Hebrews 3:1-6?

Pondering the Principles

1. The writer of Hebrews repeatedly exhorts weaker Christians who were enmeshed in legalism to rest in the sufficiency of Christ. Is legalism a problem for you? Do you feel God likes you when you perform and dislikes you when you don't? Do you equate spirituality with mere knowledge of Bible facts, holding an office in the church, or not doing certain things, such as drinking, dancing, smoking, or listening to rock music? One of the best antidotes for legalism is to understand that we are

accepted by God because of our position in Christ, not because of our works. If you struggle with legalism, study the following Scriptures carefully: Romans 5:1; 8:1; Galatians 3:3; 5:1; Ephesians 1:3, 7; Colossians 2:10; 1 John 4:9-10; Jude 24. You may want to memorize them and recall them to mind when you are tempted to think your acceptance by God is based on your performance.

2. Moses is commended in this passage for his faithfulness as a steward of what God gave him. Could it be said of you that you are a faithful steward? How well are you managing the resources God has entrusted to you, such as your time, money, spiritual gifts, children, or ministry? Are you holding back any of those areas, and not acknowledging God's rightful ownership? Remember, a steward doesn't own anything; he merely manages it for the owner. Ask God to help you to be a faithful steward of all He has given you, and to show you if you are being unfaithful in managing any of His resources.

3. Are you running the Christian race with your eyes on Jesus, or have you become distracted by the things of this world? Go somewhere where you can be alone and take a hard look at your priorities. Do they show that you are laying up treasure in heaven, or treasure on earth? Are the eternal realities of God's Word, God's people, and God's kingdom at the top of your priority list, or closer to the bottom? Ask God to show you how your priorities need to change, and then take practical steps to change them. Finally, make yourself accountable to some other believers to act on those changes.

4. The apostle Paul expressed a deep desire to know Christ better in Philippians 3:10. How well do you know Christ? If it has been some time since you have studied the life of Christ, why not do that now? A good way to begin is to purchase a harmony of the gospels, and use it as the basis of your study. In addition, there are a number of good books available on the life and ministry of Jesus (your pastor or local Christian bookstore can recommend some). As you study, ask God to reveal to you the majesty and glory of His Son.

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