

Prayers

Thoughts on prayer

Pray for a renewal and revelation of God that will transform your land. Pray for the opening of eyes and the releasing of hearts, and pray for the Holy Spirit to break open the spiritual bondages by which your land has been held in darkness

A prayer for today

Lord Jesus Christ, You said You are the Way, the Truth and the Life. Let us never stray from You, who are the Way; nor distrust You who are the Truth; nor rest in any other but You, who are the Life, beyond whom there is nothing be desired, either in heaven or on earth. We ask it for your name's sake. AMEN *(Erasmus)*

Meditation

The glory of God is impressive, beyond all understanding;
Glory shown in creation, and command of all history.

The glory of God is essential, sustaining all people and things;
Glory found throughout the universe, in time and space.

The glory of God is revealed, His Son has shown His face;
Glory in the empty tomb and the resurrection presence.

The glory of God is prophetic, revealing what will truly be;
Glory which defines the destiny of our fragile world.

The glory of God is a mystery, something never fully grasped;
Glory searched for, yearned for, quested throughout life.

The glory of God is in the Father, revealed in Son and Spirit
Glory, beyond our understanding, yet touchable and real.

Bible Passage

Hebrews 3:1-6

¹ Therefore, holy friends who share in the heavenly calling, take notice of the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus. ² He was faithful to the one who appointed Him, as was Moses, out of all of God's household. ³ Yet He is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the founder of a household has more respect than the house itself, ⁴ for every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.

⁵ Now from God's household, Moses was faithful as a servant, testifying to what would be said in the future. ⁶ Christ, however, was faithful as a Son placed over God's house; and we are His house if we firmly grasp the assurance and the confidence of our hope.

Review

SUMMARY

Make sure that you hold Jesus as God's Son in the highest regard and do not let your interests in books, people, music, art, science, history or any other good thing, trump your knowledge and love of God through Jesus His Son. Early Jewish Christians were tempted to hold on to Moses and the law and use them as the basis for their worship of God. No, says Hebrews again; look to Jesus.

This a wonderful and expressive passage of Scripture, mixing a clear message about Christ with some fascinating insights. In chapter 2 of Hebrews, the writer has given an explanation of how Christ makes sacrificial atonement for our sins rather like a great Jewish 'High Priest'. Now, however he appeals to his readers to look not so much at Old Testament models of salvation, but to look at the person of Christ as superseding them. He does this because as God's Son, He is greater than anything that has gone before!

As we begin, however, it is worth looking at how this passage begins. Hebrews talks about God's people, the Church, in an interesting way, describing them as '*holy friends who share in the heavenly calling*' (3:1). This is a wonderfully inclusive phrase which identifies the bond holding all Christians together; they have a 'heavenly calling' which is to testify to Jesus Christ, and Hebrews continues to explain what it means to speak of Jesus as the Son of God.

Hebrews appeals to Jews to see past Moses to Jesus

Now any Jew of any generation would quote Moses as the greatest servant of God, and with good reason. Whilst Abraham was certainly the 'Father of the Nation' in a genealogical sense and a role model for personal commitment and behaviour, Moses was the great Jewish leader and Law-giver of Old Testament history. Significantly, Moses was used by God to bring the Israelites out of Egypt and form them into a nation as they struggled towards the 'Promised Land'.

Now many of those who first read letter had spent a lifetime in Judaism, doing what they believed to be right before God according to the teachings of Moses, found in the Old Testament. The Law, contained in the four books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy defined the relationship between a Jew and God, and between the nation and God; Moses was commonly referred to as the supreme 'faithful servant' of God (3:2) who had remained true to God's call despite the sometimes extreme odds stacked against him (Exodus 17, 18, 34).

In this light, we can see why Hebrews is at pains to explain that now Christ has come, the position of Moses has changed, especially for Jewish Christians; '*He (Jesus) is worthy of more glory than Moses*' (3:3). Yes, Moses is to be respected along with other greats of the Old

Testament, but however impressive Moses is as a man, he is only a member of God's household like every other man or woman in the lineage of Abraham. Christ however is the 'Son' (3:6), meaning the Son of God. So He has greater authority in the household of God, and the writer urges his readers to adjust their thinking accordingly; '*Moses was faithful as a servant ... Christ, however, was faithful as a Son ...*' (3:5,6).

The illustration of a 'house' or 'household'

Throughout, in order to make the point about the relative merits of Moses and Christ, Hebrews uses a picture of either a 'house' or a 'household' (3:2-5). The language slips almost seamlessly between these two; from '*He (Moses) was faithful out of all God's household*' (3:3) to '*every house is built by someone and the builder of all things is God*' (3:4). So what are we talking about; a group of people in a family, called a '*household*', or picture language of God's people as like a '*house*'?

The answer is both, partly because the two are so closely intertwined, even today. Any large dynasty can be called a '*household*' or a '*house*'; and the English Royal Family is called the '*House of Windsor*'. So whilst Hebrews is clearly using the term 'house' in this way, it is language very similar to that used by Paul when he likens the church to a building whose '*cornerstone is Christ*' (1 Cor 3:10,11); Paul also uses the idea of 'building' the church of Christ frequently (see Romans 15:20, Gal 2:18, 1 Thess 5:11, etc.).

The description of Christ; 'Son over the house'

The basic idea here is that in any great household, there can only be one senior servant with authority and general oversight. In old English practice, for example, a butler would hold such a position. Jews traditionally held that Moses was this senior figure, but Hebrews argues on principle that no servant can ever trump the authority of the son of the man who has built and sustains the household. So whilst Jews may celebrate the faithfulness of Moses as a servant of God, Hebrews calls on God's people, both Jews and Christians, to recognise the work and example of the Son as of a higher authority than that of Moses.

In the last part of our passage today, Hebrews speaks warmly of Jesus as '*a faithful Son placed over God's household*' (3:6). This summarises the point, but the writer continues with a bold and affirmation; '*and we are His house if we firmly grasp (it)*' (3:6). So here it is, the household of God is now made up not of those who follow Moses, but those who accept Christ by faith as the Son of God. Hebrews concludes the sentence with a wonderful threefold description of such faith, which is full of '*assurance and confidence ... hope*' (3:6). These words capture the sense of urgent conviction found in early Christians, keen to see the Church of God founded on solid ground.

The description of Christ; 'High Priest'

Now we should look further at what this passage says about Jesus, because Hebrews does not merely say that Jesus was God's Son and '*worthy of more glory*' (3:3) than Moses. In the first verse, we read the following; Jesus is the '*Apostle and the High Priest*' of our confession. Yesterday, we explored part of the idea of the 'High Priest', but it is worth remembering here that any priest, and especially the High Priest, stands between God and people representing the people to God and God to the people; this is their job function. The Bible argues that Jesus performs this role for each one of us, and for the salvation of humanity, and for this reason He is our 'High Priest'. He alone has the authority to present us to God.

The description of Christ; 'Apostle'

While such ideas are found in various places within the Bible, the second feature of the opening verse is quite different; Jesus is called an 'Apostle' of our confession. We are used to the idea that after the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples, anointed by the power of the Holy Spirit, became 'apostles' of the faith and were sent out to proclaim the message of God's love in Jesus. We are not, however, used to this idea being applied to Jesus!

Yet the more we think about this the more appropriate it becomes. Earlier in His ministry Jesus had told the disciples that their duty was to do the work He had done, and Mark in particular emphasises this when Jesus speaks to the disciples after the resurrection (Mark 16:9f.). So just as Jesus was sent into the world by the Father, Jesus now sends the disciples into the world to spread the Gospel; both are doing the same work, and both are 'sent'. Now because the word 'apostle' means 'one who is sent', it is obvious that Jesus can be called an 'Apostle of God' as the disciples can be called 'apostles of Jesus Christ'. The link is important so that we understand the message of the church is no different from the message of Jesus.

Application

Discipleship issues

Being focussed on Christ alone, (and not Moses)

Of course, we do not have to adjust our thinking from admiration of Moses to ultimate respect of Jesus, but the challenge is still relevant. We often cultivate the idea of heroes of faith, and spend a great deal of time and mental effort in admiration of such Christian leaders; Luther, Wesley, or one of the great missionaries. It sounds simple and obvious, but the message must be heard; Jesus the Son of God and the evidence of His life and federate in the Bible, is more important than all the missionaries, heroes of faith and 'fathers of the church' combined. Too often, I have found people far more familiar with the teaching of the latest Christian leader instead of God's Word and the teaching of Jesus Christ. For a Christian there can be no choice in the matter, the evidence of our bookshelves should tell the story of our love for Christ, not the church or Christian leaders or theology or ...

Building up the household of God

Our work as defined here is to build up the household of God, according to the principles of Jesus and His ministry; the house whose founder is Christ (3:4,5). It is amazing to me to find people in the church who think that it is possible to be religious and attend church, but have little to do with trying to dig more deeply into our faith and explore what we mean by it (as we do here in Hebrews). The message of the Bible is consistent within both Hebrews and the other New Testament books, certainly with the Great Commission in Matthew (28:19).

In God's church today, we could all do with a reality check about what the Bible says is true about our faith and what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Unless we come together around the one true Gospel, the worship of God we offer on Sundays is relatively meaningless, and calls down God's judgement on us. So let us know our calling, hold fast to it and rejoice in what this passage calls; '*the confidence of our hope*' (3:6)!

Questions for groups

1. *What does this passage reveal about the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Does it add anything to what we find elsewhere, and if so, what?*

2. *Do you see yourself as a builder of 'God's household'? Is it possible to stand back from this obligation and still be a Christian?*
 3. *In what sense is Christ the 'head' of the house of your own 'church'? How is this put into effect and shown?*
-

Final Prayer

Jesus, You have begun a good work in me; may I not be so fickle as to fail to stand firm in my faith and hold on to the truths that have been passed on to me . Jesus, help me to face my own problems rather than try to ignore them, and liberate me from their power. Jesus, lift my heart to praise Your name, now and forever more: AMEN