

## **“Greater than the Greatest”—Hebrews 3:1-6**

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com).]*

Take a Bible and meet me in Hebrews 3...

I don't know about you, but I always get drawn into the Olympics every time it rolls around. I find myself getting emotionally invested in sports that have not crossed my mind since the last Olympic season. My kids don't share my enthusiasm for most of the obscure sports. In fact, it's pretty entertaining watching the events each night with my kids, especially my son because he's not quite old enough to appreciate how difficult some of the jumps and maneuvers really are. So Shaun White will throw down back-to-back, double cork, 1440s on the half-pipe, cruising to his third gold medal, and my son's like, "Meh." He's just not impressed. Then he proceeds to show me how he could do the same thing as he jumps on the couch.

But we know better. The older we get the more keenly aware we become of the limitations of the human body and the more we, therefore, grow in our appreciation for such Olympic feats. I can't even watch the Olympics without my body aching these days. It pains me to even imagine what it would feel like if I attempted to contort my body in some of the ways these athletes do.

In fact, that is one of the reasons I really appreciate the commentators at the Olympics. Usually they are former practitioners of the sport that give us insight into just how difficult certain elements are and what goes into mastering them. They also help us to understand the successes of the competitors in the context of the broader sport. How does this gold medal performance stack up against those that come before? I would have no way of knowing apart from these experts debating. And every so often we hear that some performance is the greatest one, not just in Olympic history, but in the history of the sport. You're left with an even greater appreciation for the greatness you just witnessed. And it's somehow more satisfying when you realize that you are considering the greatest ever.

We do this a lot when it comes to sports and entertainment. We compare and contrast. Why? Because there is something in us that longs to ascribe glory to the one that is the greatest. We can appreciate great performances, but we want to know and experience the greatest of all time, or The G.O.A.T., to borrow the modern slang and the title of our sermon series.<sup>1</sup>

That's really what the book of Hebrews is about—showing us that Christ is the greatest of all time. In chapters 1 and 2 the author helps us to see the superiority of Jesus when compared to the prophets and angels. And now, in chapter 3, the author of Hebrews wants us to see how Jesus stacks up against Moses, arguably the most important figure in Jewish history.<sup>2</sup> Spoiler alert: Jesus is superior to Moses as well. We will begin to see *why* this morning, as the author of Hebrews continues to advance his main argument—“Jesus Christ is the climax of redemptive history and the fulfillment of all of God's Old Testament promises, prophecies, and patterns.”<sup>3</sup>

You can follow along as I begin reading at the start of chapter 3. This is the Word of God...

*“Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession,<sup>2</sup> who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was*

*faithful in all God's house.* <sup>3</sup> *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.* <sup>4</sup> *(For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.)* <sup>5</sup> *Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later,* <sup>6</sup> *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.*” (Hebrews 3:1-6)

In some of my readings this past week I came upon this statement—“Human beings need two things: we need to hear from God and we need to go to God.... We need revelation from him and reconciliation with him.”<sup>4</sup> This is certainly true and it is worth noticing how verse 1 addresses both of these needs when it describes believers as partakers (or sharers) “*in a heavenly calling*”. Describing this calling as “*heavenly*” reminds us that it comes from God, it is from heaven. And the fact that it is a “*calling*” reminds us that it involves an invitation heavenward, it is a way to God. So this “*heavenly calling*” that believers share in reminds us that God has met our two greatest needs in Christ—a need for a word from God and a way to God. To be a Christians means that you have found Christ to be both of those things for you—the ultimate Word of God and the sole way to God.<sup>5</sup>

Our hope and confidence that we share in this “*heavenly calling*” though does not derive from our own righteousness. Among us there is every kind of sinner imaginable. We are not a perfect people and we don't pretend to be. In this room can be found liars, addicts, the sexually broken, the greedy, the hypocritical, and deviants of untold varieties. We are people who struggle to string together hours of good behavior, let alone days, weeks, and months. We regularly lament the reality that Paul describes in Romans 7.

*“For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. <sup>17</sup> So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”* (Romans 7:15-19)

We're not much to look at. But we're here because of Jesus. We're here because He is our only hope in life and in death. The reason our hope and confidence in this “*heavenly calling*” is firm is not because our own righteousness. It's not because we are the cream of the crop when it comes to Christian virtue. If it hung on our record, we would have no hope whatsoever. Our hope and confidence rest on Jesus alone. And that is what the writer of Hebrews is reminding us of in verse 1. He says to those who share this heavenly calling, “*consider Jesus...*”<sup>6</sup> He's the reason we share in this heavenly calling. But what specifically does he want us to consider about Jesus in that verse? That He is “*the apostle and high priest of our confession*”.

The word “*apostle*” in Greek, literally means “one who is sent.” An emissary. Someone who is sent on a mission to represent the interests of another. When Christians hear the term “*apostle*” we tend to think of those earliest disciples, who encountered the resurrected Christ in person and were sent out by Him to preach the Gospel and lay the foundation for the Church. We are not used to thinking of Jesus as an “*Apostle*” and, in fact, this is the only place in the New Testament where the term is used in reference to Christ. But it fits. He was the *Apostle par excellence*, sent on a mission by His Father to seek and to save the lost.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, Jesus is also the “*high priest of our confession*”.<sup>8</sup> The priestly ministry of God's Son is something that chapter 2 has hinted at, as Derek showed us last week, and will occupy much of our attention later in the book. It's a huge theme down the stretch in Hebrews so, Lord willing, we will give this idea considerable attention in the weeks ahead.

But these two descriptions of Christ—Apostle and High Priest—remind us of the two-directional nature of His ministry. An Apostle, in the biblical sense, represents God to man and a High Priest represents man to God. Jesus Christ, the God-man, does exactly that for us. He is our Mediator. He is the one person “through whom man comes to God and God to man.”<sup>9</sup> Again, notice how these two titles highlight the two great needs I mentioned earlier—hearing from God and getting to God.

In a sense, Moses was the closest thing there was to an apostle-high-priest in the Old Testament. He was sent by God to carry out a specific mission on God’s behalf, which had to do with delivering God’s people from their bondage, and he was Israel’s representative before God in the wilderness. F. F. Bruce writes in his fine commentary that it was Moses’ “brother Aaron, and not [Moses], who was high priest of Israel as far as the title and investiture was concerned; but it was Moses, and not Aaron, who was Israel’s true advocate with God.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, while we don’t tend to associate the title of “high priest” with Moses, his role among the people of God has much in common with the Israel’s high priests who came after him. We saw examples of this recently in our Exodus series.

And this is why Moses was, in many respects, Israel’s rock star. He was revered. He was the greatest of all Hebrews. The greatest of all Levites, the priestly tribe. That statement needed no defense among first century Jews. It was a given. Indeed you’d be treading on thin ice if you aimed to contradict it. In fact, this is how the Pentateuch, the Old Testament books of the Law conclude:

*“And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face,  
<sup>11</sup> none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt,  
to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land,<sup>12</sup> and for all the mighty power and all the  
great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.”* (Deuteronomy 34:10-12)

Perhaps then we can understand why the writer of Hebrews believed it necessary to stress the superiority of Jesus Christ to Moses. He was writing primarily to Jewish-Christians who thought Moses was the bee’s knees, the height of excellence. But the writer doesn’t want to exalt Jesus by demeaning Moses. Not at all. He could have drawn attention to Moses’ failures. He could have reminded them of his reluctance to carry out God’s mission at first or his fits of anger that ended the life of an Egyptian on one occasion and kept Moses out of the Promised Land on another. But there is no interest here in belittling Moses. There’s no hero-bashing. The aim is quite the opposite. The writer of Hebrews wants us to remember just how awesome and inspiring Moses truly was because when we see Moses at his best we are positioned to see Jesus as all the more glorious! To say that Jesus was greater than Moses was really saying something.

The case for Christ’s superiority begins as you would expect, with a bit of comparison and contrast. The comparison comes at us in verse 2 and the contrast in verses 3 to 6. The contrasts will take some time to unfold, so today we will limit ourselves to the comparison in verse 2—“[Consider Jesus,] *who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God’s house*” (Hebrews 3:2).

The most important thing that Jesus and Moses have in common is that they can both be described as “*faithful*”. What does it mean for someone to be considered faithful? Well, it could mean a couple of things. On the one hand, it could mean that the person was full of faith, that he or she possesses much faith in God. This was certainly true of Moses. A bit later in Hebrews we are going to read this description of Moses:

*“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.<sup>24</sup> By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter,<sup>25</sup> choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.<sup>26</sup> He considered the*

*reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.*  
<sup>27</sup> *By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.* <sup>28</sup> *By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.*” (Hebrews 11:23-28)

When we read that we are left with the impression that “every major decision in Moses’ life [was] attributed to his faith, or trust, in God.”<sup>11</sup> It was. He was full of faith.

On the other hand, being faithful could mean being reliable and dependable. In this case the sense would be that Moses faithfully carried out the tasks that God assigned to him. Both of these nuances—full of faith and faithfully fulfilling his tasks—were true of Moses. He was both a man of faith and a faithful man. If these ideas can be separated, it is probably the latter that is primarily considered in Hebrews 3.

Why do I say that? Because there’s almost certainly an allusion here to Numbers 12. This Old Testament passage is the one where Miriam and Aaron come at Moses because he married a Cushite woman. You might remember that I argued once last year that, based on the punishment that Miriam incurs from the Lord (i.e., being made “*leprous, white as snow*”; Numbers 12:10), that there was probably a racial component to their gripe against Moses. They didn’t like that he married a Cushite, which was a Black African woman. It’s a passage that anyone who opposes interracial marriage needs to read because God sides clearly with Moses and not with Miriam and Aaron. And it’s in this context, when God was coming to the defense of Moses, that the Lord says these words,

*“Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream.”* <sup>7</sup> *Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house.* <sup>8</sup> *With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”* (Numbers 12:6-8)

Did you catch that God said that Moses was “*faithful in all my house*”? That’s the same language we find in Hebrews 3:2—Jesus was faithful “*just as Moses also was faithful in all of God’s house.*” The house of God in these contexts is simply a way of referring to God’s people, whether Israel or the Church. The writer of Hebrews seems to be alluding to Numbers 12 though, where God Himself vindicates Moses’ faithfulness before his detractors. And given that God was highlighting Moses’ faithful service there, that’s probably what is being highlighted here as well. Moses was faithful to fulfill all the tasks that God appointed for him. And the writer of Hebrews is saying, “so was Jesus!” Jesus and Moses “are comparable in that they both were appointed by God over a people (3:2) and that they were faithful in their ministries (3:5-6).”<sup>12</sup>

And more than that, we read in verse 5 that “*Moses was faithful...to testify to the things that were to be spoken later,*” which is a way of saying that the evidence of Moses’ faithfulness is best seen in the fact that he pointed ahead to the work of Christ. That was the most important work that God called him to. Jesus once said to the Pharisees, “*if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me*” (John 5:46). So the writer of Hebrews is just echoing what Jesus said—Moses testified about Him. “Those who were abandoning Jesus for Moses demonstrated by their actions that they did not have the faintest idea what either one of them was saying.”<sup>13</sup>

Even the Law of Moses, which the original audience of Hebrews was tempted to turn back to, was meant to point to Jesus. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them*” (Matthew 5:17).

And Moses testified to Christ in ways that he likely didn’t anticipate. Go back and listen the “Out of Egypt” sermon series on our church website and you will find sermon after sermon that celebrates the

ways Moses' story foreshadowed the life and works of God's Son centuries later. Every sermon (and there were a ton of sermons in that series) was packed with examples. So the legacy of Moses, the Law of Moses, and the life of Moses all pointed to Christ. As one commentator put it, "Moses presented Israel with pictures or types of the Messiah to come, shadows that were cast backward into the Old Testament by the light of Christ and were fulfilled in his long-awaited coming."<sup>14</sup> And it was to that "long-awaited coming" that Moses was referring when he said to Israel, "*The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen*" (Deuteronomy 18:15; cf. 18:18-19). You might think of Moses as an Old Testament John the Baptist, preparing the way for Christ. "This being the case," writes Richard Phillips,

"if Moses could write to the Jewish Christians, he would tell them the very thing emphasized by the writer of Hebrews: that they should hold fast to Christ in faith. In fact, Moses did write such a letter; he wrote the first five books in the Old Testament, and their ultimate purpose was to point to Jesus Christ as the Savior of his people, the apostle and high priest of our confession."<sup>15</sup>

Moses was faithful to do what God called him to do and that's why he prepared us so well for Christ. Jesus was also faithful to do all that His Father appointed Him to do, which is why He was obedient all the way to the point of death on a cross. He faithfully executed His Father's will. To coin a phrase, "*It is finished!*" (John 19:30).

But the writer of Hebrews is not done yet. While Moses and Jesus were both considered faithful, we read in verse 3 that "*Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses...*" They are both worthy of glory, but Jesus is worthy of more glory. Why? Well this is where the author introduces us to some contrasts between Jesus and Moses by way of a building metaphor. But we are going to save that for a couple weeks from now...

Let me close with a few remarks on Christ's faithfulness. You might be tempted to just gloss over the fact that Christ remained faithful to all that the Father called Him to fulfill, even to the point of shedding His blood, but you need to understand that the faithfulness of Christ is absolutely necessary for your personal salvation. You would have no forgiveness of sins apart from His faithfulness. Your salvation rests on more than just the cross and the resurrection. It rests on His faithfulness as well, or what theologians like to call "the active obedience of Christ."

And now we find ourselves knee-deep in the beauty of the Gospel, so let's venture even deeper. One of the best books I have read in the last few years is called *Hidden in the Gospel* by William Farley.<sup>16</sup> It's a book that teaches you one way to preach the Gospel to yourself. It's very good. He describes the Gospel in eight steps—election, incarnation, active obedience, cross, resurrection, ascension, second coming, and new creation. Then he shows how each of those steps can be an entry point for preaching the Gospel to yourself.

When we do what our text this morning is calling us to do—namely, consider Jesus—then we will think about the active obedience of Christ. The standard of obedience we are called to is perfection. "*Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect*" (Matthew 5:48). We missed the mark, of course. *But Jesus did not.* He was perfect. He kept every one of God's Laws. He never once sinned. And that fact is absolutely essential for our salvation. We would have no hope of being saved without the active obedience of Christ. Why? Because it solves our need for perfection.

Paul explains it like this—"*For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin [i.e., Jesus], so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). What is the righteousness of God? In a few words it's absolute moral perfection. It's the righteousness God requires from man, which none have ever produced except Jesus. So what we have earned for our lack of perfection is God's wrath. But

what Christ has earned for His utter perfection, His complete faithfulness, is God's approval. And, according to Paul, that perfection and approval can be ours in Christ.

When we acknowledge and turn from our sins (repentance) and put our trust in Jesus alone to save us (faith), then our sin is completely forgiven on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection and in its place we are credited with Christ's own righteousness, His perfect record of faithfulness. Are you catching this? Christ's perfect righteousness is given to us through faith. Grasp this, His perfect track record on prayer, credited to your account. His perfect obedience in giving, credited to your account. His textbook practice of the spiritual disciplines, credited to your account. His perfectly pure and holy motives, credited to your account! His faithfulness to resist every temptation that came His way, credited to our account. That's what makes us right with God. That's how the standard of perfection is reached for us. We don't just need forgiveness. We need righteousness. His righteousness. And that is why Christ's active obedience, His faithfulness, is necessary for our salvation and good news for our lives now because that is how we obtain it.

We don't have to wallow in our unrighteousness, we can boast in Christ's righteousness. We don't boast in our good deeds, we boast in Christ crucified because that's where our true righteousness was bought. When we realize this, that's where the daily change in our lives come from. The gift of His righteousness begins to transform us into more and more faithful people. Faithfully living out Christ's instructions becomes worship. It's not a means to gain approval of God; it's a response to the grace of having it in Christ. Our lives are increasingly catching up to our identity of Christ. Day by day, we are being made more and more like Jesus. It's a lifelong journey. We will stumble many times along the way. But never forget that the journey is filled with good news.

So you see, you have not been faithful like Christ was faithful. You haven't even lived up to the lesser faithfulness of Moses. That's what makes you a sinner and separates you from God. But the Gospel is the solution to that grim reality. It is good news to know that we are approved by God through faith in Jesus Christ. It's good news to know that we have every spiritual blessing in Christ. And it's good news to know that we can be fully righteous in the sight of God today, if we would put our faith in the finished work of Christ. Amen! Hallelujah! What a Savior!

We will pick up these verses, Lord willing, in a couple of weeks. Next week we will consider Jesus from a different text of Scripture as we share the Lord's Supper together.

Pray with me...

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<sup>1</sup> The title for the sermon, “Greater than the Greatest,” was drawn from William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, Revised Edition (DSBS; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 28.

<sup>2</sup> It’s worth noting, as Thomas Schreiner does, that there are repeated themes when one compares the opening two chapters with this new section beginning in chapter 3. “We find many contacts with what has preceded: (1) Jesus’ high priesthood is picked up from 2:17; (2) his faithfulness, noted in 2:17, is a major theme in 3:1-6; (3) those who belong to Jesus are part of his family (2:11-12; 3:1, 6); (4) believers are holy (3:1) because they have been sanctified by Jesus (2:11).” Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation; Nashville: Holman Reference, 2015), 112. Cf. Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (PNTC; Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2010), 125.

<sup>3</sup> R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary; Nashville: Holman Reference, 2017), 41.

<sup>4</sup> John Piper, “Jesus: Worthy of More Glory than Moses,” a sermon preached to Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN, on August 4, 1996, and accessed at the following website: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/jesus-worthy-of-more-glory-than-moses>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Similarly, Mohler writes, “The ‘heavenly calling’ shared by believers refers to God’s purposes in our salvation and to our glorification.” Mohler, 42.

<sup>6</sup> John Piper, “Jesus: Worthy of More Glory than Moses.”

<sup>7</sup> R. Kent Hughes points out that “Jesus repeatedly describes himself (over ten times in John’s writings alone) as being sent by the Father into the world.” R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* (PWS; Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 91-92; e.g., John 3:34; 4:34; 5:23, 24, 30, 36-38; 6:29, 38-39, 44; 7:18, 28-29, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42; 1 John 4:9-10, 14; et al; cf. Matthew 10:40; 15:24; Mark 9:37; Luke 4:18, 43; 9:48; 10:16; Acts 3:26; Gal 4:4.

<sup>8</sup> “[T]he word ‘confession’ denotes the truth embraced by the readers (4:14; 10:23). The teaching accepted by the readers focuses on Jesus as God’s high priest, as the one sent by God. The confession is not an abstract list of doctrines. It focuses on Jesus himself and his work on the cross for the readers’ salvation.” Thomas Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation Commentary; Nashville: Holman Reference, 2015), 114.

<sup>9</sup> Hughes, 92.

<sup>10</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Hebrews* (NICNT; Eerdmans, 2012), 91-92. “After the idolatrous festival in honor of the golden calf, in which Aaron himself was implicated, it was Moses whose prevailing plea procured pardon for his guilty people (Ex. 32:11-14, 31f.), as it did on a later occasion when the unfavorable report of the spies cause a rebellion in the camp and a resolution to return to Egypt (Num. 14:13-19).” Ibid., 92.

<sup>11</sup> Mike Andrus, “One Greater than Moses,” a sermon preached on November 15, 2009, and accessed at the following website: <http://firstfreewichita.org/sermons/sermon/2009-11-15/one-greater-than-moses>.

<sup>12</sup> George Guthrie, “Hebrews,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 952.

<sup>13</sup> Scott Lindsay, “Hebrews 3:1-6—A Sermon,” *Reformed Perspectives Magazine*, Volume 10 (March – April 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Richard D. Phillips, *Hebrews* (REC; Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2006), 85-86.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> William Farley, *Hidden in the Gospel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014).