

“Our Ultimate Example”

Heb. 3:1-6

- INTRO. - Some time ago a group of young children were asked to list someone they saw as a hero. The names given were all TV (or movie) celebrities, sports figures, singers, or the President. This exercise is (likely) a good reflection on where we are (now) as a nation.

- Previous generations called *these* kinds of people “celebrities” while reserving the designation of “hero” for someone characterized by unique courage, nobility, achievement, or sacrifice.

- As George Guthrie puts it, “Our age of high tech has transformed the movie actor, the singer, and the football star into larger-than-life figures, blurring the lines between superstar status and true heroism.”

- What has been made clear in recent weeks, is that political leaders now garner votes through image, marketing savvy, and ingenuity -- rather than moral excellence.

- Henry Kissinger once did a book review of the 1995 book *Churchill* by Norman Rose. In that review he gave insightful observation on the difference between a true hero and a mere celebrity.

- He said, “Our age finds it difficult to come to grips with figures like Winston Churchill. The political leaders with

whom we are familiar generally aspire to be superstars rather than heroes. The distinction [he said] is crucial. Superstars strive for approbation; heroes walk alone. Superstars crave consensus; heroes define themselves by the judgment of a future they see it as their task to bring about. Superstars seek success in a technique for eliciting support; heroes pursue success as the outgrowth of inner values.”

- Then he added, “The modern political leader rarely ventures to comment in public without having tested his views on focus groups, if indeed he does *not* derive them from a focus group. [But] to a man like Churchill, the very concept of focus groups would have been unimaginable. Thus in the space of a generation, Churchill, the quintessential hero, has been transformed from the mythic to the nearly incomprehensible.”

- Qualities like walking alone on the basis of internal values characterize true heroes. Most true heroes go unsung, giving their lives in quiet service in a variety of roles. But we now live in a world where true heroism is confused with fame.

- Even the church has bought into this fuzzy notion – and has exalted certain celebrities (that profess to be Christians) into the status of being superstars. Every time a sports figure or a rock singer (supposedly) becomes a Christian, we see it as a special coup for the faith. Many in the church begin to think that their acceptance of Christianity (somehow) gives special credence to the

Kingdom of God, or that their fame will aid in the advancement of the gospel.

- Sometimes their speaking role in the church takes precedence over the faithful preaching and teaching of the Word of God. They are seen as more important than godly shepherds who have given their entire lives in service to our Lord.

- The truth of the matter is, we don't need celebrities – we need true heroes of the faith – we need genuine examples of true devotion to Christ. I believe *that* is the reason why there are so many on the pages of the Bible. Most of us grew up learning about the great heroes of God in the Old and New Testaments – and this is very important.

- In the ancient world, the use of examples was a common rhetorical methodology. Examples were used in both positive and negative ways.

- And in Heb. 3:1-6 we see the first mention in this book of a great OT hero. We see a reference to Moses – who was seen by most Jews of that day as the greatest man in the history of God's people.

- Even though this passage is about the superiority of Christ above Moses, we *do* see where Moses was faithful in his God-assigned role. Men like this are important as examples of true heroism in the faith.

- In order to grasp the significance of this passage, we need to understand how the Jews of that day revered this man. John MacArthur says, “Moses was esteemed by the Jews far above any other Jew who ever lived.”

- Of course, we know that God had supernaturally protected him in his infancy, and also buried him at the end of his life. He was personally called by God into his unique role through a burning bush.

- He was a man who stood up to the most powerful man on earth – the Egyptian Pharaoh. We know of all the mighty miracles God performed through this man – all the incredible plagues of Egypt and the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea.

- We also know that he was a man who actually saw God on the Mountain, and was a man God spoke to, face to face. He was the “great deliverer” who led Israel out of bondage in Egypt and shepherded them in the wilderness.

- He *not only* gave the people the Ten Commandments, but the entire law. He was the man who wrote the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. He was the one through whom God provided the plans for the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant.

- He was a man who stood in the gap and interceded for his people on a number of occasions – and turned away God's wrath. He was indeed a great man – and yet Num.

12:3 tells us he was more humble than any other man on earth. Moses is mentioned 70 times in the NT.

- By the way, it is important for us to hold up true heroes of the faith to our children in days like these. We need to talk about great men and women (from ancient times to modern times) who have demonstrated true faith in God and have stood on that faith against incredible opposition.

- We need to know about great men like Polycarp, William Tyndale, John Hus, Martin Luther, Hudson Taylor, Jim Elliott, and many others. And we need to hold up to our children great heroes of the faith in Scripture, such as Daniel, David, and the Apostle Paul. We need to hold up to them great women of the faith as well.

- As Christian parents we should ask ourselves if our children are more enamored with sports figures, cartoon figures, or celebrity icons than they are with the great heroes of the faith in the Word of God (and in church history).

- And (of course) Jesus Christ is the ultimate example we need to focus on. In fact, that is the message of this passage: “consider Jesus.” Although there are many examples of godly faith in Scripture, our ultimate example is the Lord Jesus Christ.

- As George Guthrie puts it, “Great religious heroes like Moses serve as spiritual telescopes, tools used by God to magnify Someone greater than themselves. For it is to

Jesus, the One who stands at the heart of the faith, that we must look if we are to endure in our Christian commitment.”

- So, with all that in mind, we need to move (now) into our text. All of that was just introduction, but let’s see what the Spirit of God wants to teach us here in this passage.

- Now, one of the most powerful aspects of this particular book of the Bible, is that it is in the form of a sermon, and the author moves back and forth between exposition and application. Sprinkled throughout this book we find these sections of exhortation – warnings and commands related to the truth that is being conveyed.

- And what we need to understand here, is that the passage we are looking at today is the first part of a large section of exhortation. That section goes all the way from 3:1 to 4:16.

- In this first part we see a comparison and contrast between Jesus and Moses. The author of Hebrews follows his typical pattern of giving an exhortation and then providing the *basis* (or grounds) for that exhortation. And we are going to take these first 6 verses on four divisions. The first thing we see is:

I. THE COMMAND (v. 1)

- Look with me at v. 1, “Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.”

- First of all, this section is clearly addressed to believers. The phrase “holy brethren” cannot be taken in any other way. These are fellow Christians – those who are true brothers in Christ.

- This is likely pointing back to the truth of 2:11, which says, “For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren...” He also makes mention of the fact that they are His “brethren” at the *end* of chapter 2 (in v. 17).

- And notice that these are those who are “partakers of a heavenly calling.” That likely refers to the effectual calling of God unto salvation. Jimmy Draper describes this as “a calling from heaven to heaven.”

- This calling is one that God has initiated. Jesus said in John 6:44, “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him...” Salvation is a heavenly calling. It is something that God does. It is a calling that is initiated by God Himself.

- But this heavenly calling *not only* points to our ultimate destiny, it also refers to our present perspective. Later the author of Hebrews is going to describe them as those who

desire a heavenly country (11:16) and a heavenly Jerusalem (12:22).

- John MacArthur says, “All of these blessings show the superiority of Christianity to Judaism. Judaism was an earthly calling with an earthly inheritance. Christianity is a spiritual and heavenly calling with a spiritual and heavenly inheritance.”

- As Paul wrote in Phil. 3:20, “...our citizenship is in heaven...” That is (now) our true home. We are strangers and pilgrims in this world, and we are just passing through. Our real home is in heaven and we are to live (in this present world) in light of that ultimate destination.

- Paul wrote in Col. 3:1-4, “If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”

- The call is to let go of earthly things and to set our hearts on our ultimate home. We are ultimately citizens of heaven. That is where our hearts are to be. We are to hold the things of this world loosely – knowing that all this is just temporary.

- That is the heavenly perspective we are to have. But there is no question that the author of Hebrews is

addressing believers in 3:1. However, we can understand (from this larger exhortation) that these are believers that are beginning to waver in their commitment to Christ.

- As Jewish Christians, they are glancing back at Judaism – and that is *why* they are being admonished to “consider Jesus.” Once they are fully convinced of the vast superiority of Jesus, they will no longer be tempted to turn back to Judaism.

- And in essence, what they are being asked here is, “Why would you want to hang on to the earthly rituals (the earthly symbols and ceremonies) when you now have the real thing? You now have the heavenly reality.”

- Now, there’s application for *us* there as well. Religion has always tended to cling to rituals and ceremonies, but we have the spiritual reality in Christ. John MacArthur says, “There is no place in biblical Christianity for externalism because Christians have continual access to spiritual reality.”

- He says, “For Christians to hang on to earthly religious trappings *not only* is unnecessary and pointless but also spiritually harmful. To do so keeps us from experiencing the fullness of our new relationship with God and from being able to follow Him as faithfully as we ought.”

- And remember now, this book is really a sermon, and it is addressed to a mixed audience. Portions of it are aimed at unbelievers. Some of it is directed toward those who

have become intellectually convinced of the truth of the gospel, but have fallen short of fully committing to it.

- And then, there are sections (like this one) that are directed at believers – in this case believers that are beginning to waver a bit.

- It was a major challenge for Jews in the first century to abandon Judaism for Christianity. You had Judaizers, who were trying to put Jewish believers back under the bondage of legalism. You had religious persecution from Jewish unbelievers, who were saying that they were rejecting the heritage of their forefathers.

- So this section is focused on those who were Jewish Christians, who had one eye on Christ and the other eye was glancing back at Judaism. And the message is, since Jesus is greater than any aspect of Judaism, they need to keep their eye fully on Him, and *not* keep looking back to that which was pointing to Him.

- The word “therefore” (in v. 1) refers back to what had been said previously. This is the author’s way of saying, “In light of all I have said, consider Jesus (first and foremost).”

- It may apply (specifically) to what he said in the previous chapter, that Christ is a faithful high Priest who is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. The word “consider” means more than to merely look at something. It means to “fix your mind on.”

- It is a word that implies continual action. The idea is, “Put your mind on Jesus and keep it there. Keep your focus on Christ alone.” He alone is the ultimate example. We are to fix our eyes on the One who is the supreme example of faithfulness. On the basis of Who He is and what He has done, we are to “consider Him.” He is all we will ever need.

- The concept (here) is the very same as what he will later express in 12:2, “...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith...” *Here* the command is to fix our eyes on Jesus who is “the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.” But our focus must remain on Christ alone.

- The fact that he calls them “holy” points to their purification from sin through faith in Christ. 2:17 tells us He made “propitiation” for sins, so these believers are completely pure before God (positionally).

- Of course, all the way back in 1:3 we saw where Jesus came for the express purpose of making purification for our sins, and in 2:11 we see where He is the One “who makes men holy.” (NIV) He is the One who sanctifies sinners.

- But He is clearly speaking of those who have been “sanctified” – those who have been cleansed from their sins and have been made “holy” (positionally) in Christ. And because of this, the Lord is *not* ashamed to call them “brethren.”

- Now, we’ve already seen the word “partakers.” This is a key word in this book, but it is often misunderstood. Herschel Hobbs writes, “Unfortunately, the English word has come to mean largely to share in something received, such as partaking in a meal.” But this word means much more than that.

- It is the Greek word “metochos” and it does (in fact) mean “sharers.” But it means to share *fully*. The word “partners” is probably a better translation. It is the same word that is translated “companions” in 1:9. These are the heavenly companions who have become full sharers in the “heavenly calling” of Christ.

- This same word (partakers) is used in 2 Peter 1:4, where it says believers in Christ have “become partakers of *the* divine nature,” and in Col. 1:12 where it says believers have become “qualified...to share in the inheritance of the saints...”

- Now, we’re also told that we “share the sufferings of Christ...” (That’s 1 Peter 4:13) In *all* of those passages it is the same word. The idea seems to be that we have become one with Christ and that we now share as “partners” with Him in every way.

- Now, notice that Jesus is referred to here as “the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.” This is the only place in the NT where Jesus is called an “Apostle,” but this is used in the general sense of “a sent One.”

- This is pointing to the fact that Jesus was sent by God the Father, but notice that it does *not* say “an Apostle;” it says “THE Apostle.” He is the only One sent by God in this unique way as the Son.

- In fact, the author of Hebrews does *not* call anyone else as Apostle in this book. He reserves this title for Jesus Christ alone. Of course we know that Jesus had 12 Apostles, but this is employing this concept in a totally different way.

- This goes back to what he said in 1:1-2, that Jesus is the full and final revelation of God to man. He is the only One who can be called the Apostle (in this sense). He is the only One who can reveal God to men.

- So (here in this context) you could say that Jesus is the “Supreme Apostle.” He is the only One who could come from God and reveal to us God’s nature and plan and purpose.

- He is also our perfect “High Priest.” We’re going to see several chapters on what this means. But for now, suffice it to say that He is the supreme Mediator between God and men. He is the One who came to fully atone for our sins. He is a merciful High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses.

- The Latin word for “High Priest” is “pontifex.” It literally means “bridge builder.” Jesus Christ is the ultimate “bridge builder.” He has built a bridge between God and men. The Roman Catholic Church has wrongly applied this title to the Pope, but Jesus Christ is the only One deserving of this title. He is the only One who could build a bridge between God and men.

- He is the one and only sent-One from God, who came with all God’s power and spoke God’s voice, but He is also the only One who can bring God and men together.

- He has *not only* made it possible for us to *know* God, but to ultimately (one day) live forever in the *presence* of God. As the Bible says, no one can go to the Father except through Christ. (That’s John 14:6)

- And then notice that last part of v. 1, “...consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.” The author of Hebrews is writing (here) to those who had made a “confession” of their faith in Jesus Christ. The word “confession” (or profession) is one’s avowal of Jesus as Lord and Savior. We’re going to see this word again in 4:14 and 10:23.

- Now, you probably have already guessed that we will *not* be able to make it through all of this today (because there is so much good stuff here), but before we move off of v. 1 note how this compares with Moses.

- He is going to be moving to a comparison and contrast of Jesus to Moses, but notice that even though Moses was seen as an OT apostle (in the sense that he was sent by God and represented God to the people), he was *not* a priest, much less a “high priest.” His brother Aaron was the High Priest.

- The fact that Jesus was both THE Apostle and High Priest indicates His superiority over Moses. And (as we will see) His superiority is seen in the fact that He brought a better covenant. In fact, He Himself would be the sacrifice that would make that new covenant effective.

- ILL. – Many years ago, in a seminary chapel service, someone introduced Dr. Everett Gill as a “foreign missionary.” Dr. Gill said, “No, I am *not* a foreign missionary. The world has had but one foreign missionary, Jesus, who was sent by the Father to the earth. I am just a missionary serving in Europe as you young preachers serve in areas near this campus.”

- So what this is communicating, is that Christ is the ultimate Apostle and the only true High Priest – and in this way He was vastly superior to Moses. (Pause) Well, let’s see if we can get to one more point in our outline. Notice secondly:

II. THE COMPARISON (v. 2)

- Go with me to v. 2, “He [that is Christ] was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house.” At this point, the author of Hebrews is *not* making a *contrast* but a *comparison*. Both were faithful.

- Before showing Jesus’ superiority over Moses, he talks about the resemblance between the two. Like Jesus, Moses was faithful. He was faithful “in all His (God’s) house.”

- This comes from Num. 12:7-8, where it says, “...My servant Moses...is faithful in all My household...with him I speak face to face...” The Word of God tells us that Moses was faithful in all God called him to do. That is confirmed by the fact that God spoke to him face to face.

- There is no one else in the OT that can be said of. God spoke to His prophets through dreams and visions, but with Moses He spoke to him as a close friend.

- And we need to remember how highly the Jews of that day regarded Moses. It is difficult for us (Gentiles) today to fully comprehend this, but nearly *everything* connected with God (for them) was also connected with Moses.

- So the Spirit of God (through the human author of Hebrews) is beginning with this positive affirmation of Moses’ faithfulness. He was faithful to do all God called him to do. He was faithful in standing up to Pharaoh and in leading the Israelites out of Egypt. He was faithful in the wilderness. He was faithful in the giving of the Law

and in his intercession on behalf of the people. Moses was a faithful servant. He was faithful to the One who sent him.

- And in the same way, Jesus was faithful to the One who appointed him as well. As God's supreme Apostle (God's supreme sent-One) He was completely faithful to the will of the Father.

- As the Gospels testify, Jesus always did the Father's will. In fact, He said in John 7:18, "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."

- In other words, "You can tell that I am the true Apostle because I do *not* seek My own glory, but the glory of the One who sent Me." In John 5:30 He said, "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

- Moses was faithful to the One who sent him – and so was Christ. The phrase "in all His house" (in v. 2) means that Israel was established by God and Moses was a steward over that "house." It was God's house, but Moses was faithful to manage it according to God's design.

- And (by the way) the Bible tells us that we (as believers) are all stewards, and that faithfulness is the primary quality of a good steward. In 1 Cor. 4:2 we are

told, "...it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy (or faithful)."

- Moses was faithful over God's house. He was willing to go and do all the LORD commanded him to do. He was willing to go against some of the greatest opposition in the history of the world. He was willing to do what was hard. He was ready to walk by faith when he couldn't see how Pharaoh would ever let the people go, or how they would ever get across the Red Sea.

- He was a faithful man – but Jesus was even more so. Although Moses was faithful, he was *not* perfect. Jesus (on the other hand) perfectly obeyed the will of the Father – and because of that Christ is our ultimate example.

- Now, next time we will see the contrast. We will see that Christ is superior to Moses – therefore the covenant He brought is superior to the one Moses brought.

- MAKE APPEAL

- PRAYER