

Hebrews 3:1-6

¹Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, focus your attention on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. ² He was faithful to the one who appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in God's whole house. ³ In fact, Jesus is worthy of greater glory than Moses, in the same way that the builder of a house has more honor than the house. ⁴ For every house is built by someone, and God is the one who built everything. ⁵ Moses was faithful as a servant within God's whole house by testifying to the things that would be spoken. ⁶ But Christ is faithful as a Son over God's house. We are his house, if we hold on firmly to our confidence and the hope about which we boast until the end.

Sermon for Epiphany 4, January 31, 2021 St. Paul's Green Garden

Text: Hebrews 3:1-6

Theme: "Keep Your Eyes on Jesus"

In the name of Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, dear fellow redeemed,

"Keep your eyes on the ball." It's a principle of most any sport that uses a ball or a puck. Whether you are shooting, hitting, or catching a ball, every coach will tell you keep your eye on it. That's how you score, or make the big play. Take your eye off the ball and you will miss the pitch, the slap shot will go wide, you'll drop the pass. Really, keeping your eyes on the ball is the most fundamental part of any sport.

Though he wasn't writing about a sport, it was much the same principle that the inspired writer penned to the Jewish Christians in the first century. They suffered persecution because they believed in Jesus. They came under pressure from other Jews who did not believe Jesus is the Messiah. Non-believing Jews saw Jewish Christians as sort of being traitors who had given up their Jewish-ness. How could they be called Jews any longer? So some of these Jewish believers were tempted to go back to their Jewish roots and give up on Jesus.

The writer had just spent the previous 14 verses telling his fellow persecuted Jews that Jesus is true God who came to earth and took on our human flesh because God the Father sent him to save us from sin. He truly was the most important human being in their lives. And that was really something for a Jew to admit because the one human being that every true Jewish person admired and held above every other human being was Moses. The NT mentions Moses' name at least 80 times. But as important as Moses is, and he is important, the writer still said to his readers then as he does to us now, "**keep your eyes on Jesus.**" He has three reasons for telling his fellow Jews to do this. And though these reasons relate to Moses, though some of our temptations today are different from those the

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Jews faced then, the writer still makes his point. Keep your eyes on Jesus, 1. He is faithful, as Moses was. 2. He is worthy of greater honor than Moses was. 3. He is the fulfillment of what Moses said.

You could hardly talk to any Jew about Moses without conjuring up thoughts of how God had appeared to him at the burning bush and called him to demand that the most powerful ruler on earth at the time let Israel leave the land where they had been slaves. Every Israelite knew that Moses had received his commission from God. It was no small assignment. And Moses had fulfilled it. But as important as Moses and his commission were, there was someone who had a greater commission because he is greater. **“¹Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, focus your attention on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.”** Notice that the writer calls Jesus an apostle.

No other writer calls him that, and it is unusual to call Jesus an apostle. The word ‘apostle’ simply means someone who is sent by another to fulfill a commission. Jesus sent his apostles on their commission to make disciples of all nations. But he himself was an apostle who was sent by his Father to save the human race. It is in this sense that the writer uses the word ‘apostle’ to describe Jesus. And here was an important reason for those first readers to keep their eyes on Jesus.

Jesus was faithful to his Father and his commission. He was faithful to his father by following his Word. He made it clear to everyone he spoke to that his Father’s word came above every other word or any other command. And if any word or command conflicted with this Father’s word, he would discard whatever contradicted his Father. So the Father’s commission was most important. Even when his disciple Peter said, **“No, Lord! You’re not going to die. That will never do!”** But Jesus remained determined to faithfully complete the mission his Father assigned him.

And when Satan came to tempt him to gain attention and glory for himself while discarding his Father’s mission, as he did in the wilderness and many other times, Jesus put his Father’s word above Satan’s temptations. We need to understand that it was not merely his Father’s command that moved Jesus to be faithful. He had a deep, abiding, eternal love for his Father and his Father’s plan. This is why he was faithful to his Father.

Not only was Jesus faithful to his Father’s commission and plan, but he had far more responsibility than Moses. Jesus’ carried out the role of High Priest as part of his commission though he surely was not part of the O.T. priesthood. That priesthood was a picture of Jesus’ priesthood. But he himself, is the true High Priest. The role of the priest was to represent God before His people and to

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represent the people before God. Jesus carried on his greatest work as priest by giving himself up as the sacrifice for the sins of the whole human race. When he did this he brought all his holiness and his perfect life before his father as the price he paid for our rebellion against God.

Contrast Jesus with Moses and we can see that while Moses was faithful, he still had human failings. God certainly called Moses, a prophet, a pattern of Jesus to come. But Moses was human. He had his doubts about God's power for him. God called him to challenge the most powerful ruler in the world by leading Israel out of Egypt, yet sometimes he wavered in trusting God. He sometimes forgot he had the power of the almighty king of the universe in his corner. So his faithfulness was still subject to his human weaknesses.

The Christian Jews who first read this letter believed they owed much loyalty to Moses because he had given them God's law. God's laws were all they knew. The enemies who were against Christ were tempting them to forsake Jesus whom they knew had redeemed them. The writer wanted these Christian Jews to remember that while Moses was great, Jesus IS greater because he lived a life with no sin. Because of this he is our perfect redeemer. What this says to us, is simply that we need to keep our eyes on Jesus. There are many earthly distractions in this world and Satan puts them in our way because he wants to keep our attention away from Jesus. A difficult economy can strain our income. If we are trying to keep a job and make sure we don't lose it, that puts a strain on us personally and our family. We may feel as if we need to put in more time at work and less time into our own and our family's spiritual training. This is why we need to admit we have sinned when we neglect to focus on Jesus. And that is the beauty of coming back to Jesus again. When we keep our eyes on him we do so first of all because he has paid for our sins. He takes away our guilt. Keep your eyes on Jesus. He was more faithful than Moses. Every day Jesus faithfully forgives you. And because of that Jesus is always worthy of greater honor than Moses.

Again, these Christian Jews who revered Moses so highly, the writer wants them to remember that while Moses is worthy of honor, he was a servant IN God's house. We may not think that term 'servant' makes a great distinction between Moses and Jesus. In the O.T. Isaiah calls God's Son the suffering servant in Isaiah 53. But Jesus IS worthy of greater honor than Moses says the writer because Jesus was faithful as a Son OVER God's house. The writer seems to be saying that since Jesus is the Son he is the heir to his father's estate. The heir is always worthy of greater honor, and especially THIS son because he is the eternal Son of God. But Jesus is not only the heir, he is the builder of God's house. That does set him apart from Moses and qualifies him for far greater honor than Moses.

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So, what is this house that Jesus has built? We need to relate this house to his main work as Savior and redeemer. Paul writes that **Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish.** Paul also wrote to the Colossians that Christ is **the head of the Church, his body of which he is the Savior.** And to the Ephesians Paul wrote that the church **“is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone.”** As an inspired writer then, the writer of this letter is saying that Jesus is worthy of greater honor than Moses because by his death and resurrection he brings the Christian Church into existence.

Jesus is worthy of greater honor than Moses just as we honor a great architect for a well-designed building far more than we honor the building itself. We honor Jesus because of all that he did to build the church. He made every believer holy by giving his life to pay for our sins. We gather together as a body of believers under the headship of Jesus whom we worship as our Lord and Savior. Here is the second reason we keep our eyes on Jesus. Moses was a temporary earthly leader God gave to his people for a certain specified period of time in history. Jesus is the builder of God’s house of believers. He is the eternal ruler for ALL time. He redeemed us and he will take us home to heaven.

That is far different from earthly rulers. All over the world people are frustrated with earthly rulers. Some are dictators, some are thirsty to dominate trade or become world leaders by force. Others are interested only in earthly gain for themselves and or their political friends. But friends, keep your eyes on Jesus. He has built the church and he does everything for her as Paul says he rules over everything for the church. And when the last day comes those earthly rulers who ruled cruelly, with injustice, for personal gain will be judged and Jesus will take his people home. So while it is frustrating for us now, just keep looking at Jesus. He knows what’s happening in this world. He will finally bring justice for his people. He is worthy of honor even when some earthly rulers dishonor Jesus by the way they rule. The writer of Hebrews surely understood how frustrated Christians might be with earthly rulers, especially in the Roman empire. But, he wanted them to know that Jesus is still ruling everything. So he reminds them one more time to keep their eyes on Jesus because he is the fulfillment of what Moses said.

Moses faithfully recorded the promises God made about the Savior by writing them down as God directed him. He wrote many prophecies about the Savior to come, from Genesis 3:15, **“I will put enmity between you and the woman...”** all

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the way down to his own final prediction of the prophet to come, of whom Moses himself was a pattern.

Here, for the first time in the first three chapters the writer calls Jesus 'Christ'. "Christ" is a title, the anointed one. It shows him as the one chosen by God, the one that Moses wrote about. He came into the world by God's power and plan to redeem the world. This God accomplished through his anointed one.

And again, we recognize that Moses surely deserved honor; God himself reminds us that Moses should receive honor as God's faithful servant. But the Hebrew Christians were not to let anyone persuade them to believe that anyone other than Jesus should have the glory and honor that belongs to Him.

Today, too, the devil works through many religious leaders and sects to direct our trust to our own works and worthiness instead of trusting in Christ alone. When we trust our own works, our own strength, even in earthly matters we give ourselves the honor instead of Jesus. Instead, we keep our eyes on Jesus and honor him when we remember to seek his help and strength even in matters we might consider trivial or not worthy of Jesus' attention. But do we think that we can take care of some things without Jesus' help?

Friends, think of the man Daniel. He was a very gifted statesman in both the Babylonian and Persian governments. Yet he was constantly praying and asking God for help. He knew and believed that God deserved all the honor. This truth came out also in the lives of his three friends who willingly faced the fiery furnace rather than worship a false god. They kept their eyes on Jesus.

There is no one else you can depend on who is so entirely reliable. And understand why this is so. When God says something will come true it always does. When he said he would send his son to take away the sin of the world, he did it. Jesus is the one Moses wrote about. It was not just a nice prediction that came true. It was the coming of God's Son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. Jesus is THE prophet Moses wrote about. He is THE Suffering Servant, THE son of David, THE Messiah. Keep your eyes on him. Focus on him alone and you will always be in touch with God. Amen.