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Bridgeway Church

Hebrews #9

## **Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our Confession**

### **Hebrews 3:1-6**

I had an interesting experience in studying this passage in Hebrews 3 and in my preparation for this message. I got *massively distracted!* But in a good way! And I hope you will be happy and pleased that I was. So let me explain.

As we've already seen in our study of Hebrews, this book is all about establishing and demonstrating in a variety of ways that *Jesus is better*. We saw in chapters one and two that he is better than the OT prophets and all the angels who serve God's people. In chapters three, four, and five he will be shown as better than Joshua and Aaron. Throughout the rest of the book our author will portray his sacrifice and the new covenant he established as better than all the animal sacrifices of the old covenant. But here in Hebrews 3 his aim is to demonstrate that *Jesus is better than Moses*.

The superiority of Jesus to Moses is our author's focus in vv. 2-6. But, as I said, I was massively distracted by something in v. 1 and got stuck there! And it is there that I want to spend most of our time this morning. But before I share with you what so captivated my heart this week, let me say a few words about the argument in vv. 2-6.

#### *Moses: Israel's National Hero*

Although Abraham and David and Isaiah and Daniel are critically important figures in the OT, none is greater than Moses. He was truly a national hero and "the architect of Israel's corporate life" (France, 58).

Moses was born to Hebrew parents, whose names were Amram and Jochebed (Exod. 2:1; 6:20). We know that he was 80 years old when the exodus occurred (Exod. 7:7). If the exodus out of Egypt is dated in 1446, Moses would have been born in @ 1526 b.c. He was the third child in his family: Aaron was 3 when Moses was born and their sister Miriam was probably in her early teens. He is described as being a “beautiful” child in Acts 7:20.

You know the story of how Moses was placed in a basket and set afloat on the Nile River. By the way, the Hebrew word translated “basket” or “chest” is used only one other place in all of the OT: in Genesis, with reference to the “ark” of Noah! There is an obvious parallel between the two. Both were God’s appointed means of salvation. Both were preserved from the waters of destruction by an “ark.” The only difference is that Noah’s ark had a rudder and a steersman to keep it on course, whereas the “ark” in which Moses was placed is providentially steered by God himself. If you are disturbed by the decision of Moses’ mother to take this course of action, you must remember that it was the ancient equivalent of leaving a child on the steps of a hospital or orphanage. Women frequently came to the banks of the Nile River to wash clothes, to bathe, and to prepare food. Releasing Moses along its shoreline was therefore the most likely way in which she could entrust him to the care of someone else.

As for Pharaoh’s daughter who pulled him from the Nile, tradition has given her the name Bithiah, but we don’t know her identity with any degree of certainty. Moses probably was nursed by his biological mother for some two years. The name “Moses” is Egyptian for “son” or “one who is born of” but the name also sounds like the Hebrew verb “to draw out” (see Exod. 2:10).

There is little doubt that *Moses was a type or foreshadowing of Jesus*, especially in the circumstances surrounding his birth. Both Moses and Jesus are God’s appointed means to bring about deliverance and redemption for God’s people. Both are threatened by a ruling monarch (Pharaoh / Herod). In both cases the attempt to kill him is first secret; having failed, public steps are taken to get rid of the child. In both cases Moses and Jesus survive while other infants are slaughtered. The parents of Moses deliver him *from* Egypt, whereas the parents of Jesus deliver him *into* Egypt.

As you know, when he was about 40 years old Moses struck and killed an Egyptian who had been caught beating up a fellow Hebrew. When Pharaoh got wind of what had happened he attempted to kill Moses, but he escaped into the wilderness of Midian where he spent the next 40 years tending the sheep of his father-in-law Jethro.

The contrasts in the life of Moses have been beautifully captured by I. M. Halderman. He writes:

“He was the child of a slave, and the son of a queen. He was born in a hut, and lived in a palace. He inherited poverty, and enjoyed unlimited wealth. He was the leader of armies and the keeper of flocks. He was the mightiest of warriors, and the meekest of men. He was educated in the court, and dwelt in the desert. He had the wisdom of Egypt, and the faith of a child. He was fitted for the city, and wandered in the wilderness. He was tempted with the pleasures of sin, and endured the hardships of virtue. He was backward in speech, and talked with God. He had the rod of a shepherd, and the power of the Infinite. He was a fugitive from Pharaoh, and an ambassador from heaven. He was the giver of the Law, and the forerunner of grace. He died alone on Mount Moab, and appeared with Christ in Judea. No man assisted at his funeral, yet God buried him” (I. M. Halderman).

Perhaps the most important passage in the OT that tells us how highly God regarded him and how intimate he was in his relationship with God is Numbers 12:6-8. There we read of God’s rebuke of Aaron and Miriam who likely were jealous of the authority and power God had given Moses:

“And he [God] said, ‘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. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. 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?’”

### *Comparing Jesus and Moses*

With all that being said, we are ready to look at the argument of our author in Hebrews 3:2-6, and it is fairly straightforward and doesn’t require a lot of explanation. There are **four** points of comparison/contrast in this text, each of which establishes the superiority of Jesus to Moses.

***(1) Whereas both Moses and Jesus were “faithful” to God, only Jesus was altogether obedient and never sinned or disobeyed.***

Please understand that in this contrast there is no denigration or criticism of Moses. It isn't that Moses was bad and Jesus was good. It's simply the contrast between a man, on the one hand, who is faithful, but still a sinner who occasionally fails and disbelieves and disobeys, and Jesus, on the other hand, who is perfectly faithful and, although tempted in all things like us, never sinned (cf. Heb. 4:15).

***(2) Moses was faithful in God's house, whereas Jesus built it!***

The "house" of God here is not a reference to the Temple but to the people of God collectively. We might even render it as "household." The reason Jesus is worthy of greater glory than Moses is that although Moses was faithful and played a crucial role in God's redemptive purposes, he was still only a part of that house, a member of it. Jesus, on the other hand, is the builder of the house. He created it. Moses is himself one of the people of God. Jesus is the Creator, Savior, and Lord of all such people. There is a sense in which it might even be said that ***Jesus is worthy of greater honor and glory than Moses because Jesus made Moses!***

We see here again that although Jesus is fully human he is also fully God. In v. 3 it says that Jesus built the house and in v. 4 that God built not only the house but everything. The point is that Jesus is God!

***(3) Moses was faithful as a servant of God, but Jesus is the Son!***

This point of contrast is seen in vv. 5-6a. It is true that both Moses and Jesus serve the people of God. But what sets them apart is that ***Jesus is more than a servant of God's people: he is God's Son! He is the Savior of God's people!*** The Son, by way of inheritance, owns the house and is lord and master over the house and provides for the family within it and protects them from danger and destruction.

***(4) Moses testified and prophesied of greater things to come, and Jesus is the fulfillment of all that he said!***

The fourth and final point of contrast is more implicit than explicit. The key here is in the second half of v. 5 and the phrase: "*to testify to the things that were to be spoken later.*"

Once again let me say that the author of Hebrews does not argue for the superiority of Jesus and the new covenant by denigrating or disregarding Moses and the old covenant. Moses has been rightly praised as a faithful “servant” of God. But the covenant under which he lived was temporary. Its purpose was to point forward to something greater and more lasting and more glorious. Moses did a wonderful job of testifying “to the things that were to be spoken later.” And what are those “things”? Jesus and all that he brought to us in the New Covenant!

***Moses and the Old Covenant were not the goal or the end or the ultimate aim of God’s revelation. They existed to symbolize and foreshadow and prophesy about and point to Jesus and the New Covenant!*** We will see this very truth over and over in Hebrews, such as we find in Hebrews 10:1 where the “law” of Moses is described as “but a *shadow* of the good things to come.” The substance is Jesus Christ and the law of the New Covenant.

### *Perseverance as the Proof of who is in God’s House*

When we were in Hebrews 2, I spoke briefly about the emphasis in this epistle on persevering and remaining and enduring over time in the faith that we profess. ***Merely saying or declaring that one is a Christian amounts to very little.*** In fact, it may be an act of self-delusion and self-deception. All through the NT we come across what can only be called “false faith”. False faith is a form of “belief” in Christ that never fully takes root in the heart. There may be an initial season of joy and excitement and Bible study and church attendance, but it is followed, at some point, by drifting away from the Lord and falling into unrepentant sin and idolatry.

Perseverance functions as evidence of an existing right relationship with God. Our author doesn’t say that a person *will become* a part of God’s people if they persevere. Neither does he say that a person will *remain* a part of God’s people if they persevere. Rather he says: this is how you can know if someone already is a part of God’s people – does he or she hold fast their confidence and their boasting in hope in Christ all the way to the end. In other words, ***he is less concerned with whether or not they profess to believe and more with whether or not they persevere to believe.***

Some so stress God’s saving grace that they end up undermining personal responsibility and holiness of life. People are told: “If you ever prayed a prayer or walked an aisle or wept during a hymn or signed a decision card or joined in with your friends at summer camp in confessing the name of Jesus aloud, you are saved and secure no matter what else you do in life.” People who have wandered away and are living in unrepentant sin and give no indication of a deep heart-felt affection for Jesus and his saving death on the cross are often told, “Don’t worry. Once saved, always saved. Your decision back then is all that matters.”

At the other end of the spectrum are those who minimize and undermine God's saving grace by arguing that it really doesn't matter what happened in the past, even if at some point you were genuinely born again and justified by faith in Christ. You must remain faithful and if you don't your failure will nullify God's grace and cut you off forever from his saving purposes. You may have once been genuinely saved but now, because you have abandoned your faith, you forfeit that privilege and fall under condemnation yet again.

***Both are wrong!***

Look closely at the latter half of the verse where he refers to our "confidence" in Christ and our boasting in the "hope" we have in him. Clearly he is describing the initial act of faith when a man or woman claims to have put their trust in Jesus for salvation. If a person who professes to have "confidence" in Christ, a person who claims to have trusted him for salvation, "holds fast" in this hope and faith all the way to the end, this indicates that they truly "are" members of God's "house." Perseverance provides evidence of the reality of one's claim to know Jesus.

How can we know whether or not someone genuinely shares in Christ, which is to say, is born-again and is justified and is a child of God? We can know by observing whether or not they "hold fast" their confidence and hope in Christ.

***He does not say that if you fail to hold fast your confidence this means you once had it but later lost it. Rather, if you fail to hold it, it means you never had it at all.*** If someone does not hold firmly to the end of this "faith" or "confidence" that he/she claims to have put in Christ, this reveals that they never truly and sincerely shared in Christ in the first place.

Simply put, perseverance is the proof of salvation. ***No perseverance, no salvation; not because you had it but lost it, but because you never had it at all.*** So let me say it again as clearly as I can. Our author is *not* telling us what *will* be true *if* a person endures to the end but rather what is *already true*. A person's endurance or perseverance in faith and obedience is the evidence of their vital, saving connection to Christ and their participation in him.

*How I was Joyfully Distracted!*

I now want to talk about what so captivated my attention this week. It's found back in v. 1.

There we are encouraged to “consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession” (v. 1a). The focus of our confession, the focus of our faith is Jesus, not Moses. Moses spoke prophetically of Jesus. Everything in the Mosaic Covenant and the Law and the Levitical system pointed to Christ! So consider him!

In serving as our Apostle and High Priest, Jesus accomplishes for us the two most important things we need. ***We need first to hear from God***, to know who he is and to be given a clear and infallible revelation of his will. This is what Jesus did as our Apostle. The word “apostle” means the one who is sent. Jesus the Son was “sent” by the Father to make him known. We saw this clearly in Hebrews 1:1.

But after hearing from God ***we need to get to God***. We need access to him. We need to be reconciled to him. This is what Jesus did for us as our High Priest. Thus, as John Piper has said, we need “a word from God and a way to God.” Or again, “we need revelation from God and we need reconciliation with God,” and Jesus provides both as Apostle and High Priest.

What caught my attention, however, was the way in which our author describes those of us who by God’s grace have considered Jesus and put our faith in him. We are among those ***“who share in a heavenly calling”*** (v. 1a).

To be among those who share in a “heavenly calling” has to do with our ***identity***, and there is nothing more central or crucial to our lives as Christians than understanding who we are. I can’t begin to tell you how many times during the course of an average week I hear from people whose primary struggle in life has to do with their ***mistaken identity***. Or perhaps it is a child who simply doesn’t know who he or she is or even why they exist. Or on occasion it is someone whose sense of personal identity has been so warped and damaged by abuse or neglect or some other sin that they’ve simply given up hope of ever finding personal value and purpose in life. They live under the false guise of someone that isn’t them; they’ve been told who they are or what they should be and it has nothing to do with what God created them for.

That is why this opening statement in Hebrews 3:1 is so important. Christian, listen to me. You cannot afford to turn a deaf ear to this question. ***Do you know what it means to be the recipient of a “heavenly calling”? Do you?***

Let me mention three things.

**First**, you are a man or a woman whose existence and identity cannot be explained merely by pointing to something in this world. In other words, you can't stop by saying: "Well, I'm a child of my mother and father. You ask who I am, and the answer is: I am what they've said I am. I am whoever their sins have shaped me to me." Or again, you can't stop by saying: "O.K., I am nothing more than a broken and helpless sinner, a sexually warped and intellectually stunted and physically unattractive blip on the screen of this vast universe."

No! If you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, if he is Lord over your life, ***your identity (your value, meaning, purpose) is shaped and determined by the call placed on you from heaven by God.*** This isn't a guidance counselor at school who has administered certain personality profiles or skills tests to see what you are best at in life. This isn't an employer who informs you that you've advanced about as far as you'll ever go in your job, so just settle in for the duration and be content with your title, your position, and your salary.

Listen again to the words of God: you are one who shares in a "heavenly calling"! ***God, the God of the universe, has summoned you to himself. He has called you, has drawn you, has redeemed you, has placed his stamp of ownership on you, has beckoned you to himself, and has established with you a relationship of love and intimacy and joy that will last forever.*** This is what it means to be called from heaven.

**Second**, this "calling" doesn't simply ***come from*** heaven; it ***leads to*** heaven as well. In other words, this is as much about your ***ultimate destiny*** as it is about your ***initial origin***. He isn't telling us merely where our hope comes from, namely, ***from*** heaven, but where our hope is taking us, namely, ***to*** heaven. Your life is far more than what you amass in your few years on this earth. Don't ever let your identity be shaped or limited merely by what you accomplish or accumulate now. Your identity is as a man or woman who is destined to live eternally in heavenly bliss and glory, which is to say, in the presence and in the enjoyment of God himself.

Let me say one more thing about this facet of being "called" not only from heaven but to heaven. In Ephesians 1:15ff. Paul prays that "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, ***that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you***" (vv. 17-18a). Did you see that? He's talking about the "hope" to which we have been "called". This is our "heavenly calling" and Paul's prayer is that the Spirit would enable us to spiritually "see" and grasp and find strength in the reality of all that is entailed by it. That is why what we are doing here in Hebrews 3:1 is so eternally important.



**Third**, the word “heavenly” doesn’t merely talk about where our calling originated or where our calling is taking us. It also describes the *quality* of our existence; *the kind of person we are designed to be*. Our lives now and forevermore are to be characterized by the values of heaven; energized by the power of heaven; shaped by the beauty of heaven. *We are to live now, on earth, heavenly lives*. Do you get that? *You have been called by God to live now, on earth, a heavenly life, which is to say, a life that reflects the morality and beauty and power and glory of heaven itself*.

Why, then, would you listen to anyone who would tell you otherwise? Why, then, would you ever consider giving yourself over to merely earthly pleasures and earthly activities? There lives within you a heavenly power, the Holy Spirit, who is calling you to consider who you are in Christ. And if you do that, nothing will ever be the same. *Things you used to love*, but all the while knew you shouldn’t, you’ll gradually grow to hate. *Things you used to believe as true*, but all the while knew were false, you’ll gradually grow to reject. *Things you used to do and say* because you believed they alone could make life fun and worth living, you’ll gradually come to recognize as empty and delusional and destructive.

What I’m saying to you right now is almost identical to what the Apostle Paul said to the church in Colossae in **Colossians 3:1-4**.

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:1-4).

*If our author is correct, and your “calling” and identity are from heaven and leading to heaven and are to be characterized by the qualities and values of heaven, you can understand why Paul would tell us to “seek” the things of heaven, to seek after the things “above” and not “the things that are on earth.”*

In the larger context of Colossians 2-3 Paul is telling the Christians in that church, and us as well, how you overcome sensual and fleshly impulses; in other words, how you fight and defeat sinful temptations in your life. Yielding to fleshly urges is overcome by "seeking" the things above. Fixing our minds on "things above" leaves little time or mental energy for earthly fantasies. The heart that is entranced by the risen Christ is not easily seduced by "the things that are on earth" (v. 2b). Paul uses language that requires both the energetic orientation of our **will** ("keep seeking") as well as the singular devotion of our **mind** ("set your mind"). This is a conscious and volitionally deliberate movement of the soul to fix and ground itself on, indeed to glut itself in, if you will, the beauty of spiritual realities as opposed to the trivial and tawdry things of this world.

Let me also say that this is precisely what the author of Hebrews has in mind when he tells us to “**consider**” Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession. To “consider” isn’t to think about once in a while. It means to devote all your mental and spiritual energy to thinking and meditating and concentrating on who Jesus is and what he has done. Fixate your thoughts on Christ. Rivet your attention on him alone. ***Be ruthlessly attentive to him.*** This is what Paul means when he says “seek” the things that are above and “set your mind” on things that are above (Col. 3:1-2).

People, I know how hard this is to do. Never in the history of mankind have there been at our fingertips so many opportunities and devices to distract us and take our minds off of Christ and off of our heavenly calling. It’s become so bad that many of you can’t sit still and focus on God’s Word for 40 minutes on a Sunday morning without being drawn to check your Facebook page or your email or twitter or instagram. ***It’s positively painful for you to turn off TV or shut down the computer or set aside your smart phone and think and meditate and study and pray about Jesus Christ and the things above and the hope of your heavenly calling.*** Some of you, it grieves me to say, have absolutely no idea what I’m talking about. And even those of you who do have no idea how to go about it or how to get started.

And then you wonder why you’re so unhappy and unfulfilled and impatient and easily upset and so prone to boredom and why you give in so quickly to whatever temptation comes your way.

Look again at Colossians 3. The reason we must seek the things above is because that is “where Christ is” (v. 1). He is the exalted center and supreme sovereign of the eternal and heavenly realm. Why would we want our lives and thoughts and actions fixed anywhere else? The appeal of heavenly things is the presence of Jesus. It is the glory and beauty and multifaceted personality and power and splendor of the risen Christ to which Paul directs our attention. This is surely what the author of Hebrews had in mind when he exhorts those who “share in a heavenly calling” to “consider Jesus”!

I don’t want you to misunderstand what either the author of Hebrews or Paul is saying. When Paul commands us to “seek” after things above and not things on earth and when the author of Hebrews describes our very identity as those who have received a “heavenly calling,” ***neither is suggesting that we embrace an "other-worldliness" that treats with contempt, or at best a benign neglect, the earth and nature and normal human endeavors.***

Neither author is encouraging Christians to ignore social injustice today in anticipation of the vindication of righteousness in the age to come. Neither Paul nor the author of Hebrews is

suggesting that we carelessly exploit the environment now, knowing that we shall one day live in the pristine glory of a New Heavens and New Earth.

The terms used by Paul (“above” and “on the earth”) and the word used by Hebrews (“heavenly”) are not spatially literal but point to ***two opposing ethical realms, indeed two antithetical world systems (with corresponding antithetical worldviews)***. In saying Christ and God are “above” does not mean they are absent from the earth or uninvolved with what happens in the world in which we live. Far less does our “heavenly” calling mean that we are to be unconcerned with this world, given the fact that God’s purpose is to redeem it and deliver it from the curse (see Romans 8:18ff.). Don't ever forget that we will live on a redeemed, new EARTH for all eternity!

So again, to be a person who has received a “heavenly calling”, a person who is commanded to seek and think about “things above” does not mean we are to ignore and neglect the daily affairs and responsibilities of life in the here and now. In saying that we should neither seek nor set our minds on "things on the earth" but rather live in accordance with our “heavenly calling” they are not suggesting that we refuse to mow the grass or take out the garbage or play with our kids or be punctual in our appointments. Rather, they are denouncing a carnal mindset, a perspective that is fixated on this world system to the exclusion of Christ and the kingdom of God.

So, when Paul refers to "things below" or "things on the earth" he has in mind that worldly system under the dominion of Satan, those values and goals and principles that conflict with the revelation of God in Scripture. "Things on the earth" are whatever is driven by pride, greed, lust, and disregard for the glory of God. “Heaven” and the “things above,” on the other hand, are whatever reflects the beauty of Christ, whether that be the changing of a diaper, sharing a meal with friends, or celebrating the Eucharist.

The "real" life of the Christian, the "true" life in the "Spirit" and the reality of living in accordance with our “heavenly calling” is not something we do in some distant realm, detached from and unconnected with the dirt and sweat and frustrations of trying to cope with other fallen folk and our own obligations to them (however onerous they may be). The "real," "true," "spiritual," “heavenly” life of the Christian is right here, right now, empowered by the exalted Christ with whom we are forever identified.

### *Conclusion*

The certainty and hope of this heavenly calling does not hang suspended on our good works. Our heavenly calling is not conditioned on our righteousness. If it were, we would have no hope. No, our hope and confidence and the certainty of our salvation hang on Jesus. We are to consider

“Jesus”! Don’t consider me. Don’t consider this church. Being a member of Bridgeway does not save you. Don’t consider your family or your possessions or your reputation. Don’t consider the fact that up until now you have not committed some scandalous public sin. Don’t “consider” anything but Christ!

Don’t pay him the courtesy of a passing glance. Don’t patronize him with an occasional thought. Be fully occupied and obsessed with Jesus Christ as the Apostle and High Priest of your confession. Do you acknowledge and bank everything on the truth that as your Apostle Jesus was sent to you and me to provide the only infallible revelation of who God is? Do you acknowledge and bank everything on the truth that as your High Priest Jesus alone can make atonement for your sin and bring you to God? If you can sincerely say Yes to those questions, it means you have been made the recipient of a “heavenly calling.” So live, love, talk, think, feel, and act like it!