

# Better than Moses

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[ 0 : 0 0 ] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 9th of March 2003. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled Better Than Moses and is based on Hebrews chapter 3 verses 1 to 6. Please be seated.

And you may like to have open the Bibles at page 972, Hebrews chapter 3. And we're preaching in the 10am service a sermon series through Hebrews.

This is I think week 4. And we'll be doing that during the year in three main blocks of sermons. And let's pray that God will speak to us through these words.

God our Father we thank you that you speak to us and have done for centuries through in various and many ways through your prophets. And then finally and fully in your son Jesus Christ.

[ 1 : 0 4 ] And we pray that as we come to his word now you will speak to us not only to inform our mind but to reform our lives. For Jesus sake. Amen. Life has more dropouts than successes.

For every winner there are dozens who don't win and many who don't even complete. Team New Zealand not only lost the America's Cup but at least two of their races didn't even complete the race one of which they broke their mast.

I remember when I started my first undergraduate university course in actuarial studies. That less than half who started finished the course. And of those who finished the course not all that many actually finished with the high enough grades that they were supposed to get.

Plenty start but fewer finish. And the Christian path is similar. That applies not only in normal life, in athletics and in sport and various other pursuits but in the Christian life as well.

The Christian path is strewn with many who drop out. Some find the Christian life too hard. The demands of God too high. Too demanding.

[ 2 : 1 9 ] Some people drop out of Christian faith because they're disenchanted with church or maybe offended by somebody. Sometimes alternative activities encroach upon the time that they would normally give, so they drop out of Bible study or church life or reading the Bible and so on.

Sometimes it's the demands of work that consume the energy and enthusiasm, and so people begin to wane in their Christian life. Sometimes it's the attractions of the world, the desires of money or power, maybe the attraction of a non-Christian person.

Sometimes Christians drop out because they're burnt out by Christian service. Years of voluntary service or even paid Christian ministry are burnt out and waning in their Christian faith.

Sometimes it's doubts that are fuelled by a sceptic society or sceptical or non-Christian family or friends or neighbours. For whatever reason, the Christian path is strewn with many who drop out of Christian life and faith.

The Christian life is a heavenly calling. We're called to heaven. We're called from earth to have our eternal destiny in God's glorious heaven.

[ 3 : 40 ] It is an upward call. It says St. Paul in Philippians, here in Hebrews 3, a heavenly calling. It is a heavenly calling that is made possible by Jesus coming from heaven to share our earthly humanity so that we may go to heaven and share his heavenly glory.

And for this we are set apart by Jesus, dedicated or made holy are the expressions that are used in the scriptures here in Hebrews. And this letter to the Hebrews is written to Christians who are in danger of dropping out, who are in danger of drifting in the Christian faith away from God and away from his people.

It is written to Christians who are perhaps losing their enthusiasm for living as Christians in this world. And so the ties to God are beginning to be loosened.

A slackness in coming together as church week by week. A slackness in reading the Bible and in praying. And so the ties to God are becoming slacker and looser.

And these readers to whom this letter was written are in danger of drifting from God. And throughout the letter it's dotted with exhortations to keep on in the Christian faith.

[ 5 : 06 ] To persevere in the Christian faith. And here at the beginning of chapter 3 we find another of those exhortations. Therefore brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider that Jesus the Apostle and High Priest of our confession was faithful.

Consider that. Consider means not as a fleeting thought, like the hundreds of thoughts that we have during the day. In our day we hear things in the background or we see things and we have fleeting thoughts about this, that or the other, something that we should do, it's in one ear out the other, we've usually forgotten it very quickly.

Not like that. That's not how we consider Jesus. The word means to fix our thoughts upon or to apply our minds diligently to Jesus Christ.

It is something deliberate, something that requires our attention and our effort. Consider Jesus. Because it's Jesus who is the reason why we're Christian.

And it is Jesus who is the reason why we continue to be Christian. And why we persevere in the Christian faith. And when we consider Jesus, the temptations of our world fade by comparison.

[ 6 : 25 ] When we consider Jesus, the difficulties that we face from opponents of the Christian faith, they fade by comparison. Listen, the church might fail us, but Jesus never does.

It is Jesus who is to be fixed in our thoughts. It is Jesus who is to be the object of our mind's attention. If we are to persevere as Christians.

And in particular, the thing about Jesus that is mentioned here in Hebrews 3, is the fact that Jesus was faithful. Consider that Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, was faithful to the one who appointed him.

That is God. Jesus here is paraded before us as a role model of faithfulness. The task appointed to him by God, he fulfilled faithfully.

He didn't drop out, but he fulfilled that task to the end. He didn't fail to finish, but fulfilled the task perfectly and totally.

[ 7 : 33 ] And the task assigned to Jesus is summed up by the two words at the end of verse 1, the apostle and the high priest. It is unusual to call Jesus an apostle.

We tend to think of the apostles as the 12 disciples or followers of Jesus, rightly so. In fact, this is the only time in the Bible that Jesus is called an apostle. But literally, the word apostle means somebody who is sent.

A messenger, an envoy, an ambassador, a spokesperson, if you like. And so the first part of Jesus' task is that from heaven he's sent by God to a hostile world as God's envoy, ambassador, as his spokesperson.

And that's exactly the idea we saw right at the beginning of Hebrews. In many and various ways in the past, God spoke to us by the prophets, but now in more recent times, God has spoken by a son.

That is, he's God's spokesperson, envoy or ambassador from heaven to earth to speak God's word and to reveal God to us. That's the first part of his task.

[ 8 : 40 ] And Jesus was faithful to that task. He completed it fully. Job done. He spoke God's word despite the opposition and rejection that he faced day by day.

The second half of Jesus' task is summed up in the expression, the high priest. And if you like, this is the complementary side of being an apostle. The apostle is sent from heaven to earth to speak God's word and reveal God.

The high priest stands for us back to God in heaven. So in order to be a high priest, as we saw last week, Jesus was perfectly human, fully human, in order to represent us back to God.

And in particular, that representation to God we saw at the end of chapter 2 was to offer a sacrifice of atonement for sin. That is, he died on the cross so that our sins would be dealt with, we can be forgiven, and God's anger against us averted.

And that job Jesus did fully, perfectly, and totally as well. At the cost of his life, no less. So we're being asked here to consider the faithfulness of Jesus.

[ 9 : 53 ] A faithfulness in speaking God's words as his apostle or envoy, and his faithfulness as a high priest, which indeed meant the giving of his life for our sin.

Neither side of that task was easy. Both sides of it faced rejection, opposition, persecution, and of course his death on the cross. In a nutshell, that's his rescue mission.

God's apostle to earth, our high priest representing us back to God in heaven. Bringing us heavenward, as fits our heavenly calling.

And despite all obstacles, Jesus fulfilled those tasks faithfully and fully. He is a model of faithfulness to encourage us to be faithful in the Christian life.

That's why the writer is explaining the faithfulness of Jesus here. So that we may be faithful in our Christian lives. If Jesus finished his tasks and mission from God faithfully, so ought we finish our lives faithfully as Christians.

[ 11 : 00 ] If Jesus resisted temptation because he was faithful to God, so ought we resist temptation. If Jesus withstood the opposition that he faced day by day, so ought we withstand the opposition, persecution, and ridicule that we might face for being Christians day by day as well.

And if Jesus returned to heaven, faithfully fulfilling his task, his mission accomplished, so to speak, then so ought we finish our lives on earth faithfully, so we may arrive in heaven, fulfilling our heavenly calling.

One of the frequent devices used in this letter to motivate the readers is the device of comparison. And throughout the letter, Jesus is compared with all sorts of people and things from the Old Testament.

A way of summing up the letter is in fact to say Jesus is better. And you may have noticed the sermon titles for this series all pick up the idea of something that is better, because that's what the writer is saying.

So Jesus we've already seen is compared to angels and shown to be better. Later in the letter we'll see Jesus compared to Old Testament sacrifices, Sabbath day, tabernacle, and so on.

[ 12 : 20 ] And each time we'll see that Jesus is better. Now the comparison is Jesus and Moses. And each time the comparison occurs in the letter, it has three reasons for it.

One, it's to teach us something of Jesus and what he did and who he was like. Secondly, it's to show us that Jesus is better without ever depreciating or belittling what he's compared to.

So it's not that Moses is bad and Jesus is better, it's that Moses is great and Jesus is still better. And the third reason for the comparison is to encourage us to persevere in faith.

Because if these aspects of the Old Testament were important and good as they are, the fact that Jesus is even better is to encourage us to continue as Christian people.

Now one of the greatest of the Old Testament figures and people was Moses. Traditionally he's regarded as the author of the first five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

[ 13 : 23 ] He's the one who was the rescuer of Israel from Egypt and from the oppression they faced there, using as God's messenger, so to speak, to Pharaoh, bringing the people out through the Red Sea and the wilderness.

He's the one who received the laws and commandments of God and relayed them to the people of God. He's the one when Israel failed, as often they did, he prayed for them and interceded for them.

So the Old Testament says that Moses was regarded as faithful in all of God's house, in the midst of God's people. Indeed, he's the epitome of faithfulness in many ways, not perfect, but certainly a model of faithfulness in the Old Testament, not least by comparison to the people he led, who were so faithless.

It seems that after the Old Testament was finished, the esteem with which Moses was held was raised even higher. And so by the time of Jesus and by the time of this writer, it seems that Jewish people in particular valued Moses very highly indeed.

Now Jesus is compared with him. Firstly, a point of similarity. Both were faithful. Moses, an epitome of faithfulness in the Old Testament, in God's house.

[ 14 : 41 ] Jesus, likewise and similarly, faithful. Indeed, you could say that both of their tasks were quite similar. Just as Jesus was apostle and high priest, there's a sense in which Moses was the apostle, the envoy of God sent to Pharaoh, and to speak God's words to Pharaoh.

And just as Jesus was a high priest, there's a sense in which Moses, for the people of Israel, was a high priest, interceding for them and praying for them. And that, I think, is why the writer goes on to make this comparison between Jesus and Moses.

But there the point of similarity ends. The point of contrast is to highlight the place of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus is worthy of more glory and more honour even than Moses received.

The comparison is not between something bad and something good. Moses is held in high esteem, Jesus in higher esteem. The analogy is made in verse 3 of a builder and the house that he built.

The builder is worthy of more honour than the house itself. So too, Jesus is worthy of more honour than Moses. And the implication, I think, of the analogy is that Moses belongs within the house of God.

[ 15 : 55 ] That is not a building, but the people of God. But Jesus, if you like, is the builder. So verse 3 says to us, Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honour than the house itself.

For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. And I think there is an implicit statement there that Jesus is on a par with God to be worshipped like God.

God is the ultimate builder of all things. It is God's house. Verse 3 makes the statement that Jesus is like the builder Moses' role in the house of God was to be a servant.

Not a belittling title. When Moses died, the book of Joshua, after recording his death, says that Moses died as God's servant.

And that is a title of honour. He is held in high esteem as the servant of God in the midst of God's people. But of more honour is the Son, Jesus Christ.

[ 17 : 10 ] For that is Jesus' role. See, Moses was faithful in the midst of God's people as part of God's house himself. Jesus Christ was faithful over God's house.

Supreme over it or Lord over it. Moses was faithful as a servant. Jesus was faithful as a son. Moses was faithful in speaking God's words but they were words that testified to things that would be spoken later.

That is to Jesus himself. So verse 5 and 6 say, Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant to testify to the things that would be spoken later.

Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son. And we are God's house. Notice that at no point is the Old Testament ever dismissed or put aside.

Never is it hinted at that the readers of this letter should do away with the Old Testament because it's now old and redundant. Rather, the Old Testament is still regarded as God speaking and it is God speaking testifying about things that would be spoken later.

[ 18 : 28 ] So what is being said here is that the Old Testament itself is pointing to Jesus Christ. In particular here, the things that Moses said pointing to Jesus Christ.

And if we regard the first five books of the Bible as coming from Moses, then what it's telling us is that the story of the creation, the fall of humanity into sin, the promises of God made to Abraham, the words spoken to the people and to Egypt through Moses, Moses, the laws given to Moses and the sacrifices and the tabernacle that he built, all of that is pointing to Jesus Christ.

And that's a function of the Old Testament. It is pointing to Jesus Christ. It's a bit like an analogy where the Old Testament is like the sketch diagram or the concept drawing for the building.

The building comes later. The sketch diagram and the concept drawings are important. They establish the patterns and the structures with which the building will be built.

But it's not the building itself. The Old Testament, if you like, is the sketch diagram, the drawings, the concept drawings or the plans. Jesus is the building, the fulfilment of what is anticipated and expected.

[ 19 : 49 ] When we did our building works here, we needed to have concept drawings and sketch diagrams to start with a couple of years ago now. Well, that wasn't what we were doing. We weren't satisfied to just have sketch diagrams.

What we wanted was the actual building. But they were the beginning of the plans, pointing forward to the reality. We'd look at the plans and think, what on earth is this going to look like? Sometimes hard to visualise. So too the Old Testament, pointing forward to Jesus, establishing the patterns, the structures of how God will work in saving the people of the world through Jesus Christ, not always easy to visualise.

But then the reality comes in Jesus. So what the writer here is saying is the Old Testament still is important as the diagram, the plan, the sketch, if you like, of what God is on about fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Never is the Old Testament put aside. But it's testifying to the things that would be spoken later in Jesus Christ. Now the point of the comparison here is not to make a sort of complicated point about Old and New Testaments and about Moses and Jesus.

The point of the comparison is that the readers of this letter and you and I today keep on being faithful as Christian people. If Moses was faithful, Jesus was even more faithful.

[ 21 : 08 ] And they are models for us to be faithful in our Christian lives as well. See how the paragraph ends. We are God's house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.

Christians need to hold firm our faith to the end. Christians need to persevere in Christian faith to the end. As Moses was faithful, as indeed, even more importantly, Jesus, to the end of his mission, was faithful to God, so too are we to be faithful, to persevere, to hold firm our faith to the end.

And notice how that's expressed in that last line of the paragraph. If we hold firm the confidence, Christian faith is confident faith. It's not self-confident faith.

It's not confidence that you place in yourself or in ourselves, but confidence that is placed in Jesus Christ. Therefore, a real and substantial confidence indeed.

Christian faith is not to be timid faith, fearful faith, uncertain faith. Rather, to be confident faith because we know who Jesus is and what he's done and that his mission was accomplished faithfully and totally.

[ 22 : 28 ] So be confident Christians. Approach God confidently and boldly. Approach heaven confidently and boldly.

To paraphrase, I think, the old Star Trek statement, to boldly go, not where no one has been, but where Jesus has gone. That is, to boldly or confidently go to heaven.

Not because we're basing our confidence in ourself, but because it is based in Jesus Christ. Christ. So the end of this passage says, if we hold firm the confidence and the pride, again, not pride in ourselves, that would be arrogance, something that the Bible consistently rejects, but pride in Jesus Christ, to boast in Jesus Christ and what he has done for us.

Not in ourself, but in him. So to hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope, hope not that is wishful thinking, like we Richmond supporters might have at this time of year, to somehow hope that we might win, but no, really, that we're never going to.

That's vain hope. Hope that is confident and certain because of what Jesus has done in dying for us and rising to God's side in heaven.

[ 23 : 54 ] Because Jesus was a faithful apostle and high priest, our faith in him is to be confident, pride in him and full of sure hope indeed.

How then do we persevere? By considering the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, who despite all the obstacles and opposition and rejection in this hostile world, faithfully discharged his duties as God's apostle and our high priest to the very end at the cost of his life.

How are we to consider him? Because God has spoken to us in him as recorded now for us in the words of scripture. If we're to persevere as Christians, then God's word will be the basis of our perseverance.

God's word of Jesus. We'll take the Bible seriously. We'll read it and meditate upon it. We'll take seriously things like sermons and Bible studies and hearing the scriptures read in church.

If our minds are not being applied diligently to God's word, then we are very vulnerable to drift from God and to drift from faith in him.

[ 25 : 08 ] But the word of truth in the scriptures about Jesus Christ, our faithful apostle and high priest, will cultivate within us a tenacious and persistent faith that will withstand the opposition we face, that will resist the temptations which we face, will be faithful to the end of our lives and our arrival in heaven to fulfill our heavenly calling.

There are plenty of pressures on us in this world to lead us to be dropout Christians who drift far from faith.

In response to those, the one thing that we are to do is to consider Jesus Christ. He is the basis not only for our faith, but our perseverance in faith also.

If we are to hold firm to the end our confidence and pride that belong to hope, then we are to apply our minds diligently to Jesus Christ.

For we are holy partners in a heavenly calling. Heaven is our eternal destiny. We are to hold firm our confidence and pride that belong to hope.

[ 26 : 23 ] Don't be a dropout Christian. Finish well. Alright. Goodbye. Thanks so much.

Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.

Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.