

Jesus is Greater than Everything

Hebrews 3:1-6 (NIV84)

¹ Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. ² He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. ³ Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. ⁴ For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. ⁵ Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. ⁶ But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.

In 1966, the western world was rocked when Beatles member John Lennon said in an interview, "Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn't argue about that. I'm right and I'll be proved right. We're more popular than Jesus now. I don't know which will go first, rock 'n' roll or Christianity." You're probably thinking what I'm thinking: blasphemy. I may like the Beatles' music, but I cannot get behind their ideals. Lennon, you think your music will survive over Christianity? You don't have a clue! Christianity has already survived and thrived for thousands of years and still has the largest number of adherents over any other world religion.

The backlash over this statement in the US was so big for their upcoming tour that the Beatles never toured again and instead became a studio only band. How much the attitude has changed in 50 years. Now it is for some a symbol of pride to declare themselves an atheist. Well-known celebrities claim that the worldview of Christianity will simply cease to exist in the near future. Something bigger and better has taken its place. Either it's the popularity of the Beatles or it's the claim of science as being absolute truth.

People like Lennon are casting off our beliefs as if they are some fly by night operation that will just disappear if you give it enough time. And they say it with such confidence. "[Christianity] will vanish and shrink. I needn't argue about that. I'm right and I'll be proved right."

Somewhat similar statements were being made to the recipients of the letter written to the Hebrews. All that we can say with certainty about the original audience of the letter is that they were of Jewish descent. They had grown up hearing and believing the stories of the Old Testament. The pinnacle of the Old Testament, the one who got the most amount of attention, was Moses. Moses had written the first five books of the Bible. He is the one who gave the people the Ten Commandments and laid down the law from God. He is the one who brought the plagues upon Pharaoh and Egypt. He is the one who led the Hebrews out of Egypt and to the Promised Land of Canaan. He is the one who caused the Red Sea to split in two so that they walked on dry ground and then caused the waters to come rushing back destroying the Egyptian chariot army. Moses gave the Hebrews bread from heaven, that manna, for 40 years while they wandered in the wilderness. Moses caused water to come from a rock for the one million plus people. He gave the Hebrews victory over the Amalekites while he held his arms up over the battle. The Hebrews had told stories of Moses, had followed the law Moses gave their people, for some 1400 years now. He was their mainstay. He was their hero. "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house." (verse 5)

Now the Hebrews who received this letter were hearing about this Jesus guy, someone who had only been around for some 30 years or so. Sure, he spoke with confidence. He did miracles, but so did Moses. Moses was more popular than Jesus to them. They had a hard time with people telling them that Jesus should now take precedence over Moses.

Who is more popular to us than Jesus? It's easy to point a finger at other people putting certain religious leaders above Jesus. Catholics have the Pope. Muslims have Mohammed. Mormons have Joseph Smith. People looking in at us could say you Lutherans have Martin Luther. To be fair, there are Lutherans who hold up Martin Luther or other Lutheran Church fathers and their writings and teachings above the Bible, even above Jesus. It's easy to be distracted from Jesus, to take a historical figure and make him bigger than Jesus, just as Moses was for these Hebrew Christians.

We can elevate religious leaders, people like Moses, to be greater or more popular than Jesus. Then we no longer focus on Jesus. We get distracted from him. Then our confidence and hope in life become shaky. Other religions such as Catholicism, Islam, Mormonism, all hold to the idea that Jesus is not enough; there is something that I have to do to get right with God. In other words, there are things, there are people greater than Jesus.

The Hebrew Christians who received this letter were feeling the same distractions. Moses had told them how to get right with God, what commandments must be followed to appease him. Moses is greater than all others who have come. It was because of this mindset that the author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote, "Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess." (verse 1)

I hope that all of you who have gone through confirmation, through our Bible Information Class, know that we as Lutherans don't believe in Martin Luther. We do not claim that Luther will help us get to heaven or has revealed something new in addition to God's Word. To us, Luther is an important historical figure, one whom God used to return many people to what Jesus taught in the Bible, that Jesus is greater than everything. We simply believe what Luther taught, and Luther taught the Bible, that Jesus was and is and will ever be the only way to heaven, that God did everything for us to declare us right with him. A Lutheran believes that the Bible is the source and norm for all we believe, and these truths are also written in what we call the Lutheran Confessions. We adhere to these Lutheran Confessions only because they profess what the Bible teaches. For a true Lutheran, the Bible trumps all other notions, all other history, all other beliefs, and fixes our thoughts on Jesus as the only one who can save us.

Even though Luther may not be someone you consider greater than Jesus, what distracts your thoughts from Jesus? Does pop culture, bands like the Beatles, do this to you? Do current events take your thoughts away from Jesus, that as you read about the latest terrorist attack or school shooting that God can't be in control? Do thoughts of work or family distract you from fixing your thoughts on Jesus, that I have to take care of what is in front of me, not worry about that forever after stuff right now? Do I think that my religion is all about rules, that I need to follow all the "thou-shalt-nots" for God to accept me? If so, my thoughts have drifted away from Jesus. If I am caught up in a net of worry, thinking that I am all alone to solve the problems around me, my worry has distracted me from Jesus. There are so many other pursuits and priorities in life that vie for our attention, which want to be considered greater than Jesus in our lives. They want all our attention. They want to drag us away from Jesus. This is why we need to get refocused on Jesus, that he is greater than everything.

"[Jesus] was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house." (verse 2) So, why should we fix our thoughts exclusively on Jesus? Both Moses and Jesus were faithful. Jesus, though, is both our apostle and high priest. Moses was a messenger of God, a prophet, but he prophesied himself that a prophet would come who is greater than him. That prophet was Jesus. "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house...But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house." (verses 5, 6) Moses was a servant. Jesus Christ is the Son over God's house. As a servant, Moses is part of the house, someone who serves it but did not construct the house and doesn't own it. Jesus, the Son, is the builder of God's house. He owns it. God's house exists because Jesus built it. He is the basis for all Christians to come together, to be united together in family as we talked about last week, to be united in only one person who is our salvation. Moses would not exist if the Son had not made him and made him a servant in God's house.

It's for all these reasons that "Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself." (verse 3) This is why we fix our thoughts on Jesus. When that is where we are focused, if Jesus is the most popular person in our lives, if we live believing that he is greater than everything, then we have a hope of which we can boast because our courage, our confidence, rests in God's Son and not in ourselves or in any other person or thing. When I fix my thoughts on Jesus, my focus in life changes from what I can do to earn a place in God's building to realizing that God has already built me into his house, into his body of believers.

When you are overwhelmed, when you are tempted to put your hope on your shoulders, when you are distracted to think that you have to be the strong and courageous one because no one else will help you or be there with you, fix your thoughts on Jesus. There is no one greater than him. Sure, people will come along like John Lennon, and they will prove to be popular for a time, and they may even look more popular than Jesus and Christianity in general. But Jesus will never shrink and he will never vanish, even while people ignore him and blaspheme against him.

Jesus has staying power. Ever since the days of Adam and Eve people have put their faith in Jesus to save them. They will continue to do so until Christ returns and the world ends. The house that Jesus builds, that house built by faith in him, is a house that will stand forever. He is the only one to be both God and man at the same time. He is the only one to sacrifice his life only to take it back up again. This is why we can boast that Jesus will never fade away. He will never shrink. He will never vanish. So, fix your thoughts on Jesus because he is greater than everything. Amen.