

Give Greater Honor to the Builder

Hebrews 3:1-6 (NIV)

¹ Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. 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," bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. ⁶ But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.

Without using Google, do you know who built the White House? (James Hoban) The Pentagon? (Bergstrom & Witmer) How about the Sears Tower? (Bruce Graham) Or the Louvre in Paris? (kind of King Francis I and King Philip II separately and together) How about this building, our building? I don't know the contractor, but the architect's stamp on the original blueprints is Thair Blackburn. We know all these buildings. They're nationally recognized; they're iconic. We are familiar with this building because we use it week to week. Yet how many of those architects and engineers and builders did you know? How many of you know who built your house? (At least those of you who built your house know.)

The author of this letter to the Hebrew Christians puts out a general truth: "The builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself." (verse 3b) This makes sense. These buildings wouldn't have happened had someone not built them. Buildings have to be built. Yet, by the fact that we don't know many, if any, of the builders of these iconic building, we live contrary to this fact. We give more honor to the building than the builder. We get souvenirs with the seal of the White House, not of the man who designed it. We visit the Sears Tower, not the grave of Bruce Graham. Are we guilty of doing the same to God, that we give more honor to the building than the builder?

Look around the building we are in today. This was originally built by Lindquist and Sons using Blackburn's design for their Layton mortuary. Lindquist sold it to us in 1996, and we repurposed it. The accordion walls on each side (convenient for funeral viewings but not so much for church) were removed and replaced with solid walls. Where our altar stands, where the cross is hung on the wall, these used to be double doors where they would carry the casket out to the hearse waiting in the carport. A platform was added so that the preacher could be more readily seen. The cross, the altar, the baptismal font were constructed and placed in here for us to gather around for worshipping the Lord. Wood paneling was removed to brighten this area. More recently, we added center doors and side doors with glass to allow for more natural light to flood our sanctuary. The 22 ft long pews placed in here with the overriding thought of maximum capacity for a funeral have been replaced to allow for a better flow in worship: offering, acolytes, communion. Our rooms nearing completion out front will soon allow more areas for children, places to meet, places to greet.

So many people have used their time, their talents, and their treasures to make this building what it is today. We could write up a placard to give honor to those people because they are worthy of it, worthy of greater honor than this building itself. Yet, none of this would have happened had God not given to these people their time, their talents, their treasures. We see the truth from the author of this letter to the Hebrew Christians: "For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything." (verse 4)

At the end of the day, this building itself is nothing more than wood, dry wall, some metal beams, paint, carpet, and the like. It's not the material, not the building, that makes this place special. What God does here, what God builds here, that is what makes this building special. Here, God's Word is preached. Here he tells us that he took on human flesh to taste death for us, to break the power of death by his death, that his blood covers over our sins, that because he is pure and holy, he makes us pure and holy, brings us into his family so that he unashamedly calls us holy brothers and sisters. Here his sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are administered. Full and free forgiveness of sins is given through them and the Word of God. Sins are absolved and removed from you forever. God gives us our heavenly calling here as God the Holy Spirit clothes us with Christ's righteousness and makes us people who are bound for a home with God in heaven. Here, God works through these means to build us into his building, his house, his Church.

God is the builder of everything. That includes this building. That includes those who built this building. That includes us who are his building, his house. Because of these things, he is worthy of greater honor for having built us into his house than for us who built this house of God.

Do we give greater honor to God or to the building of God? I don't just mean this building as if we worship this building instead of God, as if we make this building an idol. Do we give greater honor to the building than the builder? Do we put more trust in people than God? Do we trust doctors and medicine more than we trust God to heal us? Do we put more trust in money than God, as if money is the thing that saves us, gives us security and safety? Do we put more trust in methodology than God – that if I do things a certain way, pray a certain way, put on a certain event, use a certain font type or one color option over another, pick the right clothes, then we will grow and attain success as a church? Any time that we give honor to the creation, the building, over the God who made it, the God who built it, we have made that building our God. We have taken honor away from God, worshiping the building instead of the Builder. This is idolatry.

This kind of idolatry of giving greater honor to the building than the Builder sneaks up on us. The Hebrew Christians were tempted to put more trust in the great Prophet Moses than in Jesus. To them, Jesus was still new. They had only recently heard about Jesus fulfilling what they had grown up hearing Moses teach. Moses is what their parents knew, what their grandparents knew, what their great-grandparents knew. Should we change out the tried and true, the unchanged and great Moses for this new-comer Jesus?

Knowing that they were wrestling with this, the author of this letter to the Hebrew Christians makes the comparison between Jesus and Moses. Both were faithful. Both are worthy of honor. “‘Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house,’ bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house.” (verses 5-6a) A son is greater than a servant. Jesus as God’s Son has a relationship with God that Moses - as honored as he was - never had. Jesus is also our high priest, one who always lives to intercede for us, one who offered himself as the sacrifice for our sins one time and by doing so made us perfect forever. Moses served in some priestly functions: he interceded for people, offered sacrifices to God, but he was never a high priest. He was a sinner. Moses was not perfect and so he could never be the perfect substitute needed to save all people from their sin. Jesus is our apostle, the one sent out by God for this specific mission to draw us into his family by making us holy through his sacrifice of atonement, his perfect blood shed for us to cover our sins. By doing so, Jesus led the way that delivers all people from the slavery of sin and death. Moses’ mission was limited to the Israelite people, to lead them out of physical slavery. Add this all up, and the conclusion is clear: “Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything.” (verses 3-4)

Jesus as God is certainly worthy of greater honor than anything he has made, and that includes his servant Moses. So, we fix our thoughts on Jesus so that we give him that greater honor as the builder of all things over the buildings themselves. We thank him for giving us the time, talent, and treasure to build this building knowing that the reason people gather here is for him, not the brick and mortar, the drywall and the paint. We give Jesus the honor of him changing people hearts and lives here by his Word, using this building for his purpose, for building people into his house. When we go to the doctor and take our medicine, we fix our thoughts on Jesus that he is the only reason that we have doctors and medicine and that he is the only way that doctors and medicine will help our ailments and bring healing. When it comes to our money, yes, we need it for daily life, we need it for food, for heat, for clothing, for so many daily necessities, but it all comes from God. We may work for it. We may have saved it up. But the only reason we have any of this money to do those things is because God gave it to us. It’s not the money that saves us, but the God who gave these blessings to us who saves us, that we would use his gift of money to bring him honor and glory. It’s good to examine methodology when it comes to what we do as a church, to think through programs, appearance, and the like, but these things don’t change hearts and they don’t save people. Only God changes hearts through his Word. Only God draws people in and keeps them coming. When he does this, we give the honor as the Builder who did this, not the methods we used.

Jesus is the builder of every good thing. “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” (John 1:3) Not only has God given us all these good things of doctors and medicine, of money and security, of a building and people who worship here, but he has built us into his house. . He built us into the Church. We are his building. We wouldn’t be here if not for him and what he did for us. He is the light that shines in the darkness, the light no darkness can overcome. He saved us by sharing our humanity, by taking on human flesh and blood to taste death for everyone to pay the price for our sins. He is the one who is holy and who makes us holy so that he unashamedly calls us brothers and sisters in his family. He has built us into his house.

So, when you see those beautiful, iconic buildings like the White House, the Pentagon, the Sears Tower, the Louvre, and, yes, our church building, fix your thoughts on Jesus. He is the builder of all, including those buildings. He built them by giving those people the time, talents, and treasures to build them. More importantly, God our Builder has built us to be his house. Fix your thoughts on him and hold firmly to the fact that Jesus has made us holy brothers and sisters sharing in the heavenly calling from our apostle and high priest whom we profess. Amen.