

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Broadcast Date: 22 January 2017

No. T0973

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The Greatness of Christ: Christ greater than Moses (Hebrews 3:1-4:13)

I had to smile as I listened to an overexcited sports commentator recently. He was obviously enjoying the outcome of what he was reporting on and said, "Today you are witnessing history in the making ... Not since 1968 has this been done." Until then, I hadn't realised that I was born in historical times and that I might find myself referred to as a figure from history along with Julius Caesar and King Henry VIII! Perhaps I am becoming a grumpy old man but it seems that, increasingly these days, reporters in all walks of life use inappropriate hyperbole to describe what is good, but hardly fantastic! Just to prove I'm not grumpy all the time, every morning when I'm unlocking the rooms at work, I stop and sniff and smile when I come to the book room. I love the smell of new books, and also the combined wisdom and spirituality that went into writing them. I think my favourite title, although I haven't read it all the way through, is "Perfect Person, Perfect Work." Now I would be more than happy for all the commentators in the world to describe the subject of that book in glowing terms, and even if they did it would not do Jesus justice, because when you are perfect, and when what you do is perfect, then it really can't be equalled and surpassed.

This morning we draw to a close our series on the greatness of Christ. We have seen how Jesus Christ is greater than all the prophets. We have seen how He is greater than all the angels. This morning we will look at how He is greater than Moses and Joshua. Now from the very title of the book in the Bible that we will focus on, Hebrews, we can fairly safely assume that the majority of the readers of this particular book would have been of Jewish origin. To them, Moses was the undisputed national hero. He was the one who had given them the law that so identified them as a people and brought them into relationship with the one true God. He was the one who had brought about a national deliverance from the slavery of Pharaoh in Egypt. To suggest that Moses was not the greatest was the equivalent of suggesting that the earth was spherical, when everyone knew that the world was flat! And yet that is just what the writer to the Hebrews is going to do describing a perfect Person in Hebrews 3 and a perfect work in Hebrews 4.

Let us then read together Hebrews 3:1-6, *"Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honour than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end."*

Since this is the only time in the New Testament that we get the two roles of Apostle and High Priest linked together, and in relation to the Lord Jesus, it must be worth our while just considering this aspect of His perfect person. We often think of the twelve Apostles but they were such only because they took their character from the Great Apostle. An apostle is one who has seen, and then been sent by, God (see Matthew 10:1-5; Acts 1:21-22; 1 Corinthians 9:1). Those who claim to be modern day apostles can only do so by distorting the meaning of the word, and altering the role beyond its biblical definition.

There is a remarkable incident in the life of Moses which truly reveals to us his motives and desires. We read about it in Exodus 33:17-23: *"So the LORD said to Moses, 'I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name.' And he said, 'Please, show me Your glory.' Then He said, 'I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.' But He said, 'You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.' And the LORD said, 'Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen.'"*

Do we have a desire like Moses to see the glory of God? I believe that this was a far greater view of Him than, for example, Shadrach and his friends had when they were in the fiery furnace (See Daniel 3:19-25). Moses, more than any other man, had seen the very person of God, and lived. And there is no doubting his call: *"Go, and tell Pharaoh ... set My people free"* (see Exodus 6:11). Truly, Moses' apostolic credentials were impeccable. And yet those of the Lord Jesus are perfect. Let us consider three more scriptures:

"The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth; while as yet He had not made the earth or the fields, or the primal dust of the world. When He prepared the heavens, I was there, when He drew a circle on the face of the deep, when He established the clouds above, when He strengthened the fountains of the deep, when He assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters would not transgress His command, when He marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in His inhabited world, and my delight was with the sons of men", Proverbs 8:23-31.

"I speak what I have seen with My Father ... for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me", John 8:38, 42.

"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him", John 1:18.

From these verses, and many others besides, we can see that in a truly unique way the eternal Son of God, who was and is ever in the bosom of the Father, enjoyed that relationship from eternity and will do so into eternity. But He came *"so that we might have life, and have it more abundantly"*, (John 10:10) free from the tyranny of the devil, and the destroying power of sin.

Moses, as such, was never appointed as High Priest; indeed it was his brother Aaron who first filled that role. However, he undoubtedly exercised that ministry. This can be most clearly seen in Exodus 17. Perhaps later you can read the story for yourself. He represented the people before God as they were engaged in battle with the Amalekites. However, his arms grew weary, and the Amalekites gained the upper hand until, with his arms supported by Aaron and Hur, Moses was again able to act on behalf of the Israelites and they gained the victory.

But of Jesus Christ it is said:

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin", Hebrews 4:15 and:

"Therefore He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them", Hebrews 7:25.

What a wonderful truth to know that yesterday, today and for ever we have the Lord Jesus speaking up for us in the throne room of heaven! No accusation that the devil may bring against us can stand the scrutiny of His representation!

But in the verses that we began with in Hebrews 3:1-6, there is another reason why Christ is greater than Moses. It lies in the fact that He is the Son of the house, whereas Moses was a servant in the house. God was building a dwelling place amongst men in the nation of Israel, and He chose Moses to be that builder. By giving the law, and in the subsequent keeping of it, there would be a people amongst whom God could live. Sadly, as the history of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament illustrates, the problem was that the people proved utterly incapable of keeping the law. The sinful nature in them, and in us, is wholly unable to do what is required of us. As Son, however, Christ has built His house on an entirely different foundation. Due to His completed work at the cross of Calvary, God can now deal with us in grace rather than law. So Peter speaks of us as *"living stones, are being built up a spiritual house"* (1 Peter 2:5).

Having considered then the perfect person of the eternal Son of God, we need to move on and see how His work is perfect, and thus He is greater than Moses. This is in no way to "throw stones" at Moses - indeed, I think it would not be unreasonable to say that from the Bible record, Moses was the greatest of all God's servants. Moses was indeed *"faithful in all His house"* (Hebrews 3:5), but Christ is infinitely greater. The writer to the Hebrews brings this out most clearly by comparing and contrasting the results of the work of Moses and Jesus. Let us read then from Hebrews 3:16-19, and Hebrews 4:8-10:

"For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:16-19).

"For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His" (Hebrews 4:8-10).

Again and again in the Old Testament, the wilderness journey is referred to - the crossing of the Red Sea and the journey afterwards as a real pinnacle in the history of Israel. And yet, for all that, all those who left Egypt, of responsible age, were dead before journey's end, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb. The Israelites did not enter into the blessed promised land that God had given them because of their rebellion and unbelief. The theory was so beautifully simple - obey God, and wherever the sole of their foot trod was land that would be given to them. What could possibly go wrong? Well, whenever we rely upon mankind to have to do something for salvation we can be sure that no good will come of it. Much of the central part of Hebrews 3 is taken up with a quotation from Psalm 95 which highlights Israel's problem, and serves as a warning to us.

Rebellion and disobedience followed the Israelites as they journeyed through the wilderness.

The incidents in Exodus 15, Exodus 17 and Exodus 32 stand out in dire warning as to the state of the human heart, which finds it so difficult to trust God and remain free from bitterness. Indeed the Greek word for "rebellion", *parapikrasmos*, comes from the root word for bitter, and the writer may well have had in mind the incident in Exodus 17.

God would never have rescued the Israelites from Egypt only to see them die of thirst in the desert, and yet that is exactly what the people accused God of. He was inadequate for their needs - or so they thought. But it was not God who was at fault here - it was their thought patterns and their understanding. And so it was that, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, all those who had left Egypt were dead, and God would work through Joshua, and a new generation, as He brought them into the Promised Land.

And yet, as we have read, though the circumstances were different, outwardly much better, the people had not changed, and so the rest that the writer of Hebrews talks about, the rest that God had intended for His people, was not to be enjoyed. Moses, for all his meekness and faithfulness, Joshua for all his courage and boldness, failed in their mission to bring the people of God to the situation that God wanted for them.

Now we need to think a little about this "rest" to understand the greatness of what Jesus has accomplished for us, and for all those who will believe in His name. If we go back to the very beginning of the Bible, you may recall that on the seventh day God, and Adam, rested. Why was this? It certainly was not because God was tired! The writer of Psalm 121 makes this very plain: *"I will lift up my eyes to the hills - from whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."* God was not exhausted by His creatorial work and in need of a day off. I don't suppose Adam was all that tired either - he had only been on the planet for 1 day, and would probably been fizzing with excitement wanting to explore everything all at once! No rest was not needed as a cure for weariness but was needed as a time to worship and for Adam to know his God and enjoy relationship with Him. This is the rest that God wanted for the Israelites. He wanted a nation who worshipped Him, and gained a deeper and deeper knowledge and understanding of who God was. It was to the Samaritan woman that Jesus revealed His true mission. We read about it in John 4:21-24: *"Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.'"*

And again in John 17:1-4: *"Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: 'Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.'"*

The rest - the worship - that God so desires for His people, and that Jesus has so perfectly accomplished in His finished work at the cross - is that we might have eternal life. Now this eternal life is not so much one that goes on for ever and ever, although it does, but one that brings us into ever deepening knowledge of God. The more we know God, the more we will understand His ways. The more we understand His ways, the more we will worship Him. The more we worship Him the more we will know Him.

The reason eternal life does indeed go on without end is because this is how long it will take us to get to know an infinite God! The perfect Son of God has revealed the Father to us and so this eternal life is ours now. We can make a start on knowing God right now and in that sense have entered into our rest. And because we are securely saved, there is nothing that can stop us from one day belonging to Him in heaven and there continuing to appreciate the wonders of our God.

The fullness of God has been revealed to us in the person of the Lord Jesus, as He Himself said to Philip, when he asked Jesus to reveal the Father to them, in John 14:8-12. And how do we come to know the Lord Jesus? Simply by faith in all that He has done. Our salvation does not require us to do anything. If it did then we, like the Israelites would fall short and fail. But Jesus demonstrated His superiority to all by doing all that is necessary for us to know Him, and His Father, thus entering into the rest that will be enjoyed in all eternity.

No wonder at all then that Christ is greater than Moses and Joshua, and indeed all who have gone before, or will come after Him. Perfect indeed in Person, perfect in His completed work. Now I suppose I ought to get around to reading that book, and not just the title on the front cover! And if, like me, you think that reading that book would be a good idea, get in touch with me at jonathan@emmausuk.com for a free copy.

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