

# The Servant of the Lord is Called 4) To Confess Christ

Hebrews 3:1-6 • 2021-01-31 • Series for Epiphany



Would you believe that I was once part of a church golf league? Probably not if you've ever seen me golf. When I hit a golf ball, I like to catch sight of where it is going. After all, if I'm going to be searching in the tall grass or woods to find my ball, I'd like to get a glimpse of where it lands. No doubt you've heard the advice given by even the most novice golfer: "Keep your eye on the ball." Of course, they're not talking about watching it soar through the sky. They're talking about keeping your head down as you follow through with your entire swing. They're talking about not glancing upward to catch the sight of your ball as it begins to soar through the sky. "Keep your eye on the ball" is probably good advice. But there is still a part of me that wonders, "How can this make any difference in where the ball will be hit?" I can't help but glance away from the ground to see the ball soaring right away—usually only to see it skipping across the turf until it stops right about where my divot landed. I must admit that it makes a difference keeping your eyes on the ball.

The writer to the Hebrews urges us, "Fix your thoughts on Jesus." How can that make a difference? We read from Hebrews 3 today and find our answer.

The letter to the Hebrews was written to the second generation of Jewish Christians. They grew up in a Jewish world that already knew and heard of Jesus as the Christ. The message was passed on to them by first-hand eyewitnesses of Jesus. But it seems that their focus had begun to drift from Jesus.

How were they beginning to lose sight of him? To understand their situation, one needs to fully appreciate the religious background of a 1st century Jewish Christian. They were firmly rooted and surrounded by the teachings given to them by Moses. Though it seems like the original recipients of this letter lived outside of Jerusalem, they were familiar with the temple and its practices. As devout Jews they certainly would have honored Moses as God's messenger. Apparently, some Jewish rabbis even taught that Moses should be placed on a pedestal greater than the angels. And no wonder! Consider what great things Moses did. The writer says, "Moses was faithful in all God's house." Moses led the people out of Egypt. Moses spoke to the Lord directly. Moses recorded the first five books of the Bible. Moses recorded the statutes and regulations regarding the sacrifice and the tabernacle of God. Moses directed the priestly line of Levites. The first century Jewish believer had his eyes firmly on Moses.

And Moses doesn't just disappear from importance in the New Testament era. No other Old Testament prophet is mentioned more in the New Testament than Moses. Moses was tried and tested as the religious norm for the last 15 centuries and remained a go-to standard in the New Testament era.

But the writer to the Hebrews had to urge them to fix their sights higher: "Fix your thoughts on Jesus." Why? Not because Moses was to be tossed out. Moses is described as "faithful in God's house." But Jesus is so much greater than Moses. As we read earlier today Moses directed the people of Israel to the coming Christ. (Dt 18:15) That is why God gave them special laws, festivals, Sabbaths, the priesthood, and everything unique. It pointed them to the great high priest.

But the first century Jewish Christians were beginning to lose sight of Jesus. I'm sure that if you've ever given a big present to a young child you've seen what happens. We love to see how little children gravitate toward the largest present in the room and constantly ask "Who is that for?" We love to see the reaction of little children when they take off the wrapping paper. Finally, when they figure out what is inside, we see them start to unwrap with greater enthusiasm than ever. If the toy is attached to the box, they tug and pull and can't wait to get it out to play with it. The camera flash goes off as the exciting moment is captured. But I'm sure you've seen the scene a few minutes later. The camera takes another snapshot. The toy isn't in the picture this time. The kids are having a blast, but they seem to have forgotten entirely about the present. The picture is of a little head peeking out of the world's most exciting cardboard box. I'm sure most of us are not too frustrated by this type of response. We probably just check it off as a bonus gift. We'd probably like to say to the child, "Now remember who gave you that box." The Jewish believers in Jesus were beginning to set aside Jesus, as they fixated on Moses. Moses and the law are really useful. But they are also really only serving the purpose of the wrapping paper and cardboard box. Jesus the content within Scripture.

What about us? Many things which plagued those early Jewish Christians still confront us today: Persecution for the faith. Resorting to old and traditional so much we value it over the study of God's Word for us today. Overly permissive attitudes toward sin which abused the gospel of grace. Questioning why they were facing troubles if they were loved by God. Even failure to honor those who shared the Word of God with them. But the most dangerous thing which plagued them still remains the most dangerous in the Christian church today: taking our eyes off Jesus.

Of course, we are not tempted to revert back to the Old Testament sacrificial system. I won't be demanding we keep things like the festivals and Sabbaths. We know God clearly says these were all only meant for the Jewish people until Christ came. But might our thoughts ever begin to drift from a focus on Jesus to a primary focus on the law?

This has always been a danger in the church. Don't think the early Hebrew Christians were the only ones who fixated too much on Moses. Moses himself had to warn against this tendency. Many churches throughout history have taken Christ and made him into a mere second Moses and a giver of the law. There are parents who want to bring their child to church so the child can, "be a good and moral person." Other parents are content to say, "Is it really that big a deal that my son or daughter isn't actively focused on Jesus? They hang out with the right crowd and keep out of trouble. He's a good kid. She's a good kid." The church plays along with this mindset as it makes personal performance the thing to focus on.

Holy brothers and sisters who share in our heavenly calling. We have been called to confess Christ, not ourselves. We know there is real danger in not keeping our eyes on Jesus! What good is there in fixing our thoughts on our own body and blood when we cannot even stop the curse of death? What about fixing their thoughts on the body and blood of the Lord, on his holy Word? What good is it if we get excited about the law? Can the law save us? What about the one who comes to church and is excited to learn about the gospel and the free gift of eternal life, only to slowly drift back into confusion and fear by another church which only preaches with an emphasis on the law, and not on Christ? What about the family member who resents the one who goes to church because of his pride for keeping the law?

Many false beliefs take hold unless Christ remains the focus. These false beliefs will leave us either boastful or broken. What about when we feel we are on top of our game and living the life that God would be pleased with? "I hope you're watching God; I've kept your laws this week!" What about when we feel we should mope around in despair because we've failed to keep God's law? "I'm unworthy of being in his family." If our thoughts and our confession are not centered on Jesus, we remain boastful or broken. We remain outside the family of God.

We can become so busy tracking our own two feet, so fixated on our own two hands, that we don't look up anymore. We don't see his hands. We don't see the mess that follows our feet. We begin to fail to see Jesus because we have reverted attention away from him. The real irony of turning and fixating on Moses and the law is we can lose sight of how they direct us to Jesus and make us yearn for Jesus. Moses tells us, "Fix your mind on the one coming after me!"

When we are focused on our own two hands and feet and our own performance of the law, we need these words: "Eyes on Jesus." The writer to the Hebrews redirects our attention back to what first gave us joy and excitement. We didn't find our joy and excitement in the work of our own hands. We found our joy and excitement in the work of our great apostle and high priest, Jesus.

It is because of him that we can call one another, "Holy brothers." All who look to Jesus are considered holy because they share in a heavenly calling. They are brothers because they all belong to the family of God, they are members of his holy church. Our pride and our own performance fade as we focus on boasting in Jesus.

We are brothers and sisters in the holy family of God because the Son of God came to be our brother. We confess him as our "apostle and high priest." As apostle he was sent from God. Jesus alone has made the Father known in all fullness and glory. Jesus alone is the one sent by the Father to save the world. Jesus alone came from God. He is the high priest who offered what the blood of goats and bulls could never do: forgiveness for the world. He offered up himself as the sacrifice that makes us holy. His blood was shed to save us from our unholy steps, unholy words, and unholy thoughts. "Fix your eyes on him." When we take our eyes off our own efforts and our own keeping of the law, we see his hands perfectly obeyed the Father. And his hands took the nails and punishment as a sacrifice for our sins. And as our great high priest he now lives and intercedes on our behalf. For every unholy act we turn to him and he says "Father, forgive them." Our great high priest confesses us to be his brothers, so we confess him to be our Savior. Fix your thoughts on Jesus' feet, the work of Jesus' hands, and the words that come from Jesus' mouth.

Don't misunderstand. Moses and the law serve a purpose. The writer to the Hebrews spends no time trying to downgrade Moses. But let's not get stuck on Moses. He was preliminary. Moses was faithful. But he was just a servant. But Jesus is the real deal. Moses was faithful as a servant. Jesus as the Son. Moses was faithful in God's house, as a part of it -a fellow member of the church with us. Jesus was faithful as a Son over God's house. He is the one who created and built the church. He has all authority over it. Moses pointed forward to the one to come (as we read earlier) Jesus is the reality, the one who was to come. Jesus said of Moses and the law, "These are the Scriptures that testify about me." (John 5:39)

And you, brothers, sisters, are part of that house and family of God. In a world that is quick to boast about itself and surrounded by a great number of churches which like to fix their eyes on themselves, fix your eyes on Jesus. And together we confess him to be our great apostle and great high priest.

As we do, we are no longer blind to our sin, or boastful of the work of our own hands, or broken in despair because of our guilt. We see him take away our sin, we boast of the work of his hands, and we are built up into his house free from guilt and despair. Servants of the Lord, you have been called to share in a heavenly calling. It is to join Moses and all believers with Christ, our apostle and high priest. Fix our eyes on him and confess him.