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TO ENDURE, CONSIDER JESUS

Hebrews 3:1-6

By

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Hebrews Lesson 9

To Endure, Consider Jesus
Hebrews 3:1-6

I won't ask for a show of hands, but there are probably many of you who made New Year's resolutions that have already fallen by the wayside. It's easy to begin a diet, but it's tough to stick to it when tempting foods are set before you! It's easy to begin an exercise program, but it's not so easy to work out when your body is screaming, "You deserve a break today!"

Or, more seriously, it's easy to begin a marriage. You're in love, you're young, you're healthy, and you think, "How could I ever have problems with this wonderful person?" But as we who have been married for many years know, it's not so easy to sustain a loving marriage when the problems of life press in.

The same is true of the Christian life. It's easy to trust in Christ and receive eternal life as a free gift. Such a deal! In our culture, it's usually easy to confess your faith in Christ through baptism. In Muslim or Hindu cultures, it can mean giving up your family and friends, and perhaps your life. But in America at present, it's fairly easy to be baptized. At first it's easy to join a local church. It's wonderful to be a part of a loving body of believers.

But, as those of us who have been Christians for a while know, it's not easy to endure. The Christian life is warfare against the powers of darkness, and there are many casualties. Yielding to sin brings down many. Others drift gradually, neglecting to spend time daily with the Lord. The crud of the world gradually builds up, like the salt and dirt on our cars during the winter months when it's difficult to wash them. Soon they are far from the Lord.

Others seem to do well for a while, but they lose their first love and settle into a humdrum Christian existence. Others fall away because they get wounded by fellow Christians who spread half-truths about them, or who treat them poorly. At first they claim to be following Jesus, but their bitterness towards His body, the church, takes a toll. They do not endure.

The Hebrew Christians had begun well. Early in their Christian experience they endured great suffering and persecution. Many had their property confiscated on account of their faith, and they endured it joyfully (10:32-34). But now they were in danger of drifting back in Judaism and neglecting their great salvation in Jesus Christ (2:1-4). So the author is exhorting them to endurance. In our text, his message is simple:

To endure, consider Jesus.

“Consider” means to think about something by taking the time to observe it carefully. Jesus used the word when He told us to consider the ravens and the lilies (Luke 12:24, 27). We see ravens almost every day, but we don’t usually stop to *consider* them. Jesus pointed out that they do not sow nor reap. They have no store-rooms or barns, and yet God feeds them. He concludes, “How much more valuable you are than the birds!” Why didn’t I think of that? Because I didn’t stop to *consider* the ravens!

To consider something requires *time* and *effort*. It doesn’t happen automatically, especially when you’re busy. But if you take the time to do it, it usually yields rich rewards. We had some friends in California who visited Yosemite. They had heard us raving about its beauty. They told us later that they spent an hour there, saw it, and left. We were stunned! An hour in Yosemite?

I later read about an old park ranger there who was still working in his late eighties. He had literally spent his life exploring and enjoying the spectacular beauty of Yosemite. One day a cityfied woman hurriedly approached him and asked, “If you had only one hour to see Yosemite, what would you do?” He slowly repeated her words, “Only one hour to see Yosemite.” After a pause, he said, “Ma’am, if I only had one hour to see Yosemite, I’d go over to that log, sit down, and cry!”

How much time did you spend this past week considering the beauty of Jesus Christ? The Bible has page after page revealing His majestic glory. It is our only source of information, by the way. Some Christians make up a “Jesus” in their minds, but He isn’t the Jesus of the Bible. Their Jesus is nice and never judgmental. When they sin, which is often, their Jesus just hugs them and assures them that we all make mistakes. Their Jesus loves them just as they

are, which is how they like it, because they don't want to confront their sins and discipline themselves for the purpose of godliness. The problem is, their "Jesus" isn't the Jesus of the Bible!

And so our antidote to drifting and our strength for endurance is to see and savor Jesus Christ from His Word. I implore myself first, because I'm prone to drift, and I implore you: *Take time to consider Jesus often!*

1. Consider Jesus as the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.

"Our confession" refers both to the body of Christian truth that we call "the faith," and to our heartfelt consent to this truth. The great creeds and confessions of Christian doctrine define in a concise way what we believe. We verbally and from the heart confess that we believe these things. The author mentions two truths about Jesus to consider:

- A. Consider Jesus as the Apostle of our confession.

This is the only time in Scripture that this title is applied to Jesus. The name "Jesus" used alone focuses on the humanity of our Savior, which the author has just developed in chapter 2. As a man, born of the virgin Mary, Jesus came to earth in obedience to the Father to fulfill a specific purpose.

"Apostle" literally means, one who is sent under authority. The Gospel of John often refers to Jesus as being sent by the Father (John 3:17, 34; 5:36-38; and others). He came to reveal the Father to us and to accomplish the Father's purpose, to redeem us by shedding His blood. Jesus said that He did nothing on His own initiative, but He only sought the will of the one who sent Him (John 5:30).

We cannot know God except through Jesus (Luke 10:22). We cannot know about heaven and eternal life, except that One who eternally dwelled there left His glory there and came to reveal these things. Jesus prayed (John 17:6), "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world." We have the inspired record of what these men saw and heard in the New Testament. Jesus told the disciples after His resurrection, "all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44). Those are the three

divisions of the Hebrew Bible. Thus the Old and New Testaments point to Jesus, the one who was sent under God's authority to reveal Him and to accomplish His will.

B. Consider Jesus as the High Priest of our confession.

The author already mentioned this in 2:17 and will develop it at length later. Here he only mentions it in passing, and so will I. The Apostle of our faith brings God down to us; the High Priest brings us up to God. He presented His blood on the mercy seat as the propitiation for our sins, thus satisfying the just wrath of God, so that we are now welcome in His presence.

Although he was never called an apostle, in function Moses fulfilled that role in Israel. God sent Moses under authority to deliver His people from bondage in Egypt. But Moses was not a high priest. That role fell to his brother, Aaron. Jesus fulfills both roles in one. He is our Apostle and High Priest. We must submit to His commands as the authority of God Almighty. We must come before God only through the merits of Jesus' blood. Think often and carefully of Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession!

2. Consider Jesus as greater than Moses.

From verse 2 through 6b, the author develops the theme that Jesus is greater than Moses. To understand this, you must realize that for the Jews, there was no greater leader than Moses. For them, he was the greatest man in history. God had miraculously preserved Moses' life as a little baby. God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush and sent him to deliver His people from 400 years of bondage in Egypt. God used Moses to bring the plagues on Egypt and to part the Red Sea for the deliverance of the Jews. He struck the rock in the wilderness to provide water. He went up on the mountain to commune face to face with God and receive the Ten Commandments. God gave Moses the elaborate instructions for the Tabernacle. Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament, showing Israel how to live before God.

On one occasion, even Moses' brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, challenged his leadership. God came down in a pillar of cloud and said (Num. 12:6-8),

Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make myself known to him in a vision. I shall

Speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses. He is faithful in all My household; with him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?

When the cloud had lifted, Miriam had become leprous! Moses graciously cried out to God to heal her, which He did. In all of the history of the Jews, there was none greater or held in higher esteem than Moses.

But Moses was not perfect, and the author could have focused on his mistakes. But he does not do that. Instead, he begins by showing that...

A. Both Jesus and Moses were faithful men (3:2).

Twice (3:2, 5) the author cites Numbers 12:7, that Moses was faithful in all God's house. As Paul said (1 Cor. 4:2), "it is required of stewards that one be found [faithful]" (same Greek word). A faithful man lives all of life, including his inner thought life, with a God-ward focus. As Paul told the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:3-6), he didn't come to them with flattering speech or a pretext for greed. Then he interjected, "God is witness." Paul said that he spoke, "not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts." He knew that God knows our every thought and motive. So he wasn't playing to the crowds. He sought to please God in everything that he did, whether in public or in private. That is the key to being faithful.

The author's point here is that both Jesus and Moses were faithful men. He compares rather than contrasts them because he knew that his audience thought highly of Moses and because God Himself commends Moses as a faithful man. In Exodus 35-40, there are 22 references to Moses' faithfulness to God (John MacArthur, Jr., *Hebrews* [Moody Press], p. 82). Jesus, of course, was more faithful than anyone, including Moses, because He never failed even once. But the author begins with this comparison. Then he goes on to show how Jesus is greater than Moses.

B. Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, as the builder of the house is greater than the house (3:3-4).

The main point here is that although Moses was a great leader, he was just a member of God's house, but Jesus was the builder. Verse 4 clarifies that God is the builder of all things. Since Jesus is the builder of God's house (2:3), Jesus is God. As the author began this epistle, it was through Jesus that God made the world (1:3).

So without in any way demeaning Moses, who was a great leader, the author is saying, "Jesus is in a totally different class! Moses was a faithful leader in God's house, but Jesus built the house. If you marvel at how Israel became a nation after 400 years in slavery, and you're amazed at how God used Moses to lead them out of Egypt, marvel still more at the fact that it was Jesus who designed the whole program! He called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees and promised to bless all nations through his descendants. He revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush. He was with Israel in the wilderness in the pillar and cloud. He fed them with manna and gave them water from the rock (see 1 Cor. 10:1-4). While Moses is worthy of honor, Jesus is worthy of far more glory. So don't turn back from Jesus to following Moses or you'll be turning from God Himself to mere man."

C. Moses was faithful as a servant over God's house, but Jesus was faithful as the Son (3:5-6).

The Greek word for "servant" is used only here in the New Testament. It comes from the Septuagint of Numbers 12:7, and has the nuance of one who serves voluntarily (G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* [Charles Scribner's Sons], p. 108). The contrast is, although Moses was great, he was only a servant, whereas Jesus is the Son of God, the heir of all things.

As a servant, Moses' role was to testify "of those things which were to be spoken later" (3:5). All that Moses wrote looked ahead to Jesus, who rebuked the Pharisees, saying, "If you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me" (John 5:46). Moses was just a servant, pointing ahead to the heir, who is Jesus. And so the argument is, "Don't go back to Moses. Consider Jesus, because He is greater than Moses."

Probably none of us are tempted to turn back to Moses, but we are easily tempted to turn to good things in such a way that we miss the best. Some believers emphasize obedience, and certainly

obedience is a good thing. God forbid that we not obey His Word! But sometimes those who emphasize obedience start adding things that go beyond God's Word and they fall into legalism. They camp on minor issues, but neglect the majors. They push man-made rules or standards as if they were binding on all Christians. They take pride in their conformity to these rules, and look down on those who don't keep them. Jesus confronted the Pharisees, who were meticulous about tithing even their table spices, but who neglected "the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness" (Matt. 23:23).

I have seen others who emphasize Bible knowledge or correct theology, and again, those are very important things. But if our Bible knowledge and theology do not lead us to know and worship Jesus Christ more fully and to submit our hearts more completely to Him, we've traded the best for the good. If we take pride in our great knowledge and look down on those who are not as enlightened as we are, we're off track. True knowledge of the supremacy of Jesus leads to humility, not pride.

So, consider Jesus! To endure the many trials and temptations of the Christian walk, consider Jesus as the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. Consider Jesus as greater than Moses.

3. Consider also what Jesus had made us.

It is significant how the author addresses his readers:

A. Jesus has made us "holy brethren" (3:1).

The name "brethren" probably points back to 2:11, where he said that Jesus is not ashamed to call His people brethren. It brings out the close relationship that we enjoy with our Savior. The adjective "holy" looks back to the same verse, where he says that Jesus is the one who sanctifies and we are the sanctified. Both terms come from the word that is translated "holy." It refers to those who are set apart unto God from the world. The apostle Paul often addresses God's people as "saints," which means, "holy ones." "Saints" are not a special class of extraordinary Christians, who deserve special recognition. All who know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord are saints or "holy brethren."

There are three senses of sanctification, or holiness. In the sense we are considering, we have once for all been set apart unto

God at the moment of salvation. In an ongoing sense, we are progressively being sanctified as we grow in godliness. In the future sense, when we see Jesus, we will be totally sanctified forever, so that we will never again sin. If we would keep in mind our present position as saints or holy brethren, it would help us to say no to temptation and to live as people who are set apart unto God.

B. Jesus has made us partakers of a heavenly calling (3:1).

The author of Hebrews uses the word “heavenly” more often than any other New Testament book (6 times: 3:1; 6:4 [gift]; 8:5 [sanctuary]; 9:23 [things]; 11:16 [country]; 12:22 [Jerusalem]). “In all cases, the ‘heavenly’ is contrasted with the earthly, and in all cases the heavenly is the superior, the real as compared with the shadow” (Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* [IVP/Eerdmans], p. 97). Our calling is heavenly in that it comes from heaven and it culminates in heaven. The initiative comes from God, who calls us to be His “called-out ones” (*ekklesia*, the Greek word for “church”). To be partakers of a heavenly calling means that our focus must be on heaven and the blessings God has promised us there, not on the things of this earth.

C. Jesus has made us His house (3:6).

“House” is used seven times in this paragraph. It is a metaphor for God’s people, in whom He dwells (Eph. 2:19, 22; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:4-5). The Bible never calls a church building “God’s house.” God’s *people* are His house. They may gather in a barn or an open field or a house or a building constructed specifically for worship. But the building isn’t sacred; the people are sacred! We are to be built *together* into a holy temple of the Lord, a dwelling of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:21-22).

All of this is very comforting, but then the author throws in one of those uncomfortable warnings: “if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope.” (The phrase, “firm until the end” was probably not original and was inserted from 3:14; Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [United Bible Societies], second ed., p. 595). F. F. Bruce explains the “if” clause (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans], p. 59):

Nowhere in the New Testament more than [Hebrews] do we find such repeated insistence on the fact that continuance in

the Christian life is the test of reality. The doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints has as its corollary the salutary teaching that the saints are the people who persevere to the end.”

He goes on to cite the parable of the sower, where the seed thrown on the rocky ground made a good showing at first, but then faded away in the hot sun, because it had no deep roots. Jesus interpreted this to refer to those who welcome the word with joy at first, but are only temporary, because “when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away” (Mark 4:17). As Bruce explains, this is precisely what the author of Hebrews fears will happen with his readers. Thus he emphasizes repeatedly the need for bold confidence and joyful hope.

Conclusion

The Christian life is not a 100-year dash; it’s a marathon. That name comes from the decisive Battle of Marathon, where the Greeks fought the Persians. If the Persians had conquered, the glory that was Greece never would have been known. Against fearful odds, the Greeks won the battle. A Greek soldier ran all the way, day and night, to Athens with the news. He ran straight to the magistrates and gasped, “Rejoice, we have conquered!” Then he dropped dead. He had completed his mission and done his work (William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* [Westminster Press], pp. 210-211).

It is significant that when Paul wrote his final letter to Timothy, he did not report on how many he had won to Christ, how many churches he had planted, or how many evangelistic campaigns he had conducted. He said simply, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). He fought and he finished—he endured! If you want to join his ranks, take time often to consider Jesus.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is important to derive our understanding of Jesus from the Bible *alone*, not from personal experience or popular ideas?
2. What are some practical ramifications of Jesus being the Apostle of our confession?
3. What are some practical ramifications of Jesus being greater than Moses?
4. Many Christians are bitter towards the church and prefer to worship "outside" the church. Why is this not God's plan?

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