

September 29/30, 2018

Hold Fast
Christ is Enough Series
Hebrews 3:1-19
Pastor Bryan Clark

Over the last couple of weeks the writer of Hebrews has told us some amazing truths—that the God of the universe took on human flesh to conquer sin and death once and for all by offering the ultimate sacrifice of Himself, that sin might be paid for, that He might offer salvation freely as a gift, that one day we might actually rule and reign with Him forever. So here’s the question of the morning, “Do you really believe that?” Now we all know the right answer; that’s not really what I’m asking. I’m asking, “Do you *really* believe that?” In others words, if we were to follow you all week long, would it be evident in your actions? Would it be evident in your attitudes? Would it be evident in your emotions that you really do believe that God tells the truth? Because the consequence of unbelief can be devastating! That’s what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Hebrews, Chapter 3. Hebrews chapter 3, starting in verse 1, the word **Therefore** I think goes back to everything that has preceded chapter 3.

Therefore, (in light of everything that we have talked about), **holy brethren**, (set apart family. The writer is talking about us together as brothers and sisters in Christ) **partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus**, (meaning to anchor down, to really focus on Jesus, the person and work of Christ), **the Apostle** (This is the only place in the New Testament where Jesus is referred to as the Apostle, rightly **the Apostle**, the Greek word really means “the sent one,” and He is the ultimate sent one from God, sent to be the Saviour of the world.) **and High Priest**, (Who we learned last week offered the ultimate sacrifice for sin, and then sat down, indicative that the payment for sin had finally been made—mission accomplished!) **...the High Priest of our confession.** (*NASB, Hebrews 3:1)

Often when we think of **confession**, we think about confessing our sins to God or to one another, but the word confession means *to agree with*, and historically it has often been used just to refer to a statement of faith—a confession of faith. In other words it’s a body of doctrine and we say together, “We believe this.” We actually were just doing that in song. I mentioned the first week of our study, as strange as this may seem, there are a lot of Christian churches in America that have drifted away from Jesus as the center of their theology. But the writer of Hebrews is saying Jesus *is the center*; the person and work of Christ is what the Christian church is all about. It’s the center of our hope; it’s the center of our confession of faith.

He (Jesus) was faithful to Him (the Father) who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. (Vs. 2)

Now again, the comparison of Jesus to Moses might seem odd to us, just like the comparison of Jesus to the angels seems kind of odd to us. But again, if you remember, probably what was happening with the first century readers is they were tempted to go back to the old ways, to the old covenant. Perhaps there were Judaizers that were saying to them, “If God is for you, this persecution wouldn’t be happening, and you need to go back to the old covenant. You need to go back to the temple and the sacrifices and the Sabbath and all the things that God put in place.” And perhaps they were arguing that the old covenant was mediated by the angels. So who is Jesus? What gives Him the authority and the power to do away with the old covenant and usher in

something new? Answer: He is superior to the angels. He didn't do away with the old covenant so much as He fulfilled it and has ushered in something new. So you can also imagine the argument that Moses brought in the old covenant; therefore, who is Jesus? Do we think Jesus is greater than Moses? And so that's the nature of the argument here.

The idea of **Moses was in all His house** provokes some discussion around, "What does he mean by **house**?" Some think it means the tabernacle, so all the activity in the tabernacle. Others think of it like the household, the people of God. I think probably it's both. I don't know how you discuss the old covenant without discussing the people and how do you discuss the people without the old covenant, so it's all of that that Moses represented in the Old Testament. Verse 3:

For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house.

So of course Jesus is superior to Moses. The logic of that is because the builder is greater than the house. Think of it like this: if you were to go to the Parade of Homes and see a whole bunch of beautiful homes, while you are admiring those homes, ultimately what you are admiring is the builder of these homes. In other words, nobody is going to think the house built itself. What you are ultimately admiring are the builders. It's like a piece of art. When you see a beautiful piece of art, while you are admiring that, nobody thinks the art painted itself or the sculpture sculpted itself. You are ultimately admiring the one who made the art. Well, in the same way, the house didn't build itself, so Moses was like a manager in the house, but he wasn't the builder of the house. Verse 4:

For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; (Vs. 4-5)

This text doesn't say anything negative about Moses, actually just the opposite. Moses is celebrated; he was faithful in his role. The idea here of a **servant**, typically when you see that word in the New Testament it's a translation of the Greek word *doulos* which means *servant, slave, bond- slave*, or something like that, but that's not this word. As a matter of fact, this is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used. It's a term that basically is a reference to *someone who is right under the person in authority*, in other words right under the owner, someone who is managing everything on behalf of the owner. Maybe in our world today we would say something like, "Oh, that's his Number 2 person." So the owner has someone who is running the show for him. That's this word. It's celebrating the fact that, "Yes, Moses did a great job. He was faithful as someone who was put in position of managing the house." It includes the idea **...for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later**. In other words, the whole point of the **house** was to bear witness to something that would happen later, that would be talked about by the prophets and ultimately fulfilled. So, Moses was the manager of the old covenant that was foreshadowing and picturing something that was yet to come. Verse 6:

...but Christ (the Messiah, the anointed one) was faithful as a Son over His house— whose house we are,

So Moses was a faithful servant but Christ was the builder of the house. He is the owner of the house, and He has ushered in a new house. He says, "*This new house of which we are,*" clearly stating that the Old Testament under Moses was all foreshadowing and picturing the fulfillment of God's promise all the way back to Genesis 3:15—the promise made to Abraham, foreshadowed and

pictured throughout the Old Testament. Jesus didn't do away with the old covenant. He is the fulfillment of the old covenant. He is the builder, the owner of the house, and He has the authority and the power now to usher in something new. That's why the old must fade away and the new must be celebrated. The end of verse 6 then says,

...whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

Now those are the kind of verses that make a lot of people really uneasy because of the *"if" clause*. If what? Most of you are aware that down through church history there has always been a debate of whether or not you can lose your salvation—and there are good and godly people that argue on both sides of that discussion. So as soon as some people see the *"if" clause*, it immediately taps into their own insecurities. "I knew it! I knew it! If I'm not a great Christian all the way to the finish line, I'm out!" And it raises all kinds of discussion. So one of the things we wrestle with is, "Is this statement meant to be *descriptive* or is it *conditional*?" What I mean by that is if it's descriptive, it's simply saying, "Those who have truly experienced conversion will endure to the end." Jesus promised, "I will finish what I started." Or is it conditional, meaning only those who do perform up to a certain level to the end of the story will be saved. In my mind it is very clear. It is *descriptive* because the rest of the New Testament is very clear that God will finish what He started. If you have to perform at a certain level—and who decides *all the way to the finish line*—then clearly there is a level of works necessary to complete your salvation, and that's contrary to everything the New Testament teaches. So it's simply saying, "Those who are truly born again, truly converted, will endure to the end."

But what's helpful to understand is that's not really the point of the text, especially for those of us in the West. Our theology tends to be really black and white, and people are always wrestling with "in/out," "in/out," so we impose this on so many texts. Does that mean that they are in or out? And oftentimes that's not the point of the discussion at all. It's just not that black and white, and in this case it's not even the point. So think of it like this. If I were to tell you, you have to perform to a certain level to be saved, at the end of the story would that cause you to say, "Okay, since that's a threat, I'll believe!"? Or if I were to tell you, "No, you can't lose your salvation," therefore you say, "Phew, that's a relief. Therefore, I don't need to listen." Either way that's the wrong attitude. The point in this particular passage is that wherever you're at in your spiritual journey, the question is, "Do you believe God tells the truth?" To ratchet up the language just a little bit, do you think God is a liar? Do you think that's God's track record? Do you think that's who He is or do you think He tells the truth? And if He tells the truth, are you willing to believe Him? Whether this morning you are an unbeliever, whether you are a brand new believer, whether you have been a Christian for thirty years, it's the same question, "Do you believe He tells the truth?" and, again, the evidence would be in your actions, your attitudes, and in your emotions every single day. Verse 7:

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says,

Two things real quick. One is the writer is identifying Scripture as the very words of God. Even though this psalm he's about to quote is written by David, it's ultimately the God-breathed words of God, and that's what he said. This is what the Holy Spirit **says** in Psalm 95. The other thing to notice is that it doesn't say *said*—past tense—it says **says**—present tense. The writer is going to argue in chapter 4 that this is *a living book*. Therefore it's not just something that was said in the past, but the Holy Spirit continues to say this to us today as His people. Then he goes on to quote Psalm 95:

**“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,
DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME,
AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS,
WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED *Me* BY TESTING *Me*,
AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS.
“THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION,
AND SAID, ‘THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART,
AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS’;
AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH,
‘THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.’”** (Vs. 8-11)

One of the key terms is **today**; that’s going to be repeated again in this chapter and on into chapter 4. *Today*, we still have *today*—there’s a sense of urgency. Whatever has happened to you in the *past*, whatever you’ve done in the *past*, it’s *past*! You don’t know if you have a future. What you have is *today*. So, do you believe God tells the truth *today*?

The idea of **harden your hearts** I think is consistently presented in the Scripture as the idea of when God reveals Himself in a very clear way, nobody walks away from that experience neutral—in other words unchanged. In that moment either you believe and your faith is increased, or you do not believe and your heart becomes harder and harder. When God clearly makes Himself known and you stubbornly rebel and you say, “I refuse to believe it,” you walk away from that experience with your heart just a little bit harder than it was before.

So what’s he talking about here? He’s going back to when the nation of Israel left Egypt, God manifested Himself through the plagues. They leave Egypt. God manifests Himself through the parting of the Red Sea, through the destroying of the army of the Egyptians. God led them as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God provided water. God provided food. God provided protection. God’s presence was so evident in so many tangible ways. When they got to the threshold of the Land of Promise, a land that God said, “I will give you, and it’s a land flowing with milk and honey,” Moses sent twelve spies in to check out the land. They come back, and two of them—Joshua and Caleb—report, “It’s a land flowing with milk and honey. Let’s take it.” But ten of them said, “Yes, it is a land flowing with milk and honey, but there are giants in the land. We can’t win. Let’s not go in.” And the ten convinced the majority, and together they said, “Were not going in!” God, then, responding to their disbelief said, “I will give you the land. It will be everything that you long for,” but essentially what they said is, “God, You can’t be trusted. We don’t think You are faithful. We don’t think You are telling the truth.” And so God said, “Because of that, for forty years you will wander in the wilderness until that generation of unbelievers dies, and then maybe the next generation will trust Me.” Within that generation there would have been well over a million people, and out of that million people, two entered the Land of Promise. The consequence for disbelief was catastrophic. One can only imagine what would life have been had they just believed God tells the truth. Had they just trusted God, after so many demonstrations of God’s faithfulness, they could have experienced a land flowing with milk and honey, but they wouldn’t.

Now, again, people then start to question, “Well, were these people believers or unbelievers? Are they *in* or are they *out*?” That’s how we always want to reduce these stories, and the answer is, “There is no way to answer that question.” The Old Testament text doesn’t address that; that’s not the point of the story. Some would say, “Well, because the Promise Land is a picture of salvation and they didn’t get in, clearly then they are out.” So don’t forget Moses didn’t get to go in. Is Moses out? So it’s just not that clear; it’s not the point of the story. The point of the story is they had this

opportunity to rest in the land flowing with milk and honey if they would have just trusted God and believed He tells the truth. But because of their unbelief they did not enter. Now unbelief doesn't mean just a struggle along the way. All of us from time to time struggle along the way. Unbelief is a much stronger term. It's an act of rebellion. It's basically this idea of saying, "I will not believe. No matter how God demonstrates Himself to be faithful, I won't believe. I'm going to do it my way. I don't think God can be trusted." It's a very defiant rebellious act of the will, and the consequences were catastrophic.

The idea of **rest** is interesting because Psalm 95—if you go back and read it at your leisure—is a wonderful psalm that was used as a call to worship every Sabbath at the synagogue. So these people would have been highly familiar with this psalm. The whole idea of rest that they were seeking through the Sabbath, was actually there to be found in Christ, in this new covenant, if they would just believe that. Verse 12:

Take care (that's a command; anchor down), **brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.**

The Greek word translated **falls away** is the word from which we get our English word *apostasy*. The Greek just simply means to kind of distance yourself away from God. Jesus used the exact same word when He talked about the sower and the soils. When He talked about sowing the seed on the rocky ground, at first it looks like something is growing but there are no roots and it just fades away. So, the very first week I talked about the fact that we don't really know specifically who the recipients of this letter were. The letter is starting to tell us that they are believers, but the writer also has a concern that mixed in with the believers are those that may not truly believe. That's clearly a concern he has. That's a concern of almost all the New Testament Epistles. No one could write a letter to a church somewhere and be one hundred percent sure that everyone in that church is truly a believer. So you always have these hints within every letter that there may be some among us that don't really believe, just like Jesus talked about with the sower and the seeds. So that's the concern, that there are some that really don't believe it's true. How do we help with this? Verse 13:

But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

So how do we do that? We do it *together*. This will be an emphasis in the book of Hebrews—that as these people are headed into persecution, and there is a fear that they might go back to their old ways, they need to consistently come together to encourage one another, to strengthen one another, to take this journey together. We have a tendency in America to be consumers in our Christian faith, and that really is problematic. So, for example, if week after week after week someone sits home in their pajamas and watches the service over the internet, that's a consumer. That's like, "What's in it for me?" But we are called to so much more than that. We are called to come together to encourage one another, to celebrate one another, to strengthen one another, to hold one another up, to understand that we are in this together and together we get to the finish line. But to do that, we need to come together, and that's a part of what we do every week—to reaffirm what we believe to be true, because life can get really hard and really confusing at times. Again the emphasis is on "**Today**"! I don't know about tomorrow; I don't know about ten years ago. I don't know what you did; I don't know what was done to you. It's past history; we can't go back and change it. I don't know that you have a future. What I do know is you have **today** so there's this emphasis with a sense of urgency, "What do you believe to be true today, because today matters.!"

The idea of the **deceitfulness of sin** is to understand every time I give into temptation and engage in some sin, ultimately what I'm saying to God is, "God, You cannot be trusted with this area of my life. I know what You've said. I know what Your track record is, but I just don't think You are going to be faithful. I don't think You tell the truth. Therefore, in this particular area of life, I'm going to be my own God and I'm going to run the show. That's the **deceitfulness of sin**. It's always rooted back to unbelief. "God, You can't be trusted, so I'm taking charge." That's the basic idea; that's why unbelief can be so destructive. Verse 14:

For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,

This again is descriptive. Those who have truly believed will endure all the way to the end, but there may be those among them that don't truly believe. Verse 15:

...while it is said,

"TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,

DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME."

Now, he wraps it up with a series of questions.

For who provoked *Him* when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief. (Vs. 16-19)

It was those that didn't believe that **provoked Him**. It was those that had so much evidence of God's faithfulness and God's presence that were determined not to trust Him and went their own way and engaged in all kinds of idolatrous sin again and again and again. Now be careful how you read some of this, less you misunderstand. You think, "Well, what is the deal with God getting so angry?" Think of it this way. Let's imagine you have lived your life with the highest integrity and character. Again and again you have been faithful to someone. Again and again you have been good and kind and compassionate to someone. You've demonstrated your character and heart to someone again and again and again. And all they keep doing is saying to you, "I can't trust you...I can't trust you; I just think you're a big liar." You tell me, how would you respond to that? Would you, with an indifferent heart say, "Oh, that's okay."? No, you would get angry. You would get angry because your track record of goodness and faithfulness and truth is clear so, "Why do you keep saying that to me?"

And that's what God is saying—what He wants is to bless His people. What He wants is for His people to trust Him and enter into the Land of Promise. What He wants for them is a land flowing with milk and honey. What He wanted for them is so different from what they experienced. And again and again and again He made His power and presence known to them. "Just trust Me. I'll get you in the land. I'll take the land. It's yours!" But with a rebellious heart again and again they said, "No, we don't want to trust You; we don't want to do it Your way." As a matter of fact, often they said, "We want to go back to Egypt; we think that was better." But one can only imagine what could have been if they had just trusted!

So now we are back to our question, “Do you *really* believe God tells the truth?” It is entirely possible to genuinely be a born-again Christian and live a miserable life all the way to the finish line because you never really believed that God would be your refuge, that God would be your rest, that Christ would be enough.

One of the frightening things of all of this is that the moment when this is going to show up most intensely for you will be in the worst moments of your life. When your pattern is not to believe, when your pattern is not to trust and you just struggle along, when the bottom drops out of your world, that is the moment when you most need to believe Christ is enough, and that even in your worst moments there’s rest...there’s peace...there’s safety...there is security. But in that moment it’s devastating because you *have not believed all along the way that God tells the truth*. God has revealed it. I can do my best to explain it, but I cannot believe it for you. There’s no magic in this; there’s no mystery in this. It’s an act of *your will*.

Do you or do you not believe God tells the truth, and is that evident in your actions, in your attitudes, in your emotions, through the best and the worst moments of your life? Our prayer is that we would all chose, in an act of our will, to believe that God tells the truth, so in the most difficult moments of life we will truly say, “*I do believe Christ is enough!*”

Our Father, we just ask that You would give us the courage, the faith to believe that You do tell the truth, that we can really believe what You say, that we will experience Your refuge, we will experience Your rest, and that even in the most difficult moments of life we will say with integrity, “It is well with my soul,” because we believe, we believe Christ is enough! Lord, may that be true of us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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Opening Discussion

1. How would you describe the difference between affirming something is true and truly believing it? Can you give some examples?
2. What is God's part in your salvation story and what is your part? By your salvation story I don't just mean getting a ticket to heaven but living in the present-day reality of your salvation.
3. What does it feel like to not be believed? Can you share an example when someone would not believe you were telling the truth?

Bible Study

1. Read Hebrews 3:1-6. When the writer says to "consider Jesus" he's referring back to all we've learned about the person and work of Christ. Do a quick review from Hebrews chapters 1-2. Who is Jesus and what has He done for us?
2. Because of the temptation to go back to the Old Covenant ways, the writer has argued that Jesus is greater than the angels. Now he argues that Jesus is greater than Moses. In what ways is Jesus greater than Moses according to this text? In light of this, what does it mean to "hold fast" (3:6)?
3. Read Hebrews 3:7-11. Read Psalm 95 as background to these verses. What was the nation of Israel guilty of and what was the consequence?
4. Read Hebrews 3:12-19. What then is the writer's concern for believers and how can we help one another avoid this same sin? See I Corinthians 10:1-13. What is the core issue that is being discussed?
5. What is the consequence of "unbelief" in this text? What specifically does that mean?

