

May 3, 2015

# Consider Jesus

## Hebrews 3:1-19

In 1956, C.S. Lewis, a confirmed bachelor, married Joy Davidman, but after four intensely happy years, Joy died, and Lewis was alone again. Inconsolable, he faced a crisis of faith. He wrote: "Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. **The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him.** The conclusion I dread is not, 'So there's no God after all,' but, 'So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer.'"

Week by week we're looking at the book of Hebrews that was written to 1<sup>st</sup> century urban Christians who were experiencing a lot of trouble and fear and discouragement in their lives. And the problem as C.S. Lewis put it was not that they were in danger of not believing in God, but rather that they would come to believe such dreadful things about Him. Because the question the writer addresses is one that seems to say, 'If God loves us so much, why are we experiencing such hardship? Why is life so hard? Why do we have all this trouble in our lives?' They were in danger of believing the worst about God. And in this chapter the writer tackles that response head on by calling them to consider the faithfulness of Jesus. And he brings them back to the experience of Israel in the wilderness to make the point again, that life is a journey through the wilderness, through the desert, through the hard places, and quite frankly, there were people who didn't make it through. The only way through this wilderness life is to keep your eyes on Jesus.

And so in the first verse he says, *Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.* Therefore, since you are holy and bound for Heaven, **think about this Jesus, consider Him, meditate on Him, give Him first place in your thoughts.** This would indicate that it is not automatic to think about Jesus. Remember the warning of chapter 2 – *we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it.* And drifting is a very real possibility. To not drift, we really need two things. **We need to hear from God and we need to get to God.** We need a word from God and we need a way to God. We need to hear from God so that we know what He is like and what His purposes are in the world and what He requires of us. And we need a way to get to God because we have been cut off from God. And if we go to our grave without reaching God, it is darkness and misery and torment forever. So we have these two great needs: to hear from God and to get to God. So Jesus comes as our apostle and high priest.

He is our apostle, that is, the one sent from God, God's Messenger who has come to deliver God's Word to us, and He is our high priest. He's the mediator, or 'go-between' who offers Himself as the perfect sacrifice so that we can be reconciled to God. And, the Bible says that as the apostle He is the Living Word to us. He initiates and sustains our salvation, He is the mighty power at work in every believer and He upholds us by the word of His power. And as our high priest, **'He ever lives to make intercession for us.'** Hebrews 7:25. That is, Christ Himself is praying for us in Heaven – that's high priestly work. In the Old Testament, the high priest wore a chest-piece that had 12 stones representing the 12 tribes and the Bible describes what this is for: *'In this way, Aaron will carry the names of the tribes of Israel on the chestpiece over his heart when He goes into the presence of the Lord in the Holy Place. Thus the Lord will be reminded of His people continually.'* Exodus 28:29 And Jesus, our high priest is praying powerful prayers for us every day.

The thought that the writer was trying to get out here is that as the one who is the very word of God to us – He's come from God as the word of God, in order to bring us to God – you can trust Jesus because He is faithful. He's trustworthy. You can count on His word. You can't count on your circumstances, but you can count on Him. So often we are ambushed by our circumstances and we begin to be persuaded that God is not for us, that He really doesn't have our best interests at heart. That's what happened to the Israelites in the wilderness. All of a sudden there's no water, there's no food, life is hard, all we see is this desolate desert – where's God? He must not love us or care about us. Let's go back to Egypt. And the writer says, 'No, don't do that. Don't harden your hearts like they did in the wilderness. Don't believe the worst about God. Don't do that. Hold on to the revelation of who He is and how much He really loves you. Don't fall away from God'. Consider Jesus, think on Him, meditate on Him, because He is the faithful apostle and high priest.

Look at what the writer says, *[consider Jesus] who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses--as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a Son.*

I think it is safe to say that Moses is the most important figure in Jewish history. In fact I don't think you could overstate the pre-eminent place this towering figure occupies in Jewish culture and tradition. In many ways, Moses is seen as the savior of the Jews, not God, and certainly not Jesus. Moses was the one who rescued them from bitter bondage. Moses was the one who led them to the promised land. It was Moses who received the law from God and passed it on to the people. He was the savior. When Jews at this time talked about salvation, they talked about it as the salvation of a nation, a community, a people. That's what Moses did. The salvation of the individual was bound up with the salvation of the entire community. For the Jew, the savior was this great temporal leader who would rescue the nation Israel from her enemies, fulfill all the covenantal promises of God to Israel, and make her great in all the earth

This was no doubt in the back of the minds of these 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish believers. They had been weaned on Moses and the idea that a Messiah, a Savior was coming and would restore all their former glory and power. And Jesus now was being heralded as that Messiah. But not only were they *not* seeing the promises of God to their nation come to pass, they were being persecuted and marginalized; they were experiencing trouble and suffering. And their view of Jesus was suffering. They needed to understand that Moses as a Savior was merely meant to point to the One who would come as the real Savior. They were brought up believing that Moses had been a great and faithful savior, but they weren't sure about this Jesus. Maybe it was time to go back to Moses.

So the writer makes the argument that though Moses is worthy of glory, Jesus is worthy of more glory. They were both faithful to God who appointed them both – but while Moses was faithful literally, *in all God's house* – that is, in the truth that God entrusted to him under the Old Covenant, Christ was the one who was in charge of the whole thing, in fact He owns the house. And Christ is worthy of greater honor than Moses, just like the builder of the building of the building gets the glory, not the servant who works there. And just as the Son and heir is due more respect than the butler – so Christ, the Son who is the Heir of all things is due more glory and honor than Moses. Moses was good, he was faithful, he was humble, but he was still only a servant in the house of God and Christ should get the glory, not Moses. So think about this Jesus. Jesus is more faithful than Moses.

He's more faithful and worthy of more glory because when you are His, you are His all the way. *And we are His house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.* As Christians we love to talk about unconditional love and unconditional grace and unconditional acceptance, and we get a little uncomfortable and a little bit ansty when someone begins to put conditions on our Christianity. But here we have a little 'if'. Actually it is a big 'IF', and we need to pay attention here. We are God's household, we are God's people, we are saved – 'IF'. This 'if' is so serious and crucial that the rest of this chapter is in support of this statement. Note the condition – *if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.* That is, if we keep up or hold fast our hope to the end (future), we are now (presently) the household of God. It is like saying 'You are a redneck if you drive a pickup with rifle rack and a dog in the back.' Driving a pickup like this doesn't **make** you a redneck – it **shows** that you are one. So the writer says that this defines the household of God: **God's people hope in Christ, God's people are confident in Christ, God's people are courageous in Christ** – that is the evidence and support for your claim that you belong to Him.

This blows away lip-service Christianity – because when push comes to shove and you are down in the valley of death and things look very black and hopeless – God's people hold fast to their hope in Christ – they don't throw it away when things get tough and try something else. **In fact that is the evidence that they belong to Jesus.** It isn't because at some time you recited a prayer or said the right things to the right people – it is because you have a living hope in you that cannot be conquered by anything this world or Satan can throw at you. *And we are His house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.* There are two things here tied together with a verb phrase. The first is *our confidence*, and the second is *our boasting in our hope* and they are tied together with one verb phrase, *hold fast*.

The first thought is **hold fast our confidence.** The word translated 'confidence' is *parrhesia* which means **outspokenness, frankness, unreserved in speech, boldness in speaking, fearlessness.** The book of Acts shows that *parrhesia* was the outstanding characteristic of the followers of Christ. They 'boldly, fearlessly, and frankly' proclaimed the Good News and they did not fear the consequences of their actions because they belonged to Christ. So the first thing about the evidence that we belong to Christ is that we are bold and courageous in our reliance upon Christ and we do not fear the plans of men or devils.

The second thought is **hold fast our boasting in our hope** and the word translated 'boast' is *kauchema* which means *to boast in something.* So those who belong to God quite naturally boast about Him because He is so great and they boast about their hope in Him and especially the hope that awaits those bound for Heaven. He's the best thing going in the universe, and they are going to the best place, and they want everyone to know. So the second thing about the evidence that we belong to Christ is that we boast in Him, we boast about Him and we are not shy about letting people know.

The third thought here is that those who truly belong to Christ, **hold fast.** That is they hold on to the end. They are no flash in the pan phenomenon. When things get tough, they don't leave, and the whole race counts, not just the beginning. I have known a lot of professing Christians who have made a good beginning – but they left early – they didn't hold fast to the end. They started the race, but now they are out of it. The word translated **hold fast** came from the nautical term meaning to bring a ship all the way to shore. And this is the evidence that we are part of God's house, that we are God's people, that we indeed are saved. We persevere, we endure, we ride this ship all the way to shore. So if you want to be assured that you belong to Christ, test yourselves to see if you have hope and confidence in Christ and trust Christ with everything and look to Him for your security and happiness and fulfillment and the satisfaction of your heart – all the way to the end. So we might say: **Hold on to your confidence and hope in Christ in order to demonstrate that you are in the household of God.**

Now look at verse 14 because here is the same 'IF'. Another condition. *For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.* And the real sense here is *'...we have come to share in Christ (presently), if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. (future)* That is, our holding fast goes from day 1 in Christ until He returns. The condition is future *'if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end* but the effect is present – *we have come to share in Christ.* So we might say **'Hold fast to your assurance in order to prove or show or give evidence and demonstrate that you ARE a Christian and will share in all that belongs to Christ.'** This is absolutely crucial to our faith because you cannot truly be bound for heaven, consider yourself in the household of God and be a sharer in Christ and then throw it all away.

The writer is not saying here that true, born again believers can lose their salvation. What he is saying though is, if we do not hold fast our hope and assurance firm until the end, if somewhere along the way we throw away our confidence – **then we were not truly His to begin with.** We had an emotional moment, we perhaps indulged in some intellectual assent – but we never committed our lives to Christ because the evidence is that we did not go all the way. Let me make it perfectly clear – true born-again believers cannot lose their salvation – **that is why the gospel is good news. It is good all the way to Heaven!** But the evidence of the reality of our salvation is that we endure all the way to the end. Matthew 24:13, along with many other passages make this crystal clear: *'But those who endure to the end will be saved.'* What the writer is saying is that those who crash and burn before the end were never His to begin with. They may have been trying their best, they may have thought they were o.k.; but they never trusted Christ all the way, and when things got tough – they got going. Or to put it another way, **to not hold fast our assurance and confidence and hope firm until the end does not make us lose our salvation – it shows we never had it.**

But don't make the mistake of thinking this is a matter of human will or intent. If I can just grit my teeth and hold on, I'll make it. Only God can cause us to persevere in our faith through all the trials, through all the storms and earthquakes of life – and for those who are His, **HE WILL DO IT!** That's why He's worthy of more glory than Moses or the angels or the prophets. And He is praying for us to make it all the way. *'Now may the God of peace sanctify Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you and He will also bring it to pass.'* 1 Thessalonians 5:24 This is not a call to superhuman effort. This is a call to throw yourself into the arms of the only One who can carry you through this wilderness all the way to glory.

Salvation is a daily matter. Listen to what the writer says in verses 7 and 8, *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness,* Today is what is important – yesterday is gone and tomorrow may never be, all you have is today. And all we ever have is today. And the key to persevering, the key to holding fast our assurance and hope firm to the end is that **daily we do not harden our hearts**. And what hardens our hearts is that we refuse to believe God – we refuse to believe that He is sufficient for our every need, that He will come through for us in every circumstance, that He is our high priest interceding for us in Heaven right now, that His word is true and faithful and will never be wrong. That is how we get hard hearts. Even miracles are not proof against hard hearts.

Miracles will not guarantee salvation. Look at verse 9: *where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.* They saw the Red Sea parted, they drank water from a rock, they had food provided from the sky every morning, they saw God in the pillar of fire and the cloud, their shoes and clothes never wore out in forty years – how many more miracles does it take to make a believer out of you? It is not enough to see miracles – miracles are only a demonstration of who God is, but they are not a guarantee of salvation. Through the parable of the beggar Lazarus and the rich man, Jesus told the unbelieving Pharisees that if they didn't believe Moses and the prophets, they wouldn't believe even if someone was raised from the dead. And they didn't. Jesus raised another Lazarus and the Pharisees wanted to kill them both.

Instead of seeing God's loving provision for them in the miracles He performed for them in the wilderness, the Israelite chose to believe that the opposite was true of God and hardened their hearts against Him. And the writer records that eventually God gave them their wish: *Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known My ways.' As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'* In other words, God will not contend with us forever. In Genesis 6:3, when God looked down and saw how unbelievably corrupt man had become, He utters a fearful judgment: *'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever...'* God is patient, God is kind, God is incredibly compassionate – but there comes a day when He says 'Enough! You want your own way, you want to do your own thing – fine, I'll let you. But know the consequences.' In speaking of God's people in the wilderness in Psalm 106, the psalmist says, *But they soon forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel. But they had a wanton craving in the wilderness, and put God to the test in the desert; He gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting disease among them.* Literally it says, *"He sent leanness to their souls'.* Be careful what you ask for. If we persist in our sinful desires, God will perhaps one day grant them and that is not a good thing, because what comes along with that is a plague. And God will stop waiting and listening for our repentance. [Jeremiah 7:8-9, 10, 16]

The writer points to that desert experience and says, 'Watch out - *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.* In other words, don't be like those guys who saw the mighty hand of God, who experienced His lovingkindness in the wilderness, and still refused to believe that He would come through for them. Don't be like these guy who came close but never really came in. The writer is not saying that real believers can ultimately be lost. What he is saying is that it is possible to think you are in the faith but fail in the end to hold fast. I think we all know people who perhaps have made a start in the Christian life, and then turn away at some point – and I believe that sort of person is the one this writer has in mind as he writes this. Just like Israel who started out great – they left Egypt with all kinds of treasure and high hopes and confidence, they crossed the Red Sea and turned around and saw the mightiest army in the world completely annihilated, they danced and sang on the other side – and three days later they were ready to kill Moses and go back. Is this a familiar story to anyone?

Verse 14 tells us what had happened – they had not become sharers in Christ. They never really committed themselves to Jesus. Remember? – *we have come to share in Christ. IF...'* In other words, you can turn away from God in the sense that you have at some point come close to the work of God – the love of His people, the light of His word, the privilege of prayer, the awesome power of His miracles, the blessings of His providence – and you can taste these things and be deeply affected – and yet be lost in unbelief because Jesus Christ Himself is not your heart's delight and desire and hope and confidence and reward. You have something – but it's not Christ, therefore it can be turned away from and lost. You are close – but close is not good enough. Close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades.

All kinds of things in the world around us every day are making war on our souls – don't take anything for granted. The world is always offering other affections and other embraces that replace Christ with other treasures. And if we have never committed our lives to Him, if He is not first in our thoughts, if we are not thinking about this Jesus, we will be lured away to destruction. Don't be careless or lackadaisical or inattentive to the condition of your heart – test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Or in the words of chapter 2 – 'Don't drift!' Or as Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:10: *be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.*

The way to know whether or not your Christianity is true is check your heart – Is it hard against the Word of God? Are you resistant to the truth? Is it hard against God? Do you see Him as for you and not against you? Do you believe 'dreadful things' about Him? Do you harbor suspicions that God delights in your troubles? Are you assuming the worst about Him? This was the case with all but two of those whom God had rescued out of Egypt: *For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked 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 unable to enter because of unbelief.*

The tragic thing about this is that God always came through for them. They looked at the lack of food and concluded that God wanted them to starve – but He fed them anyway. They looked at the lack of water and concluded that God wanted them to die of thirst – but He gave them water anyway. They looked at the land and saw giants and concluded that God wanted to kill them – but He defeated all their enemies anyway. And the final record in Joshua reads like this: *And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as He had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.* Joshua 21:44-45

So how do we not end up like these guys? How do we keep our hearts from being hardened? How do we continue in the faith? Community. Look at verse 13: *But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.* We have to exhort one another, encourage one another. This is a community thing. We have to warn each other, encourage each other to think about Jesus, bear one another's burdens. Otherwise we may never be brought to the point where we are wholly committed to Christ. If salvation were a one-time event like a flu vaccine, then we would have no need for a community experience. But if our salvation involves a daily battle against faith-robbing unbelief and deceitful schemes to lure us into sin and cause us to be hardened against God, then we need the exhortation and encouragement of all the believers to cause us to look at Jesus and not our circumstances, to see the greatness of Christ and the value of Jesus over all things.

And this must happen more than once a week – '**every day**' the text says. And this is why getting together is so important. It is in togetherness that we can touch each other's lives and hearts and detect the smallest beginnings of the deceitfulness of sin and hardness and encourage and warn each other. The Christian life is a community life, and those who are His naturally want to come together, naturally want to enjoy the life of Christ in each other, they are naturally bent toward the church life. If you struggle in coming to church, giving your time and energy and money to the cause of Christ, if you have trouble understanding what the big deal about small groups and service ministries is, then there is serious reason to question whether or not you are committed to Christ. We need each other walking through this wilderness place. We need others to remind us of God's faithfulness. We need to hear the truth in His word. Jesus our apostle comes to us in His word and He gives us each other to help us hear.

We also need our high priest who is not only praying for us, but who went to the cross for us to bring us to God. We need to rehearse the truth of His sacrifice of love to ourselves and to one another so that when we're faced with discouragement and fear, when we're faced with circumstances that seem to contradict God's goodness and love for us, we will stop and hear His voice. Yes God leads us into the wilderness; yes there are things that don't make sense; yes there are heartbreaking days and tear-filled nights; yes we do not yet see everything under our feet; yes God leads us into difficult places. But He also led His only Son to another place that made no sense – He led Him to Calvary. And it is there that we hear God speak to us through Jesus. And through the cross He says to us, **'Trust Me all the way. My love for you is unshakeable; My promises to you are unbreakable; My faithfulness to you is everlasting.'**

*Our gracious and merciful Father,*

*Today, while it is still called today, help us to consider and meditate on and think about this Jesus. Don't let us be mistakenly assured, but cause our hearts to heed Your word today. Help us see that it matters that we hold fast firm until the end. Holy Spirit, shine Your penetrating light into the recesses of our hearts to flush out any thoughts of casual allegiance to Christ. Do not let us be deceived by the deceitfulness sin and hardened against You. Don't let us drift, but anchor us firmly in Your word of truth. Help us to hold on to Christ and let every other thing go. Help us look to Christ for our hope and our joy and our endurance to the end. Confirm our calling and election with the evidences of Your grace in our lives. Cause the way we live our lives to line up with what we know of Your word.*

*Forgive us for being casual and half-hearted about You Jesus. Forgive us for not cherishing and pursuing this great salvation. Push us to run hard, don't let us coast, don't let us be paralyzed by the spirit-numbing pleasures and pursuits of this world. But cause our hearts to treasure You and show us the infinite and all-satisfying glory of the risen Christ.*

*Thank You for the gift of salvation and the assurance of the Holy Spirit. Thank You for Your promise to bring us all the way in and to work in us what is pleasing in Your sight. Thank You for the cross of Christ that helps us to know the extent of our forgiveness. Thank You for today and all the rich mercy You stand ready to give, and the promise that You who began a good work in us will complete it all the way to the end. In Jesus' mighty and precious name we pray, Amen.*