

“Consider Jesus”
Hebrews 2:17-3:6
June 6, 2021

INTRODUCTION:

The book of Hebrews presents a rather simple answer to the problems being faced by its original readers. Remember that they were facing such severe persecution that they were considering abandoning their faith. The author’s answer is simple, but not simplistic. In different ways, the command of 3:1 is repeated time and again. They need to “consider Jesus.” The verb translated “consider” is what is called an intensive compound word meaning to apply one’s mind diligently to something. A brilliant mathematician by the name of Norbert Wiener supplies us with a picture of this kind of concentration. He was walking across the campus of MIT, so absorbed in thought that when a student greeted him, he failed to respond. But after a few steps he turned and asked the student, “Pardon me, could you tell me which way I came from?” The student pointed and answered, “That way, sir!” “Thanks,” said the prof. “Now I know I’ve had lunch!”

We are called here to focus ourselves similarly on Jesus. When asked a question in Sunday School, children often learn that the most common answer is “Jesus.” Similarly, Jesus is the answer to our need. But we need to have more than the Sunday School answer. We need to experience Jesus as the answer to our need. The main point of this entire book is to help us experience Jesus as the only answer to our need. To that end, we see him in today’s passage as the only one able to solve our greatest problem and the one who alone can secure a bright future for us.

I. He Alone Solves Our Greatest Problem – 2:17-18

One of the most common complaints I hear from those who don’t believe in Jesus is the lament, “Where is God? Why doesn’t he do something about the misery of this world?” What is meant by that complaint is that God doesn’t solve the problems as defined by the complainant. These problems are usually things like poverty, injustice and disease. Make no mistake, Jesus will solve all those problems in due time. But he must first solve our biggest problem, the one that gave rise to all the other problems and is the root of all human maladies. I’m speaking about the problem of sin, the problem Jesus came to this world to resolve. Our author highlights two of the primary ways Jesus solves the sin problem, delivering us from the penalty of sin and from the power of sin.

Jesus’ deliverance of us from the penalty of sin is seen in one of the great biblical words describing our salvation, the word “propitiation” in verse 17. Jesus’ became man that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest. In his high

priestly role, his principal accomplishment was **“to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”** It’s a word that means to satisfy God’s wrath through a sacrificial offering. There is rich and abundant Old Testament background to this word. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would take the blood of the sacrificial lamb and sprinkle it on the mercy seat that sat atop the ark of the covenant. This was viewed as the place of propitiation.

Many people don’t like this word because they don’t like the idea of a wrathful God, considering it to be at odds with the idea of a God of love. Some translations use the easier word “atonement” in order to soften this idea. But God’s love and his hatred of sin are not at all opposed to one another. It is the same with our love. If you love your children, you will hate everything threatening them. Nothing is more destructive to us than sin, so in his love God hates sin. God’s wrath against sin is also a product of his holiness. If sin did not provoke his wrath, he would be less than holy.

Opposition to the idea of propitiation, of the satisfaction of God’s wrath through a sacrifice, springs from human pride. Such opposition essentially says to God, “You shouldn’t need such satisfaction of your wrath.” God says that it is needful. And in his love, he provides such satisfaction himself, through the death of his Beloved Son. As Philip Hughes wrote, “Our hell he made his, that his heaven might be ours.”

There is great comfort in this idea that Jesus, in his priestly role, takes care of our great sin problem. Priests have a foot in two worlds—the world of human sin and the courts of heaven. They represent and meet our needs before a holy God. When someone is accused of a crime in our society, that person enters the complex, mysterious world of the judicial system. It is a world in which the one who doesn’t know the rules and procedures will be certain to run afoul of justice. I remember one of our church members telling me about a time many years ago when he found himself facing an appearance before a judge as one accused of violating the law. Then he said that an attorney he knew came up to him with these words, “Don’t say a word; I’ll take care of everything.” That’s what Jesus says to us concerning our sin. He says, “Let me take care of this. I am your high priest who makes propitiation for you.”

Jesus not only takes care of our problem regarding the penalty of sin, he also takes care of the problem of sin’s remaining power in our lives. **“For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted”** (2:18). Some people think that because Jesus didn’t have a sin nature, that his temptations were easy to deal with. The exact opposite is the case. Because we do have a sin nature, we quickly give in to sin and never experience the full force of the temptation. Jesus experienced the full force of sin. Let me give an analogy. Our grandson is staying with us for a few days, and he loves to watch old episodes of “Lego Masters.” One episode featured a bridge building contest in which the contestants had to construct a Lego bridge spanning six feet. The

winner was the bridge that would hold the most weight. One bridge only held 45 pounds before collapsing. But there were two others that kept receiving more weight until they reached the limit of 1000 pounds. We are like the weak bridge, and Jesus is like the strong one, with the result that his temptations were far greater than our own. Yet he successfully resisted them all, never taking the easy way out.

How does Jesus' successful handling of temptation help us? The author says that it does, but how so? Jesus helps us in two ways. First, he is an example to us of what it means to be truly human. To be fully human is to resist sin. It is not to take the easy way out but to be guided by God's laws and rules in every part of life.

But we need more than a good example. Because of our own weakness, we need power from God. Such power is found in Jesus. He is our helper, meaning that he comes to our aid when we call on him to do so. In your fight with sin, you are not alone. Call on Jesus to help you. You will not succeed in your fight against sin without his help. The world, the flesh and the devil will easily overpower you. But you have a helper who is willing and able to help you. Simply call on him and don't depend on your own strength. Confess your weakness to him and ask him for help. Say with the great King Jehoshaphat, **"We are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you"** (2 Chron. 20:12). Make this your prayer morning, noon and night.

II. He Alone Secures Our Bright Future – 3:1-6

My Bible translation summarizes the first six verses of chapter 3 with the words, "Jesus Greater Than Moses." That is indeed what this paragraph is about, but it does beg the question of why bother to make a point that no one disagrees with. This may seem to some a bit like saying, "Lebron James is a better basketball player than Brad Allison." No one in their right mind would disagree with such a statement. But what if the comparison to Lebron James is instead made with some highly regarded basketball player from the past, say Michael Jordan? To claim the superiority of Lebron James in his prime to Michael Jordan in his prime is to say something. That is closer to what our author is saying. Moses was a man who stood at the pinnacle of respect among the readers of this book. As great a man as he was, Jesus is greater.

The main point is made clear in verses 5 and 6. **"Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant..., but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son."** Moses was faithful *in* God's house, while Christ is faithful *over* God's house. Moses was a mere servant in that house while Christ is a son. In order to appreciate the force of this idea of Jesus' superiority over Moses, we need to

understand the meaning of the word that occurs seven times in this paragraph—the word “house.”

What does our author mean when he speaks of God’s house over which Jesus rules as a son? We get a clue when he says in verse 6 that “we are his house.” And then it becomes clear that the “we” refers to God’s people, those who hold fast their confidence and their boasting in hope. So it would seem that God’s house is just another way of describing God’s people, the Church in the New Testament and Israel in the Old Testament. But there are deeper biblical roots still to this word. Do you remember the word King David used when he spoke about building a temple for God? He referred to it as building a house for God. When David made clear his intentions to build such a house, God said, in effect, “I will build you a house, David.” He didn’t mean a house of stone and mortar, but rather a dynasty in which the descendants of David would rule forever as king. Ultimately, that promise is fulfilled in Jesus. But still, the Old Testament temple is rightly called “God’s house.” Further, this temple that David wanted to build had deeper roots still, roots found in the Tabernacle erected in the days of Moses and even earlier in the Garden of Eden. God directed that this tabernacle should feature scenes of paradise in Eden.

This language of God’s house taps into the big storyline of the Bible. God’s plan all along has been to live with his people, a plan first realized in the Garden of Eden. That paradise was lost due to man’s rebellion. But God did not give up. He called a people, the descendants of Abraham to be his people, and directed that a tabernacle be built where he would meet with them. It was a little beachhead of paradise restored on this rebellious planet. When Jesus came, he said that he was the temple, the place where God would now meet with his people. And then we read in our passage, as well as elsewhere in the New Testament, that the Church is now God’s house. We are the place where God meets with his people.

This idea that we as the Church are God’s house has significant implications. Let me mention four of them, two theological and two practical. The first theological implication is that God has only one house. If you are familiar with dispensational theology, you will understand it when I say that these verses undermine this teaching. Dispensationalism teaches that God has two different people, Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament. But note how this passage says that Moses and Jesus are in the same house, with Moses as a servant and Jesus a Son. But it’s the same house.

A second theological implication is that the Church is the place to go if you want to find God and have a relationship with him. Do you remember the story of the Queen of Sheba in the Old Testament? When she wanted to learn more about Jehovah, she went to Israel and to its king, Solomon. If you want to be with God, you have to go to the place where he lives, and he lives with his people in his house, the Church. Imagine somebody one-hundred years ago wanting to get to

know Henry Ford by opening the hood of a Model-T and saying, "Henry, are you there? I want to get to know you." If a person wants to get to know Henry Ford, going to his house would be a better choice. Many people today think that the best place to get to know God is in his creation, in nature. That's like trying to get to know Henry Ford by opening the hood of a Model-T. If you want to get to know God, go to his house, the Church. If you want your friends to get to know God, invite them to church. If you want to see people come to Christ, invest in strengthening the church. Offer your gifts and talents, your time and money to the church.

A practical implication of this truth of the church as God's house is that it shows us that God wants to be actively present in every part of our daily lives. That's what happens when you live in a house with someone. This is what Jesus makes possible for us and what we were designed for. After Patrick evangelized the Irish in the fifth century, they became a nation of missionaries used mightily in the evangelism of Europe. In his book, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, George Hunter says that one of the keys to their success as missionaries was their use of contemplative prayers throughout the day that reminded them of God's active presence in all aspects of life. For example, they had a prayer for starting the morning fire. "I will kindle my fire this morning/In the presence of the Holy angels of heaven. God, kindle Thou in my heart within/A flame of love to my neighbor, To my foe, to my friend, to my kindred all, To the brave, to the nave, to the thrall." A similar book of liturgies has been written recently called *Every Moment Holy*. Prayers have been written with the intention of bringing God into the everyday moments of life. There is a prayer "For the Ritual of Morning Coffee," another "For the Loss of Electricity," and still another "For the Paying of Bills." We were made for such intimacy with God, and Jesus is the builder of the house to make it happen.

CONCLUSION:

This brings us to our final implication of this, found in the last verse of our text. **"We are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope."** Hope is as necessary for life as oxygen. Since Jesus is building us a house, our future is secure and bright, and our hearts can be filled with hope. Didn't Jesus say, **"In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also"** (John 14:2-3). This is such a strong hope that we boast in it. When you boast in something, it means that you treasure it, that you would do anything to keep it and that it is your pride and joy. When we consider Jesus and all we have in him, our hope burns bright.