

Faith Reformed Church
Stevensville, Ontario
March 9, 2008
Morning Service

Text: Hebrews 3:1-6
Sermon: Greater than Moses

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; AMEN.

Moses was revered by the Jews as the greatest man in history and if we look at his life we can see why. First of all, Moses was providentially chosen by God to fulfill a great destiny. Think about it: His life was miraculously preserved from death as a little child. Pharaoh had decreed the death of all Hebrew boy babies. Moses' mother had to set him adrift on the Nile River in a basket made of reeds and trust him completely into God's keeping. Pharaoh's daughter discovered him, took him into her home to be raised as a prince of Egypt and hired his mother to be his nurse. Clearly God's hand was at work in his life.

Second, God chose Moses to be the deliverer of his people. He called to him from a burning bush which was not consumed and commissioned him to go to Egypt with the command to Pharaoh to let God's people go, so that they might worship him. When Pharaoh refused to comply, Moses unleashed a series of plagues that displayed God's power and might. The Nile turned to blood. Plagues of frogs, gnats and flies fell upon Egypt. Plagues of hail and boils affected man and beast. The sky was darkened so that you could not see your hand in front of your face at noonday. And on the Passover night the firstborn of all in Egypt not sheltered under the blood

of the lambs all perished. With his rod Moses smote the Red Sea and it parted; with that same rod he struck the rock and water gushed forth for all Israel to drink. And so it was that under his leadership he led his people out of slavery and to the border of the Promised Land.

Third, Moses was Israel's great prophet, to whom God communicated directly, personally and intimately, unlike any other. In Numbers 12:6 and following this is what God says:

When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; his is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord.

When Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive the Law, his communion with the Lord God was so intimate and profound that his face retained a wonderful radiance. God said of Moses that he spoke to him face to face, as a friend.

Fourth, Moses was the lawgiver. To a Jew, the law was the greatest thing in the whole world and Moses was the conduit through which the riches of the Ten Commandments, the Levitical laws, the worship and ceremonial laws and the Tabernacle came. Everything in the Jewish religion could be summarized by speaking of "the law of Moses.

Fifth, Moses was the great historian of his people. It was Moses who wrote the first five books of the Bible. In fact, if you wanted to speak of the Old Testament in a kind of shorthand, you could simply call it “Moses and the Prophets.” The question, “What do Moses and the Prophets say?” means, “What does the Bible say?”

And in spite of all these wonderful attributes and accomplishments, the Bible tells us that Moses was the “meekest man on earth”—the “most humble.” Now when Moses is called humble and meek it clearly does not mean he was weak—quite the contrary. It means that all of his life was offered up for the Lord’s purposes. To be humble in the biblical sense is to use all that you have to the glory of God alone. In the Old Testament there is no one greater in this regard than Moses. His whole life was directed to God and not to self.

If you want to sum up the life of Moses you can gather up his attributes, character and accomplishments under this title: Moses—The Great Apostle and High Priest of the Old Testament. The word “apostle” means “one who is sent.” Moses is called, appointed and sent by God as his representative both to his people and to the courts of Pharaoh. And as to his

being the High Priest, let's listen to what the biblical scholar F. F. Bruce had to say:

It was his brother Aaron, and not he, who was high priest of Israel as far as title and investiture were concerned; but it was Moses and not Aaron who was Israel's true advocate with God.

In Exodus 17, when Israel goes into battle against the Amalekites, it is Moses' hands that are lifted up in intercession before the Lord; it is Aaron and Hur who are his helpers. After the golden calf was worshiped, it was Moses' intercession before the Lord that obtained pardon for his people. In confirming the covenant between God and Israel, it was Moses who sprinkled sacrificial blood on the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you..." (Exodus 24:8).

To the Jews, then, there was no one greater than Moses. They held him in such high regard that one of their traditions held that Moses was superior even to the angels of heaven, holding a higher rank and privilege. Now as you remember, our little congregation of Jewish believers that this letter is addressed to was being pressured to turn away from the gospel, to leave the faith and to embrace once more the Jewish faith they had been born into. Our writer understands the reverence and high regard in which Moses is held in this congregation; he holds Moses in that same high regard. But as great a man as Moses was, he understands that Moses was in no way

greater than the Lord Jesus. He understands that to turn from the Lord and embrace Moses is to lose the Lord and Moses both. And so, to strengthen the faith of this fledgling Jewish Christian congregation, our writer proclaims the greatness and the glory of the Lord over all others. He has already shown that Jesus is greater than all angels; he now confirms that Jesus is greater than Moses.

Let's turn to the lesson. It begins, "Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess." "Holy brothers." That is a lovely expression that captures the essence of the lesson we had last week. We are brothers because through faith in Christ we have been adopted into the family of God. We are holy because that is what Jesus is determined to make of us. By his Spirit we are more and more being set apart for godliness and the things of God. By the Spirit we are more and more being taken from the realm of the world, the flesh and the devil.

"Fix your thoughts." This expression means "to pay attention through continuous observation and regard." It means "to apply one's mind diligently" and "to fix one's mind in such a way that the significance of the thing is learned." It is the same word that Jesus uses in Luke 12:24, where he tells us to "consider the ravens." Jesus is saying, "Set your mind upon

how the ravens and the birds of the air are provided for by the heavenly Father—and think about what it means in your life.” Here the words mean, “Think about the Lord Jesus and what his being apostle and high priest means and what it means to you personally. Keep on applying your mind to this until you see the truth of the matter and all of its implications.”

Now, in our Bible study on Wednesday morning somebody mentioned that this was easier said than done. That is, of course perfectly true. The Christian life is easier to talk about than it is to live. Nevertheless, here are some ideas that we can use to help us in our Christian walk. First of all, to fix our thoughts upon Jesus we must make a commitment. We must be committed to seeking after the Lord with a single mindedness of purpose. We must say, “I have troubles and sorrows. I am facing dangers and have worries and fears. They are like great big waves that are beating against my little rowboat. Nevertheless, I am going to look past these waves to the Lord Jesus, who stands above them. I know that God has sent him to me and that he has died and risen to save me. I know that he sits at the right hand of God the Father and intercedes on my behalf. More, I know that God the Father is not unwilling to bless; he does not have to be persuaded; he is the one that sent Jesus in the first place and so he must care for me with a depth I cannot begin to comprehend. Therefore I will commit myself to looking past my

trials to the Lord. And when that becomes too difficult for me to do, I will seek out my Christian brothers and sisters to help me. I will worship with them. I will praise and pray with them. I will seek their fellowship and their encouragement. I will use the means of grace God gives to his children to walk godly before him. And when I am strengthened, I will strengthen someone else in return.

Our author is saying to this small and pressured congregation, “Turn your eyes away from your trials—turn them away from the temptations of the world and the enemies of the Lord—and fix them upon Christ. He is your apostle, for he has been sent from the Father to deliver you from death and he has done so through his death and resurrection. He is your great high priest, who even now sits at the right hand of God the Father and makes intercession for you in all of your trials.” The hymn we sometimes sing puts it this way:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in his wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of his glory and grace.

Let’s turn back to our lesson and pick things up at verse 2.

He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God’s house. Jesus has been found worthy of

greater honour than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honour than the house itself.

Our author now explicitly address how Christ is superior to Moses by showing that while both Jesus and Moses were faithful to their God-given callings, Jesus was greater because his work was greater. That what he means when he writes that “the builder of the house has greater honour than the house itself.” Michelangelo is greater than the Sistine chapel because he designed, built and painted it. Sir Christopher Wren is greater than St. Paul’s Cathedral because he designed it. Frank Lloyd Wright is greater than any of the houses he designed. Jesus is the builder of the house; Moses is part of the house; Jesus is therefore greater than Moses. This is not to denigrate Moses in any way. He was faithful. He was a leader in the house of God. But he did not build it.

Let me talk for a minute about God’s house. What is it? The house Jesus is building is simply the people of God. In the Old Testament this house is called “Israel.” In the New Testament this house is called “the church.” Whether Israel or the church, Moses served, as do we, in the house where Jesus is Lord. This house of God is made up of people who are, in the words of Peter (I Peter 2:5) “living stones.” Earlier Hebrews taught us about adoption. By faith we are adopted into the body of Christ. Here Hebrews teaches the same lesson using a different illustration. By faith we are joined

to Christ in the way that bricks are mortared into the wall of a house. You can think of it this way—a way Paul describes in Ephesians 2. Jesus is the cornerstone. The cornerstone of the house is the stone that all of the lines and angles of the house are established on. Next comes the foundation. The foundation of the church is the apostles' teachings which are recorded for us in the Bible. A Christian is a person who receives Christ, believes the witness of the Bible and builds his life upon it, as this foundation rests upon Christ himself. So Jesus is the builder; Moses is part of the building. Or to put it another way, "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house."

Moses was faithful. If you read Exodus 35-40 you will find no fewer than twenty-two references to the faithfulness of Moses. A blessed part of that faithfulness was his testimony about the future. Think of his witness to what was to come. Moses' Law, the Ten Commandments, were written on tablets of stone but they testified to the character of Jesus Christ who, in his earthly life personified the law perfectly, fulfilling it in all of its particulars and obeying it from the heart by loving his Father with all his strength and his neighbour as himself. Moses instituted the Levitical system of sacrifice—and in doing so testified to the Lord who would come as a substitute and

shed his blood for the remission of his people's sins. Moses constructed the Tabernacle and in that way instructed God's people how could have access to their heavenly Father's throne of grace and mercy through Jesus Christ. In his life by symbols, types and shadows Moses painted a picture of what was to come when the Lord Jesus was born into the world. You can think of it this way: The life of Moses was an earthly picture of the spiritual work of Jesus. Just as Moses delivered his people from the earthly bondage of slavery to Pharaoh so they could go and worship their God, so Jesus delivers his people from spiritual slavery to sin and frees them from the grip of the devil so they can serve the Lord in glad worship and thanksgiving. Jesus put it this way when he confronted Pharisees one day: "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me" (John 5:46). And when he was on the road to Emmaus, fellowshiping with downcast disciples, the Bible tells us that "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

Moses is a faithful servant in God's house, testifying to the Son. Jesus is the faithful Son who rules over God's house. And when we look at the picture of Jesus the Moses painted and the reality of Jesus when he was come in the flesh, what awful faithfulness we see:

1. He faithfully laid aside his heavenly glory, putting aside his omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience, and left his home in heaven.
2. He faithfully became incarnate, taking upon himself the weakness of human flesh in body, mind and emotion. Think of it. The Lord of the universe had to learn how to walk, how to talk, how to feed himself and how to read and write.
3. He faithfully underwent temptation and suffering, never giving in to temptation or turning back from the path of suffering that had been laid out for him, not even when the devil confronted him in a season of weakness and offered him all the kingdoms of the world, if he would simply bow down and worship him.
4. He faithfully went to Jerusalem, Gethsemane and Calvary though he knew exactly what must happen to him there.
5. He faithfully became sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
6. He faithfully became a curse so that we might be blessed.
7. He faithfully died for us so that we might live.
8. As our resurrected and ascended great high priest he sends his Holy Spirit into our hearts, he makes intercession for us before his Father and he prepares a place for us so that all will be ready for us when he returns.

Beloved, fix your thoughts on Jesus. I like the way that Richard

Phillips describes it:

Contemplate the sufficiency of his work for you, and reflect upon the love that bore your sins. And when Satan levels his accusing finger at you, saying, "You are a great sinner," you then can say, "Yes, I am a great sinner. But Jesus Christ is a great Saviour."... He is the great apostle sent by God to bring us salvation; he will not fail. He is the great high priest who reconciles us to God; nothing now shall separate us. He is the master architect and builder, constructing God's house for his own glory and dwelling. And we are that house. He will not be thwarted; he will not be overcome. The house he builds on the rock of his gospel will not be dashed by any storm. So we draw our courage and our confidence and our hope from him. And there we are safe, to the praise of his name.

And there we are safe, to the praise of his name. That is the good news we must ever cling to. In Christ's name. AMEN.