SERIES: The Absolute Supremacy of Jesus Christ
SERMON: **One Greater Than Moses**
SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 3:1-6
SPEAKER: Michael P. Andrus
DATE: November 15, 2009

Introduction: Who is the greatest hero among God's people today? That question is a bit hard to answer, for this is not the age of heroes. In fact, Americans seem to take delight in hero-bashing. Probably the closest we have had to a bona fide Christian hero in my lifetime is Billy Graham. Others who have that status among certain groups might be Dietrich Bonhoeffer, C. S. Lewis, Francis Schaffer, or Mother Theresa. But not one of these names or even all of them together would have nearly the status among us that Moses had among the Jewish people. He was a true hero of heroes and he had been that for 15 centuries already by the time the book of Hebrews was written!

In our Scripture text today the author of Hebrews compares and contrasts Moses with Jesus. He has already argued convincingly in the first two chapters that angels are great and awesome creatures, but Jesus is even greater. He now offers a similar argument in respect to their great and awesome hero, Moses. Believe me, it was not without some risk that he makes this point to his primarily Jewish audience. You didn't mess with Moses lightly. But you'll notice that he has nothing negative to say about Moses. He doesn't draw attention to his sins or his failures; rather he stresses how great he was, but at the same time he makes the point that Jesus is even greater. That is exactly what he did with the angels.

Let's read our text for today, which is Hebrews 3:1-6:

> *Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything.*
>
> *But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.*

You will notice that Moses isn't mentioned until verse 2. That's because the author is intent on providing us a bridge or transition between chapters 2 & 3, so we're going to focus for a few moments on the first verse of chapter 3.

A key transitional verse (3:1)

The first word is "therefore," a connecting word that looks back to chapter 2. Josh brought a great message last Sunday on a very difficult passage. He showed us that in the middle of the argument about Christ's superiority to angels, the author digresses to deal with a potential theological problem. It can be expressed as a syllogism:

Major premise: If Jesus is superior to angels,
Minor premise: and if mankind was created a little lower than the angels (as Psalm 8 says he was),
Conclusion: then Jesus must not be human; perhaps a super-man but not one of us.

Wrong, says the author! Remember the chart Josh showed us? He who once existed in unbelievable glory in heaven as a member of the godhead, gave that position up and became a human being in every way that we are (except for sin, of course). Thus He also became a little lower than the angels Himself, but only for a time! After suffering death for everyone He was then exalted to the right hand of His father, to a place far greater than that of the angels.

The amazing thing is that in doing so He blazed the trail for us, His brothers, His fellow human beings. Though we had fallen into sin, through His atoning death He enables us to be restored to that place of glory and honor where everything will eventually be subject to us, which was God's original intention for His prize creation–mankind.

Verses 16 and 17 bring together the argument about angels and the focus on Jesus' humanity: "For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants." Jesus didn't die for angels; He died for us. "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people."

Now in chapter 3 he picks up on the faithful high priest theme, and in fact, he's going to keep coming back to it for a number of chapters, "*Therefore*, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. He was faithful . . ." I think his point is this: "Because of all I have just taught you, because Jesus is our brother; because He identified completely with us in the incarnation, i.e. in his birth, life, suffering, and death; because He became our substitute, destroyed the power of the devil, freed us from slavery to the fear of death, became an adequate advocate, and helps us when we are tempted, *therefore*, you must fix your thoughts on Him." Who else is worthy of your attention if you have a Savior like this? What else deserves priority if you share in a heavenly calling from such a Lord?

He calls us "holy brothers." This takes us back to the amazing fact Josh pointed out in verse 11 that Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and also in the same verse to the fact that we are made holy through His sacrifice. Not only are we holy brothers, but we also share in a heavenly calling. The follower of Jesus, rather than living with an earthbound perspective, lives in light of a heavenly orientation.

Jesus is called here the apostle and high priest whom we confess. This is the only place in the Bible where He is called an "apostle." As our apostle He is God's representative to man; as our high priest he is man's representative to God. When life gets rough and problems seem to have no solution, when disappointment becomes the norm, when temptations seem impossible to resist, when persecution causes us to consider chucking it all–then we must fix your thoughts on Jesus and keep them there until our strength is renewed and the answers become apparent.

It is at this point that our author launches into his second major argument for the superiority of Jesus–a comparison between Jesus and one of the greatest examples of faithfulness in the Old Testament. "He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful."

Moses was faithful as a servant in God's house and is therefore worthy of honor.

But just as it was not possible for us to appreciate the force of the argument about angels until we learned how great the angels were, so now we must know something about how great Moses was. The Jewish people receiving this letter had studied about Moses from childhood and were well aware of the qualities the author was speaking of when he referred to Moses in such lofty terms. But we may not be so well versed in the Old Testament. Therefore, I want to offer a brief overview of his life.

1. He was a man of great faithfulness. Twice, in verses 2 and 5, we read that "Moses was faithful." That can mean one of two things. It can mean that he was reliable and dependable, i.e. faithful in what he was called to do, or it can mean he was full of faith, i.e. a man who trusted God fully. Both were actually true of Moses. God Himself described Moses as reliable when He spoke out of the cloud to the children of Israel, as recorded in Numbers 12:6-7: "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; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles." God saw Moses as uniquely dependable among His prophets, and therefore worthy to receive and pass on God's revelation.

But Moses was also faithful in the sense that he was full of faith in God. Turn with me to Hebrews 11:23ff, where that particular trait of Moses is in focus:

> *By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel."*

Every major decision in Moses' life is here is attributed to his faith, or trust, in God.

2. He was a man of great character. There are many noble things that could be said about the character of the man Moses. I have chosen just three traits to highlight. He was humble, compassionate, and teachable.

He was humble. In fact, his humility was so outstanding that the Scriptures say that Moses was "more humble than *anyone else* on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3). One need only think of his call by God at the burning bush. God spoke to him and told him that He wanted him to go to Pharaoh and lead the people out of Egypt. But Moses responded, "Who am I? What if the Israelites want to know who sent me? What if I tell them and they don't believe me?" God answered every one of Moses' questions and performed miracles right there to strengthen Moses' faith, but still he responded, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since

you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." And even after God promised to help him speak and teach him what to say, Moses pleaded, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."

There is, of course, a fine line between humility and a sinful sense of inadequacy, and Moses may have crossed that line here. But I see as much positive as negative regarding his character in this encounter, for there was no possibility he would be going forth in his own power and ability–he knew he didn't have it. Moses was humble.

He was compassionate. The characteristic of compassion is seen all through the ministry of Moses, but never more than at the time when Israel made and worshiped the Golden Calf. Moses was up on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments while this godless and immoral activity was going on in the camp. Moses instituted severe discipline on the people and then said,

> *"You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." So Moses went back to the Lord and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin–but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written"* (Exodus 32:31).

In effect Moses offered to give up his own salvation if the people God had entrusted to him could be spared.

He was teachable. This is not a terribly common characteristic of great leaders. Often they feel they don't need to learn from others. Not Moses. Some time after he led the children of Israel out of Egypt and before they arrived at Sinai his father-in-law, Jethro, a priest of Median, came to visit. Moses told him about the Exodus and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the Lord had saved them. Then it says in Ex. 18:13-24:

> *The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?"*
>
> *Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will. Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and laws."*
>
> *Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. But select capable men from all the people–men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain--and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve a judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people*

will go home satisfied."

In other words, Jethro recommends a justice system that started with a justice of the peace and then went to district judge to appellate judge to Supreme Court (that would be Moses). But the most important statement for our purposes is the next sentence, which says, *"Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said."* That is the sign of a man of great character– teachable and willing to learn from others, even his in-laws.

Moses was not only a man of great faithfulness and great character, but also . . .

3. He was a man of great suffering. I refer once again to the words of Hebrews 11: "He (Moses) chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time." The unique thing about Moses' suffering is that it was unnecessary; he chose it. The pleasures of sin and the treasures of Egypt were his for the taking. He was reared in Pharaoh's home and undoubtedly educated in the best of Egyptian universities. Some scholars have even suggested that he could have inherited the throne one day. But instead he opted for the long haul, which involved great suffering. Temporary pleasures and earthly treasures were discarded in favor of permanent pleasures and heavenly treasures.

4. He was a man of great accomplishments. Moses took a small nation of slaves, stood up to the most powerful monarch on earth, rescued his people from tyranny, gave them the greatest legal and moral code known to man, gave them the plans for the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant, nursed them through the desert for 38 years, left them safely on the very door of the Promised Land, and equipped them with a successor whom he had personally discipled and trained, namely Joshua.

Now I don't mean he did all this on his own; as a matter of fact, he did it all by the power of God! But *he* still did it. In addition he wrote the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Bible) through which he still speaks to God's people 3500 years later. Who among mortals has ever accomplished more than Moses?

5. He was a man of great position. Moses is called in our text today "a servant in God's house." On the surface that may seem a bit demeaning, but it is not at all. The word for servant here is not the usual term meaning bond-slave, nor the second most common term referring to a servant who runs errands, but rather a word which signifies one who renders voluntary service inspired by affection. Moses' high position as a servant in God's house reminds me of the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 84:10: "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked."

By the way, we can easily misunderstand the point of the author of Hebrews if we misinterpret the word "house," used seven times in the six verses that are our text today. It is common to use the term "the house of God" to refer to a temple or church building. It does not; at least not here. As a matter of fact, the early church had no buildings for its first 200 to 300 years. When the author of Hebrews refers to the house of God he means the people of God. Moses was a great

servant over the family of God.

Now we have taken just a glance at the greatness of the Old Testament hero, Moses. But that should be sufficient, for the whole point of our passage is this: as great as this man was, Jesus is greater, for while Moses was faithful *as a servant* in God's house, . . .

Jesus is faithful *as a Son* over God's house and is thus worthy of even greater honor.

I want to take the same five issues we have considered from the life of Moses and compare them to the life of Jesus. Moses was a man of great faithfulness, but . . .

1. Jesus is *completely* faithful. Verse 2 of Hebrews 3 says, "He (i.e. Jesus) was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house." The author of Hebrews is comparing Jesus and Moses, but there is an implicit contrast here as well. Moses was both a man of faith and a faithful man. But the Jewish people who were the original readers of this epistle were surely aware of some major incidents in Moses' life when he was not entirely faithful. He once murdered a man instead of allowing God to bring retribution on him. On another occasion in anger at the people he disobeyed God. So serious did God consider that incident that Moses was not allowed to go into the Promised Land.

But Jesus was and is always faithful. 2 Tim 2:13 says of Him, "Even if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself."

Moses was a man of great character, but . . .

2. Jesus is *perfect* in character. Moses, as we noted earlier, was humble, compassionate and teachable. But there were a few times when he was proud, vindictive and stubborn. Never could that be said of Jesus. Take humility, for example! Peter says that "when they hurled their insults at him, Jesus did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." Take compassion! He was so compassionate that He prayed regarding the very people who were in the process of crucifying Him, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Every good character trait known to man was possessed and exercised perfectly by Jesus Christ.

Moses suffered, but . . .

3. Jesus suffered to the *ultimate* degree. Moses was never tortured, nor did he die prematurely as the result of human mistreatment. In fact, he died of old age (120) and was given a very special burial! Deuteronomy 34 tells that story. As far as I know, Moses is the only individual God personally buried. It says, "He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone."

In contrast, Jesus suffered to the ultimate degree. He not only experienced the pain of rejection,

and accusations of blasphemy and insanity, but He also suffered physical abuse and eventual death as a common criminal in the very prime of His life. Of course, the greatest way He suffered is taking upon Himself the sins of the world and having His own Father momentarily turn His back on Him. He suffered to the ultimate degree.

Moses was a man of great accomplishment, but . . .

4. Jesus accomplished *all* that God sent Him to do. As much as Moses accomplished, his greatest assignment was left unfinished when he died. God had appointed him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt into the promised land. But as he stood on Mount Nebo just before he breathed his last, God said to him, "I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it." But Jesus accomplished all that God gave Him to do. As he hung on the cross one of His last words were, "It is finished."

Moses was a man of great position–a servant in all God's house, but . . .

5. Jesus has a greater position, that of *Son over* God's house. The author of Hebrews says in verse 3, "Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself." Then verse 5 adds, "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." Two points are being made here.

First, Moses was a member of the household, but Jesus is the builder of the house. Frank Lloyd Wright was perhaps the greatest architect in American history. The homes he designed have always attracted a great deal of attention and a very high price. But the honor of those houses goes not to the buildings themselves, nor to their present owners, but to the architect. When it comes time to sell a Wright home, the owners do not advertise their own names nor the square footage, nor the layout. They simply let it be known that Frank Lloyd Wright was the architect, and that sells the home. Moses was part of the house, but Jesus was the architect and builder of the house. He deserves the honor; He is the one we should advertise.

Second, Moses was a servant *in* the house, but Jesus is the Son *over* His own house. A number of years ago World Impact in St. Louis purchased an old 3-story home near downtown St. Louis for $11,000, a home that they intended to renovate so that it could become the home of the director of the ministry there. This was a three-story brick home that had once been in a beautiful area of the city but was now in the middle of a slum. It was well enough preserved to see that it had once had a glorious history–beautiful mantels made of oak, beveled mirrors, gorgeous columns of polished cherry wood in the library, an incredible butler's pantry with floor to ceiling glass and wood cabinets. But the thing that fascinated me most was the fact that it had two stairways. One was wide, with beautiful banisters rising from the entry hall. Right next to it, and separated only by a wall, was a very narrow and steep stairway going from the kitchen up to the second floor. I asked. "Why would they bother to build two stairways so close together?" The answer was that the narrow one was for the servants, so they could go from their quarters to the kitchen without being seen by guests or family.

Moses was a servant in the house; Jesus a Son over the house. Moses testified about the reality to come, but Jesus was that reality. Isn't it sad how often we give honor to Jesus' messengers rather than to Jesus Himself?

Now there is one more point made in our text. The last part of verse 6 reads, "And we are his house." It's time for the author to apply the truth directly to the lives of his readers. It's one thing to know the fact that Jesus is the Son over the house of God; it's quite another to be a part of that house. There is no substitute for that.

We are God's house *if* we hold on. (3:6)

Some of you probably don't like the way I put that. But friends, that's exactly what the text says. If the writer of Hebrews were a 21st century evangelist he would undoubtedly put it differently, maybe something like this, "And we are his house *if we profess* Christ as Savior." But he was not interested in profession; he was interested in possession. Perhaps he had seen too many people walk the aisle, raise their hand, pray the prayer, but then bail when the going got tough. So instead he writes, "We are his house *if we hold on* to our courage and the hope of which we boast."

Many who were weaned on the doctrine of eternal security don't like verses like this. But instead of massaging the Scriptures to say something else, I want to offer you three simple propositions that I believe can go a long way toward clarifying this doctrine for us:

It is possible to have assurance without security.
It is possible to have security without assurance.
But God's will for us is to have security with assurance.

1. It is possible to have assurance without security. By that I mean that there are a great many people who are sure of their salvation but they're not saved. Due to heresies being taught, like salvation by works, or salvation by baptism, or salvation by liturgy, many religious people have become convinced that they're going to heaven, but they don't even know Jesus. Hundreds of millions of followers of the great world religions are also convinced that they are OK with God, but if Jesus was telling the truth when He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life," they are sadly mistaken. Even conservative, Bible-believing churches have their share of people who have assurance but no security. But . . .

2. It is also possible to have security without assurance. Some people have been reared under the constant threat that they will lose their salvation if they commit certain sins or they die with unconfessed sins on their slate. Others are just full of fear about the future. Still others have been told that assurance is presumption and that it's dangerous to believe in security. Some of those people, I believe, are genuinely born again but they have never learned that perfect love casts out fear. They may be secure in Christ but they lack assurance of their salvation.

3. But God's will for us is to have security *with* assurance. In other words, we need to

understand that the true believer is secure in Christ, not because of anything we have done but because of what He did. We also need to understand that the Holy Spirit gives us assurance as He witnesses with our spirit that we belong to God's family.

Yet even that security and assurance which is promised every true believer does not argue against the fact that there is danger in presuming and pretending.

4. However, there is grave danger in presuming and pretending. I am convinced that there are many who have professed Christ but have never really possessed Him. There are many who pretend at Christianity, perhaps even fooling themselves, but have never actually received Jesus Christ as Lord. And there are many who give the appearance of thorough conversion, but are like the seed which fell on rock, of which Jesus spoke in Luke 8. In verse 13 He says, “Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.”

It is to these that the words of Hebrews 3:6 are directed: “We are His house if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.” The proof of reality is in the continuance. It's no different than what Jesus said, “If you *abide* in My word, then you are truly disciples of mine.” (John 8:31)

Conclusion: The first-century Hebrews were being tempted to abandon their faith or to neglect their faith or drift away from the truth they had been taught. The solution offered to them is to “fix your thoughts on Jesus.” That is the same solution for us in the 21st century as well, is to “fix our thoughts on Jesus.” He is the answer.

No human hero can take His place–none!