

Title: Great is Thy Faithfulness
Text: **Hebrews 3.1-6**
Theme: The faithfulness of Christ
Series: **Hebrews #7**
Prop Stmt Faithfulness is evidence of genuine faith

Read Text:

Traditions can be wonderful practices that help establish a feeling of rootedness and a sense of belonging. We may not all like the same traditions, though we all like traditions, because they are familiar. A tradition is something that we feel safe with. We have done this before. It is predictable. And if it is something that we have done many times before and we have derived great pleasure from it, well then, of course we want to do keep doing it and we would naturally feel jolted and even threatened by someone who takes that away, or a bit depressed if we were unable to keep our traditions.

Now, I would imagine that for most of you, Christmas is the most traditionally loaded time of the year. Now, think of what it was like to be a Jew during the time the book of Hebrews was written. Many of the Jews, as evidenced of the events during the life of Christ, practiced their national holy days. The Day of Atonement, the Passover, the Feast of Trumpets and the Festival of Booths were times of national unity and deep religious significance. The people would travel to Jerusalem, many of them walking the same roads that they had traveled for years. They walked with the same travelers, sang the same Psalms, told and heard the same stories, and longed for their first glimpse of Jerusalem in the distance. But now, since Christ had come, the Day of Atonement was a thing of the past. It held deep symbolism that was fulfilled in Christ. Think about this. If you were a follower of Christ, could you still celebrate the Day of Atonement? The Day of Atonement was the day when the nation would gather at the Temple, while the high priest would take two goats. One he would kill as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. He would take the blood of the goat and offer some of it before the Ark of the Covenant and some he would pour on the Mercy Seat. He would then lay his hands upon the remaining goat in a ceremony that symbolically transferred the sins of the people onto the goat. The live goat would then be chased out of the city and eventually into the wilderness. Some traditions say that the goat was eventually chased over a cliff to its death. Taken together, this holy-day illustrated what Christ would do through his atonement. The atonement of Christ accomplished both propitiation and expiation. Propitiation means that the wrath of the offended one has been appeased, so that the one who was angry with us is now at peace with us. Expiation means that guilt has been removed. Both were fully and finally accomplished by Christ on the cross. If after trusting in Christ as your Savior, you celebrated the Day of Atonement, you would be denying the gospel. The Day of Atonement was a yearly ceremony for the nation of Israel that pointed to the ultimate sacrifice that was going to come. Once that sacrifice was made by Christ, there was no need for the Day of Atonement celebration, and yet, it continued.

Listen carefully and heart-fully. We are creatures of habit. There are many habits and traditions that we have participated in. Many of these habits and traditions are good because they pointed to the gospel. But, the habits and the traditions are not the gospel;

they pointed to the gospel. Your heart, like my heart is an idol-producing factory. It is very easy to take the traditions that point to the gospel and confuse them with the gospel itself. Hebrews was written to people who were caught in the middle of this type of tension. They were viewed as rejecting the traditions of their people and being an enemy of the “true faith”, when in reality they were accepting the fulfillment of the traditions because they had embraced the Savior to whom the traditions pointed. The people who were keeping the traditions were denying the gospel because they considered the keeping of the traditions to be more important than the Savior who fulfilled the traditions. Many of you know exactly what I am talking about and you can therefore appreciate the pressure that these Hebrew Christians were under because of your background.

So, while we may initially read these words (3.1-6) and shrug our shoulders and think – “well, of course, Jesus is greater than Moses, who doesn’t know that? After all, if Christ is greater than the angels, then obviously he is greater than Moses!” These 6 verses may initially look like an argument that does not concern you in the least. However, if you grew up in a close ethnic culture with a long history and was forged by persecution, rooted by stories, identified by land, rituals and songs that spanned over a thousand years, and you announced that you were no longer following those customs because you believed in something that was better; you could expect some serious tension.

There are a couple of things that are happening in this text. First, there is the comparison in the text between the goodness of Moses and the greatness of Christ. But, there is also the connection between the people who rejected Moses and the people who rejected Christ. The people, who rejected Christ, claimed to be the people who accepted Moses. Obviously there is a problem with that. The author uses “you” in verse 1 and returns to the familiar “we” in verse 6.

1. Standing up the Text

Because this book was written to professing believers with a Jewish background, we should expect that there are a number of references to the OT. We have already seen several direct quotes. Here is there is short quote that comes at the end of v.2. “just as Moses also was faithful in all God’s house” This comes from Numbers 12.7. (turn)

A. OT

a. Numbers 12.7

The children of Israel were complaining “about their misfortunes” (11.1). God will judge the sin of complaining and he did. The fact that God severely responded to their complaining with judgment was the occasion for more of them to complain, this time about the food. In the next chapter, “Miriam and Aaron spoke out against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman.” The land of Cush was a large empire just south of Egypt. Now, the text is very clear that Moses, a Jew had married inter- racially and his sister and brother did not like it. Tapping into the uncomfortableness that others may have had, or the gossip that was going around, Miriam and Aaron revealed some underlying bitterness and jealousy that was in

their hearts. After all, Moses, the hero, was their little brother, and that was apparently rather difficult for them. So, they started to complain. (Read verses 2-9) Talk about a “come to Jesus meeting” this is it. It is God who says (v.7) that while Moses is a prophet, he is not like other prophets. Moses is “faithful in all my house” (a reference to the people of God). In fact, he is so faithful (and meek – v.3) that God does not reveal things to him in a vision, but God speaks to Moses mouth to mouth, clearly and not in riddles. Not only that, but Moses beholds the form of the LORD. In other words, God directly puts his words into the mouth of Moses. So, if you are going to complain about Moses and what he says, you are complaining about God. To reject the word of Moses was to reject God because God spoke through Moses. Now, how were they supposed to know that Moses was a prophet of God and the leader that God had established? Look at the evidences! Everything he said that would happen – did!

This incident was one piece of a much larger picture. This entire adult generation that came with Moses out of Egypt and witnessed first hand the power of God and heard the voice of God, never made it into the Promised Land because of their unbelief! Is that not incredible? “We love God but we don’t want to listen to God’s leader!”

b. Deut. 18

In Deut. 18, Moses prophesies about the perfect prophet who will come from the nation of Israel. This is obviously a prophecy about Christ. Follow the logic. If rejecting the word of Moses was a serious problem that God responded to with severe judgment, and if Moses predicted that a perfect prophet would come who would speak, then how much greater would the consequences be for the ones who rejected the perfect prophet that Moses prophesied about? Are you with me? To reject Moses, to whom God had spoken was bad enough. To reject the prophet who was God in human flesh was the ultimate foolishness. But, that is exactly what happened to Christ.

B. NT - John 9

In Jn 9 Jesus heals a man who was blind from birth. When the Pharisees ask him how he was healed, he told them that Jesus did it! Now they have a problem. So, they try to discredit him and intimidate him and it does not work. I cannot wait to meet this guy in heaven. They finally get exasperated with him and arrogantly accuse him of being a disciple of Jesus, while they are disciples of Moses. (v.28) Then they say, remarkably (v.29), “We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” The Pharisees were just like the Israelites in the wilderness. They claimed to be followers of God, but they rejected the word of God. They claimed to be followers of Moses, but Moses prophesied about the perfect prophet who was to come and was now here, and they rejected him while they claimed to be followers of Moses. Again, how were they supposed to know that Christ was the Savior, the Messiah, the Prophet, the King? Look at the evidences! Everything that he said would happen – did! Right there, he opened the eyes of a man who had been born blind. And what did they do with that evidence? They rejected it and pretended that because they were following Moses that they could not accept the authority of Christ. So, did those who reject Christ

in reality accept Moses? NO! If they had really understood Moses, they would have loved the One that Moses had spoken of. Now we are ready to tackle these verses. Chap. 2 begins with a warning and ends with an encouragement. Chap. 3 begins with an encouragement and ends with a warning.

2. Understanding the Text

A. This text has a context

a. What comes before – “Therefore” – v.1

The designation of “holy brothers” (and sisters) is linked to 2.11 where it is Christ who makes us holy and it is Christ who makes us brothers. Because you are members of Christ’s family set apart by him and for him, being cared for and kept by him, you are holy brothers. He goes on to describe you (pl) as people who “share in a heavenly calling.” The idea of this is a calling from Christ to press on as pilgrims and follow our high priest, our leader into the presence of God. The “you” is plural and sets us up for the command by emphasizing that this pilgrimage is something that we do together. As we will see, your faithfulness is part of our faithfulness. Your faithfulness is an enormous encouragement to the rest of the body. As we follow Christ, we reflect Christ and we reflect Christ to each other. In a very personal and practical way, your faithfulness helps others to see the faithfulness of Christ. So, this opening phrase is repeating who you are, which comes before the command to action. Who you are always drives what you do. But look at how the next section begins.

b. What comes after – “Therefore” – v.7

Verses 1-6 are obviously connected with verses 7-19. Beginning in v.7 the author is issuing a serious warning to those who were tempted to follow the pattern of the children of Israel who rejected Moses. The consequences of rejecting the word of Christ are even more serious than the consequences of rejecting the word of Moses as revealed in vs. 1-6.

B. This text has a command (that has 3 aspects to it) (vs. 1-2a)

1) We are commanded to rivet our attention upon Christ.

“Consider Jesus!” “Fix your thoughts on Jesus” (NIV) The word translated “consider” is used in Luke 6.41 in reference to examining to see if there is a problem with yourself. It speaks of thoughtful, intentional and careful examination that is intended for you to have a greater understanding of what is going on.

2) We are told what to think about who Christ is.

Okay, what does the text say about who Christ is? Christ is the apostle. This is the only time in the Scriptures where Christ is called this, but it is a term that means God’s messenger. As the messenger of God, God is preaching to us in the person of his Son.

Christ is also called the *high priest of our confession*. This concept of Christ being our high priest was introduced at the end of chapter 2 and will be expanded on in 4 and 5. This term speaks of Christ as our representative before God who not only represents us in life and death as the sacrifice for our sins, but he also represents what we believe. He is the high priest of our confession. Now, that is a loaded expression, especially these days. The word that is translated confession is a compound word (homologeō) that means to say the same thing as. So, Christ is the high priest of OUR confession. Let's put this phrase together now.

Christ is the one who tells us the message from God. That message is not subjective, it is objective. The message has doctrinal content in the form of propositional truths that have to be believed. We have to agree with him if what we believe is right. That is we, together mutually hold an objective body of truth that we have formally and publicly stated that we believe. Amongst other things it at the very least includes a confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. He is the focal point of our entire belief system. So, consider Jesus who tells us what God said, and who represents and embodies all that we are to believe.

3) We are told to think about what Christ did.

We are to “consider Jesus ... who was faithful to him who appointed him.” Continually think great thoughts about how Christ was faithful to the one who appointed him to his mission. That is our heavenly calling! Like Christ was faithful to his calling, you be faithful to yours. Notice how this command involves your thinking. Christianity is not mindless religious activity or traditional ceremonies that you do because you were raised that way. Do not get distracted by anything else.

C. This text has a comparison. (vs. 2b-6a)

The comparison is between the faithfulness of Moses and the faithfulness of Christ. Faithfulness is clearly the theme of these verses. The comparison does not in any way demean Moses. In fact, this text shows us how much Moses was like Christ. Our appreciation of Moses grows as we see that he endured so much of what Christ endured.

“Just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house” is a phrase from Numbers 12, where Moses was faithful even though he was rejected and had to put up with the incessant criticism of the children of Israel. Christ was faithful like that and in the face of the same kind of criticism except it was worse. The irony is that the Pharisees were claiming to be followers of Moses, when in reality, their rejection of Christ (the one to whom Moses was pointing), revealed that they were following in the steps of the children of Israel who rejected Moses. Moses was faithful, Christ even more so. Moses was the architect and builder of the people into a nation, but Christ built an even better house, so Christ is the recipient of even more glory. Moses was faithful like a servant and Christ was faithful like a son. Those comparisons only underscore the point that while Moses was good, Christ was great. To these Hebrew Christians, it meant, be grateful for your past, but the past and its traditions (many of them God-given) were set in place to point to Christ. Now

that Christ has come, hold fast to Him. If, you hold fast to the traditions which were types and symbols that point to Christ, instead of holding to Christ, then your confidence is not in Christ, and your faith is not valid. You may say, that you believe in Christ, but time reveals where the true affections of your heart and confidence rest. That is why...

D. This text has a promise and a warning. (6b)

Notice the conditional “if” at the end of v.6. This promise is a great encouragement, and really is what the author is emphasizing in these verses. When you consider the faithfulness of Christ and you press on pilgrim, even though it is hard and there are plenty of critics who are stinging you with their words and hurting you with rejection, you can rejoice knowing that you are part of “his house.” This promise is ours IF we hold fast our confidence and (hold fast) our boasting in our hope. The “if clause” implies a warning that is taken up in v.7. I will address this issue of perseverance in a specific message.

3. Standing under the Text.

A. Ask the Spirit of God to reveal to you what your confidence is in.

B. Distinguish between good traditions and gospel-based commands.

I am a creature of habit, and so are most of you. I like us to do things that point to Christ, but we have to be careful that we our confidence and joy is not misplaced in them instead of being in Christ. So, let’s think through some of our practices and make certain that we know the difference between a nice tradition and a gospel-based biblical command.

We read the Scriptures in our services. Is that a nice habit, or a biblical mandate? (1 Tim. 4.13) We normally stand for the reading of the Bible. Is that a nice habit, or a biblical mandate? Preaching is a regular part of our gathering. Is that a nice habit, or a biblical mandate? (1 Tim. 4.13, 2 Tim. 4.2) We do not normally give an altar call. Do the Scriptures command that? We have Sunday services in the morning. What if a church had them in the afternoon or in the evening instead? Is that a nice habit, or a biblical mandate? We observe communion. Is that a nice habit, or a biblical mandate? (1 Cor. 11) We have men serve communion. Is that a nice habit, or a biblical mandate? What if women helped?

For years we had a practice that the men who served communion wore a coat and tie. Now, obviously the early church did not do this, so this is not something that we have to do. But we did. It was a practice that was in place before I came, and I frankly did not care about it because I usually wear a tie. However, like many practices, it was becoming in the minds of some a mark of authentic Christianity and being a good church. That is when I changed the policy. People were losing sight of what mattered and what didn’t.

C. Ask yourself, “What do I love more?”

Do you love Christ more or traditions that make you comfortable? Some of you like the tradition of guitar-led worship. To you it reminds you of campfires, special times of being away with other believers where God really did some meaningful things in your life and you and others sang your hearts out to God. An acoustic guitar has a more natural and authentic sound to it. When you hear it, it reminds you that you do not have to pretend to be someone that you are not. Some of you like organ-led worship. To you it reminds of you sounds from your childhood and services where God really did some meaningful things in your life and you and others sang your hearts out to God. An organ has a more majestic sound to it. When you hear it, it reminds you that God has glorious in majesty and you know that it is good for you to be overwhelmed with that. Now, besides the obvious of recognizing the different backgrounds within our own congregation and learning to enjoy and celebrate them all, I need to ask all of you this question. Do you love Christ and his gospel more than the instruments?

D. Be charitable and flexible about traditions. (oh that is hard)

E. Be tenacious and unbending about the gospel.

As your shepherd, I want to see every single one of you (lambs) makes it safely into the fold. There is only one thing that is going to help you press on pilgrim, there is only one thing that is going to sustain you through the dark nights and when you cross the Jordan, and it won't be a guitar, an organ, an open collar or a tie, it will be a tenacious hold on Christ and an unbending confidence in the gospel.