

+ Hebrews 3:1-6 + Fix Your Thoughts on Jesus! + 21st Sunday after Pentecost + 25 October 2009 +

Do you ever lose focus? Not blurry vision, but lose focus on a task at hand or a goal you're trying to reach. For example, has something like this ever happened to you? You sit down at your computer to do a project. You end up opening your e-mail, checking the scores, reading a news article, and pretty soon, time has passed and you're nowhere near the project you started. You've flown so far from it, you can't see it anymore.

Maybe you don't use a computer that much, but you have a certain errand to run—buy milk at the store. Of course, the milk is often at the very back of the store and you have to make your way past aisle after aisle of tempting goodies or “necessities”. Next thing you know, a gallon of milk has turned into a cartful of groceries. I'm sure you can think of other examples.

Every one of us at some point in time has lost focus whether on a task at hand or a goal ahead. In fact, there are times when all the distractions around you make it very difficult to keep focused. This is especially true for Christians. So many different voices, so many different messages, so many different people, so many different temptations, so many different distractions from outside of you and within you threaten to draw your focus away from Christ and his gracious promises, away from what's really important. If and when you allow that to happen, very quickly you find that time has passed. You're nowhere near Christ and overloaded with guilt.

The Hebrew Christians were losing focus too. Life was getting tougher for them. The local authorities allowed them to be hauled off to jail or have their property seized. The threat of bloodshed was increasing, all because they were Christian, a not-quite-legal religion at that time. With all these potential threats to their homes and lives, many of these Christians, who had once been Jews, were starting to long for the supposed safety of Judaism. “It was pretty good before, right? At least it was legal. Jesus is the fulfillment, but at least it's close, right?” Reports of Christians going back to Judaism reached the writer of our text. So the Holy Spirit inspired him to send a letter of warning and encouragement to these Hebrews, who would soon completely lose focus on Christ. He urged them as he urges you and me today, **FIX YOUR THOUGHTS ON JESUS! (Read Hebrews 3:1-6)**

Now if you don't fully appreciate something or someone, you'll quickly lose focus on it. If you don't fully appreciate a loved one, you'll take them for granted. If you don't fully appreciate the importance of completing a particular task, you'll permit yourself to do everything else, but that task. Who of us hasn't “procrastinated” when there was a big, difficult job to do?

As Christians, we need to realize that if we don't appreciate Christ, we will very quickly lose focus on him too. We need to be reminded of who we are by nature in God's sight, who we have become through Christ's work, and why Christ deserves our full and devoted attention all the time. First and foremost, **he is faithful to you**. The writer of Hebrews brings that out very clearly in the first verses of our text, ***“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 to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house.”***

It's a little surprising that the writer calls his readers, ***“holy brothers”***. When times got tough, they were willing to give up on Christ and Christianity for the safety of Judaism. They were about to abandon Christ to follow the great prophet Moses, who was highly regarded by all the Jews and even Jesus himself, but to forsake Christ for a mortal prophet would bring eternally disastrous results. Still the writer calls them ***“holy brothers”*** to remind them of who they had become through Jesus.

You see, by nature, they were neither holy nor brothers nor even extended family of Christ Jesus. In fact, by nature they were unholy slaves to sin and Satan and death. By nature, they were God's mortal enemies who defied his holy will. They had tried to earn God's favor, while every sinful thought or word or action only earned them more of his wrath.

Before we look down on them, though, we need to realize that that's what you and I were too. Have you always lived like a ***“holy brother”*** or sister of Christ? Have you ever let materialism or self-centeredness draw your focus away from Christ to self or stuff? Have you ever tucked away your Christianity to “have some fun” or to prevent an awkward situation at work, with friends, or in school? Have you ever let lust or anger or selfishness lead you to defy God's holy will? Have you ever let sins of weakness, those “pet sins” we all commit, drag you around like some slave? Have you ever tried to get rid of guilt by doing more for God, while the guilt remains and only wears you down? Have you ever earned God's holy wrath by a sinful thought, word, or action? Every single one of us has to confess, “Yes, I deserve God's condemnation”, but yet the Lord through his inspired writer calls us ***“holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling.”***

How is that possible when by nature, we are “unholy enemies of God, who share in hellish condemnation”? It was ***“Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.”*** It was Jesus, who came to save, to rescue, to deliver,

as his name means. It was Jesus, who was commissioned and sent from God to redeem the world as Jesus himself told his disciples in John 20, ***“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”***

It was Jesus, who was sent from his heavenly throne to go down into the muck and filth and corruption of this sinful world to ransom you from sin’s slavery with the atoning sacrifice of his own blood. It was Jesus, who filled the breach between you and God, who willingly faced the awful punishment of hell in your place and mine. It was Jesus, who lovingly fixed his eyes on you and never let his focus be drawn away by the world’s distractions. It was Jesus, whose focus was fixed on you from the manger to beneath the cross to outside the empty tomb. It was Jesus, who made you holy, brought you into his family through the water and Word of Holy Baptism, and through that same Gospel message called you to a heavenly calling. It is Jesus, who now intercedes for you as Mediator as St. Paul wrote to Timothy, ***“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...”*** It was Jesus, who earned an eternal home for you in spite of your foolish wandering and misplaced priorities. It is Jesus, who was and is faithful to you as he ***“was faithful to the one who appointed him...”***

Moses, the great Old Testament prophet and leader of the Israelites, didn’t do that, nor could any other man or thing. The Hebrew Christians needed to know that. Yes, Moses was great. ***“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 great...as a servant. Jesus was greater...as the Son of God. Moses testified to how God would deliver sinful mankind in the future. Jesus fulfilled all those promises.

We need to hear this too. I doubt any of you are considering a return to Judaism, but for us to keep our focus on Christ, we need to remember that Jesus is worthy of greater glory and honor and attention from us than anyone or anything else in this world. More than our entertainment. More than our jobs. More than our educations. More than our hobbies and activities. More than our achievements. More than our wants. More than our families. More than our selves. Jesus Christ is so much more worthy of that greater glory, because **he is faithful to you and is faithful to his promises to you.**

“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.” When times get tough in your life—the finances get really tight, a loved one is unexpectedly hospitalized, your job security is threatened, life doesn’t go the way you expected, death rears its ugly head—how do you persist? On what do you focus? Do you fix your thoughts earthward to happy memories when times were good and life was pleasant? Does the sourness in your stomach or the lack of restful sleep draw your gaze inward? Does your focus look to mortal men who promise to have answers or to your gut instinct to get you through the tough times? Anytime you do that, as a dear professor of mine used to say, you are only “navel-gazing”, but what does that accomplish other than hopelessness, pain, and more sorrow? What happens when you don’t come through on a promise you’ve made to yourself or to others or when the promises of others fall to the floor?

So quickly you lose hope and courage in such difficult times. Still the writer encourages you to hold on to that hope, that courage ***“of which we boast”***. He’s not talking about pride-filled arrogance here, but later in Hebrews, he explains how and why you can have real hope and true courage, how and why you can ***“fix your thoughts on Jesus...”***

He writes in chapter 12, ***“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”*** Jesus was faithful to you. He endured the cross and scorned its shame for you. He sits at the right hand of God to make you living members of his house, beloved siblings of his family. Surely Jesus remains faithful to his promises to you too. What is that he promises? Forgiveness. Strength for this life and his loving presence ever with you. Contentment with the blessings he so graciously gives. True courage that is more than toughness, and hope that is really confidence. Heavenly glory. Eternal life, joy and rest—a time when you can drop that cross at his feet forever.

Jesus is faithful to you and to his promises to you. Jesus is the apostle and high priest whom you confess. Jesus is your holy brother, who calls you heavenward. Focus on him and don’t let anyone or anything try to distract you from what really matters—Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. In him you don’t have stuff or fleeting pleasure or pointless ease or shallow hope. In him you have everything you can possibly need and more. So fix your thoughts on Jesus, who is worthy of all glory and honor and praise. Amen.