

A Better Ambassador

Hebrews 3:1-6

There are times in every one of our lives, and especially during childhood, when we feel intense pressure to fit in. I remember when I was in fifth grade, everyone in my class was really into Guess Jeans. Normally I couldn't care less what brand of jeans I wore, but I really wanted to fit in. Everybody had them. And they were ridiculously expensive. And so my parents took me to the only store in the mall that sold them, and I got my first pair of Guess jeans. What the salesperson didn't tell me is that he had sold me a pair of women's jeans. I didn't know the difference; I wasn't really into this. I was just trying to fit in. But everybody in my class knew, because the triangle on my backside was red instead of green.

And so I swore off trying to fit in from that moment on in life, right? No—I took those jeans back and exchanged them for a pair with a green label, because I wanted to fit in.

We all feel the pressure to fit in. We don't want to be marginalized or mocked because we're not into or excited about the right things. When everybody else is really excited about something else, we actually become insecure about our real interests. Shy. Feel the pressure to mute them or hide them, and instead emphasize the interests we think others will admire and appreciate. Which doesn't necessarily mean we're being dishonest. For instance, if everyone's really excited about Justin Timberlake's new album; I might like Justin fine. But I might feel like I need to hide the fact that I take Johnny Cash any day of the week over that stuff. Because everybody else likes Justin, and I don't want to be left out.

It's a silly game. But there's a more serious version of this that happens when it comes to our passion about spiritual things—ultimate things—and the temptation to become timid, insecure, shy, even ashamed of the gospel of Jesus, because everyone else seems to be really excited about something (or someone) else.

The book of Hebrews was written to a church facing this kind of pressure—the pressure to adjust their passions, their loyalty, their doctrine and faith, in order to avoid being persecuted or marginalized by those around them. And based on what the author addresses throughout the book, it seems that the pressure this particular congregation faced was coming from those who wanted to see them go back to Judaism—the Law of Moses, the temple and priesthood, the sacrifices—as though Jesus wasn't really the Messiah, or hadn't yet arrived to fulfill the old covenant and establish the new.

And so the author has made it his goal to demonstrate how Jesus is better than the Old Covenant of Israel in every way, and how our greatest need is therefore to hold fast to our confession of faith in him, despite whatever opposition we might face. So far he's shown how Jesus is better than the prophets as the full and final revelation of God's salvation (1:1-4). And how he's better

than angels, because he is both above them as Creator and King (1:5-2:4), and became a little lower than them in order to save us, sharing our humanity and suffering for our sin (2:5-18).

But he's only getting started. And in ch. 3 he turns to a new subject, a new mode of comparison, showing in the next couple of chapters how Jesus is better than both Moses (3:1-6) and Joshua (3:7-4:13).

Fidelity to Moses and the Pressure to Fit In

Moses is without doubt one of the most famous and influential Israelites in all of ancient Israel's great history. Last year we worked through the book of Exodus on Sunday mornings, which is where we meet Moses and see who he is and how God uses him to accomplish his great work of salvation. Moses was God's ambassador to Israel. He was sent by God to lead his people out of slavery—remember how he called him at the burning bush and sent him back to the land of slavery that “to bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt” (Exod. 3:10). He was an ambassador sent by God.

And he was an ambassador who interceded before God on behalf of the people, especially when they went astray. After God rescued them from Egypt, you'll recall how often Israel grumbled against God in the wilderness—complaining that they were thirsty or hungry, and rebelling against Moses for having the gall to lead them out of slavery—which was in reality rebellion against God (Exod. 16:8; cf. 15:22-27; 16:1-17:7). When that happened (and it happened more than once, cf. Num. 11; 20), Moses was the one who appeared before God on behalf of the people to seek his mercy and forgiveness (E.g., Exod. 33-34; Num. 11-12). Though his brother Aaron officially received the priesthood, Moses often acted as high priest—not least because Aaron was often part of the problem. Remember the golden calf (Exod. 32), or the time when Aaron and Miriam got jealous of Moses' leadership and unique relationship with God (Num. 12)?

But Moses did in fact have a unique relationship. In Numbers 12, when Miriam and Aaron (his brother and sister) spoke against Moses and tried to position themselves as prophets on his same level, the Lord responded:

“Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” (Num. 12:6-8)

Moses' relationship with God was unique. And God himself affirmed that he was a faithful servant in all God's household. He was God's ambassador to Israel, an apostle and high priest. The model prophet and mediator of the old covenant (cf. Exod. 20ff)—a covenant often identified with his very name: “the Law of Moses” (e.g. Josh. 8:31; Dan. 9:11; Lk. 24:44).

And so if you want to make a case for the lasting superiority of Israel's old covenant, emphasizing its association with Moses is a pretty powerful strategy. Especially among Jewish circles in the first century. Loyalty to Moses was essentially loyalty to God. This was a common angle played by Jewish leaders in the early days of the gospel. In John 9, when the man born blind testifies that Jesus has healed him, the Jewish leaders hurl insults at him while hiding

behind their loyalty to Moses: “And they reviled him, saying, ‘You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from’” (Jn. 9:28-29). Or in Acts 6, the Jews who are trying to dispute with Stephen and who ultimately incite the crowd who murders him, do so by portraying the message of Jesus as a threat to Moses.

Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.” (Acts 6:11-14; cf. 15:1-5; 21:20-21)

Everyone was excited about Moses. If you wanted to be seen as a loyal follower of God, attaching yourself to Moses was a sure way to please the critics. On the other hand, advocating for the supremacy of Jesus was a sure way to get yourself in trouble.

And so in that impulse to fit in, to avoid being mocked or marginalized or even persecuted, it was really easy to become insecure or timid about their allegiance to Jesus and his gospel, and instead emphasize their loyalty to or appreciation for Moses, God’s ambassador to Israel, the great servant of the Lord.

And it’s pretty easy for us to do something similar today. In our desire to fit in and avoid ridicule or rejection, we can become timid, insecure, or even ashamed of the gospel, because everyone is really excited about something else. We mute or minimize what really matters, what we’re really passionate about, and instead emphasize the interests or causes we think others will like and appreciate. What will win us approval.

For instance, everyone today is excited about social justice—which is a good thing. Doing good for people, defending the downtrodden, advocating for the marginalized, making the world a better place. People are not particularly excited about what the gospel says about sin—that it really is sinful and worthy of eternal punishment; or the exclusivity of Christ—that Jesus is the only way of salvation from our sin and reconciliation with the Father. People are not particularly excited about holiness or obedience or dying to self and following Christ, especially if that means submitting our sexual ethic or money ethic or any cherished ethic to God and his will.

But drilling wells in Africa, building schools in Haiti, reducing carbon emissions, providing afterschool programs in under-privileged neighborhoods, fighting to end racism or poverty or human trafficking—everyone’s excited about that. Just look at the recent Super Bowl commercials—you can’t sell products now without taking a stand on some social or environmental issue. Diversity, clean water, thanking first responders—which are all great things. But they tell you nothing about quality of the car, or beer, or soda you’re trying to sell.¹ In fact, the one ad that didn’t play the social justice card in its commercial—Jeep, who just

¹ Maureen Kline, “[Super Bowl Ads Show Brands Taking Stands on Social and Environmental Issues](#),” *Inc.com*, Feb. 4, 2018.

showed how their vehicle can plow through a river and climb a mountain—received criticism afterward from fish conservation groups about their habitat destruction.²

And so if you want to be praised for your products today, or for your *spirituality* today, if you want to fit in when it comes to religion, emphasize your passion for social justice. Get excited about what everyone else is excited about. But don't get too crazy about Jesus and the cross, because that will get you into trouble.

And here's the thing: it's not that there's a problem with social justice, or being passionate about social justice. These are all good and important things to be passionate about. In fact, social justice is an implication of the gospel. If we love Jesus and love our neighbors, we will care about clean water, good education, societal renewal, ending racism and discrimination, protecting the environment God gave us, and so on. We don't have to treat good things as though they are bad in order to make much of Jesus. But we do have to take confidence that *Jesus is better*. That he alone is able to deal comprehensively with the sin and brokenness of this world. That in him we have a heavenly calling, an eternal inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. That his gospel is not a matter of shame or shyness, but of glory and pride and world-changing hope.

The Supremacy of Jesus and Pride in the Gospel

But to see this, we must *consider Jesus*. That's what the author calls us to do in this passage. "Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus . . ." (3:1). Take a good, fresh look at who he is and what he's done. Study him. Ponder him. And consider him in comparison to that which everyone is excited about. Consider him in comparison to Moses. Everyone loves Moses; how does Jesus compare? If we're going to be convinced of Christ's supremacy, and confident in our confession of him (even when others don't share that excitement), we need to take an honest inventory. That's what happens in vv. 1-6.

But again, we don't have to treat good things as though they're bad in order to make much of Jesus. As with his contrast between Jesus and angels back in ch. 1, at no point does the author tear Moses down in order to build Jesus up. He could have made his case that way—that Jesus was *more* faithful than Moses—because it's true (just read Numbers 20). But instead he appeals to Moses' reputation of faithfulness within God's household as a *positive* parallel—Jesus was faithful like Moses. Look again with me at vv. 1-2: "Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house."

Jesus is faithful like Moses. If you're excited about Moses, if that's your standard, your loyalty to him, then you should pay attention because Jesus, too, was a faithful ambassador—an apostle and a high priest—one sent by God and who represents the people before God.

So he starts with a positive comparison. He doesn't tear Moses down to make Jesus look better. But he does show the supremacy of Jesus. Not by calling Moses unfaithful, but by demonstrating that Jesus was faithful to God at a different and *much higher level*. Moses was faithful *within*

² Reece Counts, "[Jeep Super Bowl commercial nets criticism from fish conservationists](#)," *Autoblog*, Feb. 15, 2018.

God's house as a *servant*; Jesus is faithful *over* God's house as a *Son*. That means he is worthy of even greater glory. Verse 3:

For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses- as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. ⁴ (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) ⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, ⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. (3:3-6)

Jesus is better than Moses. Not because Moses was bad, but because Jesus is better. It's a difference of identity and role. Moses was a servant of God who was given authority within God's household, and found faithful in it. He did what God sent him to do, and interceded on behalf of God's people when they blew it. But he operated as a member of that household—not as someone above it. If ancient Israel were a sports team, Moses would have been the general manager, or the coach. And he was a good coach. But Jesus is the owner. He is faithful at a higher level. He's the faithful Son of God who has authority *over* the household, and who completes the bigger mission of God in redeeming that household, not just from slavery, but from sin and death.

Jesus was the *ultimate apostle*. That's a word we don't often see associated with Jesus. We think of *his* apostles—the disciples who were eyewitnesses of his death and resurrection and entrusted with the message of the gospel. But the word “apostle” means “sent one”—someone who is sent on a mission. And Jesus was the ultimate apostle, sent by God. He says in John 5:36, “For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has *sent* me.” And his mission was much bigger than that of Moses or anyone else. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (Jn. 3:17-18). Jesus is the ultimate apostle sent for the salvation of all nations.

But more than that, Jesus is also the *ultimate high priest*. The author of Hebrews is going to unpack this at length as we go. But just as Moses and the priests of Israel interceded for God's people—that is, they approached God to seek his mercy and forgiveness for Israel's sin—so “when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (9:11-12).

Jesus is the better ambassador, who accomplishes God's mission and intercedes for God's people not merely as a servant, but as a Son. And because he has done this, and shown himself to be faithful at a higher level than Moses, a faithful Son over God's house, he is worthy of more glory than the most faithful servant within that house. “As much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself” (3:3-4). You think about a beautiful structure—the State House downtown, or Trinity Church, or the Custom House Tower—you immediately recognize the glory of that structure. But the building didn't design itself, or construct itself. The glory of that beautiful structure is but a reflection of the greater glory of the one who made it. And so God, as creator, is worthy of more glory than his creation. Jesus, as the author and finisher of our faith, is worthy of more glory than Moses.

And the irony is for those who were really excited about Moses and defined loyalty to God as loyalty to Moses, and sought to guard his honor and pressure Christians to fit in by abandoning Jesus and returning to the old covenant of Moses—they weren't actually honoring Moses. Because Moses pointed to Jesus. He testified to the things that were to be spoken later (3:5). Jesus puts it this way in John 5, speaking to Jews who took pride in their loyalty to Moses and used that as an excuse to reject Jesus:

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. . . . Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope.⁴⁶ If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. (Jn. 5:39-40, 45-46)

Jesus is the better ambassador, who accomplishes God's mission and intercedes for God's people not merely as a servant, but as a Son. He is better than Moses—as good as Moses was. And he's better than anything else we might be tempted to get excited about in order to fit in.

Jesus is better than social justice. Caring for the poor is urgent and good and necessary; but only Jesus can offer the kind of bread through which we will never hunger again (Jn. 6:35), or the water that wells up to eternal life (Jn. 4:14). As Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert have said, “there is something worse than death and something better than human flourishing. If we hope only for renewed cities and restored bodies in this life, we are of all people most to be pitied.”³

Similarly, advocating for racial harmony is urgent and good and beautiful. I preached on that just a few weeks ago. We need to be at the forefront of affirming the image of God in all people and advocating for the justice and reconciliation. But only the gospel of Jesus is actually powerful enough to take what has been divided by sin and unite us together with each other and with the God together through the cross (cf. Eph. 2:11-22).

Which means, that just like with Moses, the irony is that those who are really excited about social justice today and define spirituality as social activism and pressure Christians to fit in by abandoning the claims of the gospel and simply loving their neighbor—they aren't actually accomplishing justice. Because real justice, *lasting* justice—making right all that is wrong in this broken world—is only possible through the cross, and will only be fully realized in the new creation. On the cross, Jesus dealt decisively with sin and wickedness and evil. He made our sin his own, that he might bear the full weight of God's wrath in our place and the unjust be justified (cf. Rom. 3:21-16). And he made the sins committed against us his own, that he might take our pain and suffering, deal with it fully, that we might be free to forgive (cf. Eph. 4:32). And when he returns he will put away sin and evil and injustice once and for all—no more death, no more pain, no more tears. All things will be made new (cf. Rev 21:1-5). And so anyone who really cares about lasting justice should be a proud advocate of the gospel, not embarrassed or shy about it.

And this temptation to mute the gospel in order to fit in isn't limited to emphasizing social justice. I used that as an example because I think it's one of the most prominent examples in our culture right now. But there are countless causes or people or ideals—good things—that we can emphasize at the expense of Jesus, because the people around us are more excited about them

³ Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 23.

and therefore less likely to malign or marginalize us if we fit in. Family values, career success, academic achievement, financial stability, and so on.

But when we truly consider Jesus in light of any and every alternative—even truly good things—in each and every way we see that Jesus is better. He’s faithful at a higher level. He accomplishes God’s redemption in such a way that everything else is but a shadow. He’s faithful not just within God’s house as a servant, but over God’s house as a Son.

And we are that household, Hebrews tells us, if we hold fast to our confession in Christ (3:6). We are the heirs of the salvation he accomplishes, through our faith in Christ. So our hope in Christ, no matter how much we stand out or how intense ridicule or rejection or persecution might become, our hope in Christ should never be a matter of timidity or shame, but of pride and confidence in him. Hebrews tells us to “hold fast our confidence and our *boasting* in our hope.” Boasting—yes, *boasting* in the hope of the gospel. Not in an arrogant way, but with pride and confidence that Jesus really is better, and in him we have something better—better than anything this world can provide.

And that’s something to hold our heads up about. We have a better ambassador and a confident hope. In him we have confidence in our identity, confidence in our inheritance, confidence in the love of the Father, confidence that no matter what happens in this life, our hope is secure. As he puts it in ch. 10:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. (10:19-23)

So there’s no reason to hide our faith under a veil of whatever our culture deems acceptable. Or to apologize for believing that Jesus is the greatest treasure this world affords. We can hold our heads high, and hold the gospel out with confidence and pride in the glory of Jesus. Jesus is a better ambassador, who accomplishes God’s mission and intercedes for God’s people not merely as a servant, but as a Son. There’s no better advocate than him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Questions for Study and Understanding

1. How do the previous two chapters provide context for this passage? In other words, what points did the author just make about Jesus that set up the points he’s now making in 3:1-6?
2. What does the author seem to be emphasizing in these verses (for clues, look at things like structure, repetition, etc.)?
3. What’s the significance of Moses for first-century Jews? Why do you think it’s important for the author to draw a comparison between Moses and Jesus?

4. What is the main point of the comparison he makes between Moses and Jesus?

Questions for Reflection and Application

5. How does the author want us to respond to this portrait of Christ?
6. As the early church was tempted to emphasize their allegiance to Moses in order to fit in and avoid persecution, what are we tempted to emphasize today at the expense of the gospel, so as to fit in and avoid ridicule or rejection?
7. How does Jesus compare to those things? In what specific ways is he better?