

Hebrews 3:1-4:13

Introduction

Recall again the conviction on which the Epistle to the Hebrews is based – the basis of the whole thought is the full and final revelation of God, which came through Jesus Christ. Began by showing Jesus was superior to the prophets, then superior to the angels. Now shows Him to be superior to Moses. Might at first seem an anti-climax, but not for the Jews. For them Moses held an utterly and absolutely unique place. God had spoken to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. No-one stood closer to God than Moses. He received the Ten Commandments, and for the Jews the greatest thing in the world was the Law. They regarded Moses as greater than all the angels.

But Jesus was greater than Moses, just as the builder of a house is more honourable than the house. **Moses was faithful in all his house, as a servant; but Christ as a son over his own house** (Hebrews 3:5-6). Then again our attention is drawn to Christ after the writer has argued his case.

This section of the epistle is very full and difficult. Going to examine three directions the writer gives to point to our relationship to Christ.

Fix our attention on Jesus

Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus (Hebrews 3:1). *καταοησατε* translates “fix attention” on Jesus. We are not simply to look at and notice something or other, but to fix our attention in such a way that the inner meaning is revealed. C.f. **Consider the ravens** (Luke 12:24); **Consider the lilies** (Luke 12:27), meaning more than just look at these things, but understand, learn from them the lesson that God is seeking to teach you. Not a cursory glance, but a concentrated gaze.

Now the writer tells the readers, **partakers of the heavenly calling**, to fix their gaze on Christ, and observe two things – (1) the Apostle, and (2) the High Priest. Nowhere else in the New Testament is Jesus called an apostle. Hebrews never uses the term in reference to any man, only to Christ. *αποστολος* means “one who is sent forth”. So Christ was sent forth from God, clothed with the power of God, revealing all God’s grace and mercy and love. He came as God’s ambassador, speaking in the name of the One who sent Him. Jesus was the voice of God. In Him, God speaks to us.

High Priest is a theme about which more will be said later in the letter. The Latin word for priest, “pontifex”, means bridge-builder. Christ is the bridge between God and man. Jesus was the perfect High Priest because He was perfectly man and perfectly God. The bridge came through Himself and through His work on the Cross.

Therefore as an apostle He brings God to us, and as a High Priest He brings us to God. He makes the golden link by which heaven and earth are united, and we are brought in touch with God. We have to consider Him, the one whereby God dwells

with man, and the way whereby sinful man dwells with God. Also must consider what it cost, in terms of suffering and death, for Him to discharge these functions. And consider His faithfulness to God.

There are many effects of considering Christ. Initially, we receive salvation. “Looking” is one of the simplest ways of expressing our response and acceptance of the Lord. Then, we receive inner calmness in a world of noise and confusion, amidst the pressure of everyday lives. Also find confidence amid fluctuations of opinion, in days when the very foundations of faith are under investigation. Considering Christ gives us a point of reference, stability and discernment, helps us to get all in perspective. Also produces diligence in service and patience in suffering. While we keep Him before our eyes, life will be blessed. If we set Him at our right hand we shall not be moved, and we shall walk in the light of His countenance on earth. Ultimately He will set us at His right hand in heaven.

Warning against hardening hearts to Christ

Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts (Hebrews 3:7-8). Having shown the supremacy of Christ, the writer follows it with an exhortation to completely trust and obey Him. To harden hearts against Him will have terrible consequences. This is a warning against the disobedience of the Children of Israel. Psalm 95:8 is quoted. God’s voice is applied to Christ. We must hear His voice today, while life lasts. We never know when that will come to an end.

Christ is speaking to us, and we must not listen with steel hearts. He speaks directly and straight to everyone. He does so through the recorded earthly utterances He made. If only we would read the Gospels, not as history, but as the voice of Christ to us today. He still says to us, “Come to me”, “If any man thirst...”. He spoke then, and speaks now, about the efficiency of prayer and the heavenly Father’s care. He also speaks through one another as we commend Christ and remind people of His words. He speaks to us within the depth of our beings, rebuilding and directing.

Man’s heart can be tragically deaf against that voice, and can stop his ears to what He is saying. Sometimes we are preoccupied, too busy to hear the Master’s voice, which is stifled and smothered. Or we can neglect what we know we ought to do, and neglect our convictions.

The writer stresses the word “Today” – act now, neglect your duty no longer. **That thou doest, do quickly** (John 13:27). William James [writing unclear] said, “Seek the first opportunity to act on every good resolution you make”. There is nothing more fatal to the character than to put off what is plainly one’s duty. Impressions of Christ’s voice soon fade away. Like dreams, very clear when we first awake, but ten minutes later they are irrecoverable. C.f. Felix trembled – then put the matter off till a convenient season (Acts 24:25) – It never came. Every moment passing makes it harder for many to turn to Christ. The great power of habit is able to weave chains around us, thin as spider’s web, but solid as iron fetters. If it is hard to turn to the Lord now, it will never be easier than the present moment. “Today” – how long will it last?

If change is right in our lives, the sooner we make it, the better. As He speaks in His Word and declares to your heart His undying love, His perfect sacrifice, His complete

salvation, the blessed life and calm death He offers – see that you refuse Him not who speaks.

The blessings of obeying His voice

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest (Hebrews 4:11). The writer elaborates on the blessings of obeying Christ's voice – entrance into rest. Not referring to heaven, but a present experience, something to be enjoyed now. Peace of God in all circumstances of life; sense of repose; end of restlessness and agitation; sense of satisfaction of desires; deep assurance with the knowledge of the blessing of God on the life. William Nicholson used to end his letters, "Yours restfully, Billy" – when he was not signing "yours till hell freezes". God's will is "yours restfully".

Surely a characteristic of Jesus was His restfulness. **Come unto me and I will give you rest** (Matthew 11:28). He did not mean absence of sorrow and conflict, temptation and cares etc. But rest in the midst of these, rest when we are in conflict, rest when things are difficult. His rest is rest which stands on a certainty – that God is loving and faithful, utterly reliable, He keeps His word and He purposes to give us the best. We rest also on the certainty of Christ's triumph and victory over all enemies, and acknowledgement in our lives of His Lordship.

This rest is ours when we are at our wits' end, in a corner, at the end of our tether. When we are in despair He puts the whole situation in His hands and under His control. When we have faced failure, and no longer have a shred of confidence in ourselves, we can still find rest in Him. This rest is maintained through fellowship and constant looking to Him for light, direction and guidance. Come what may, we can rest in His guidance and direction at every turn.

We also find rest in the delight of continuing faith.

*"Jesus I am resting, resting
In the joy of what thou art"*

When we have received His call, and act in trust and obedience, and know His rest.

If we fail to enjoy His rest – the Word of God will deal with us. It is a living word, with living issues for every man. **Quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword ... it is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart** (Hebrews 4:12) It is effective to change men's lives. It penetrates, it tests our earthly life and our spiritual life. Everything is under God's scrutiny. Also, our intellectual and emotional life is surveyed by God. All things are marked and exposed under the gaze of God. Outward trappings and disguises do not fool Him. **All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do** (Hebrews 4:13). We have to meet the eyes of God, we will all meet Him at the end. The Word of God "wounds the sinner, condemns the hypocrite, and rebukes the saint". It is perilous to trifle with the Word of God. Therefore, let's not rob ourselves by unbelief.

Conclusion

This passage again extols Christ in glory, superiority and supremacy. We are bidden to consider Christ, to hear His voice, and to enter into His rest.

