

Hebrews 3:1-6
Jesus is Greater than Moses
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Who in your life is someone that you looked up to? Is there a specific person who was formative to you during one period or another? In the architectural make up of your life, who helps frame your story?

If you look up at the ceiling of this room, you can see exposed support joists that frame our sanctuary. These have structural significance, but you can also think of them as having metaphorical significance; each one represents a person or event that gives this church its strength.

I want to tell you about someone who was a support joist in my formation as a follower of Jesus. I had just begun the 9th grade, and my church's youth group had a tradition where the upper class guys and girls would show up at the homes of freshmen and stole us away to our first senior high youth group. It was exciting, it helped diffuse the anxiety of being the new kids in the group, it gave us a sense of place. It was also a little scary having the big kids show up unannounced (our parents were in on it).

Now the guy who showed up at my front door was a guy by the name of Mike. Mike was, let's say, the Alpha male of the group—in the best sense of the term. Mike was the running back for a local football powerhouse, Mike was a natural leader, Mike had the charisma of 100 men, he could leap over high buildings in a single bound. When Mike walked in the room, the energy level rose; his presence had a way of lifting everyone's spirits. Mike, in many respects, was the barometer of the group.

Here was a guy who had a way of instilling courage in those around him, to consider seriously the role of Jesus in their life.

Mike was also a great time! On one of our annual Ski Weekends to Spirit Mountain in Duluth, Mike decided that he was going to attempt a back flip off of a jump. We all, of course, thought this was an amazing idea, never doubting for a moment that he would pull it off. Which he did, mostly. Two-thirds of the way through his epic rotation, Mike returned to the earth—face first.

Our collective gasp and worry for his safety was short lived, though, as Mike, amazingly, popped right back up and motioned to us to pick our jaws up off the hill and keep going. Truly he was a man of steel. Mike was the living embodiment of the very best of our group.

Who are the people in your life who help provide the structural integrity for your story? Maybe they don't possess super human strength, perhaps they introduced you to a love of music or movies; maybe they mentored you in a trade; maybe they simply had the super human ability to treat everyone with kindness and respect. Who are the heroes who embodied active living faith in your life?

This Lent, we've spent time each week in the book of Hebrews responding to the phrase "Jesus is greater than..." Today, we come to the character of Moses. Jesus is greater than Moses, Israel's greatest hero.

Each week, we're comparing Jesus to a different figure from Scripture. The purpose of this is to examine the types of people we're tempted to place above Jesus in our lives. What you will notice each week as we progress is that the comparison goes from the very broad and overarching (Jesus is greater than the angels) and narrows each week, until it reaches the most intimate and near expressions and traditions of faith (Jesus is greater than our offerings, our sacrifice, our traditions).

Hebrews ultimately leads us from the very broad to the very intimate. Then, after taking us into our innermost experiences of God, the author explodes with chapter 12, one of the most often quoted passages in the Bible: "Therefore...because we're surrounded by this cloud of witnesses" – because each of these characters (angels, Moses, Priests, etc.) takes their place among the throngs of worshippers, all following Jesus – "we can run this race of faith ourselves, together. Because Jesus endured hostility and struggle for our sake, for the sake of all, we can press on in faith."

Chapter 3 begins by presenting the two anchor points of Jewish and Christian faith. Like the two great pillars that anchor the Golden Gate Bridge, Moses and Jesus stand as the foremost figures of our faith. For the Jews in the first century, Moses was held in almost God-like esteem, even higher than angels. The name of Moses appears more times in the Old Testament and, in fact, in all of the Bible (847 total times: 762 in the Old Testament and 85 in the New Testament) than any other proper name except for Jesus and David.

Around 180 B.C., the Jewish Historian Ben Sira wrote of Moses' celebrated honor in the eyes of those living in the first century, that he was made "equal of the holy ones in glory," that is, the angels. Josephus wrote, "The wisest of the Greeks learnt to adopt the conception of God from the principles with which Moses supplied them." The best philosophy was plagiarized from Moses.

Moses embodied God's covenant with Israel. He was the one who brought the Ten Commandments down from Sinai, giving the Jews their anchor. In verse 2, the author quotes Numbers 12:7 saying, **Moses was faithful in all God's house**. Moses held iconic status with the Jews in the way that someone like George Washington might be viewed in our day. In the same way Washington and Lincoln are given heroic status in our retelling of American History, deservedly so, Moses is given heroic status over God's house (when the author says God's house, he's using symbolic language to refer to God's people).

When the Jews think of the architects of their history, Moses was a cornerstone. We have these kinds of heroic figures in our church's history. Men like Drs. Little and Wimberly, Phil Magnor, Marshall Henderson, Jack Miller, and so on; women like Isabelle Wimberly, Evelyn Magnor. These people are our touchstones, people who help us remember and find our place in God's story of this church. Of course, the list can go on.

But what the Bible does now, continuing in verse 3, is tell us, Moses was great, Moses was heroic, but Jesus was even greater still. What's interesting is that the author doesn't tear down Moses, he doesn't diminish his stature in the memory of the people. It's not as if when Jesus arrives, everyone else's legacy is now trampled in the dirt. What the author of Hebrews says is that yes, Moses was

great, but Jesus is greater still.

Moses took his place as a part of the Household of God, but verse 3 says, **Jesus is the builder of the house, and is deserving of more honor than the house itself.**

If I was to talk with each of you individually and ask you to tell me about your family, the people in it, people you consider family, my guess is that you would not just say immediate blood relatives. There are those friends who are so close that they would count. There are those who live far away but are close in our hearts. We might even have pets that we think of as parts of the family. Households in the first century were not confined to what we understand today as the nuclear family. Households were many generations: cousins, grandparents, aunts and uncles, grandchildren, servants, and friends. A house was not just a building where people lived; it was the vast network of relationships that made up the family.

Here verse 5 says, **Moses was faithful *in* the house, as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later.** Then continuing with verse 6, **but Christ is faithful *over* the house as a Son.**

Be careful not to confuse the roles of the builder and the servant. The temptation is there for us to give honor to the heroes of our faith they were never meant to have. I know this is difficult. These men and women are touchstones for us. They help us understand. They may even have accomplishments and victories that earn them heroic status. I think of people like William Wilberforce, who stood up to the British Slave Trade institution; Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth, who stood up to the Third Reich and stood for the singular authority of Jesus Christ during World War II; Martin Luther King Jr, and Billy Graham, and of course George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, who led our nation during two of the most seismic shifts in our history—the Revolution and the Civil War.

These are just servants in the master's house. They understood it, too. In their writings, you see the humility and vulnerability they felt in the face of God. One of the most memorable examples of this humility comes from Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. In the closing paragraphs, Lincoln admits his vulnerability and reminds the American people that God's judgments are not our judgments.

“If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

But none was the architect, none was the builder of our faith. That role rests finally and forever with the incarnate one, Jesus of Nazareth, the Word made flesh. And Jesus is greater than Moses. Jesus is

greater than our greatest heroes. Our heroes are limited, our heroes let us down, our heroes' legacy fades and is even forgotten. Jesus is the one who holds our legacy, our common story in his hand.

I want to tell you the rest of the story about my friend Mike. In 2003, I received a message from my dad that contained words that didn't make sense together. Mike has Leukemia. This couldn't be, doesn't make sense. Not that Mike. That Mike is invincible, that Mike is larger than life. If he could have cancer, if he could have a chink in his armor, then that must mean that the rest of us do, too.

Over the next few years, we all watched on as this guy, who was almost more than human, battled cancer. Seeing his body swell from the treatments, the sores form from the radiation, hearing him say *I can't play the game tonight, because if I get cut or skin my knee I may not stop bleeding*, and ultimately to see his body succumb to this horrible disease was one of the most traumatic events of my life. That is, until one day we were talking together and he said something that I'll never forget: I may not make it, but I know that the one who made this thing in the first place is with me even now.

When our heroes remind us who the real hero is, who the real Savior is, who the real builder is, we allow them to take their proper place in the pantheon of faith. Mike was no different than any of us, just another precious creation finite and loved, made in the image of a greater hero, Jesus Christ.

The author of Hebrews has one last move with this text. The last turn of this jewel shines an unexpected light: we aren't just guests in the master's house, **"we are his house."** We are the household of faith, built by God through and for Christ, a community of which Moses, and Mike, and all those other things that take their place in our story function as servants. When Jesus Christ built the house, what he was building was them, was us.

When the author begins in verse 1 today saying, "Holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling," this was not a throwaway line. When we the church stand at this baptismal pool and audaciously say, "You have been sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's forever;" when we kneel by a sick child's bedside and read, "The Lord is my light, whom shall I fear;" when we stand by a graveside and say to one another: "Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid," we say with confidence and hope that Jesus is the author and the perfecter of our faith and our lives.

Jesus is the one we can look to who will never let us down precisely because no matter where we are, he has been there, too. No matter how grim the outlook, or no matter how mighty the victory appears for us in this life, all of it is through Christ who gives strength. Don't look to the reflection of glory – remember Moses' glory was always fleeting – look to the source, look to the morning sun, for he shines with an even greater glory and is an even greater hero. Amen.