

**MOVING ON TO MATURITY**  
“SEMPER FIDELIS”  
Hebrews 3:1-6

On Sunday morning, October 23, 1983, I was in East Texas, pasturing a small church plant. But I'll never forget what happened that morning in Beirut, Lebanon. A Mercedes-Benz truck turned onto an access road leading to the U.S. Marines' compound. The truck circled a parking lot, accelerated, and then crashed through a barbed wire fence and gate, and finally into the lobby of the Marine headquarters. At that point, the suicide bomber detonated his explosives, equivalent to 12,000 pounds of TNT. The force of the explosion collapsed the four-story cinder-block building into rubble, crushing many inside. Many of us here can recall the terrible scenes of dazed survivors working to dig out their dead colleagues beneath the rubble.

A few days later, Marine Corps Commandant Paul Kelly visited some of the wounded survivors who had been taken to a hospital in Frankfurt, Germany. Among them was Corporal Jeffrey Nashton who had been severely wounded in the bombing. Nashton had so many tubes running in and out of his body that one witness said he looked more like a machine than a man. And yet he survived.

As Kelly approached, Nashton, struggling to move and racked with pain, motioned for a piece of paper and a pen. He wrote a brief note and passed it back to the Commandant. On the slip of paper were only two words – “*Semper Fi*” – the Latin motto of the Marines meaning “forever faithful.” And with those two simple words Nashton spoke for the millions of Americans who have sacrificed both limb and life for their country – and through it all *have remained faithful*.

*Semper Fi* – the colloquial form of *Semper Fidelis*, forever faithful. That's what Hebrews 3:1-8 is all about. This morning, I've asked David Johnson, whom I had the joy of seeing bow the knee to Jesus just one year ago this next month, read our passage for us:

Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. 2 He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. 3 Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. 4 For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. 5 Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. 6 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. Hebrews 3:1-6

In these six verses the writer is developing one main message that is repeated again and again throughout this book. It's this: *Remain faithful*.

But what is so powerful and penetrating is *how* the speaker develops this idea. He uses a literary device called “chiasm” in order to drive home his point. Look with me at the screen. Four times we see that word “faithful” in these verses:

Verse 2: He [Jesus] was **faithful** to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was **faithful** in all God's house.

Verses 5, 6: 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.

Here's what it looks like when you put it all together.<sup>i</sup> (Mike, see note 1. this is how I'll develop this)

(3) **Believers:** fix your thoughts on Jesus...v. 1

(2) **Jesus:** *faithful* to the one who appointed him...v. 2a

(1) **Moses:** *faithful* in all God's house...v. 2b

(2) **JESUS:** worthy of greater honor / builder of everything...vv 3, 4

(1) **Moses:** *faithful* in all God's house...v. 5

(2) **Jesus:** *faithful* as a son over God's house...6a

(3) **Believers:** we are God's house, *if*...v. 6b

So do you remember the big idea? Say that with me: *Remain faithful.*

But how? And where? And to whom?

## MOSES WAS FAITHFUL

The writer first of all points us to Moses. You see, living examples have great power. That's why people rally around heroes. We don't just want someone to *tell* us how we should live. We want someone who can *show* us how we should live.

That's why mentoring is so popular these days. A true mentor not only communicates a message in his words, but illustrates a message in his life. It's sort of like the difference between a travel agent and a tour guide. A travel agent tells you where to go and what to do. A tour guide goes with you.

I've had some "tour guides" in my life. One of them called me the other day. In fact, he calls me about every 6 months. His name is George Verwer, the founder of the missionary movement *Operation Mobilization*. He's spoken before here in this church. Over the years, he's been a mentor to me through his message. But most of all he's been mentor to me through his life. And over the last 30 years his vision and passion have left their mark.

For the Hebrew Christians who initially received this book, Moses was like that. He was their "hero," the great leader and prophet who led the Israelites out of Egypt. In a very literal sense he was a tour guide. For forty years he led over a million grumbling people through the wilderness as they aimlessly walked around squeezing sand between their toes. It makes sense, then, that in his exhortation to faithfulness, the speaker first of all points us to Moses, Israel's national hero.

**Moses:** *faithful* in all God's house...v. 2b

**Moses:** *faithful* in all God's house...v. 5

You and I might be puzzled by these statements. And we ask ourselves what the writer is referring to. Just what is "God's house" and just how was Moses faithful in it?

I believe the original readers of this book knew exactly what the writer is saying. Being familiar with the Old Testament, their minds went immediately to Numbers 12:7 where God says of Moses: “But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is *faithful in all my house.*”

Here’s what’s happening in the context where God makes this statement about Moses. There’s some pretty serious sibling rivalry going on here. One day, Miriam, Moses’ sister, along with Aaron, Moses’ brother, begin criticizing Moses because he had married a Cushite (Ethiopian) woman. But the problem is much deeper than siblings who can’t get along. Bottom line, it’s a major rebellion against the leadership that God has established. They say, “Has the Lord only spoken through Moses? Hasn’t God spoken through us, too?”

Well, God heard all of this, calls Moses, Aaron and Miriam to the Tabernacle, which was the *house of God*. “Come here, you three,” He commanded. So as they stood before the house of God, the Lord comes down in a cloud, stands at the entrance to the Tabernacle, and says, “Aaron and Miriam, step forward.” Uh-oh, I wouldn’t have wanted to be in their shoes!

But rather than zapping them dead for their rebellion, God says, “Look, even with a prophet I speak in dreams and visions. But with my servant Moses – your leader – I have spoken face to face.” And then God adds, “*He is faithful in all my house.* So stop criticizing.”

What is the “house” in which Moses was faithful? It seems clear from the account in Numbers 12 that it was the Tabernacle. Three times the tabernacle is mentioned. It is there that God brings Moses, Aaron and Miriam. And what was the tabernacle? It represented the *visible system of corporate worship* among God’s people. In the Old Testament, being part of the “house of God” is *not* simply being a member of the nation God redeemed from Egypt, but being an active participant in the visible system of worship centered around the Tabernacle.<sup>ii</sup>

Another clue that the “house” in which Moses was faithful is the tabernacle is found right here in Hebrews 3. Verse 5 says that “Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house, *testifying to what would be said in the future.*” And that is exactly what the tabernacle and the worship associated with the tabernacle in the Old Testament did – it foreshadowed the realities to come in Christ.

But how was Moses *faithful* as a servant in God’s house? He was faithful by doing exactly what God told him to do as it related to the corporate worship of God’s people. In fact, in Exodus 40 where Moses is given the specific instructions as to how to set up the Tabernacle, no less than seven times it says, “And Moses did just as the Lord commanded him.”<sup>iii</sup>

Here’s the point. This passage is telling us: Look at Moses. He was an example of faithfulness in doing exactly what God told him to do as it related to the visible expression of worship among God’s people. And this visible expression of worship among God’s people in the Old Testament was centered in the Tabernacle, God’s house.

Are you starting to get the point? As Moses, we are to be faithful. That’s the big idea. But it is more specific than that. As Moses, we are to be faithful *in God’s house*. And *how* are we to be faithful in God’s house? As Moses, by doing exactly what God has told us to do.

## **JESUS WAS FAITHFUL**

Moses is a good example of faithfulness. But there is even a far greater example to follow. It is Jesus himself. And he too was faithful, not only *in* God's house, but Jesus was faithful *over* God's house.

Look at how the writer develops this.

**Jesus:** *faithful* to the one who appointed him...v. 2a

**Moses:** *faithful* in all God's house...v. 2b

**JESUS:** worthy of greater honor / builder of everything...vv 3, 4

**Moses:** *faithful* in all God's house...v. 5

**Jesus:** *faithful* as a son over God's house...6a

We again have both the ideas of "God's house" and "faithfulness," but now as it relates to Jesus. But the difference between Jesus and Moses is this: Jesus is far superior! Why? Well, verses 3-4 tell us that Jesus, as God, is the very builder of the house (the Tabernacle) that Moses put into place. As such, he is not just faithful *in* the house, as Moses was. Jesus is faithful *over* the house.

But there is more. The writer then moves from the Old Testament concept of the "house of God" to the New Testament concept of God's house. In verse 6 he says, "But Christ is faithful as a son *over* God's house. *And we are his house...*" If the "house of God" in the Old Testament was the visible system of worship centered in the Tabernacle, then the "house of God" in this passage is not so much the building where we meet, nor the Church with a capital "C" (i.e. the Body of Christ made up of all believers), but rather the *visible, gathered worshipping community*.

How then is Jesus faithful over "God's house," that is the *visible, gathered worshipping community of believers*? I believe the writer gives us a hint in verse 1. There he describes Jesus as the "apostle and high priest of our confession." "Apostle" means simply "sent one." Jesus was sent on a mission from God to you and me. On the other hand the description of Jesus as "high priest" looks at his role as our representative before God. And so we have Jesus as "apostle," representing God to man and as "high priest," representing man to God.<sup>iv</sup>

And in both of these roles, Jesus was absolutely faithful. Though he came as an apostle sent from God the Father, he was rejected, afflicted and crucified. But he was faithful to the end. And now as our High Priest, our representative before God the Father, he ever lives to make intercession for you and me (Hebrews 7:25). He is faithful to the end (Hebrews 2:17). And in both of these roles, he is faithful *over* the house of God, the visible, gathered worshipping community of believers...with all of its faults, weaknesses, divisions, and sin.

## **WE ARE TO BE FAITHFUL**

Moses was faithful *in* God's house. Jesus was and is faithful *over* God's house. And we are to be faithful in God's house. Notice verse 6: "And we are his house, *if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast?*"

- (3) **Believers:** fix your thoughts on Jesus...v. 1  
    (2) **Jesus:** *faithful* to the one who appointed him...v. 2a  
        (1) **Moses:** *faithful* in all God's house...v. 2b  
            (2) **JESUS:** worthy of greater honor / builder of everything...vv 3, 4  
        (1) **Moses:** *faithful* in all God's house...v. 5  
    (2) **Jesus:** *faithful* as a son over God's house...6a  
(3) **Believers:** we are God's house, *if*...v. 6b

That's the big "if" of faithfulness. What is God saying in this passage? Is He saying: "You are part of God's family, the Body of Christ, *if* you manage to "hold on? Otherwise, you lose your salvation and status as a member of God's family." Or is He saying: "Persevere, for this will *prove* in the end that you are really a child of God?"

No, given the writers understanding of the "house of God" as the *visible, worshipping community*, he seems to be saying: "We, as the visible, worshipping community of believers, have the great privilege of being called 'God's house,' *if* we hold on to our courage and hope." In other words: *Remain faithful in the house of God...*the visible, gathered worshipping community of believers.

That this is what God is saying in this passage seems to be indicated by Hebrews 10:19-25.

Therefore, brothers ....since we have a great priest over the *house of God*, let us:

- *Draw near* to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith...
- *Hold unswervingly* to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful...
- *Consider how* we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds...
- *Not give up meeting together*, as some are in the habit of doing...
- *Encourage one another*-and all the more as you see the Day approaching... Hebrews 10:19-25

How do we do that? We have it clearly spelled out in verse 1: "Fix your thoughts on Jesus." The idea is to "consider" or to "contemplate." And he's not talking about some mystical, "out-of-body out-of-mind" experience of contemplation that results in little life change. No, the entire thrust of the passage is to "think about Jesus" or "imitate Jesus."

We don't hold on to our courage and hope by fixing our eyes on *people*. Unfortunately, Aaron and his sister Miriam did just that. And they suffered the consequences. Many today do that. And that's why there are so many relational difficulties at times in the gathered church, the house of God. People will always disappoint; Jesus will never disappoint. Get your eyes off of people and onto Jesus.

We don't hold on to our courage and hope by fixing our eyes on *problems*. We all have problems. We have a special place for those who have no problems; it's called a cemetery. But we don't resolve the problems we have by focusing on the problem. We are rather to focus on a person, *the* person of Jesus Christ.

You know, so many today pull away from the gathered worshipping community of believers because of these two very things: people and problems. But in pulling back from the worshipping

community, we are pulling back from Christ. The two go hand in hand. They are inseparable. You can't be faithful *to* Christ without being faithful *in* Christ's worshipping community.

*Semper Fi* – forever faithful. Remain faithful in God's house – the visible, gathered worshipping community of believers – by fixing your eyes on Jesus. In what area of your life is God asking you to do that? Remember, Moses was faithful in God's house by doing exactly what God told him to do. What is God saying to you today? The very next verse in this passage says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (3:7).

Maybe God is asking you to follow through with an area of service that he's entrusted to you. Or maybe God is speaking to you about a relationship that needs healing. Maybe you need to ask forgiveness or offer forgiveness.

Or maybe God is asking you to get your eyes off of problems and other people and onto the person of Jesus Christ. Is God telling you, as in Hebrews 10, to draw near to God? Have you been distant in your relationship with Christ? Or maybe he's asking you to come to him in confession and repentance over some sin in your life that is blocking both your fellowship with Christ and your relationship with other believers.

Whatever it is and however God is speaking to you this morning, he is asking you to be faithful. He has been faithful to you. He has endured far more than you will ever think of enduring. And so this morning, if you are hearing his voice, don't harden your heart.

I'm going to give you the opportunity to take a step towards "fixing your eyes on Jesus." Here we have the cross, the emblem of suffering and pain. It is also at the foot of the cross that we find forgiveness and healing. If God is speaking to you right now, I want you to come. Just gather around this old wooden cross. If you would like someone to pray with you, there will be some here just for that. But if you would like to simply come to stand or kneel and confess your sin and need, we invite you to do that.

If God is speaking to you right now about being faithful in God's house by fixing your eyes on Jesus, would you join me right now at the foot of the cross?

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<sup>i</sup> Moses was faithful *in* God's house (vv. 2, 5). But Jesus, as the one worthy of greater honor and the builder of everything, was faithful *over* God's house (vv. 2a,3-4, 6a). In light of that, we as believers are to be faithful *in* God's house (v. 6b). We must hold on to our courage and hope! *Semper Fi* – faithful to the end! And how do we do that? We do that by fixing our attention on Jesus, and *not* on people or problems.

<sup>ii</sup> That this is true is seen in God's reminder to Aaron and Miriam: "With Moses I speak face to face..." When did God speak "face to face" with Moses? On Mt. Sinai when he gave Moses the specifications for building *the tabernacle*, the house of God.

<sup>iii</sup> Exodus 40:16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29.

<sup>iv</sup>

<b>Apostle</b>	<b>High Priest</b>
God	God
↓	↑
Man	Man