

MOVING ON TO MATURITY

Keeping it Real

Hebrews 8:1-6

The line between what is real and what is fake seems to be getting blurrier all the time doesn't it? These days we have artificial versions of just about everything. We have artificial sweeteners instead of sugar, artificial turf instead of grass, even artificial body parts to replace our real ones when they get too damaged or worn out. Technology is making better and better fake stuff all the time. It's getting to the point where anything real seems like a novelty. The other day my wife and I saw a sign in front of a fast food place boasting that it offered hamburgers made of "100% real beef" as if the concept of eating real beef from real cows was a revolutionary idea.

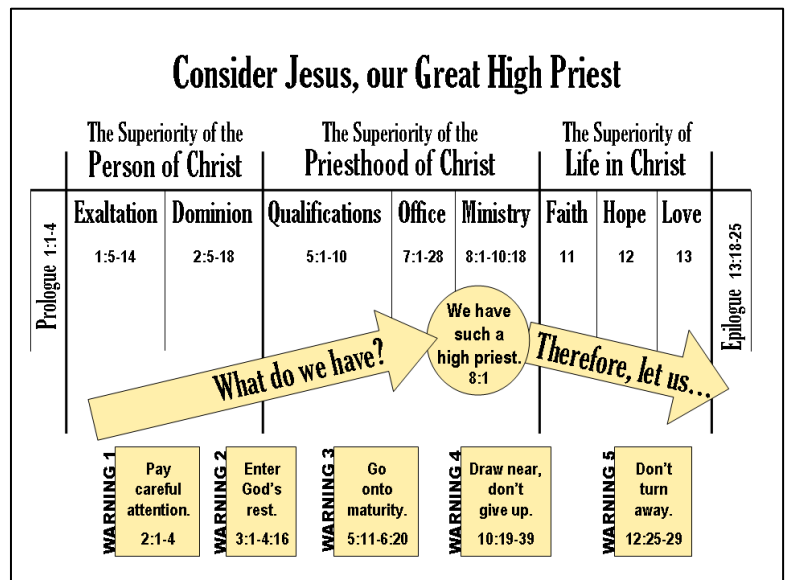
In fact the line between real and fake has gotten so confused these days that there are even people taking photos of real things and altering them to make them look like they are photos of fake things. It's called "fake model photography" and here is an example. That's a picture of a real town taken from an airplane but it has been edited in such a way as to give the impression to our eyes that those real buildings and streets are actually tiny models. Bizarre isn't it? It all makes it pretty tough to sort out what is real and what isn't and you know that can be trickier than we might with spiritual matters as well. So this morning we're going to talk about keeping our focus on the ultimate spiritual reality; Jesus Christ!



We're going through the book of Hebrews together as a church this year in a series we're calling "moving on to maturity". This morning we're going to be looking at Hebrews chapter 8 verses 1 through 6, but before we get into that we're going to take a look where we've been, because as we'll see, the first 7 chapters of Hebrews provide the foundation for what we'll be talking about this morning.

If you look up on the screen you'll see a chart that Pastor David put together outlining the book of Hebrews. As you can see the book focuses on the person of Jesus Christ who is the ultimate spiritual reality. The title of High Priest speaks to his role as the one who ministers to us and meets our spiritual needs but the writer of Hebrews goes to great lengths to point out that Christ is not just any priest he is THE priest, the ultimate priest and that no one else and nothing else measures up to him.

The first two chapters focus on the person of Christ, chapter 1 points out that he is exalted higher and therefore superior



to every created being including the Angels. Chapter 2 focuses on the dominion Christ has over creation because God has put everything under his feet. Then we see a shift from the person of Christ to priesthood of Christ. Chapter 5 talks about Christ's qualifications to be our high priest, that he was appointed by God, that he offered the perfect sacrifice and that he can perfectly identify with you and me. Most recently we've been looking at the superior office Christ holds as a priest in the order of Melchizedek a priesthood that was established before the Jewish priesthood and that included kingship as well as priesthood.

All of this description of who Christ is as our high priest has set the stage for this morning's passage which as you can see by the chart there is sort of the tipping point in the flow of this book. With a firm grasp of who Christ is as our priest we can now begin to look at his ministry in our lives and that will naturally flow into a discussion of what life in Christ really looks like with a focus on the characteristics of faith, hope and love. But before the writer of Hebrews launches into this discussion of Christ's ministry, he urges us to take one more look back over the ground we have already covered.

He says in Hebrews 8:1, "The point of what we are saying is this:" he's saying what I want you to take away from the first seven chapters is this "We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,". This is his way of summarizing everything he's already said about Jesus as our high priest. Before we move on it is absolutely crucial that we understand that Christ is the perfect, the supreme, the ultimate high priest and that, as Pastor David put it two weeks ago, Jesus is "just what we need".

Because Jesus himself is just what we need the ministry he offers us is also exactly what we need. It is superior to anything else we might turn to meet our spiritual needs. This passage highlights three specific ways that this ministry is superior. Verse 2 tells us that Christ "serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man". Jesus' ministry takes place at the very throne of God. This is the true temple, the real one. This is where intercession before God really takes place.

The second aspect of Christ's superiority ministry is his sacrifice. Verse 3 only makes a passing reference to this sacrifice saying "Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer" but we know that Christ offered himself as the perfect sacrifice and that the very fact that he has taken his place at the right hand of Father demonstrates that his sacrifice is superior. Hebrews 10:11-14 tells us "Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy". The sacrifices offered by those other priests weren't good enough they were substitutes but Christ offered a real sacrifice that meets our spiritual needs once and for all, this is the only real solution to the problem of sin.

The third aspect of Christ's ministry that is shown to be superior is the promises that come with it. Verse 6 tells us that "the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises." We don't

have time this morning to go into the relationship between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant that is referred to here. Pastor David will cover some of that in two weeks when he preaches on the second half of this chapter. For now all we need to know is that a covenant is a binding agreement between God and man it is a promise or a series of promises and the promises that are available to us when we trust in Christ are better than anything an earthly ministry can promise us. Earthly ministries may make promises but they are always conditional, based on what we do and they are never certain because they aren't backed up by God. It is only by trusting in Jesus to forgive us and to direct our lives that we can lay claim to real promises; promises that can't be broken and that even we can't mess up because they are backed up by God himself. Only Jesus' ministry comes with those kind of real promises. So we can see that Christ's ministry is superior to earthly ministries in every way. But if Christ is superior that also means that these other ministries are inferior.

Look at verses 4 and 5 with me. They tell us that if Christ "were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: 'See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.'" Hebrews says that the tabernacle that Moses built and by extension the entire ministry connected to that tabernacle, priests, sacrifices, laws, all of it is only a copy of something greater, something more real.

This is a bold statement. As he so often does in this letter, the author backs up this claim by referring to the Old Testament. He points out that the book of Exodus, in three different places (Exodus 25:40, 26:30, 27:8), that Moses was to build the Tabernacle according to a pattern that God had shown him when he was up on Mt. Sinai receiving the law. Jewish tradition held that the pattern he was shown was based on a heavenly temple in which God dwelt. Now we have no way of knowing exactly what Moses saw or exactly how the Tabernacle that he built was similar to or different from some sort of heavenly Temple but we do know that God gave him very specific instructions for how to build not only the Tabernacle but everything in it and that all of these details were so that the physical objects that God was giving to his people would appropriately reflect a spiritual reality but the Tabernacle itself wasn't important, it was only important because it was a reflection of that greater reality.

Now you might be wondering why did God tell Moses to build this Tabernacle if it was only a copy of the real heavenly temple? It was out of his love and concern for his people. God knows that as people bound to this earth we have a very hard time understanding or trusting in anything that we can't see, hear and touch. We pretty much need something physical to look and listen to in order for us to begin to understand anything. God's real glory is far too great for us to be able to see it and hear it in our current sinful state. His holiness is overwhelming it would kill us so he can't show his people the real thing so God created physical copies that we can see and hear and touch. They aren't copies of God like a photocopy is a copy of a document, they don't look just like him but each of these gifts is an imperfect picture of some small aspect of who God is. They are imperfect, which is why Hebrews also uses the word "shadow" to describe the Tabernacle but they do help us get a sense of who God is.

The earth is full of these copies, these many ways for us to begin to see and understand what God is like. None of them are really a full picture of who God is but they help us. When we look out at Mt. Hood or out at the Pacific Ocean we get a little picture of what God is like. When we interact with people who are made God's image with the kind of love and trust we were intended to share with one another we get a little better understanding of who God is. These things are not God, they don't fully explain God but they are copies, things we can see and touch that help us understand God better. That is what the Tabernacle was this kind of copy and so was everything connected to it. The priesthood was simply a model for what Christ would ultimately be and the sacrifices a picture of Christ would do on the cross. Everything in the Old Covenant was only a copy none of it was ever intended to impart spiritual life it was simply intended to help people see and understand where real spiritual life comes from, Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, many Jewish people began treat these copies as if they themselves were the source of spiritual life. Instead of seeing the Old Covenant as it was intended, a sign pointing them to Christ they began to see it as the source of righteousness. In John 5:36-40, Jesus says this to some of these people "the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." These people, these Pharisees, looked at the Old Covenant and the Scriptures that contained it but instead of seeing it as a copy that pointed to the real source of life thought they get life from the law itself. When the real source of life, Jesus, came on the scene they wouldn't accept him.

Hebrews was written to Jewish people. It is not entirely clear exactly which Jewish traditions or practices they were being tempted to pursue but it is clear that this letter was written in part to keep them from pursuing other things, besides Christ as the source of their spiritual life. That is why Christ is the focus of this book and that is why the writer in this passage points out that the Tabernacle is merely copy because if the Tabernacle is a copy than anything else that these Jews might be tempted to rely on would be a copy. The author is urging these people not to allow these other things, these copies to crowd out Christ in their lives. He understood that even good things like Angels, the Law, or spiritual disciplines and religious traditions, things that understood rightly would draw people closer to Christ, could potentially crowd him out of his proper place in our lives.

"Don't let copies crowd out Christ"

Suppose you wanted to give me a gift. Let's say my walls are a little bare and you happen to know that I really like impressionist paintings so you go out and you buy me a nice art print of a Claude Monet Seascape. That would be a nice gift. I would probably put it in a frame and hang it on the wall someplace where everyone could see it and enjoy it, that would be the appropriate thing to do. But let's imagine that you gave that same gift to the Louvre Museum in Paris. Let's say they happen to have that exact Monet seascape in their collection, the original. Do you think if you visited that museum that you would find that print framed and on the wall, next to the original perhaps? Of course not! It would be absolutely ridiculous for the Louvre to hang up your art print next to that original. It would be insulting to the artist and to everyone who came

into the place. But you know as ridiculous as that image is that is what we do when we treat God's copies, his good gifts that we can touch and see, as if they were as important as the real thing; God's ultimate gift, his son; Jesus Christ.

I think sometimes we get a bit confused about the relative value of God's gifts. We treat things that are nice as if they were priceless and in doing so we can neglect the one thing that truly is of ultimate value. I'd like to show you clip from the movie *National Treasure* to help illustrate my point. If you haven't seen the movie you should know it's one of those intense movies with a far-fetched plot but so much action that you hardly notice. In the film Nicholas Cage plays the good guy, Ben Gates and Diane Kruger plays Abigail Chase the love interest who happens to work for the National Archives. Ben has learned that the bad guys are going to steal the Declaration of Independence because there is a hidden treasure map on the back. He tries to convince Abigail of this but she doesn't believe him so he decides the only way to save the Declaration is to steal it himself. He does this during a black tie ball at the Archives building. He sneaks into the vault, steals it and tries to walk out with it nonchalantly without attracting Abigail's attention. He ducks into the gift shop to try to lose her but it doesn't work. This scene starts with Abigail confronting Ben on the street next to his getaway van just outside the Archives building, let's watch. [play video clip from movie]

That's a pretty good car chase for a Sunday morning huh? Well as much as I enjoyed that I showed it to you to make a point. Did you notice the difference between Ben and everyone else in that scene? Ben knew that Declaration everyone was chasing after was only a copy. He had stuck the real one safely in the back of the van. That's why when Abigail grabbed it he just let her go. If it had been the real thing he would have fought to keep it but he wasn't willing to risk the real Declaration trying to hold on to a copy. Now when he saw the beautiful damsel in distress his action hero credentials kicked in and he just couldn't help himself but as soon as he the girl was safe he took off, knowing that the thing everyone was fighting for was just a fake. Abigail on the other hand thought she had the real thing in her hands so she risked life and limb to protect it. That would have been insane if she had known that the real Declaration was safe in Ben's van but she didn't. My point is this, what we have in Jesus Christ is the real thing. Jesus is priceless. He is worth clinging to. It is worth it for us to put out lives on the line for Jesus. But anything else, even spiritual things, is just a copy and we should never allow those copies to crowd out Christ. If we face trouble we should cling to Christ not to the copies. He is the real thing!

Now you may be thinking to yourself, "That's nice Matthew, but I don't have anything like that in my life. I don't practice Jewish traditions, I've never been to a temple or offered a sacrifice of any kind and I don't know any priest who could take Christ's place in my life." It's true that the issues we face today are different but God has given us many good things to help point us to him that are still merely copies of our real source of spiritual life and if we're not careful we can allow these things to crowd out Christ in our own lives. There are many good things in our lives, biblical things, that we should cherish but can begin to crowd out Christ if we're not careful. Our work can crowd out Christ, our love of the country God has blessed us with, our enjoyment of God's good gifts like food and friendship all these things are good, all are things God wants us to have but all are things that if we allow them to become too important can crowd Christ out of his rightful place in our lives.

Not only that, even the things that are intended to draw us closer to Christ to help us know and love him better can crowd him out if we lose our perspective on them. Let's start with the obvious, church. We are blessed to be able to come together and worship the Lord and hear his word and fellowship freely in his name. Our church family is a gift from God and as Christ's body we represent him to our world, we are a sort of copy of Christ, but we're far from a perfect copy. As a church we do a lot of things together to help each other draw closer to Jesus. We offer many opportunities to serve and fellowship and worship and learn. These are good gifts as long as they draw us closer to Jesus but if we aren't careful we can let these activities take on a life of their own. What started as a way to draw near to Jesus can become a way to feel good about myself, or look good to other people, or in my own twisted mind look good to God. Attending Sunday School, Church or Bible Study or serving in this or that ministry cannot meet my needs, it is only as I draw near to Christ through these activities that my needs are met. The answer isn't to stop going to church but to ask myself why am I coming to church? If it isn't to draw near to Jesus and help others draw near to him then I need to adjust my perspective in a hurry. Why did you come to church this morning? Was it to draw near to Christ?

Here's another copy that if we're not careful can begin to crowd out Christ, family. Did you know that the reason God gave us families is so that we could better understand his love for us and the kind of relationship he wants to have with us. How could God call himself our father if he didn't give us parents to show us what it means to love and care for someone unconditionally, someone who is absolutely dependent upon you? How could Christ call the church his Bride if he didn't give us husbands and wives to love and cherish and delight in and whose needs we could joyfully put before our own? That's why we have families and so families are important to God. He wants us to be the best fathers and mothers and husbands and wives and sons and daughters and brothers and sisters we can be. It's good for Christians value families because families done right are a picture of God's love but even the best family is only a shadow and copy of God's love. No father's love can replace God's love, no husband can care for his wife like Christ cares for us and so we need to put our families in their proper place, high above wealth and success but below our relationship with Jesus.

That might seem like a no brainer but it is something we can really struggle with. I know that sometimes it is easier for me to make time to spend with my wife than it is for me to make time to spend alone with the Lord. That doesn't mean I should ignore my wife but if I'm finding time for her and not for God than I need to reexamine my priorities. This can be even tougher with children. Emily and I are expecting our first child this fall, a baby girl. We're naming her Naomi. Even now I can already imagine how hard it could be to put Christ ahead of her. I've imagined how I'd react if she came to me on her 18th birthday and told me that God had called her to be a missionary in a very dangerous place to proclaim Jesus some place far away where she would certainly suffer as a result and may even die and to know that after she left I might never see her again. I'm not sure how I would respond. I'm praying that God will remind me that as much as I love her my love is only a copy and he loves her so much more and that knowing that I would be able to trust him with her life. I hope that would be the case but I don't know, in any case it would be hard. How do you see your family? Have you ever been guilty of valuing your idea of a good family life over Christ or have you surrendered yourself and your family fully to him?

There is one more example I'd like to bring up this morning. It may be pushing the envelope to say this at Central Bible Church, but I'm blowing town in a couple of days anyway so I'm going to risk it. Even the Bible is only a copy of Christ. Our bible is a wonderful awesome gift of God that should be revered and respected. It gives us the clearest most trustworthy picture of who Jesus is that we can have this side of heaven but it is only a picture. The Bible is not Jesus and we must never allow ourselves to get confused about its proper place in our lives. When we read the Bible or study it or memorize parts of it we must always be doing so out of reverence for Christ and a desire to know and love him better. If we revere scripture as anything other than a picture of Christ we are in danger of worshiping our bible as an idol.

“Don't let copies crowd out Christ”

For most of the first year that my wife Emily and I dated we were on different continents. I was studying in England for most of that year and she was studying in Costa Rica for a good part of it, consequently we wrote each other many letters and e-mails. I got to know Emily, really know her, through those letters and e-mails. They are very precious to me and my love for them speaks of my love for my wife. I have saved every one of them and as a birthday gift she even printed up all the e-mails on fancy paper and put them in a binder which I keep next to the stack of letters. If my home were ever on fire I would grab those letters before I grabbed any other possession I have. But suppose my house were on fire and my wife were asleep in one room while the letters were tucked away in a drawer in another room. Where do you think I would go first? I would go wake up my wife of course, I would make sure she was safe and only then when she was safely out of harms way would I even consider going back for those letters. That should be our attitude toward scripture. We should cherish it as our most precious link to the one that we love but we should never allow it to take his place.

You might think it's impossible for the Bible which so clearly speaks of Christ to crowd out Christ himself but you would be wrong. That's exactly what happened to the Pharisees. Remember that passage we read from John chapter 5. They studied the scriptures diligently but they didn't come to Christ when he called them. What is your attitude toward scripture? When you study the Bible are you drawing near to Christ or simply paying homage to some words on a page with no person behind them?

Incidentally, it's not just Bible reading that can crowd out Christ any spiritual discipline can if we forget that it is only a way to connect with the only real answer to our spiritual needs, Jesus himself. If that happens prayers can become nothing more than talking to ourselves, fasting can become merely masochistic, and even loving other people can simply feed our own spiritual pride. All of these things are copies, tangible ways for us to draw closer to the one real thing that God has given us our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.