

A Greater Than Moses

Dr. Sinclair Ferguson

Text:Hebrews 3:1-19

OPENING PRAYER:

Our Heavenly Father, we praise you that you have spoken your word to us in the gospel. We thank you, our Lord Jesus Christ, that you are that gospel. And that we may come to you and find in you every spiritual blessing. Together with you, our father, and you our Savior, we address you, Holy Spirit. Thank you that by your power, the word that the Father has spoken in his son, has been brought home to our hearts. Thank you that you have shone upon our Lord Jesus Christ, and brought us to see him as the Savior we need and to become the Lord that we love. And that by you, we are able to cry, Abba Father. And we pray as we are gathered for worship today to sing your praises, to seek your face in prayer, great, triune God, that you will also come to us in our worship, as we commune with you, and you with us in and through your Holy Word. We thank You for the privilege of having your Word open before us. Praise you for the many times in this room over the decades and indeed the centuries now, you have spoken to your children. We pray that you would be gracious today and come afresh, and speak to us through your Word, that we may know that you have not left us, but that you still desire to speak to us. To draw us into your presence. To bring us to trust you more and to love you better. To serve you with joy. So we pray that out of the sufficiency of the treasure house of the scriptures, you would give us the bread that we need. That you would slake the thirst that we have. That you would bring us, we pray our Father, by your Spirit to our Lord Jesus. We ask it in his name, Amen.

Please be seated.

SCRIPTURE READING: (Hebrews 3:1-19)

Now as we continue our readings and studies in the Letter to the Hebrews, we come today to Hebrews chapter three. And we read there the whole chapter, verse one, through verse 19. Hebrews chapter three, and you'll find the passage in the Pew Bible, page 1002. And if you'd like to follow along, and have a different version with you, then you'll find a copy of the English Standard Version in the pew rack in front of you, page 1002. For our children, who have their children's Bible, the passage is on page 1493. Hebrews chapter three, verses one through 19, let us hear God's word.

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. 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. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, (and he quotes from Psalm 95):

"Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your father's put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. (He's obviously referring to the events that follow the Exodus). Therefore, I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' As I swore in my wrath, They shall not enter my rest'."

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it has said,

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion."

For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who are disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

SERMON:

Yesterday afternoon, in the middle of the afternoon, between two o'clock and three o'clock, to be precise, I made a special and indeed a poignant phone call home to Scotland. I phoned the man who was and remains the senior elder in the congregation I served in the city of Glasgow. The reason I called him was because at exactly that hour, 50 years ago, I had entered into the church building as a young teenager, and he was present at the service. And I came for the first time to a living faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. 50 years ago, somewhere near eight o'clock, on a Saturday evening -- five hours time difference. My friend, the senior elder may possibly never be in that building again. The congregation has done what this congregation did, some several decades ago, and convinced of doctrinal and ethical decline in their denomination has withdrawn from the denomination. Unlike ourselves, they have had to leave behind their 200 year old building. They are now as it were, exiles, meeting together, granted, in premises that are suitable to them, but premises that have none of the connectednesses to their lives -- to their spiritual experience. Many of the congregation like myself came to faith in Christ in that building. I myself became the minister of the congregation. The very walls, dear to us. What was so poignant as I phoned him, because he had been present in the building the night I was converted, and we have been such friends. He's such an encouragement to me. The way he encouraged me yesterday was by saying this, he said, "But God has delivered us from any sentimentalism about our loss." The loss is incalculable. Think of the loss this building would be to so many of us. And as I put down the phone, not without deep emotion, I thanked God for this. But while my dear friend has lost the building that meant so much to him, his eyes have been fixed resolutely, on the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I couldn't help thinking, obviously, about our studies, in this great letter to the Hebrews, written to people who in a very real sense have lost their building. Lost the space and the history and the memories of the Jerusalem temple. Have gone as he says, later on, outside of the camp to our Lord

Jesus Christ. And his concern, it's the, it's the heart and core of the christian life. His concern from beginning to end is that they should know Christ. That they should, in the words of verse one, in today's passage, "consider Christ." That they should "run the race" chapter 12, "looking to Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith." The striking thing in the words here in chapter three and verse one is that he uses a phrase to describe the Lord Jesus that is absolutely unique in the Bible. It's nowhere else used. Actually, it's such a unique expression, that you could have been a Christian 40 or 50 years, and perhaps you have never ever in your life, described the Lord Jesus to anyone in these exact words. He calls Jesus, "the apostle, and the high priest" of our Christian confession. He is the apostle; the sent one. The Greek word apostolos (apostle) means somebody who has been sent, and in the Bible, somebody who is sent by God in order to minister to men and women. And at the same time, Jesus is our high priest. Someone who has been sent by God, in order to minister on behalf of men and women. To sacrifice for them, to pray for them, to teach them, to lead them, to comfort them, and to guide them. And He wants us as we fix our eyes on Jesus as we consider Jesus, he says, "Consider Jesus" in these two capacities. In these two ministries that he has. The apostle sent by God to us, and the high priest, who makes sacrifice for us.

And if you want a handle on the rest of the letter to the Hebrews, that is the handle. In chapter three, verse one, through chapter four, verse 13, he tells us about Jesus, the apostle God has sent to us. In chapter four, verse 14, right through to chapter 10. He speaks about Jesus as the high priest, who has made sacrifice for us. That, of course, is why he mentions Moses. Why when he tells us that Jesus is the apostle, why does he mention Moses? Because, of course, in the Old Testament scriptures, Moses is THE great apostle sent by God. You remember when he meets with God at the burning bush, described in Exodus chapter three, that this is the language that is used. Moses, I am going to send you to Pharaoh. You are going to lead my people out of Egypt in a great exodus. I am going to fulfill the promises that I made to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and you are my chosen apostle. And then of course, Moses says in response, "If I say, 'I've come as an apostle to lead you out' they're going to say, 'Whose apostle are you.' 'Who sent you?'" And you remember how the Lord disclosing his great covenant name says, "When they ask you, Moses, say, 'I am the one who is I am has sent me to you.'"

And he says here that there are some lovely similarities between Moses and the Lord Jesus. For example, in verse two, Moses was faithful in all God's house, just as Jesus is faithful. But while there are these similarities, parallels, faithfulness, he wants us to understand that at the end of the day, there is really no comparison between Moses and Jesus. Moses, he says, is, is just part of the house. Jesus is the builder of the house. Moses, he says he's just a servant, going around the house, knowing his place, doing his duty, Jesus is the son in the house. It belongs to him. He has sovereign access to everything in it. He will inherit it. It's the difference between being a slave in the house and being an heir in the house. There is really no comparison whatsoever. It's that marvelous thought that Jesus is the son in the house. But Jesus is actually the one who is the builder of the house. And therefore is so much more honored or glory than Moses, that would have been such an encouragement to these people, because they had no house for God any longer. They had no church building any longer. They had become the church building, as Peter says, "God in Christ was building them into a living temple." And his desire is that they will learn to look at that living temple from the inside and not from the outside. Think of my friends in Glasgow, what are they from the outside? No longer this iconic, centuries old building -- meeting and halls. Nothing by comparison. But the real house is the people that Christ is building into this living congregation, into this living temple. This church is far more inside than it is outside. And so he's really encouraging them and, and helping them to look at themselves and their privileges, through the right end of the telescope, not to magnify their buildings, and minimize their

congregation, but to see it as congregations that Jesus Christ is building, and they are the Lord's congregation. And they are to be wonderfully encouraged by that.

But you'll notice he puts this in a very striking way, almost in an unnerving way. He says, in verse six, Christ is faithful over God's house, that's over the church, as God's son. And we are God's house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence, and are boasting in our hope. Now what's so striking about that? It's this. He is saying, let's apply this to ourselves, you and I are God's house if something happens tomorrow. We are God's house today if tomorrow and all our tomorrows, we hold fast our confidence in Jesus Christ. Now that's odd, isn't it? You would think he would put it the other way around and say, we are God's house and therefore we will hold fast our confidence. But he says we are only God's house, if we persevere in this confidence. And in case we should be scratching our heads and saying, he must have got a little mixed up there. You'll notice he says something very similar in verse 14. Indeed, it's even clearer in verse 14. We have come to share in Christ here and now we have already come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence to the end. He's saying something is true of us now only if something else is true of us in the future. And you see the point he's making. The point he's making is that we are the members of Christ's Church, the brothers and sisters who belong to Jesus Christ. And we are such only so long as we persevere in our faith. Now how can that be so?

Don't we believe here in once saved, always saved? Yes. If you're once saved. That's the point he's making. Once saved always saved. But the question is not are those who are once saved, always saved. The question is, are you saved? Were you once saved or is it simply a figment of your imagination of vain confidence that you have in yourself? And of course, this is the point he makes it again and again. He punctuates this letter with exactly the same point. Now, of course, some of us think of Jesus words in John chapter 10. But Jesus says that nobody will ever be able to pluck us out of his hands. Yes! But he's just said, "My sheep, hear my voice and follow me. And they shall never perish, nor can anyone pluck them out of my hand, or my father's hand, because they are my sheep who follow." If you're not following, you're not sheep. That's the point. Or we might say, but what about Peter says, he says, "We're kept by the power of God for a salvation that's ready to be revealed in the last day." No, what he actually says is, "We are kept by the power of God, through faith, for the salvation that's ready to be revealed." But what about what about the fact that "nothing will ever separate us from the love of God"? Well, but Paul has described those as those who love God. So yes, our author, our pastor in Hebrews has no problem, reassuring us that those who are once saved will always be saved. But his question for us is, are the evidences they're in your life that you were once saved. Because the great evidence that you were once saved is that you are going on being once saved. That you are actually persevering in the faith. And because like, all ministers and elders, he may be able to make some intelligent guesses about where we are spiritually, but cannot be certain about where anybody is, spiritually. He wants to bring to us this word, because he sees that they are in spiritual danger. Keep your eyes fixed on Christ, and run the race, never losing sight of Christ.

So of course, one of the danger signs would be in my life that I've lost sight of Christ. I went through this morning, and Jesus never came into my mind. I went through last week, and Jesus never once came into my mind. And he's saying, don't you see the danger you are in? Don't you see it sheer presumption to think that you really belong to Jesus Christ if there is actually no evidence in your life, that you really belong to Jesus Christ. And he does something very wise and this passage, doesn't he? He says, what does the Bible have to say about this? That's a pretty neat thing for this pastor to be able to do, isn't it? We should do that much more in our churches, shouldn't we? What does the Bible have to say about this? And then almost as though this congregation had been a congregation of

Episcopalians, he uses the words of the Venetie. Those of you who used to live in dark Episcopalianism and brought out into the bright lights of South Carolinian Presbyterianism, you know, the Venetie. That great 95th Psalm encouraging us to come and worship the Lord and to come and bow down before Him. And He says to us, you did read it to the end, didn't you? You know, you didn't just look at the prayer book and say, Oh, it's the Venetie again. You did read it to the end. And you do remember how the Word of God comes to us. You see, like a good surgeon.

You know, I sometimes think we ministers are cowards by comparison with good surgeons. The good surgeon has the stomach to stick the knife in. I don't fancy doing that. I don't know. I don't. I don't know. How do you...how just...you know, even if the, even if the person is comatose there and the anesthesiologist is doing his or her work. There is a living body and you're going to, you're going to cut that body, because you've got to cut to heal. And you see this man as, this man is a pastor with with stomach because he's cutting to heal. And that's why he isn't so foolish, as sometimes we ministers are encouraged to be, to say all the nice things and the right things and not to say anything that would hurt. Imagine saying to a surgeon, now you're not going to do anything that would hurt, are you? I mean, I won't feel anything after the surgery? The surgeon will say, pal if you don't feel anything after the surgery, my surgery has been a disastrous failure. And this is what he's doing. And so he goes, he goes to that latter part of the Venetie and says, Listen to the exhortation of God's word to his people in the Old Testament days as they look back on the Exodus. And you notice the language he uses, incidentally, to introduce that quotation from the Old Testament scriptures in verse seven? As the Holy Spirit says. Those are hugely significant word aren't they? "As the Holy Spirit says."

Well, what is it the Holy Spirit says? Well, the Holy Spirit is concerned here with heart disease. The Holy Spirit is concerned here with sclerosis, which is his language, hardness, the building up of fatty deposits in the arteries that causes us so much physical difficulty, and endangers our physical life. And he's saying, you know, that was what happened to God's people in the days of the Exodus. They were brought out, but they were never brought in. And actually like a skilled physician here, he has a diagnosis. He has a prognosis, and he has a prescription.

What's his diagnosis? Well, he mentions it several times, doesn't he? The problem here is hardness of heart. And he explains to us what it is that causes it, verse 12. "Take care therefore brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." Now what's an evil heart? Maybe the best way to say it is the evil heart in the New Testament is the opposite of the pure heart. Remember how Jesus speaks in the beatitudes. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. But what's, what's a pure heart? I love that title of Soren Kierkegaard's little book, *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*. That's what it is. Purity of heart is a heart that is no longer divided, but focused resolutely, firmly, determinately, joyfully on the Lord Jesus Christ. And he's warning us against impurities entering into our hearts. Remember how Jesus puts it in the parable of the sower and the soils? How the Word of God may penetrate into somebody's heart. And it seems at first as though it's bearing fruit. Indeed, the fruit may appear to come quite rapidly. But then he says into that heart comes the desire for other things. And the desire for other things chokes the life out of the Word of God and it doesn't bear real and lasting fruit. Of course, that was what happened in the Exodus wasn't it? It was the desire for other things. You remember how they put it in? It's recorded in numbers 11, isn't it? All we get here is manna day after day. Fact that it supernaturally provided they're blind to that. And they say in Egypt, we used to have free fish. We get good shrimp and grits. When we were in Egypt, and cucumbers. Now, they had a different sense of taste from most of us -- and melons. Well that's okay, and garlic and leek. And you see what had happened. In my hometown, I'm sure it's not the only

hometown, where this is a saying, "You can take the boy out of Glasgow. But you cannot take Glasgow out of the boy." And that was their problem. God had taken them out of Egypt. But Egypt was still in them. They had divided hearts, and actually, spiritually, it destroyed them.

And then he says, not only that is true, but he says, verse 13, you need to, you need to take care in matters of the heart that you're not deceived. So he says, "exhort one another, every day, as long as it's called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." It's deceitful, isn't it? We choose it. Because we think it's good for us. And he's saying you're being deceived. It's wearing a mask. And it comes along in all kinds of ways. And in this context, isn't it? Fascinatingly, later on, he tells us how Moses wasn't deceived by the deceitfulness of sin. How he chose suffering with the people of God, as greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. Now, let me apply that in our time. Suffering with Jesus Christ is greater treasure than winning the state lottery or the mega jackpot, or whatever these expressions mean. Suffering with Jesus Christ is greater treasure than signing a multi million dollar deal with Nike. And the question is, do I see it that way? Do I see it that way? Does my heart say, that's absolutely right. Obviously that's right! Because he understands that sin is deceitful, isn't it? But wouldn't it be, I wouldn't mind having a private jet. I mean, it would get you away from all the hassle at the airport. You really could get used to that kind of lifestyle. That would be a lot better than the life I live now. Going through the security and all the stuff. And you pile it on. Having people to do things for you night and day, never having another financial worry. It doesn't matter what happens with your pension. you're set for life. Your children are set for life. Your grandchildren are set for life. That is surely the way to happiness and contentment. It's all a bubble. It's just deceit. Suffering with the Lord Jesus -- greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. Is that the way you and I see it? Then we need the eye surgeon, don't we? We need the knife. The surgeon needs to say, I need to, I need to deal with cataract here. You're seriously ill. You need to be able to see much more clearly than that. That's his diagnosis.

And he has a prognosis, doesn't he? He says what happened to the Israelites; and what will happen to us is that that we provoke God. Now what does he mean by this? Our physicians will understand this, I think. Some of our physicians may have patients and you've given them the counsel, you've given them the warnings. Some of your patients, if they continue in their present lifestyle will die. They're killing themselves. And you say to them, we have got to deal with this. We've got to deal with your sickness. Because otherwise your prognosis is utterly hopeless. And so with us, he says, you see you have provoked your physician to telling you that actually he doesn't have a plan B. And BlueCross BlueShield doesn't have a plan B either. But you're so deceived, you can't take it in. That may happen to others that would never happen to me. And he says, as some physician say, Sir, Madam I can no longer be your physician. I cannot practice medicine if you persist in ignoring the best medical counsel. Ah, but you see God is different, isn't it? God says, well, actually, I don't really care. Would you say that about your children as a parent, I don't, doesn't -- go and ruin your life if you want. Oh, it matters to him. And he's really saying, You see, he says to the Israelites, I have no plan B for you. Plan A is that you enter the promised land. Outside of Plan A is that you will die in the wilderness. And so he offers this searing prognosis, because we come to a point where we do irreparable damage to our lives. And it's just then by God's grace, that we may say to the great physician, that this author of Hebrews is. Is there any hope? Is there any prospect of an antidote? Is there a medicine I can take? Is there a cure? And so he gives his prescription?

Now, the interesting thing about this physician is that actually, as he does everything he's doing, he's actually beginning to provide the prescription. What's the prescription for me? What is the prescription

for me if my spiritual life is in tatters? If I am in danger of provoking the living God, well, here's the first. There are three bottles here. And the bottle reads, take frequently finish the dosage.

Number one is this. Listen to Scripture. Listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying. Or in this context, we might say, because you almost get a sense here, as he's writing this letter, that he is..... You know, I think last February I preached on Psalm 95. It's almost as though he draws in a few minutes of his sermon, he's preaching the letters of the New Testament are written preaching for us. And so we might put it this way. Make sure your life is really under the ministry of the Word of God. Make sure your life is really under the Ministry of the Word of God. Why do I say that? I say that A because it's true. And B because we are a wash in our own time, with people going hither and yon for counseling who are unwilling to place their lives under the very first principle of Christian counseling, which is this, put your life under a faithful ministry of the Word of God? If it's preached on Sunday morning, be there if it's preached on Sunday evening, be there. If you can make it on Wednesday, or Thursday or Tuesday or whenever -- be there? Say, well, there must be some other remedy. My dear friend, why do you think it is that people who refuse that remedy, keep coming back and back and back and back again, saying, could you give me another sticking plaster? Because this is actually what normal Christian living is. You see a counselor may say to you, let me give you some homework from the Bible. But the reason God has instituted what we are doing here and now is because this is his chief means of His Word, actually doing the work itself in us. And thank God, multitudes of us know that that's the case. His word when it is preached, in the power of the Spirit gets into places nobody else knows about perhaps not even you. And certainly not the person who is preaching. So he's saying, make sure, make sure you don't neglect the gatherings of God's people for this. That's not an optional extra. And the reason we may find it so strange in our 21st century evangelicalism is that by and large we have abandoned the basic medicines God gives to his people, and decided there is something better that we can choose. But we just get exponentially more confused.

So we place our lives under the ministry of the Word, but the ministry of the word is not listening to a CD somewhere. The ministry of the word as part of the ministry of the people of God. And so he he gives this amazing command to these Christians. "Exhort one another daily while it is today." Do you know if you ever thought you'd kept every commandment in Scripture, I think this one would knock you out of the water. Knocks me out of the water. I mean, do I live every single day making sure I'm exhorting somebody? That's that's what we're here for. Sometimes that's actually painful to do. And you know, we drawback I know we drawback you and I we are, most of us are wired that way. We'd be, we would be transgressing a boundary. But we've got to learn from God's word to encourage one another. Even if it's just how are you doing these days? Even if it's just a comment on on a Bible reading or something that happens in church so that you can provide yourself with a way in. Now you'll all you'll all be looking out for each other saying I know where they got that technique from. But we need to do it and we don't, you see. And you know, we have no idea how much other people are hurting. How much it would mean, to know, you know, one of the things that really strikes me and of course, in a sense, you're given a special privilege as a minister of the gospel. One of the things that really strikes me as being totally remarkable, is that little comments you make to people, words of exhortation and encouragement, seem to be multiplied by five in their value to their lives. Not because of the brilliance of your wisdom, or the eloquence of your words, but because your heart has spoken that you care. And that you care that your brothers and sisters are going on.

So bottle number one, the ministry of the word. Bottle number two, the fellowship of the people. Bottle number three is guard your heart. Isn't it? The old word from Proverbs. Because at the, at the heart of

the matter, is the matter of the heart. He keeps referring to that again and again and again and again. It's a matter of the heart. Watch it carefully, he says. But what are we to watch? Well, we're to watch this. Is my heart directed towards the Lord Jesus? I've spoken to you before about some of the things my mentor William Still said to me as a youngster. And one of them was this, I don't know if I've ever told you this, he said to me one day, I think I was 19 at the time, so I was almost grown up. He said, Sinclair make sure there's a sanctuary in your heart that is hermetically sealed, into which nothing and no one else enters but the Lord Jesus. And he said, that includes Dorothy. That's what it means to guard your heart. To have that sanctuary, that altar in your heart, where you worship Jesus alone. That's why he is so concerned to say to us, consider Jesus and this is his prescription.

One of our physicians told me this morning after our elder's prayer, he had no idea what the sermon was going to be about. But he said to me as we were walking across the road, apropos I cannot remember. He said, you know, 68% of prescriptions signed by physicians never reach pharmacist. He'd always assumed that with those diplomas on the wall and those letters after his name that the patients trusted him and did everything he said. Actually, in some ways that was discouraging. And in other ways as a gospel minister, it was quite encouraging. Because you can be prone to think that the prescriptions physicians write are followed much more carefully than the prescriptions that you write in the ministry of the word. But maybe that's about the percentage. Maybe only 32% of people within the sound of this voice will pay any real attention to what I've been saying for the last 35 minutes. Make sure you're one of the 32%. Finish the bottle.

When I was a young and naive Christian, I bought a book, I bought it because it was cheap. And I've always been deceived that way. It was a it was a book of religious sayings, edited by a well known British individual called Victor Gollancz, who I think founded his own publishing company. And there's only one, one saying from this whole book that sticks in my memory. It began with a quotation from the scriptures. "It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God." And then it went on. "But it is an even more terrible thing, to fall out of the hands of the living God." So make sure you're considering Jesus.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, thank you that in your word here, you have sent us a pastor for our souls. A wise guide to our lives, and that we have been listening this morning in you word. The very words of the Holy Spirit. We pray that all that has been true to him, will be written into our lives. All that has fallen short will be covered by a blanket of forgetfulness in our memories, and that in each of our hearts, the Lord Jesus will be exalted. We ask this in his name, amen.