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St. Paul's Lutheran Church

2100 16th Street SW

Austin, MN 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels

Used for a lay service on

October 21, 2021

Originally presented on 10-14-18

21st Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Amos 5:6-7, 10-15; Mark 10:17-27

Hymns: 541; 377:1-5; 377:6-9 377:10 (242:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Hebrews 3:1-6

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, ²who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also *was faithful* in all His house. ³For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. ⁴For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things *is God*. ⁵And Moses indeed *was faithful* in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken *afterward*, ⁶but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Facing the challenge “You don’t belong here!”

Have you ever felt that you didn’t belong, or even heard the words addressed to you? It’s discomfoting. In America it doesn’t happen with European Americans as much as it does with people from

other ethnic backgrounds; African Americans, Latin Americans. People that are seen as different for whatever reason are often challenged, if not with words than at least with angry stares, it can make one so uncomfortable that one feels compelled to leave, even if one ought to be welcomed.

This challenge is not limited to others against us. It may come from within us as well. We may find ourselves in a neighborhood where we feel out of place, or in a restaurant where we can't afford the appetizer, and we immediately feel awkward and quickly and quietly think, "I don't belong here." Why should that be? Are those other people really any better than I am? And yet I feel unsure, and doubt that I will even be allowed to stay.

Sometimes people feel that way in church. Sadly, because people in church are also sinners it happens that someone may be made to feel unwelcome. The Apostle Paul had to address just that sort of thing with the Corinthian congregation where it became obvious that there was a division between the rich and poor members of the congregation. But what if that uncertainty comes from within ourselves? What if that uncertainty is not limited to a church building or a worship service but includes doubts about whether we belong in heaven? Our text begins with the words, "*Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling.*" (v.1) Do you believe that those words apply to you? Are you holy? People may mock such an idea! Are you a partaker of the heavenly calling? The devil would like you to believe that those words apply to others, people who are maybe better Christians, stronger believers than you are? The devil is both the father of lies and the great accuser; he delights in such misgivings and would exploit those doubts in his attempt to lead your soul to destruction.

So it needs to be addressed. We need assurance of salvation. Where are we to look for such assurance of salvation? That is what the Holy Spirit addresses for our edification in our text this morning. We are directed to --

THEME: Find Assurance of Salvation in Jesus.

We need to be cautious that we don't tune out already at this point. One might automatically think I know this already, and not realize

that in our own minds, in our own hearts and lives we are presented with two choices for the assurance of salvation. When it comes down to that most important of all questions, “Do I belong in heaven?” we **don’t** intuitively look for assurance from Jesus. We are far more likely to think first like the rich young man in our gospel lesson, “*What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?*” (Mark 10:17) So we also are presented with --

I. Two Choices for Assurance: Moses or Jesus.

Our text directs our focus away from one to the other, the better choice.

Hebrews 1:1-2 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, ² who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also *was faithful* in all His house.

The two choices of finding assurance of my being a “partaker of the heavenly calling” are 1) by examining how well I have kept the law in my life, or 2) how well Jesus has prepared a place for me. In our text this choice is presented as a choice between Moses and Jesus. Recalling that this is an epistle written for Jewish Christians, presenting the choice in this way fit their pattern of thought. We see the presentation of this same thought at the beginning of John’s gospel where we read: “*For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*” (John 1:17) In the Jewish mind there was a strong association between Moses and the law given at Sinai. Jewish believers had been raised with Moses’ name being an extension of the law, it was just called “the law of Moses” because they understood, they correctly understood, that the law had been mediated by Moses at Sinai. God revealed the law to the people of Israel through Moses because they could not stand to hear the voice of God. It was simply too terrifying for sinners to hear the voice of the most holy God!

We know then that the law was not only given through Moses but our text declares that Moses was faithful in presenting all that the Lord had directed him to lay before the people. So the Spirit’s point is that Moses was faithful so that we may be confident that as we read the law of God, as we read the books of the Bible written

by Moses we are reading the Word and will of God! So then it would appear that we ought to pay attention, careful attention indeed to all that the Lord revealed through Moses. So it is all true, but is the law given through Moses the best source for assurance that we actually do belong in heaven? Many in American Christianity today would assert that it is indeed our best source of assurance that we are partakers of the heavenly calling! Life becomes about our striving for holiness, and finding assurance of eternal life in our success toward that end.

However, our text directs our attention to another choice, a choice described here as *“the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.”* (v.1) Those words are significant in understanding the choice before us. An apostle is a special messenger, like an ambassador sent out by a king or president who delivers an important message. So Jesus is described as the Apostle of our confession because, as we already heard from John’s gospel, *“grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”* (John 1:17) Jesus came with a very special message from God regarding the kingdom of God. This message was about the grace of redemption and forgiveness that is found in Jesus. Indeed it is also OUR confession that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate was crucified, died, and was buried and that the third day He rose again from the dead. (Apostle’s Creed)

More than that Jesus is the High Priest of our confession. A sacrifice had to be offered to God for the sin of the world. Jesus was the Mediator of that sacrifice. Jesus presented that all atoning sacrifice to God when He offered Himself upon the cross that we might be redeemed not with the blood of lambs or goats, but with *“the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”* (1 Peter 1:19)

Even as Moses was faithful as the mediator of the law, so Jesus was faithful as the Mediator of the gospel. So we have the choice. Which shall give us the assurance of eternal life we need to know beyond any doubt that we belong in heaven? The Spirit directs us in --

II. Selecting the Superior Choice.

Which is the superior choice, Moses or Jesus? We might automatically declare that of course Jesus is the superior choice! But then I will ask why then do we by nature chose Moses? And we are doing just that whenever we think of how good a Christian we are! If we think of our church offerings as being right up there where God should take notice, or if we think of the faithfulness of our church attendance, (don't get me wrong regular faithful church attendance is important,) but if we think our regular church attendance assures us of getting into heaven, or if we look at how much we volunteer at church or in the community, and how quick we are to donate to disaster relief and thereby fulfill the law of love, **this is all choosing Moses**, thinking of Moses as the **superior choice** for finding assurance of eternal life. We all do it, even if it is with a negative regard for the comparative weakness of other Christians.

Moses was faithful and the Law of Moses is from God and is holy and right, but it is definitely inferior in granting a blessed assurance of eternal life and of belonging in heaven, because “*by the law is the knowledge of sin.*” (Romans 3:20) Our text makes the choice for us.

Hebrews 3:3-6a “For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. ⁴For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. ⁵And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken *afterward*, ⁶but Christ as a Son over His own house.”

Moses was faithful, faithful, as a **servant**. God acknowledged Moses' faithfulness. We read of the Lord's high regard for Moses in the closing verses of the book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 34:10-12 “But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, ¹¹in all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, ¹²and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.”

While Moses was faithful in God's house as **a servant**, Jesus was faithful in His **own** house as **a Son**. Jesus started on a different plain. Moses was a sinner like us. Like us, he trusted the Lord for life and salvation, and served the Lord faithfully to the end of his days, but he served in the house of another. Jesus is the Son of God incarnate. Jesus was "*holy, harmless and undefiled and separate from sinners.*" (Hebrews 7:26) As God's Son He took on the form of a servant. As the Servant of the Lord "He humbled Himself and was obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:8) Jesus was faithful serving as only the Son of God could serve, and so Jesus served in His **own** house, **building** the House of God with the living stones of His redeemed children. And so "*God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,*¹⁰ *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,*¹¹ *and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* (Philippians 2:9-11)

The Superior choice is Jesus for --

III. Gaining Assurance found only in Christ

Hebrews 3:6b "whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

In Jesus Christ we have an assurance the law could never give because the law is weak because of our sinful flesh. And so we are told by Paul, "*What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,*⁴ *that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.*" (Romans 8:3, 4)

God saved us through His Son. Our assurance of eternal salvation is no way dependent upon us and our fulfilment of the law. It is secured by Christ and delivered to us through faith. And so Paul wrote in –

Galatians 2:17, 21 "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified **by faith in Christ** and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. ...²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God;

for if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain.”

Christ didn't die in vain, Jesus died for me and for my salvation. That is what we hold on to for confidence of salvation, for the assurance that I belong to the Church of Jesus Christ. I am built into the walls of His house even as I have been called to faith in Jesus' name. No one can take that away from us. Not even the gates of death and hell can prevail against us!

This confidence brings joy to my heart and my life. We love to sing with joy in our hearts to the Lord. Yes, especially at Christmas and Easter we really sing out our hallelujahs as we praise the Lord. But this is only one way that our joy of life and salvation is evident. Our hearts have been changed and our lives transformed so that life is no longer about me and what pleases me, or how good I am. It is about Christ. This is what Paul was writing about also in Galatians chapter 2.

Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Now I live for Jesus, to His praised and glory. Now I live so that others might see the power of Jesus in my life and glorify my Father who is in heaven. That fruit of faith is a blessing from God the Holy Spirit that empowers my life and gives it joy and purpose. These fruits of faith are not and were not ever the cause of my salvation or my confidence that I belong in heaven, but rather the response of a grateful heart that loves my Lord and Savior and seeks every opportunity to praise His glorious name starting right now in this life and then forevermore.

So then “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” that is simply what assurance of salvation looks like from the outside. Praise the Lord for the confidence of hope of heaven we possess inside, in our hearts, and the joy of our salvation that is ours through faith in Christ Jesus. He has called us to be “holy brethren,” and “partakers of the heavenly calling.” To God be the glory both now and forevermore!

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)