

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon Title: “This is Not Ripley’s Believe it or Not,” Hebrews 3

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INTRODUCTION: Probably most of you know of the *Ripley’s Believe it or Not* business. It’s quite incredible with over 500 attractions and twelve million visitors per year. Claims are made, and then we all have the opportunity to believe it or not. If you write to the Ripley’s company disputing one of their claims, you’ll get a postcard reply that says, “Believe it or not!”

In the early days of the Christian Church, claims were made, some true, some false. And, people had to decide whether they believed them or not. It seems like nothing much has changed in the last 2,000 years. Let’s look at some of the belief challenges faced by the early Christians.

There are two beliefs I want us to examine today:

1. Jesus was acknowledged as an apostle, a high priest, higher than Moses, and the faithful Son, and today we acknowledge him as greater than all.
2. Let us not be victims of our own unbelief.

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 3:1-6 ¹*Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest.* 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,” bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future.* ⁶*But Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.*

First, JESUS WAS ACKNOWLEDGED AS AN APOSTLE.

EXPLANATION: What does this mean?

We think of the 12 apostles, but we generally don't think of Jesus as an apostle.

There are different definitions of the word apostle. Traditionally, we call the disciples who saw Jesus apostles. We include the Apostle Paul in this group because he saw Jesus as well.

It doesn't make sense to say, Jesus saw himself and therefore was an apostle, so there must be another meaning to this word. And, there is. It is one who starts a new work, like a pioneer. Or, it can also mean "messenger." Jesus was both. He was the pioneer with a message.

Then, JESUS WAS ACKNOWLEDGED AS A HIGH PRIEST.

EXPLANATION: What does this mean?

The high priest had an interesting role among the Jewish community. Moses' brother, Aaron, was the first high priest. The high priest was over all the other priests and performed duties which the other priests did not perform. Suffice it to say, the high priest was one busy person.

Now, as I understand it in Leviticus 3, when the high priest sinned, it was treated as if all the people had sinned. Another thing the high priest did was atone for the sins of the whole nation on the Day of Atonement. Now we know Jesus never sinned, so what did it mean that he was a high priest? It meant he was higher than all other priests, and it meant he atoned for the sins of people through his death and resurrection.

Then, JESUS WAS ACKNOWLEDGED AS HIGHER THAN MOSES.

EXPLANATION: What does this mean?

Remember, Hebrews was written to Christian Jews who were about ready to give up this new way of living and return to their old way of living as a Jew under the Law of Moses. In the Jewish world, Abraham was considered the most important man, but the most talked about man was Moses. Moses is the one who received the

Law from God and, in fact, the Law was called the Law of Moses, not the Law of God, even though it was truly God's Law.

Moses was the one who received the law from God, and he was also the one who read the Law to the people. In some languages, the first five books of the Bible are called The Books of Moses 1- 5. Moses was remembered as the great leader that he was.

Now all of a sudden, these new Christians who were Jews learned Jesus is more important than Moses. In a way it sounded like heresy. Half way through their lives, they took on a whole new way of relating to God. This new way came with a lot of freedom and personal responsibility. All the time, they had spent doing things good Jews did before they became Christians. They no longer had to do these things because they were free from the Law. The awkwardness was too much for some of them, and it's apparent from reading Hebrews many, or most, of them were ready to give up.

ILLUSTRATION: Now, we are told the builder of the house is greater than the house. Most of the time, you look at a beautiful house, or building, and unless you are a builder, you don't think of the builder. You just think of the house. You look at the Biltmore, the White House, or a cabin in the woods, and your first comment is about the house. Why is the builder greater than the house? Because: The house didn't build itself. It had to be crafted by someone. All the angles, walls, colors, and features had to be put in place by builders.

Another reason why the builder is greater than the house is because he's not limited to one house. He can build more.

So, we know the Law wasn't really Moses' Law. It was God's Law dispensed through Moses. In other words, Moses didn't build the house. He just served in it.

SCRIPTURE: Look in verse 5: "*Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house.*" This verse is a quote of Numbers 12.

ILLUSTRATION: I told some of you once about a church where I interviewed as youth pastor years ago. I walked into the pastor's office, and he told me he came as pastor in 1988, and nothing before that mattered. Wow, how wrong he was. You see

he didn't build the church; he was just a servant in the church. I think the same thing about me. This church was built long before I came, and therefore, I am just a servant. And, who really built the church? Was it the people? Look in verse 4, *but God is the builder of everything.*

Then, JESUS IS ACKNOWLEDGED AS THE FAITHFUL SON OVER GOD'S HOUSE.

EXPLANATION: What does this mean?

Moses was the faithful servant *in* God's house, and Jesus was the faithful Son *over* God's house. If the house is symbolic of the Law of Moses, then Moses was faithful in dispensing the Law. Now the Son is over the Law, which means it's been delegated to him. He faithfully fulfilled the Law, and in doing so, he is over the Law.

Now, this house-talk continues. Who is God's house? We are, according to verse 6. This means Jesus is the faithful Son over us.

So here's a review so far:

- Jesus was acknowledged as an apostle, a high priest, higher than Moses, and the faithful Son.

Second, LET US NOT BE VICTIMS OF OUR OWN UNBELIEF.

EXPLANATION: All of this information was included in Hebrews to help the new believers believe. They struggled with belief because their minds had been formatted another way. Listen to me, if you grow up one way and find out there is a new way, or a better way, or you find out what you always believed is no longer true, it's really difficult to take off those old beliefs and put on new beliefs. This is why it is so important to tell children about Jesus at a very young age.

ILLUSTRATION: Probably all of you know about the ISIS fighters, this organized terrorist group which is sweeping through the Middle East. I read this week 100 of the fighters are from America. This is hard to believe. What would make Americans join a terrorist army?

One psychologist said a group like ISIS can be attractive to “young people who lack a clear sense of self-identity and are craving a sense of larger identity.” These are young people who have a gnawing sense of uncertainty which must be settled. So, they are eager to join a group who declares the truth is on their side and everyone else must go. Lack of firm beliefs is dangerous!

APPLICATION: And, let me add, if you have a lack of firm belief in Jesus’ ability to keep you until the very end, that’s very dangerous. Belief is the glue which connects us with Jesus.

SCRIPTURE: Let me repeat part of Verse 6: *And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.*

The next part of Hebrews warns against unbelief.

1. Warning against unbelief #1: The Israelites—

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 95:7-11⁷ *So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice,⁸ do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness,⁹ where your ancestors tested and tried me, though for forty years they saw what I did.¹⁰ That is why I was angry with that generation; I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’¹¹ So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’”*

EXPLANATION: This is a quote of Psalm 95, which looks back at the Exodus when the children of Israel were about ready to kill Moses because of their thirst, and Moses called out to God for fear of his life. The people quarreled against Moses and tested God, accusing Moses of taking them out of Egypt. The real issue here was lack of belief God was with them and would provide for their needs.

2. Next, Warning against unbelief #2: Hold each other accountable—

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 3:12-15¹² *See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.¹⁴ We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.¹⁵ As has just been*

said: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.”

EXPLANATION: This “today” statement is interesting... “*Encourage one another daily as long as it is called ‘Today.’*” There is a sense of urgency here. Encourage one other today, because without encouragement, we can become victims of unbelief and hardened hearts.

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 3:16-19 ¹⁶ *Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt?* ¹⁷ *And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness?* ¹⁸ *And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed?* ¹⁹ *So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.*

EXPLANATION: Those who quarreled and disbelievers of God to see them through were disciplined for the next forty years. They all died, and a new generation of people went into the Promised Land. I wonder if this has parallels for Tusculum Hills.

CONCLUSION: Here’s my review of today’s message:

- Jesus was acknowledged as an apostle, a high priest, higher than Moses, and the faithful Son, and today we acknowledge him as greater than all.
- Next, let us not be victims of our own unbelief. At the beginning of the message, I mentioned *Ripley’s Believe it or Not...* There is a vast difference between Ripley’s claims and the claims of Christ. One is for entertainment. The other is for forgiveness of sin, an abundant life, and eternal security. But, so many people view Jesus in the same way as a Ripley’s spectacle. And, a person has to choose to believe. No one forces a person to believe.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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