

## FIX YOUR THOUGHTS ON JESUS

Hebrews 3:1 • Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost • October 15/18, 2015

*Therefore, holy brothers and sisters who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.*

### Jesus

Dear holy brothers and sisters in Christ who share in the heavenly calling:

The final hole of the 1961 Masters. Golf great Arnold Palmer, the leader by one stroke, had just hit a perfect tee shot. He looked to have the tournament in the bag. As he walked down the fairway toward his ball he noticed an old friend standing at the edge of the gallery. The man motioned him over, stuck out his hand and said, "Congratulations." Arnold shook his friend's hand, but as soon as he did he realized he had lost his focus. His next two shots were not so good: one in the sand trap, one over the green. He missed his putt and lost the tournament and the famed green jacket to Gary Player.

It's so easy to become distracted, to lose your focus, to forget about what really matters. And when we're talking about spiritual things there's a lot more at stake than trophies or jackets, prestige or prize money. Eternity is on the line. This morning the writer to the Hebrews encourages us to keep our focus, to concentrate on what really matters in life. Under the Spirit's inspiration he says: **FIX YOUR THOUGHTS ON JESUS.** We need to keep our focus on our Savior because the world is filled with distractions, and because Jesus is our greatest treasure.

#### **I. The World is Filled with Distractions**

The epistle to the Hebrews was penned by an unknown author to Jewish Christians who were under a lot of pressure. They had

once lived under Judaism – the law of Moses, the temple sacrifices and holy days, the many regulations like dietary restrictions and circumcision. At some point the gospel was preached to them and they became believers in the promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, they were tempted to go back to Judaism.

Emperor Nero had outlawed Christianity. Christians were being abused and persecuted. They were being robbed of their rights and their property. Christianity was illegal but Judaism enjoyed the protection of the state. So the pressure to revert back to the safety of Judaism was very real and only grew worse as the persecution of Christians heated up. The eyes of these Jewish believers were beginning to wander away from Jesus and his cross and empty tomb and instead were focusing on the pressure, pain and property loss they were experiencing. Some of them had already fallen away from the faith; others were in danger of doing so. The writer's message is clear: "Don't." Fix your thoughts on Jesus. Persecution had become a distraction. They needed to stay focused on Jesus.

What distractions do we face? What tempts us to lose our focus on Jesus? We don't face the same kind of persecution they did. We don't live under Nero. Christianity is still legal in America, but I wouldn't say that the Christian faith is exactly popular. In fact, our thoroughly biblical stance as confessional

Lutherans invites abuse from a world of secularism and pseudo-Christianity.

We believe, teach and confess that the Bible is God's Word, completely free from error, timeless truth that applies to all people. The world says, "You're kidding, right? You're still thumping that dusty old book. The world has moved on. Stop living in the stone age."

We believe, teach and confess on the basis of God's Word that Jesus Christ is the world's only Savior, that those who by God's grace believe in him have eternal life, and that those who reject him will spend eternity in hell. We teach that those who Muslims, Hindus and other non-Christian religions do not worship same God that we do. And the world calls us narrow-minded and arrogant.

We believe teach and confess the morality of the Bible, that all life is valuable, including life in the womb, that marriage is between one man and one woman for life and that sex is to be enjoyed only within that sacred institution, that God has designed different but equal roles for man and woman, that in the church and the home men are to be servant-leaders and that woman are to be servant-helpers. The world that preaches tolerance won't tolerate this: "You're a bunch of hateful misogynists and homophobes."

These things are distractions. Like the Hebrew Christians before us, we are tempted to go along with the world, to fit, to seek an easy life rather than stand out from the crowd as those who stick to the Word of God without apology. People are leaving true Christianity in droves simply because doing so makes life easier in our anti-Christian culture.

Another distraction is materialism, and no we are not immune to this malady. We live in a capitalistic society, a world that preaches the gospel of prosperity. Advertisers know how to write copy for our covetous hearts? *You need the latest iphone! You can't live without all those channels! You don't want to be seen wearing the same tired old fashions!* Is it wrong to have nice things? No. The problem is that, as Luther once said, "the human heart is an idol factory." Our hearts can so easily take good blessings from God, value them much more highly than we out, and thus turn them into terrible distractions. Before you know it we can't see our Savior's cross anymore because our eyes are filled with dollar signs. How dangerous is materialism? I'll let the Apostle Paul answer: **The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith, and pierced themselves with many griefs** (1 Timothy 6:10).

There are lots of other distractions too, temptations with which our hearts struggle. Maybe you battle insecurity and the desire to be popular. Maybe you struggle with addiction to pornography or same-sex attraction. Maybe you are overcome by constant worry. Whatever it is there is only one way to overcome: Fix your eyes on Jesus.

## II. Jesus is Our Greatest Treasure

He is our greatest treasure. What would going along with the world gain for us? An easy life for a little while perhaps, and then an eternity of suffering. What about giving in to our natural desires to live the good life, to eat, drink and be merry? Again, fun for a little while, followed by eternal pain and punishment. There is only one way to avoid such pain and punishment, only one path to eternal life: Jesus. We need to fix our eyes on

him. And the writer of our text explains why.

**Fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.** The writer uses too important titles for Jesus. The first one is *apostle*. This is the only time in the Bible that that word is applied to Jesus. An apostle is someone who is sent on a mission. **“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son”** (John 3:16). He sent Jesus to pull us out of the meat grinder of materialism, temptation and worldly thinking. He sent Jesus on a rescue mission to save us from our sins.

The next term describes how he did it. The writer calls Jesus our *high priest*. In fact, much of the rest of the letter to the Hebrews is about how Jesus fulfilled this role. The high priest in the Old Testament had basically two jobs: to represent the people before God and to offer sacrifices sins. That’s what the priests did, day and day out. They approached God in his temple, prayed for his people and sacrificed animals to atone for sins – both those of the people and their own sins.

This is what Jesus did as our high priest, with some important differences. Listen to what the writer of our text had to say later on in the letter: **Such a high priest meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.**

The Old Testament high priests were themselves sinners in need of forgiveness. Jesus is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners. The Old Testament high priests went to work every day, making the same

sacrifices over and over again, which couldn’t really atone for even a single sin. Jesus only made one sacrifice, the only one that was needed. He offered himself on the altar of the cross, a bloody sacrifice, the perfect sacrifice that paid for the sins of all people and satisfied his Father’s perfect justice.

What is the result of all this? That’s made clear by the way the writer addresses his readers. **Holy brothers [and sisters] who share the heavenly calling.** Those words describe the Hebrew Christians. Those words describe you and me. Though we remain sinners, though we continue to struggle against the Old Adam within each of us every day, in God’s eyes we are holy and blameless. At Baptism God called us to faith in Jesus, washed us clean and dressed us in the robes of his holiness. That’s why we pastors wear these white robes. They not only serve as a reminder that the pastor speaks not for himself but for Christ, they also remind us that each and every believer in Jesus is dressed in the robe of his righteousness, that we are justified, declared not guilty, holy in God’s eyes, forgiven for every last sin.

With such glorious clothing we are now ready for eternity. The book of Revelation has this to say about heaven: **Nothing impure will ever enter it** (21:27). But we will. We will because **[we] were washed, [we] were sanctified, [we] were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God** (1 Corinthians 6:11). We share in the heavenly calling, the call to faith in Jesus, the call to an eternity of joy with him.

That’s why Jesus is our greatest treasure. Nothing this world has to offer can compare.

All this world's collected wisdom and wealth can't give us what Jesus gives us: a new life, complete forgiveness, a glorious eternal future and meaningful purpose. Paul told the Ephesians: **Live a life worthy of the calling you have received** (4:1). Dear sharers in the heavenly calling, live a life worthy of that calling. What a life we have! A life of peace in forgiveness and hope of heaven. A life growth in faith and power for living given through Word and Sacrament. A life of love for both God and neighbor. A life of contentment and generosity. A life of sharing with others the reason for the hope that we have. What the key to living such a life? God's Word is clear: Fix your thoughts on Jesus! Amen.

**S.D.G.**