THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY HEBREWS 3-4

Keith Green was a popular Christian singer in the 1970s. Keith had been a hippie - a 60s flower child. Like his peers he searched for truth in eastern religion.

But one day he had a thought... Every guru he'd heard ended up referencing a person named Jesus.

All the exotic religions he'd studied had tried to justify its teaching by drawing a link to Jesus. It dawned on Keith, "Maybe I should just find out about this Jesus."

He purchased a Bible, and spent some time considering Jesus. It changed his life forever. And it would do us all some good to consider Jesus!

To find meaning, and gain strength, and open up your mind to wisdom, and touch the presence of God; then you and I should spend time considering Jesus.

Thus, Hebrews 3 begins, "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, **consider** the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus..."

Yet tragically, the Hebrew believers who first received this letter were proof that in this world it's easy to get distracted and take our eyes off Jesus!

Remember Peter walked on the water as long as his focus was on the Lord, but as soon as he saw that the wind was boisterous he became afraid and sank.

And today, the winds and waves of circumstance, the boisterousness of modern living - can steal our vision of

Jesus. Life can get so hectic and frenetic that we forget what really matters. We focus on trivialities.

We become preoccupied with the peripherals - and forget what's at the heart and core of our lives.

One commentator writes, "If you would deal aright with the circumference, live at the center. From your daily world come back evermore to Jesus, that from Jesus you may better go back to the world - bearing the peace and power of the Lord Himself upon you."

While Jesus was in Jerusalem a Greek delegation approached His disciples. In John 12:21 we're told that they asked Philip simply, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus..."

This should always be our prayer and priority, "we wish to see Jesus..." Verse 1 tells us, consider Christ!

Verse 2, "Who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house."

As we mentioned last week the book of Hebrews was written to a band of Jewish believers struggling with their Jewish roots. They had embraced Jesus as Messiah, but what about the traditions of Judaism?

Spouses, parents, siblings, community leaders were exerting tremendous pressure on these converts.

The opponents of Christianity were adamant - faith in Jesus was not enough, you needed to obey the rules and adhere to the rituals of Judaism. These Hebrew believers were struggling to sort out their allegiances.

In this book the author compares the institutions of Judaism with the person of Jesus - and he concludes there's no comparison! Jesus is better than any other way of relating to God! It's best to believe in the risen Christ than to follow the precepts of a dead religion.

In chapters 1-2 we're shown that Jesus is better than the prophets, the Law, and the angels. Now chapters 3-4 explain how He's better than Moses and Joshua.

Verse 3, "For this One (i.e. Jesus) has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses..." As we learned in verse 2 Moses was a faithful representative of God.

Among the Hebrews he was not only the most revered Jew who ever lived - he was the greatest human. Moses was a *hero* with no peers. Except for one incident, He faithfully led Israel for forty years...

Talk about a resume... Moses' was unparalleled...

Moses spoke to God from a bush that burned yet wasn't consumed; and later on Sinai face to face.

He welded miraculous power and parted the Sea.

He humbled a tyrannical Pharaoh and mighty Egypt.

He liberated His people from 400 years of slavery.

Moses delivered God's law to His people and the world. God's Law is forever called "The Law of Moses."

He relaunched a massive nation and sculpted a band of former slaves into a fighting army.

He struck a rock and out came water.

He led three million Israelis through a barren desert.

Moses was so revered by His people, when he died the angel Michael buried Moses' body in a hidden grave so no one would try to worship his bones.

Years ago, Israeli general Ariel Sharon and George Bush were schedule for a meeting. Sharon was late and Bush was upset. Sharon told him, "Mr. President, I'm sorry, but I was talking to someone more important than you." Bush was thinking, "How dare him! Who could be more important than the American President?" Sharon told him, "I was talking to Moses."

Bush was impressed. He said, "Can I talk to Moses?"

Sharon pulled out his cell phone, punched in a number, and whispered... Finally, he turns to George W. and says, "Mr. President, I'm sorry, but Moses said he doesn't want to talk to you... The last time he talked to a Bush it cost him forty years in the wilderness."

It's true Moses is more important than any American President, but in verse 3 the writer of Hebrews assures us that he pales in significance to the King of kings.

Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses "inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house." In the construction of "the house (or nation) of Israel" Moses was a tool in God's hand. But Jesus is the builder! Jesus is the Divine Contractor. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus declared, "I will build My Church."

Jesus is building God's Kingdom. Verse 4, "For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God." Notice the implication - if God builds all things, and Jesus builds the

Church, then Jesus must be God. Here's a powerful prooftext for the deity of Christ.

Jesus is the builder of the house of God - a member of the Godhead. Moses, just a hammer in His toolbox.

"And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house..." Moses was a servant in God's house, but Jesus is God's Son. Moses compared to Jesus is like Dan Quinn compared to Arthur Blank. Quinn coaches the Atlanta Falcons, but King Arthur owns the team.

Moses was a hired-hand - Jesus is the heir.

And notice another implication in verse 6, the Church is referred to as "(Jesus') own house." You and I are considered the house in which Jesus dwells. He hangs out among us. He's revealed through our fellowship.

That is "whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end." God's kids don't just believe, but continue in faith.

Throughout Hebrews it's clear a believer's membership in God's family (in essence, our salvation) depends on the perseverance of our faith. "Whose house we are if we hold fast... firm to the end."

And to illustrate this need for perseverance, the writer reminds the Jews of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness. The ancient Hebrews *began well*, but they *ended poorly* because they didn't continue in their faith.

Verse 7, "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says..." and he quotes from Psalm 95, "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years."

Rather than **trust** God, they **tested and tried** God. The wilderness wanderers pushed God's patience.

The Hebrews who exited Egypt refused to take God at His word. They insisted over and over that He do something to prove Himself... You'd think Moses turning the river to blood, or parting the Red Sea would've sealed their faith forever, but realize miracles alone are not what produce faith. More often than not all miracles create is a desire for more miracles.

Faith grows by taking God at His Word.

God has done more than enough miracles to prove Himself to us. It's now time we rested in His promises.

In verse 10 God said of the faithless Jews who tested Him, "Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.'"

The Jews who followed Moses were acquainted with God's **works**. For 40 years they saw His miracles on a daily basis, but they never learned God's **ways**.

They treated God like a circus act... Let's hope He performs. Maybe He'll hang from a trapeze, or get shot out of a cannonball - but let's not sit at His feet and learn to live a better way... Even today, folks want to see miracles; then turn

around and do life their own way. Yet this is the approach that God rejected.

Look for God's works, without listening to His words, and living His way, and He'll sentence you to perpetual restlessness. You can kiss the peace of God goodbye.

You'll spend your whole life wandering in a spiritual wilderness. God promises us in verses 11-12, "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest."

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God..."

Verse 13, "But exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." The hardening of a heart is a subtle occurrence. It can begin on a spiritual highpoint.

After you climb a mountain, overcome an obstacle, win a victory - that's when you're tempted to think you're at the end of your struggle. Now you can coast!

Rather than stretch forward, you sit back. You're no longer trusting in the Savior, but in your circumstances. And it hardens us to the voice and call of God's Spirit.

That's why the writer tells us to exhort or encourage one another daily - while it is called "Today...". Never take a day off from faith - keep walking with Jesus.

"For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end..."

Notice this is an "if" statement. It's conditional. We'll be a partaker of Christ and all the blessings He brings "if" we cross the finish line with our faith intact.

The Hebrews had started well. They'd embraced the sufficiency of Christ with their whole heart. Jesus was all they needed, *but...* doubts had crept in... their confidence had waned... they weren't so sure if Jesus was enough for them. What about the Law, the Temple, the sacrifices, the feasts - the trappings of Judaism?

Their initial faith was unraveling. They were warned. You become a partaker of Christ not by once having faith, but by continuing in faith "steadfast to the end."

Verse 15, "While it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

Again he quotes familiar verses, Psalm 95:7-8. Every Jew had this passage memorized. It was used in Jewish synagogues to call the people to their evening worship. Yet sadly, though the Hebrews heard these words week-afterweek, most of them never took heed.

Apparently, *hearing* and *heeding* are not the same.

In the late 1950s a conversation occurred between a Boeing engineer and a passenger right after the introduction of Boeing's first commercial jet - the 707.

The employee of the manufacturer spoke confidently about the precision of the new airplane's engineering and the extensive testing the aircraft had undergone. Finally, the passenger asked, "Have you ever flown in the 707?" The confident engineer answered, "No, I think I'll wait until it's been flying for a while."

See, it's one thing to acquire and admire information. It's quite another thing to act on it. To hear is not to heed. The Hebrews knew the facts about Christ, now they needed to apply faith to the facts and hold fast.

"For who, having heard, rebelled?" He returns to his analogy of Israel and their resistance in the wilderness.

Just because you believed once doesn't mean you can't later rebel. "Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness?" The same folks who believed God in Egypt, later died in the desert. Even mighty Moses couldn't insure their continuation of faith.

Moses could break the will of a stubborn Pharaoh - put God's miracles on display - split the vast ocean - bring bread from heaven - but He couldn't convince the hard-hearted Hebrews to persist in their faith. Moses failed to bring His people into God's promises.

With the exception of two faithful spies, Joshua and Caleb, the generation that exited Egypt died in the wilderness. As godly a man as Moses was, he failed in his mission. Moses brought Israel out of *Egyptian bondage*, but couldn't bring them into *God's blessing*.

This describes Christians today. They've been saved out of Egypt and crossed the Red Sea of baptism. But their faith

gets challenged, and rather than press on, they grew bitter or fearful. They're saved, but stalled.

They're forgiven, but far from victorious. They have *peace* with God, but lack the peace of God. Rather than enjoying the milk and honey God promised them, they keep longing for what they left behind in Egypt.

In short, a faith that was, isn't necessarily a faith that is. How current is your faith? You've exited the Egypt of bondage, but are you living short of God's blessing?

Verse 18, "And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." When the moment of decision arrived at the threshold of Canaan only two men believed.

The other ten spies saw giants in the land and fortified cities - the obstacles. All twelve spies saw the same variables, but what doubters saw as *stumbling blocks*, Joshua and Caleb saw as *stepping stones*.

The difference? Eyes of faith. The two who believed entered. The people that didn't, died in the wilderness.

Chapter 4, "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it..." As a kid growing up in Church I heard people talk about "sins and shortcomings." For years I wondered, "what is a shortcoming?" I felt sorry for gentlemen under 5'-8" - maybe they were guilty?

But a shortcoming is the sin of coming up short.

Having watched three million Little League baseball games in my lifetime I've seen kids slide into a base ahead of the throw. Everyone assumes they're safe, but then the dust clears and there's the little guy's foot eight inches from the base... He came up short!

Well, this is a shortcoming... You launch out on a faith journey, but you get derailed, and fail to finish.

It's "salvation without sanctification" - "forgiveness without fulfillment" - "deliverance without delight."

The Hebrews exited Egypt, but the nation under Moses came up **short** of entering the Promised Land.

And here was their mistake, verse 2, "For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it." The Hebrews heard God's Word, but never mixed it with faith. On the cover of all Bibles, under the title, "Holy Bible" it should read, "mix with faith." It doesn't work without faith.

The key to entering God's rest and blessing is faith! And to prove it He cross-references several verses...

"For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said (again he quotes Psalm 95): "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest," although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works" (Genesis 2:2); and again in this place (again Psalm 95): "They shall not enter My rest." Here's an amazing truth - God has finished His work!

On the Seventh Day God rested from creation and God has been resting ever since. God fashioned a perfect world. Nothing was lacking in what He'd done.

And this remains God's posture. He's left nothing undone. There're no loose ends God needs to tie up.

When Jesus died on the cross He uttered, "It is finished." God has it all under control. He never gets uptight. With God the end has been worked out from the beginning. Today, God is relaxing, and He wants us to join Him! We're invited to enter into God's own rest!

When my kids were little I owned a hammock. And whenever I finished my yard work I'd spend a few minutes of recovery in the hammock - and my little kids always loved to join me. They'd stop whatever they were doing to jump on dad and swing in his hammock.

And here the Father is inviting His kids to join Him in His hammock... but we too have to stop emphasizing what we're doing - even for God - and rest in what He's done for us! We join in *His* rest - not produce our own.

Rather than focus on our achievements we find *His* joy... take our hope *in Him...* trust in *His* sufficiency.

Hudson Taylor, missionary to China, had a little jingle he was fond of quoting... God speaks to us, "Bear not a single care thyself. One is too much for thee. The work is mine, and mine alone. Thy work, to rest in Me."

On the seventh day God rested, and He's still resting. Now He wants us to adopt the same posture.

He wants us to mix His truth with some faith. Rather than working to get my life under my control, I need to start living by faith as if God is in control, since He is.

Verse 6, "Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as it has been said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."

God entered His own rest after His Creation, and He invited the Hebrews to join Him in that rest after He brought them into the Promised Land. Unfortunately, they failed to experience His promise for lack of faith.

But 400 years later, through the pen of David in Psalm 95, God issued the promise again. Long after Israel's failure in the wilderness, God still promised, "If you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."

The writer of Hebrews is proving to His readers that God's rest is still available to God's people. He promised this rest to Moses and his followers in 1445 BC. He reiterated the promise 400 years later in Psalm 95. The point is that God's rest is still available today. This promised rest is for all God's people, for all time.

"For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day." Even Joshua, Moses' successor, failed to bring Israel into God's rest. Thus, David still makes the offer years later.

Israel had two national heroes, Moses and Joshua, but neither brought God's people into God's rest.

That's why verse 9 tells us, "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God." And Jesus is better than both Moses and Joshua, for He leads us into this rest.

And the next few verses tell us how...

"For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His." When God entered His rest it involved ceasing from His work.

For six days, God performed certain tasks, but once His work was finished, He rested. I don't think that rest involved inaction. God didn't become comatose.

The difference was that for six days God did what was **obligatory**. On the seventh His activity became **celebratory**. And there's a big difference... obligation is *required work*. Celebration is *responsive work*.

And this is what it means to enter God's rest. Not to become inactive, but to realize on the cross, Jesus did all that needed to be done for us to be right with God. It is finished. I can now add nothing to what Jesus did.

My requirement was fulfilled by Christ. I'm no longer under obligation - that's the rest, the freedom, the joy.

Now what I do for God is out of *celebration* not *obligation*. I praise, serve, pray and witness not to earn God's favor, but because I already have it in Christ.

That's why verse 11 tells us, "Let us therefore be diligent (or literally, *labor*) to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience."

This sounds contradictory... we labor to rest?

Yet here's the point, entering God's rest does take a major effort. We need to hold fast *to* Jesus! Have faith *in* Jesus! **Consider Christ!** Keep our eyes on Jesus!

Corrie Ten Boom once said, "Look within and be depressed. Look without and be distressed. But look to Jesus and be at rest." And it takes effort to keep looking in the right direction - to avoid the distractions.

Having faith isn't passive, it's active. It's aggressive. It's looking, and focusing, and holding, and clutching...

We don't labor to earn God's rest - it can't be earned, it's a free gift - but we labor to enter it and enjoy it!

Think of the difference between *digging a ditch* and *planning a party*. Trust me, digging a ditch is obligation, whereas planning a party is celebration. Both are labor, but only the former seems like it. It may sound contradictory, but it's not, we labor to enter God rest.

Verse 12, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword..." All it takes to do miracles is to mix it with a little bit of faith.

The Greek word translated "sword" refers to the Roman short sword, or dagger. It was an ancient weapon used in hand-to-hand combat - at close range.

And this is how God's Word works. When we apply it personally to our individual hearts it has the ability to penetrate a facade, and knife through our resistance.

The Bible is "living" or active. It has a life of its own.

It's "powerful" or effective. It can transform a life.

And it's "sharp" or incisive. It cuts to the chase and gets to the point. It uncovers the real, heart issues.

And it's sharper than a two-edged sword. It slices coming and going. It's not only a weapon to use on the enemy. It's a surgeon's scalpel the Holy Spirit turns on us. *The Holy Spirit does open heart on the inner man!*

The Scriptures are able to (pierce) even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow..."

In other words, God's Word untangles flesh from faith - it sorts out what's of me and what's of God. It differentiates between the heavenly and the human.

We're told the Bible is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." It can manicure our motives.

Once, a young guy walked into an ole country barber shop. The shop was decorated with trophies of wild animals. There was a deer's head, a wild fox, a wild turkey - as well as several stuffed birds. But this young man wasn't impressed. He happened to be studying taxidermy, and he was extremely critical of the work.

He pointed to the owl sitting on the shelf, and said, "look at those drooping wings, and the crook in the leg, and the angle of the head - it looks so unnatural." He went on and on with his critique until suddenly the owl turned its head and winked. The bird was alive!

The fellow had been criticizing the life-likeness of a live bird. And this is true of the Bible's critics. They're critiquing a live book. Berate it, deny it - say what you want about the Bible - but when its ready, it'll fly off the shelf to do as it pleases! It's self-propelled. When you hear God's Word and mix it with faith the author Himself works in you to help you grasp its meaning.

Verse 13, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." God sees all.

Once, a couple came to me for marriage counseling. They informed me that they didn't want anyone to know they were having problems, *especially God*.

Sorry, God is the one true know-it-all! Nothing is hidden from Him. There's no secret He does not know.

Folks today worry that Big Brother might be eavesdropping in on their private communications. But Big Brother isn't your chief concern. You have a Father God who is exposed to it all. Your encryptions don't work on God. He sees your emails, hears your calls, reads your texts. Nothing is hidden from God!

Verse 14, "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession." Here's another reason to hold onto our faith in Christ - He's "a great High Priest!" - better than the priests of Judaism!

Once, a lady was pulled over by the police. The officer noticed that her license required her to wear eye-glasses. They were missing. When the policeman inquired, she said, "But officer I have contacts."

The policeman said firmly, "Lady, I don't care who you know, you've got to wear your glasses to drive!"

Yet sometimes, it's not as much what you know, as it is who you know. Contacts - connections - go a long way in this life... and even more so in the life to come!

This is why one of the central components of Jewish religion was its system of priests and Levites. Of the 12 tribes, an entire tribe was devoted to attend to the nation's relationship with God. The tribe of Levi's sole occupation was to intercede for the people with God.

And this gave the Hebrews confidence. When they sinned, they had a contact who would go to bat for them. And of all the priests, the one with the most clout was the High Priest. Once a year he entered the holiest room in the Temple to pay off the nation's sin.

Yet as believers in Jesus these Hebrews had turned their back on the priesthood. To the shock of parents and friends they'd thrown away this confidence. They were being asked, "If you no longer reverence the priesthood how do you expect to gain access to God?"

Well, according to verse 14 the Hebrews still had a priest - and not a High Priest, but "a great High Priest."

Jesus entered, not just the earthly Temple, but Heaven itself. These Hebrews had not lost their confidence at all. They'd gained a greater confidence!

He writes in verse 15, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." Unlike the Jewish Priest, Jesus is a perfect priest.

He's God, thus He *clearly represents God's truth*. But He's also man, and *closely understand our needs*.

For years entertainer Bob Hope led trips to Vietnam to humor the troops. Once, reminiscing on his USO shows he made the statement, "All I ever saw was those kids laughing and applauding. I never knew what they were going through until I saw a couple of movies like *'Platoon'* and *'Hamburger Hill'!* What courage they had - and fighting a war we wouldn't let them win."

Unlike Hope's visits to Vietnam, when Jesus visited earth He didn't just stay on stage and entertain.

He invaded the jungle - got into the trenches. He was subjected to the Napalm and sniper fire. He fought the battle as one of the troops, and prevailed - without sin.

Here we're told, Jesus was tempted "in all points" as we are. That means He had an active libido, a curiosity, a temper with a fuse. Jesus was a man, and vulnerable to the temptations of all men. Yet He never caved in!

He was tempted with everything Satan has ever thrown at you or me, yet He never succumbed. He was born sinless,

and stayed sinless, and as a result He is perfectly suited to help us win our struggle for purity.

I've met people who question Jesus's empathy. If the Son of God never sinned, how can He truly understand what I face... the lure of darkness, and the pull of sin?

C.S. Lewis answers this question, "Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. You find out the strength of an army by fighting against it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives into temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later... We never find out the strength of an evil impulse... until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full (extent) what temptation means."

Jesus knows a lot more than we think.

A thin rubber band can be stretched only so far and it snaps. It never experiences a high degree of tension since it snaps before a greater tension can be applied.

But take a thicker rubber band, it can handle more. You can stretch it further because it refuses to break.

So which rubber band feels the greater tension? Obviously, the rubber band that refuses to break.

And the fact Jesus didn't break enabled Him to endure all Satan could muster. We whimper and quibble, "nobody knows what I'm going through..."

Oh, yes they do! **Consider Jesus!** Your temptation is kid's stuff compared to what our Lord endured. He knows your struggle and how you can win the victory.

And since Jesus understands, verse 16, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need..." or literally, "when we need it the most."

God gives us the mercy and grace and comfort and power that we need at the exact moment we need it!

I love this paraphrase of verse 16, "So let's walk right up to Him and get what He is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help." When you go to God you don't have to call ahead and make an appointment.

You can walk right in - not haughtily or rudely - but you can enter God's throne room like you belong! For in Christ you do! Jesus secures us total access!

So let's enter God's presence *unashamedly, unreservedly, uninhibitedly*. We can come to Him just as we are - the sacrifice is *done* - the access is *won*.

Come boldly to God's throne for the help you need and rest for your soul!