

Focusing Our Families on Jesus Part 2

In apostolic times there were those who found it hard to concentrate their minds and their lives on Jesus. Past involvements and memories proved to be strong distractions, especially in times of stress or disillusionment. The *Epistle to the Hebrews*, with its strong emphasis upon the finality of the Christian system as mediated in the Son, was designed to challenge distracted Christians to rivet their eyes on Jesus. They are told not only to **"see"** Him (Hebrews 2:9), but, beyond that, to perceive His significance and His spiritual meaning (Hebrews 3:1). Furthermore, they are urged to make a habit of looking away from all else and focusing exclusively upon Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:2). According to Hebrews, **"looking to Jesus"** is not a Christian option, but an entire way of life.

It ought to be the same today for our Christian families. But the truth is that we, too, are easily distracted; we, too, need reminders to focus habitually on Jesus.

Last week we studied how God gives us families to teach us about life, and that He has determined what the roles are supposed to be within that family unit, beginning with the father as the spiritual head of the household. This week, we have been studying how if you want to get along and have peace within your family, then you have to focus on Jesus Christ.

An old adage states that *the family that prays together, stays together*. Although this is not Scripture, *per se*, it is true, nonetheless. Passage after passage from God's word teaches us the truthfulness of this proverb. Sometimes, it is obvious, such as in the following we read last week from the *Book of Deuteronomy*: **6. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; 7. and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.** (Deuteronomy 6:6-9 [RSV])

Other times, however, God slips in a little nugget or two, such as the passages penned by the hand of the Apostle Paul. These may take a little more discernment on our part to glean the beautiful truths being expressed there, but with a little study we can see they are there, nonetheless, as in the following passage of Scripture: **15. Now, brethren, you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints; 16. I urge you to be subject to such men and to every fellow worker and laborer. 17. I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence; 18. for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such men.** (1 Corinthians 16:15-18 [RSV])

We also have this little nugget from Paul in Romans 16:3-5 [RSV]: **3. Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4. who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I but also all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks; 5. greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ.**

From the above verses we can see how Stephanas behaved as God expects fathers and husbands to behave. He brought his entire household to the Lord. We can also see how much of an asset to Paul was the wife and husband team of Priscilla and Aquila, who risked their own lives in service to Paul. We also learn of the first Asian convert to Christ, a fellow by the name of Epaenetus.

What a great compliment is given by Paul to this man, Stephanas! Stephanas put Jesus first, and he and his family became the first Achaian converts to Christianity. They were instrumental in helping to build up the church, and encourage Paul in his missions. What a great testimonial the Apostle Paul gives regarding the tandem of Priscilla and Aquila! Who knows how much the church would have been damaged without the help these people gave Paul in his darkest hours. But all of these individuals did what they did because they put Jesus first and foremost in their lives. They were focused upon the Lord.

Solomon wrote in Proverbs 22:6 [RSV], **“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”** The family of Timothy, we can see, took this Scripture to heart, and as a result, one of the greatest evangelists the church has ever seen, Timothy, was instrumental in assuring the growth of the church in the first century. Timothy’s mentor, the Apostle Paul, had this to say about his young protégé in 2 Timothy 1:5 [RSV]: **“I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you.”** There are several other times in Paul’s epistles that he mentions about how useful and helpful Timothy was to him in Paul’s service for the Kingdom of God. Because the family of Timothy placed their focus on Jesus Christ, the church, as well as the entire world, have been blessed greatly through the efforts and faith of Timothy, a faith that first resided within his mother and his grandmother.

This morning we looked at the story of Mary and Martha, and Jesus being a guest in their home in Luke 10:38-42. We saw how years of built-up anger and lack of fulfillment erupted from Martha, and she took out her frustrations wrongly on Mary and Jesus. I believe it is fair to say that Martha had a wrong attitude at that time and she should not have compared her life and actions to those of her sister.

The Bible does not say what happened next in the story of Jesus’ visit to the home of Martha. The Bible does tell us, however, that Jesus visited the sisters later. Do you know who was the first to run to Jesus on that occasion? It was

Martha! So it seems like she learned a lesson that it is more important to listen to Jesus than to worry about things.

We can learn from both Mary and Martha, both of whom are women of God. At times, it is important for us to offer our hospitality and take care of guests in our homes. In fact, Paul commands **all** Christians to be hospitable in Romans 12:13, and as for widows to be added to the care and financial responsibility of the church, Paul writes in 1 Timothy 5:9-10 [RSV], **9. Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband; 10. and she must be well attested for her good deeds, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the feet of the saints, relieved the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way.** The Apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 4:9 [RSV], **“Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another.”** The Hebrews writer informs us in Hebrews 13:2 that some of us who have entertained and helped strangers have actually been showing hospitality to angels, unaware that we were doing so. Elders are also especially commanded to show hospitality (1 Timothy 3:2). However, there are times that it is equally important for us to just sit back and relax at the feet of Jesus in order to nourish our spirit, and simply bask in His presence! Martha always gets a lot of criticism when this story is discussed; but I believe her motive was pure. After all, it was Jesus Who was her dinner guest that evening!

I believe I would have been in a flurry, too, and looking for some help with the cooking! It sounds to me like Martha was a "Type A" personality, and Jesus was teaching her to stress less, and rest in His great love for her! I think Jesus would have been happier if Martha would have prepared a simpler meal; so that He could spend more of His time with her!

What a great compliment that still holds true today! Our God wishes to spend time with us personally! To simplify one's life in order to spend more time with Jesus Christ is a treasure, indeed!

Jesus wants us to choose Him over everything else. He wants us to know that He loves us and asks us to listen and obey Him. God's word tells us that we must not compare ourselves to other people, such as when Jesus was talking to Peter about what would happen to him, and what would happen to John later on in their lives in John 21. Instead, we must look and listen to what God wants for us and do it. He will help you love others and become better listeners, just like He did with Martha. We can learn to listen to what God wants and listen to others and tell them about Jesus. When you love a person, you are not jealous of them or compare yourself to them and their circumstances. Love is content with what one has, and not envious or jealous of others (1 Corinthians 13:4).

John the Immerser was a cousin of our Lord, and he was not a jealous man. He and his family were devoted to God and His work. John desired for his own disciples to follow after the Lord. In fact, nothing in this life made John more

pleased than to see his followers become disciples of Jesus Christ. John said in John 3:29-30 [RSV], **29. "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full. 30. He must increase, but I must decrease."**

We can also learn from Scripture just how focused on God was the family of Simon Peter and Andrew. Andrew, who had been a disciple and follower of John, was one of the first, if not **the** first, of John's disciples to begin his life's journey following and being devoted to Jesus. But Andrew did not wish to keep Jesus for himself! The first thing he did upon finding the Messiah was to seek out his own family, and bring them to the Lord. And so we see how Peter was eventually brought to Jesus by Andrew in John 1:35-42 [RSV].

35. The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples; 36. and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" 37. The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

38. Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to Him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are You staying?" 39. He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.

40. One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41. He first found his brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). 42. He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

God's word teaches us that the love we have for one another who are in Christ should be as strong as the love of any two brothers in the flesh. Paul writes in Romans 12:9-10 [RSV], **9. Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10. love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor.** (Romans 12:9-10 [RSV])

No less than its first recipients and readers, our families today need the Christ-centered teaching of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*. To achieve this important and critical focus on Jesus, there is no better place to begin than with a study of the names and titles attributed to Jesus in this epistle.

The most frequent title applied to Jesus in the *Epistle to the Hebrews* is "**High Priest**" (*archiereus*). Taken together with the simpler form, "**priest**" (*hiereus*), the title is used of Jesus thirteen times (Hebrews 2:17; Hebrews 3:1; Hebrews 4:14-15; Hebrews 5:5; Hebrews 5:10; Hebrews 6:20; Hebrews 7:26; Hebrews 8:1; Hebrews 9:11; "**priest**," Hebrews 5:6; Hebrews 7:21; Hebrews 10:21). Only once (Hebrews 3:1) is the definite article used ("**the high priest**"), thus

indicating it is the essential quality or function of priesthood which the author intended to stress as characteristic of Jesus. Nowhere else in the New Testament is Jesus called our High Priest. This, however, is the distinctive feature of Hebrews and the main point of the book (Hebrews 8:1). It is to the *Epistle to the Hebrews* that we owe this potent conceptual imagery, now so familiar to Christian thought.

The doctrine of Jesus' High Priestly ministry is directly bound up with the reality of His humanity, and cannot be understood apart from that doctrine. This becomes particularly evident when reading chapters 2 and 4. This is so because it is the essence of priesthood to form a link between humanity and God. The priests were selected from among human beings to function on their behalf in God-ward matters, to be a conduit between the Almighty and man (Hebrews 5:1). Because Jesus is at the same time both Man and God, He is Himself the perfect ideal of which every form of priesthood is a symbol. He fully represents God to humanity, and humanity to God. Because of this, the writer insists that distraction from Jesus is out of the question, since every alternative is empty by comparison. Jesus' priesthood is better than the Aaronic (Hebrews 5:1-7:28), it is related to a better covenant (Hebrews 8:1-13), it involves a better sanctuary (Hebrews 9:1-12), as well as a better sacrifice (Hebrews 9:13-10:18), and it is based on better promises (Hebrews 10:19-12:3). In fact, the Christian's sole confidence in addressing God is that, and only that, he has **"a Great Priest over the house of God"** (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Therefore, when we see Jesus we see our High Priest. We see accomplished in Him God's ideal for humankind, the ideal union between God and humanity (Hebrews 2:10ff). We see Him Whose perfect humanity makes representation for us before God (Hebrews 7:24-25), and Whose perfect sacrifice makes us pure for personal access to the throne room itself (Hebrews 9:14; Hebrews 10:19-22).

The second most frequent title for Jesus in Hebrews is the designation, **"Son"** (*huios*; used eleven times). Indeed, it may be said that this concept colors all the others, for again and again it is precisely because Jesus is Son that the other titles and functions have special meaning for us. For example, Hebrews 5:8-9 tells us, **"Although He was a Son He learned obedience through what He suffered. . . ."**

"Son" in chapter 1 shows us the deity of Jesus: He is the radiance of God's glory and the exact reproduction of God's essence (Hebrews 1:3). What makes God, God, is characteristic of Jesus and is inferred in the title **"Son"** (compare to Colossians 2:9).

In chapter 2 Jesus is viewed from an earthly perspective as Son of Man. As in relation to God, so here in relation to men and women, the Semitic expression "son of . . ." is designed to establish Jesus' character and definitive quality. What

makes a human being to be a human being is characteristic of Jesus (Hebrews 2:10-17).

What this means is that, on the one hand, Jesus is not merely a good man pretending to be deity; He is Immanuel, "**God with us**" (Matthew 1:23). On the other hand, it means Jesus is not God pretending to be human; He is a real human being. We do God no service attempting to safeguard Jesus' deity by denying or minimizing His humanity. It is worth remembering that the first Christological heresy in the early church was not the denial of the deity, but the humanity, of Christ (that is, Docetism). This heresy claims that Jesus could not have come in the flesh, for all flesh is sinful, and only spirit is good. Docetism is merely an offshoot, a by-product, of Gnosticism. Nor should we forget that subsequent history is full of well-meaning people who stressed one side of Jesus' nature at the expense of the other, and whose distorted systems are correspondingly impoverished and false. Hebrews insists Jesus can never be merely one or the other. He is both.

At its simplest, that which distinguished the church from the synagogue was precisely this: The church held Jesus to be the Messiah and claimed that in Him the new age had dawned. How thrilling it must have been to first-century Jewish Christians to see in Jesus their dreams and hopes come true, their long-awaited Christ! How incredible that any should "**neglect so great salvation**" (Hebrews 2:3), or "**reject Him Who warns from Heaven**" (Hebrews 12:25). Yet this epistle was sent because distracted Jewish Christians needed to learn again to focus on Jesus. We need to be sure that our families and we do not become too distracted ourselves from Jesus Christ, and remember to always keep Him in focus.

In Hebrews, the focus of which is upon the exalted, heavenly ministry of Christ, there is no loss of the historical Jesus, nothing but the closest continuity between the pre-existent, historic, and the exalted Christ. In Hebrews, this concept is succinctly stated as "**Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever**" (Hebrews 13:8).

I want to end by making another observation about Jesus and Martha. I think Jesus *liked* her, in fact, I think He *loved* her deeply. I say that because the next time we meet Martha in the Scriptures she is "having a go" at Jesus again. Her brother Lazarus had died, and she said, "**If You had gotten here earlier my brother would not have died.**" This time, however, there was no clever reply from Jesus. This time, seeing how sad and sorry she was at losing a brother she loved, *Jesus wept*. He cried with her. And for all of us who feel like we are Marthas from time to time, I think that is good news.

Jesus, who knows us very well, *likes* us, He *loves* us, and when we share our hurts with Him, He *cries with us*, too. How comforting a thought is that!