



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

January 28, 2024

Pastor James Enderle

3rd Sunday after Epiphany

First Lesson: [Deuteronomy 18:15-20](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 1

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Hebrews 3:1-6](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Mark 1:21-28](#)

From Jordan's Shore to Mountain's Glory: Committed to a Lofty Charge Fix Your Thoughts on Jesus

1. _____ **abound**
2. **Jesus is the** _____
3. _____ **abound**
4. **Jesus has made you** _____ **of His** _____

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

We've only got three games left in the football season. I know many fans here, if things turned out a little bit different last week, would be a little bit more excited for the last few games. The Packers did pretty well. I know that if there was another pastor up here, he'd probably be wearing blue and a Lions tie. I think he probably had to leave from the Lambeau area for the Detroit Lions to get good at playing, and especially if they win next week. What would that be like?

Something fascinating with football is one of the best things that can happen is when you are watching and a play starts. You start following where the camera is and all of a sudden the camera jerks around because it's misdirected. The play starts and a lot of times the teams want to have this misdirection, these distractions, to get people off and to think that the ball is one place and not in another place. In football, if you can get a defensive player to take the wrong step and to be off by a half-second, you can get by and get those extra yards and be off to the races. In football, we know that distractions can be good on offense as you are trying to distract that defense.

But what about in the rest of life; are distractions good? When we talk about God's authority and the authority of Jesus, we are going to hear about the encouragement the

writer of the Hebrews has when he says to **fix your thoughts on Jesus**. Why do we need to fix our thoughts on Jesus? How do you feel in the world today? Do you feel that it's easy to focus? Do you feel that all the things you want to get done and all the things you want to focus on are so easy to do? Or do you feel that *distractions abound*? I would say that they do. Distractions are all around us. They are abounding.

In some studies that were done in 2011 (so already 10 years ago), they said that we were consuming five-times as much information in a day than we did in 1986. So a little over 25 years ago, we were getting five-times more information than in 1986; if that's on TV, on your phone, on podcasts, on whatever else, it was five-times more information in a day. They say today that we pretty much get as much information that is like 174 newspapers. Back in the day you opened up one newspaper. You might sit there and enjoy it for a little while, but we're so inundated with information. What does that cause? It causes us to be stressed out. It causes us to struggle in what to prioritize. We're worse in processing and we're abounding with so much information. How do we know what is good and right? Then you think about your phone and how many times it buzzes and how many times we pick it up. We need that to get so much done, but it's filled with so many distractions.

We can say that it's probably much worse than it used to be when it comes to distractions, but the truth is, it's not like there have never been distractions. For the writer to the Hebrews, what he was writing to them about in this section is to encourage them to not be distracted by other good things. They knew of all these other Old Testament things and all these traditions that were not bad things, but in some ways, they were distractions.

In the Book of Hebrews, over and over again the writer is saying Jesus is greater. What is He greater than? He's greater than those other things, even though they are good; like angels. You can think you understand why they revered angels and even the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament. We even say the Angel of the Lord is maybe the pre-incarnate Christ. So you can put angels up high but none are like Jesus. They put up the patriarchs, like Abraham and King David. They thought King David was so great. The writer says, "Didn't David die? And he didn't rise again like Jesus did and Jesus sits on this throne forever." They were thinking of going back to sacrifices and they thought *"I believe in Jesus but you know what? Maybe I should do these sacrifices. Maybe I should do this little thing that will make me right and good with God. God will smile on me a little bit more if I do those Old Testament sacrifices."* He was saying, "No! Jesus is greater."

He gets to our section here where he says Moses is pretty great. He talks about how Moses was faithful. We know that. On Thursday afternoon, we had our English class. We study a Bible lesson every time and we talked about the birth of Moses. Think about the life of Moses and how awesome his life was; how God protected him; how he was

raised in the house of Pharaoh; how he foolishly thought he could save an Israelite and then had to leave Egypt. Then God called him and he came back and he helped the Israelites leave Egypt through the Ten Plagues and the Passover. Then he wrote the first five books of the Bible. Moses is pretty awesome. The writer of Hebrews is not saying Moses is not awesome. He is saying yes, he is faithful, but he was part of that house that God created. The writer is saying Jesus is greater because even though we should honor Moses, he says, ***just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself.*** He is saying *Jesus is the great builder.* Moses was a part of that house and got to be in it, but Jesus is so much greater.

We know all the things that He did and that He is God. He has been around from eternity. In those first pages of Scripture when God says "Let us make man in our image" ([Genesis 1:26](#)) (talking about the Trinity), and John tells us how this is seen even more in the beginning of the Gospel of John. ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made...*** ([John 1:1-3](#)) Jesus helped make the universe. As God spoke, Jesus created this world.

Not only did He create the world but He is also the foundation of the Church. Scripture says in Ephesians 2 that we are ***built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.*** ([Ephesians 2:20](#)) Now we use cornerstones as decorations. That piece usually isn't even a cornerstone anymore. It's a place to stand out. But back then, cornerstones were essential. They had to be placed in the right place and be strong and level. If not, then the building wouldn't come out right and everything else afterwards would be a mess. We're built on the cornerstone of Christ and He is the builder of this house, the Church, because of what He has done. He came incarnate. He came to live as one of us. He came down from heaven to be tempted in every way that we are. He came to go to the cross and to die for you and for me so that our sins would be forgiven and then to rise from the dead so that each and every one of us knows that our sins are forgiven and we, too, will see heaven. Not because of what we have done in that house but because of what Christ has done.

Do you notice that in this where we talk about the great honor that Christ is we talk about how He became one of us and was tempted in every way that we are. It's important that we talk about this, how faithful Jesus was in that. As we talk about the temptations that are around, *temptations abound* in the same way that distractions abound.

How are they different? Distractions aren't just all bad things. Distractions can be all sorts of good things in your life. Work is a blessing. God gives us work to provide for our families. It's needed and it's necessary. Sports are fun. Sports are great and are good for teamwork and to bring people together and bring great joy. Our hobbies—it's good to have hobbies. But think of all the things that can fill our lives so that we don't

keep our thoughts on Jesus. I'm not saying to not do those things, but am I giving time to God? Who can really be the judge of that? I think that is you. Are you like that tree planted by streams of water that Psalm 1 talked about? Or does it feel like you're straying because of other things?

When we talk about temptations, it's important to see that there are many things trying to lead us away from God. The devil wants to use all sorts of things. One of the biggest things he tries to do is to convince us that he is not real, that there is not a struggle, that there isn't this spiritual battle going on. But there are so many things out in the world.

There are distractions that are good and great, but then there are temptations that are saying Jesus isn't important. What God says in His Word that we say has authority and power, "That's old fashioned. That's not necessary. That's manmade. Trust in yourself. You don't need Jesus. You don't need church. You don't need other Christians in your life." All those temptations abound and it's a struggle. One of the things that we need to see is that the devil is real and he is going to tempt us.

One of the books that we're going to start reading on Sunday night (as soon as we finish Hidden Christmas) is a book called The Screwtape Letters. It's a fun one and it's going to be fun to read during the season of Lent. It talks about a demon and one of his understudies as they are trying to tempt someone and all the different ways that they try to get them to be distracted and to not follow Jesus.

It's easy to get overwhelmed by those things. But what I want you to remember is that Jesus is greater. Whatever the distraction, whatever the thing that you might think is the greatest in your life; it might be a distraction if you can't say Jesus is greater than that thing. If I would rather go and do that thing, if that thing is more important (or that person), then maybe it's a distraction that is hurting your faith, or a temptation, or a struggle in your life, like a sickness or a loss or a financial fear or all of the fears that the devil might put in your life to say "Jesus doesn't love you," "God doesn't love you," "God isn't taking care of you." In the same way that we should put those things we like and say Jesus is greater than those, put those fears, those temptations and know that Jesus is greater. When I have fallen into sin, when I fall into temptation again and again, Jesus is greater. Why? He is greater because He was tempted in every way that we are but He was faithful. So we can lean on Him and trust in Him and His Word. That's what it means that He is the Great High Priest; greater than Moses; greater than any of the things of the Old Testament, because He is our God, who lived for you perfectly. Then He took your sins to the cross and died for you.

So what does that make us? It makes us part of His house. *Jesus has made you part of His house by what He has done. It says, "**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.**"* When we talk about hope and confidence as Christians, is it

a hope as in “I hope my team wins” or “I hope the weather warms up”? Not at all! It’s not a wish or an uncertainty. As Verse 6 says, it’s a confidence and a hope of something that we know to be true but we just haven’t taken hold of yet. We know we are a part of Jesus household. Why? Not because of what I do or what I must continue to do but because of what God has done for me. What Christ has done and how He has welcomed me into His family, through baptism, how He washes away my sins. How Christ has done all these things to give us His Word and His Holy Spirit to welcome us into His family. We are a part of His house and that confidence helps us to know that He is greater than all things.

As we focus on His Word, we can get rid of some of those distractions and focus on our two-year reading plan, to be in His Word every day; to have those spiritual conversations with your friends and family; to be encouraged in the Gospel; and to hear the Words “You are forgiven and you are loved and Jesus is greater than that distraction and temptation.” So fix your eyes and thoughts on Jesus.

This is what the writer of Hebrews ends the book with: ***And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*** [\(Hebrews 12:1-2\)](#) So trust in your Lord, the one who is our builder of this house, of this world. He sits in authority at God’s right hand, guiding all things and showing His love and mercy to you. So fix your thoughts and eyes on Christ, your Savior. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.