

Hebrews

Harden Not Your Hearts

Hebrews 3:7-19

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CONCLUSION:

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INTRODUCTION:

As we have already been reminded, the Book of Hebrews was written with three groups of Jews in mind. Parts of it are directed to new believing Christians. Parts of it are directed to Christians who have an intellectual understanding of the gospel, but have not committed themselves to Christ. And parts of it are directed to the unbelievers.

Last week in verses 1-6 the passage was written to "holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling". This, of course, was directed at the new believing Christians. In our passage this morning, verse 12 tells us that it is being written to the "brethren" with "an unbelieving heart". This would be those who have an intellectual understanding of the gospel, but have not committed themselves to Christ.

And, you know, there are many people like that. There are many people who intellectually have responded to the gospel. They believe it, but they have never committed themselves to that faith. They have never gone all the way to commitment to Jesus Christ, accepting Him as Savior and Lord, repenting from their sins, and turning fully and whole heartedly to Him.

And so verses 7 to 19 then are the Holy Spirit's warning to the one who knows the gospel, who knows the truth, but because of the love of sin and the fear of persecution or whatever it may be, but has not committed himself to the truth that he knows is real.

ILLUSTRATION:

It is as if there is a fire in a hotel and you are on the tenth floor, and the firemen below are yelling, "Jump!" because there is a net available below them. So you look out the window and you cannot decide whether you should trust yourself to those firemen. The fire is moving through the apartment and you have to make a quick decision. But rather than commit yourself to the trust of those firemen and jump out, you are concerned with being able to hang onto your possessions, so you grab them, hoping you can escape by running down the stairs and you are consumed in the fire.

This is the Holy Spirit saying, in this passage, at the top of His voice, "Jump!" This is the Spirit of God moving on those hearts who know the truth. But as of yet they have been unwilling to give up their love of their possessions or have decided to try to use their own plans and ability to escape. And in the end they learn that there is no escape unless you jump in total faith committing yourself to Jesus Christ.

Now in order to get this warning across, the Holy Spirit uses an Old Testament account, because He knows He is talking to Jews and He wants to talk to them in a way that they

can relate to. And since Moses is already the subject of the passage in verses 1 to 6, He uses the experience of Moses to show the devastating results of unbelief.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Hebrews 3:7-19 (NASB95)

⁷ Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says,

“Today if you hear His voice, ⁸ Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, As in the day of trial in the wilderness, ⁹ Where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, And saw My works for forty years. ¹⁰ “Therefore I was angry with this generation, And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, And they did not know My ways’; ¹¹ As I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’”

¹² Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, ¹⁵ while it is said,

“Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me.”

¹⁶ For who provoked *Him* when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt *led* by Moses? ¹⁷ And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

Prayer

Once again the author of Hebrews uses the Old Testament to make his point. Verses 7-11 is taken directly from Psalm 95. Follow along in Hebrews as I read from Psalms.

Psalm 95:7b-11 (NASB95)

...Today, if you would hear His voice, ⁸ Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness, ⁹ “When your fathers tested Me, They tried Me, though they had seen My work. ¹⁰ “For forty years I loathed *that* generation, And said they are a people who err in their heart, And they do not know My ways. ¹¹ “Therefore I swore in My anger, Truly they shall not enter into My rest.”

The Jews would have known the story of Moses very well.

The Israelite are in captivity in the land of Egypt. They have been there 400 years making bricks. It even so rough that Pharaoh made them make bricks with no straw, and the straw was what held them together. They were oppressed, they were beaten, and so God brought in plagues. And they finally ended with the death of the first born – a great miracle.

Finally, Pharaoh relented and said, I can't take the plagues any longer.” “Get out of my sight! I have had it with you.” So Moses gathered them all together and he led them out of the land of Egypt.

But, as we know, Pharaoh decided to change his mind and took out after them. And God said to Moses, "You have a problem. The Red Sea is in front of you, Pharaoh is closing in on you. and you do not have a fleet of ultra large ships to take all of you across.

So God said, “Moses, there is only one thing you can do; just ask the Red Sea to part.” And Moses said, “Okay.” And the Red Sea parted. And the children of Israel walked across on dry land. Pharaoh thought, “That looks easy,” and marched his whole army in there, and the Red Sea closed on them and destroyed them all. God continued to work miracle, after miracle, after miracle. And they got in the wilderness, and immediately they did not believe God. That is a classic illustration of unbelief in the face of overwhelming evidence. God had revealed Himself. They knew the truth of His revelation. They saw all the miracles and yet they did not believe. They would not commit themselves to faith in God. And so they as a result they had to wander and wander for 40 years in the wilderness. And because of their unbelief and their constant grumbling, that generation died in the wilderness and were not allowed to enter the promised land.

So just as David warned the people of his day by saying, “Do not harden your heart against God like Israel did in the wilderness”, now the writer of Hebrews is saying the same to his audience and the Holy Spirit is telling **us** the same message.

Many of us today are just like the Israelites, we refuse to believe God. That is the character of unbelief, it never has enough proof. You do not need more proof about whether God is real. You do not need more proof about whether Jesus is real. You need to come to the place in your life where you hate your sin enough to commit to yourself to what you know is the truth. As long as you keep putting God to the test you are never going to know the truth and you too, will not be allowed to enter the promised land.

So they had failed to believe God’s promise. God had given them enough evidence to convince anybody ten times over. But they loved their sin, they loved their selfishness, they loved their own plans and their own ideas, and they would not put themselves in God’s hands.

We have just seen the illustration from the story of Moses of the necessity to believe and not allow our hearts to be hardened by disbelief. So the Holy Spirit is going to encourage those who are on the fence to "consider Jesus" and believe in verses 12-19. This passage breaks down into three parts.

The invitation to take heed. The instruction to exhort one another. And the issue of unbelief.

BODY:

I. The Invitation to Take Heed.

Hebrews 3:12 (NASB95)

12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

After using an illustration from thousands of years ago, the Holy Spirit now says, “Now I’m talking to **you**. Examine your own hearts.” Do you know the truth of Jesus Christ? Do not allow yourself to harden your heart and lose your salvation.

You may ask, “What is an evil heart of unbelief?” Well, it is the greatest evil in the world. But it is not murder, immorality, unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, or gossip. **It is unbelief!** Failure to believe and trust God. That is

the greatest sin you can ever commit. That is because it locks you out of God's blessing forever, an evil heart of unbelief.

Hebrews 6:4-6 (NASB95)

⁴ For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

The Holy Spirit is saying to everyone who hears the Gospel: "Respond to Jesus while your heart is still warmed and softened by His truth, while it is still sensitive. Respond to His sweet love and His call of grace. If you wait too long you will find your heart getting hard and insensitive. The decision will become harder and harder as your heart becomes harder and harder. If you continue to follow your evil, unbelieving heart rather than the Gospel, you will forever be separated from the living God and forfeit your salvation."

II. The Instruction to Exhort One Another.

Then there comes the instruction to exhort one another.

Hebrews 3:13-17 (NASB95)

¹³ But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

So the recipients of this letter are urged to exhort one another. They are to quit rejecting the Messiah and falling back, but beg one another to come to Christ. The apostle Paul was not ashamed to beg people to come to Jesus Christ at all and we must not be either.

2 Corinthians 5:20-21 (NASB95)

²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Sin is so tricky. Sin always masks the reality of itself and makes it look acceptable. Men's hearts get hard on the inside and they do not even realize it. You can hear the gospel of Jesus Christ time and time again and not respond. Often you want to be self-sufficient. I am citizen number one. I give to The Red Cross. I have good morals. I do not steal or commit murder. I take care of my pet dogs, and I give sugar to my neighbor. What is the deal?

Since when do I need this?" And that is what sin will tell you;. It is the biggest lie sin can possibly tell you, it is deceit.

John 6:64-68 (NASB95)

⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. ⁶⁵ And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."

⁶⁶ As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.

How many people I have met, how many you have met who affirmed an initial confidence in Christ, and they appear to come to Him; but it is not real. They are never at prayer time. They are never desirous of witnessing and sharing Christ. They do not want anything to do with family worship. They seldom or never read the Scripture. They never talk about the things of God, that is foreign to their conversation. And they walk in a worldly pattern and yet they claim to be Christians.

So, how many people claim to be Christian but are only pretenders? According to Matthew there are a lot of them.

Matthew 7:21-23 (NASB95)

²¹ “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. ²² **Many** will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’

And so the Word of God says, “**But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today”.**”

We do not know how much time is included in "Today", because we do not know how long we have to live or how long God will put up with our disbelief and non-committal. "Today" is the time of opportunity that we have to hear and obey the gospel. It is also the time set by God for entering his rest. For the world as a whole, today continues until Christ comes again.

Hebrews 3:14 (NASB95)

¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,

Some people might say, “Well, wait a minute, I do believe all that stuff. I come to church regularly. I am an all-around good guy.”

But he says, “That is not enough, because if you really believe it and you have committed your life to it, the evidence will be the fact that when it is all over and the day ends you will still be there.” What is the greatest proof that somebody is really a believer? Remaining faithful.

Thus we are to exhort one another to true faith while it is still day.

Hebrews 3:16-17 (NASB95)

¹⁶ For who provoked *Him* when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt *led* by Moses? ¹⁷ And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?

Who was God angry with for forty years? God was angry with the whole group of Israelites because they continued to be unbelieving. God was angry with a whole generation of

people, and He sentenced everyone that left Egypt and was 20 years old and older to die in the wilderness except for Caleb and Joshua.

The warning is that if God judged apostate unbelief in the wilderness, He will judge it yet today. They rejected the evidence of plagues that they had seen in Egypt, the evidence they had seen in the Exodus being led by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night and the crossing of the Red Sea on dry ground, and the drowning of Pharaoh's army, and the 40 years of evidence in the wilderness where they were given manna, quail, and water. We must not continue to reject the evidence of Christ and all He has done for us.

III. The Issue of Unbelief.

Hebrews 3:18-19 (NASB95)

¹⁸ And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

So we see that they could not enter in because of” – what? - “**unbelief.**” We are saved by faith.

There will be many who will say, "I cannot believe. I have one of those pragmatic, minds that has to see the facts." And I say, "That is ridiculous. Everybody lives by faith."

ILLUSTRATION:

We live by faith when we go into a restaurant and eat the food without questioning its safety. When driving down the highway, we are not in constant fear that around the next bend the road will lead us into a river where there is no bridge. We trust the people who made the highway and the people who have traveled this same stretch of highway before us. We live by faith almost constantly. If we can put our faith in the highway department and the people who prepare our food, we surely can put our faith in the God of the universe. He is worth your faith.

CONCLUSION:

If the evidence was manifested to the Israelites in their day, then the evidence is there for us today that Jesus Christ is Lord, is it not? The evidence that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that died on the cross and rose again the third day, and he arose from the grave and lives and saves men. The evidence is in. The evidence is secure. Christ has manifested God, the only begotten Son of the Father. He hath declared Him. He has displayed His love. He has displayed His grace. He sent the Holy Spirit. We do not need any human Moses. We have the third person of the Trinity to reveal Christ on top of all historical evidence; and unbelief in the face of such overwhelming evidence is unacceptable to God. And so He says to these Hebrews who know the gospel and have even made an intellectual understanding of the gospel, “Do not harden your hearts.” It is so easy to grow cold and to grow callous to what God is trying to do in your life.

You harden your heart only so far and that is when today is over. Did you get that? You can stand on the verge of receiving Jesus Christ for only so long and one day God is just going to say, “You have had enough evidence, my friend. From now on it is over. It is not today, it is tomorrow. You shall **not** see My Promised Land.” And that is why the Bible says, “Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”

What A Day That Will Be.