



## The Book of Hebrews

Verses 3:7-19

May 27, 2018

Last week, we covered verses 1-6 of Hebrews 3. We studied how the writer of Hebrews explained that even though Moses was a great man who faithfully served God there was one who was so much greater, Jesus Christ. Just as the builder is so much greater than the house, Jesus deserves far more glory than Moses. For while Moses was but a servant in God's house, Jesus is the Son of the most high God.

Today, we continue reading the next 13 verses from Hebrews 3. Before we get to those verses, I would like to read a related passage from Psalms. This passage directly relates to the verses we'll be studying in Hebrews today.

**Psalm 95:7-11** – <sup>7</sup>for he is our God. We are the people he watches over, the flock under his care. If only you would listen to his voice today! <sup>8</sup>The LORD says, "Don't harden your hearts as Israel did at Meribah, as they did at Massah in the wilderness. <sup>9</sup>For there your ancestors tested and tried my patience, even though they saw everything I did. <sup>10</sup>For forty years I was angry with them, and I said, 'They are a people whose hearts turn away from me. They refuse to do what I tell them.' <sup>11</sup>So in my anger I took an oath: 'They will never enter my place of rest.'"

It's interesting to note how in Numbers 20:13 it explains why Meribah was named as such:

**Numbers 20:13** – <sup>13</sup>This place was known as the waters of Meribah (which means "arguing") because there the people of Israel argued with the LORD, and there he demonstrated his holiness among them.

The Israelites, not unlike people of today, were a fickle people with short memories of how God had blessed them. With each new trial they faced, it was like God had never helped them before, like He had not delivered them from their slavery in Egypt, split the Red Sea so they could escape Pharaoh's army and then drown the pursuing soldiers after them, or fed them manna from Heaven. With that in mind, let's move onto today's main scriptures.

**Hebrews 3:7-11** – <sup>7</sup>That is why the Holy Spirit says, "Today when you hear his voice, <sup>8</sup>don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled, when they tested me in the wilderness. <sup>9</sup>There your ancestors tested and tried my patience, even though they saw my miracles for forty years. <sup>10</sup>So I was angry with them, and I said, 'Their hearts always turn away from me. They refuse to do what I tell them.' <sup>11</sup>So in my anger I took an oath: 'They will never enter my place of rest.'"

You will notice here that the Holy Spirit is the one speaking. It is a rare occurrence and one to which we should pay close attention when it happens. The first words spoken by the Spirit include *“don’t harden your hearts as Israel did.”*

You will recall that last week we did an in-depth look at verses 1-6. We were reminded that the audience here are Jewish Christians. Israel had a long (and checkered) history serving God as His chosen people. The Jewish people took great pride in this and cherished this fact. However, as we are reminded above their service has rarely been stellar and has often been turbulent. The Holy Spirit reminds them here of that fact. He’s reminding them of how they’ve strayed in the past, and more importantly, how God chastised them for it.

When we take pride in our past actions we tend to emulate those actions going forward. That can sometimes be a good thing but it can also be quite a bad thing when that pride becomes haughty and causes us to think more highly of ourselves than we should.

In these first five of today’s verses, the Holy Spirit is lamenting how we humans, even as we witness the miracles that God performs, can still harden our hearts and turn away from God or resist His will. This illustrates a couple of points.

The first point illustrated is how God allows us to choose our devotion to Him. God wants us to serve Him but He doesn’t force us to do it. However, God will not be mocked! We have been forewarned in the Book of Revelation that for either path that we choose, we will answer for that choice at the great Judgment Seat.

The second point to note is the great stubbornness with which we humans can react. Even when faced with the obvious truth, based on the miracles they witnessed for *forty years*, they would still constantly turn their hearts away from Him.

**Hebrews 3:12-13** – <sup>12</sup>*Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God.* <sup>13</sup>*You must warn each other every day, while it is still “today,” so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God.*

We are being admonished here today to look inwardly at our own motives and ambitions. That is not something that is really encouraged today. When something bad happens in our lives today we immediately look for some other reason or person on which to put the blame, *“it’s not my fault!”*

We are also encouraged to warn each other lest we fall. However, when some well-meaning friend or loved one tries to warn us of actions we should not be doing we often bristle and respond *“mind their own business”* or *“who are you to tell me what to do”* rather than contemplating what is being said. Of course, offering corrective advice for someone else’s actions is something for which we must be very careful doing as Jesus warns us in Matthew:

**Matthew 7:5** – <sup>5</sup>*Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.*

Anyway, succumbing to sin is not usually something that happens immediately. It happens a little bit at a time. I am reminded of one of the old-time water pumps like you would once find on farms. When new, the handle moves freely and water easily flows from the pump. But, with exposure to the elements over time, rust begins to form on the metal. Little spots first form here and there where water has collected on the pump. But over time, the rust spreads to every part of the pump until the day arrives where the pump handle seizes up and

water can no longer be pumped through. It's lost its ability to perform its designed purpose. It's become worthless. We must be wary that this doesn't happen to us.

**Hebrews 3:14-19** – <sup>14</sup>For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ. <sup>15</sup>Remember what it says:

*“Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled.”*

<sup>16</sup>And who was it who rebelled against God, even though they heard his voice? Wasn't it the people Moses led out of Egypt? <sup>17</sup>And who made God angry for forty years? Wasn't it the people who sinned, whose corpses lay in the wilderness? <sup>18</sup>And to whom was God speaking when he took an oath that they would never enter his rest? Wasn't it the people who disobeyed him? <sup>19</sup>So we see that because of their unbelief they were not able to enter his rest.

The statements made in first five verses are so important that they are repeated here again but re-phrased as questions to the crowd. Many times when statements are made by someone we may hear them but they float on by and don't really “stick” in our heads and are quickly forgotten. However, when someone asks you a question about something they just said, it makes you think deeper and reflect on what was just said so that you can answer. The writer does this here to get the people to think about and learn from the mistakes of their ancestors.

Questions For Discussion:

1. What exactly does the term “harden your hearts” mean?
2. There are many scriptural references that mention God hardening the hearts of some men (like Pharaoh). What is the difference in the two?
3. Have you ever hardened your heart? Give some examples of someone hardening their heart.
4. Have you ever suffered God's discipline for disobeying His will for you?
5. How do we tell the difference in God disciplining us and God growing our faith?
6. How do we get back to where we should be after we realize that our hearts are hardened?
7. How can we “warn each other” without offending one another when one is straying from God?