

A Study of the Book of Hebrews

Jesus is Better

Sermon # 6

“The Danger of Hardening Your Heart!”

Hebrews 3:7-19

Why is it that we as people have so much trouble heeding warnings? Sometimes it is because we misunderstand.

Such is the case with the story that “Some time ago, zoo officials in Kirby, England, had to pay visitors for articles stolen by monkeys. But what puzzled them was the favorite item the animals snatched: Eyeglasses. An investigation revealed the reason. The monkeys grabbed the glasses when visitors leaned over to read a small sign on the wall of the cage. The sign said: “Beware! These monkeys steal spectacles.” [Leo Van Dolson. Vibrant Life - www.bible.org/illus./danger]

But often the problem is not a due to misunderstanding but ignoring the warning. What do you do when you see the a sign posted saying, “Do not touch, wet paint?” “ I don’t know about you but I always feel compelled to see if it is still wet.” But not paying attention to warnings is danger thing!

“Many residents of Washington remember exactly where they were and what they were doing on the morning Mount St. Helen’s blew wide-open. The shock wave rattled windows for hundreds of miles around.

Prior to the eruption, scientists monitoring the peak didn’t know when it would go off or how big the blast would be. But all the signs of a live volcano were evident. It was just a matter of time.

Local media issued warnings and faith-fully reported St. Helen's vital signs. But as time elapsed and the big eruption did not occur, people became less wary and more bold. Campers, photographers, and others moved in to get a closer look.

Then on May 18, 1980, the mountain that had been dormant since 1857 spewed ash skyward and killed at least thirty people. They had failed to heed warnings, and they died needlessly." [Christine Dallman, The

Quiet Hour, December, 1997, February, 1998, p. 77 - www.bible.org/illus/warnings]

Today we are going to look at the second of two warnings found in the letter to the Hebrews, the first in (2:1-4) pointed out the danger of drifting and now he points out the danger of doubting. Our danger today is not that in giving in to pressure to return to some previously held belief, but many church members do have to fight the temptation to live lives that are essentially no different than the non-Christians around them! Let's not be guilty of ignoring the warning today!

First, A Warning to Hear (v. 7)

"Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice."

"Today" is emphatic. "Today" God is speaking through a greater someone than Moses, and today God expects us to respond. The writer is reminding us that Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, has a relevant message and demands a present hearing. He knew that human tendency to delay.. to procrastinate especially it seems with spiritual matters. So he repeats three times "Today..(v. 7) Today...(v. 13) Today.... (v.14)"

"Today," of course indicates urgency.

It does not necessarily mean a 24 hour period but rather it means "now!" In other words it refers to this present moment in time. In (2 Cor. 6:2) the Apostle Paul stated, "... Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." *The time to respond to God is always, now!*

The problem begins when we hear the word of God, feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit and tell ourselves that we need to take action. But then we do nothing! We tend to procrastinate with the most important issues of life. But the warning that runs through out this section of the letter is that if we fail to follow through when challenged by the word of God, we face the inevitable hardening that occurs when we hear and fail to respond. The heart gets harder every time we say "no" to Jesus or to any part of His truth or will.

If we are tempted to put off our spiritual need ...this scripture warns us of the danger of foolish choices and encourages us not to miss out on what God has for us... not to make light of each spiritual opportunity He sets before us.

"D. L. Moody called it the biggest blunder of his life. It happened on October 8, 1871, during a preaching series in Farwell Hall, Chicago. His text was "What then shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ." At the conclusion of the sermon Moody said he would give the people one week to make up their minds about Jesus. He then turned to Ira Sankey for a solo, and Sankey sang "Today the Savior Calls." But by the third verse Sankey's voice was drowned out by the noise outside the hall. The great Chicago fire had begun, and the flames were even then sweeping toward the Hall. The clanging of the fire

bells and the noise of the engines made it impossible to continue the meeting. In the years that followed, Moody wished that he had called for an immediate decision for Christ." [The Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching &

Preachers, W. Wiersbe, p. 198 - www.bible.org/illus/Hebrews]

Not Only A Warning to Hear but...

Secondly, An Example to Heed (vv. 8-11)

Hebrews 3:8–11 interprets Psalm 95:7-11, and Israel is given to us as an example. Let's consider this for a moment. In the long history of this earth, no migration of any people started so well, and with such great expectations, as Israel's Exodus from Egypt. After being in slavery in Egypt for 430 years, God led them out with a mighty hand. Moses, God's spokesman, delivered the ultimatum to Pharaoh, "*Let My People Go!*" (Exodus 5:1). And after a series of deadly plagues, culminating in the death of every first-born child among the Egyptians, Pharaoh finally relents (Ex. 6-12). No sooner had Israel stepped into the wilderness to begin the journey than God provided an immense pillar of cloud to lead the way by day, and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21).

As soon as the Israelites left, Pharaoh changed his mind and set out in pursuit with his army of chariots. Israel watched in amazement as God opened the Red Sea and allowed them to cross over on dry land and drowned Pharaoh's complete army (Ex 14). Yet no sooner had they celebrated the victory over the Lord's mighty deliverance than they began to grumble and complain.

In verses eight and nine the writer tells us how Israel provoked God. "*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 having a grateful heart for the astounding deliverance and limitless provisions of God, there was a settled attitude of compliant *because everything did not go exactly as they desired each day*. They grumbled about the Manna so God gave them meat. They grumbled about water so God gave them water. But the pinnacle of their provoking of the Lord came when with their catastrophic unbelief when they got to the edge of the Promised land. (Numbers 14). Twelve spies were sent into the land to see what they were up against. Ten spies came back with a negative report that they could not take the land. That night unbelief was rampant in the camp. All the people wept. One after another men rose to demand new leadership and a return to Egypt (14:4). And Caleb and Joshua gave a positive report and urged the people to go up at once and possess the land, the people sought to stone them. When they refused to obey the Lord, he pronounced his judgment upon them.

In verses ten and eleven the writer tells us how Israel was punished by God. *"Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.' (11) So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest."*

Just as the Egyptians got over their fear of God, the Israelites quickly got over their trust of God. Their unbelief cost them everything. As a result they missed out on the blessing of God in the here and now and eternally. The generation of Israel that came out of

Egypt doubted God, and because of their doubt they never entered the land of Canaan.

After they left Sinai, an eleven-day journey could have gotten them into the Promised Land. The people of Israel wandered in the wilderness because they did not have faith to enter the Promised Land. Canaan does not represent heaven; it represents the place of spiritual blessing and victory. They believed Him enough to come out of Egypt, but not enough to enter Canaan. They didn't believe God enough to enter into the land of promise.

The forty years in wilderness became a forty-year long funeral procession! They died at an average of almost ninety deaths a day, until all of that generation that left Egypt (except Caleb and Joshua) died out! Of the 600,000 men who began the journey to the Promised land, only two men ever got there and that forty years later.

The rebellious generation of Israel that died in the wilderness is cited to the Hebrew believers in the New Testament days as a warning not to repeat their sin.

They did not have the faith to trust God for the future. The writer of this Hebrew epistle is speaking to those who are already saved but have not entered into the blessings of the Christian life. They doubt God, and as a result they are having a wilderness experience.

Without a personal acquaintance with the Word of God, being a church member is like wearing a yoke, being browbeaten to give money, and having to do certain things. Everything is a duty instead of a drawing to the wonderful person of Christ.

Not Only An Example to Heed but...

Third, An Instruction To Implement (vv. 12-15)

First, Personally – *Guard Your Heart* - verse twelve he says, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

The term "depart" (*apostenai*) the root word for apostasy. The warning is to guard our hearts because there is the danger in each of our lives of turning away from what we know to be the truth. What is an "evil heart of unbelief"? It is a heart that stands off from God, a heart that does not believe God, a heart that will not trust God, a heart that will not follow God.

Secondly, Corporately – *Encourage The Brethren* - in verse thirteen he warns "but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. (14) For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, (15) while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

The word translated "exhort" is from the Greek (*parakaleo*) the word used by Jesus to describe the Holy Spirit in John 14:16. The root meaning of the word has to do with coming alongside to give help. "It's meaning can be illustrated in picturing someone running alongside a long-distance runner and exhorting him to finish the course in the face of his fatigue and exhaustion." [The Complete Biblical Library. "The

New Testament Study Bible: Hebrew through Jude." Vol. 9 (Springfield, Missouri: The Complete Biblical Library, 1989) p. 45]

If you do not think you need anyone else to live out the Christian life, you are arrogant, puffed up and in danger of a fall. As Charles Swindoll puts it, *"Reaching out and touching someone is not just a nostalgic, sentimental advertising slogan – it is a biblical mandate."* [Charles Swindoll. "The Preeminent Person of Christ" A Study of Hebrews 1-10. (Fullerton, Calif.:Insight for Living, 1989) p. 60]

We need the encouragement of other believers because sin is deceitful; it looks good, and it promises much. But it enslaves and it leaves broken. It devastates families, shatters lives and ruins our testimony. Not only that but it hardens a person. The more a person sins, the easier it for them to continue in sin. We need others to warn us when we are in trouble.

How different the story of the Israelites in the wilderness might have been had they shown a daily concern to promote among themselves an abiding faith in God instead of mutually inciting discontent by murmuring and unbelief. As the church of today we still have the option of encouraging each other in our walk with the Lord or carrying tales and murmuring about injustices.

Conclusion

"Dr. C. I Scofield, author of the well-known Scofield Reference Bible, worked as a lawyer before his conversion. One day a Christian lawyer by the named Tom McPheeters called on Scofield in his office. As he was about to leave, he suddenly turned around to where Scofield stood, and facing him directly, said, 'For a long time I have been wanting to ask you a question, that I have so far been afraid to ask, but I am going to ask it now.' "I never thought of you as afraid,' said Scofield. 'What is your question?' 'I want to ask why you are not

a Christian?’ said McPheeters, courteously. There was a pause of silence for that question had come so unexpectedly that for the moment he was staggered by it.

Scofield thoughtfully answered, ‘Does the Bible say something about drunkards having no place in heaven?’ And I am a hard drinker, McPheeters.’ ‘You have not answered my question, Scofield,’ the visitor said. ‘I asked, Why are you not a Christian?’ ‘I have always been a nominal Episcopalian, you know,’ said Scofield, ‘but I do not recall ever having been shown just how to be a Christian. I do not know how.’ To the answer of his friend, McPheeters had his answer. Drawing his New Testament from his pocket, and taking a chair from the lawyer’s office he sat down and there and then read passage after passage from the word of God, showing God’s way of salvation simply and clearly. Then he put to Scofield the plain and definite question, ‘Will you accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior?’ ‘I’m going to think about it,’ was the answer. ‘No, your not,’ answered McPheeters, ‘you’ve been thinking about it all your life. Will you settle it now? Will you believe on Christ and be saved?’

Scofield was silent for a moment in deep thought. Then turning, he looked at his friend full in the face and said, ‘I will.’ [Twice-Born Men. Pickering, pp. 82-83]

As Kent Hughes says, “The problem today is that so many people when asked about faith point to their ‘exodus’ – when they began with Christ. They can wax eloquent about their experience. How dare anyone questions that! They ‘went forward’ – the left Egypt – they were baptized and identified with God’s people – they visibly drank from the same rock (Christ) – they use the same redemptive

vocabulary with same pious inflections. But troubles came, and they turned away. Their 'exodus' is a convenient memory. But to trust God now? That is a problem, for there faith is dead." [Kent Hughes. *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul. Vol 1. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1993) p. 102]*

If our hearts have become hardened so that we expect nothing from God and attempt nothing for God, then our belief is more in our heads than it is in our hearts. The question is, "*What are we going to do today? Are we going to listen and act?*"