

“JESUS IS SUPERIOR TO...” SERIES

DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS

HEBREWS 3:7-19

7Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

“Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, 9 where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.

10 Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.’ 11 As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’”

12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. 15 As it is said,

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

16 For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? 17 And with whom was he provoked 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 unable to enter because of unbelief.

Introduction

So far, in the book of Hebrews, we have heard the argument from the author that Jesus is Superior. Carefully, he has laid out his defense of this position in six different ways:

1. Jesus is superior to the Angels
2. Jesus offers a superior Salvation – Hold Fast Your Salvation
3. Jesus is God, therefore Nothing is Outside of His Control
4. Jesus is the Creator of Salvation, He is – The Captain of Our Salvation

5. Jesus is Immanuel, “God with us”, therefore – He Was Made Like His Brothers
6. Jesus is Superior to the Law and Moses

The writer of Hebrews finishes up this chapter by warning the readers not to harden their hearts.

A parallel passage is found in Psalms 95:8-11

8 do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, 9 when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

10 For forty years I loathed that generation and said, “They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways.”

11 Therefore I swore in my wrath, “They shall not enter my rest.”

Why do humans have so much trouble heeding warnings? I find that sometimes I fail to heed warnings is because I don’t understand it.

Illustration: 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]

At other times I fail to observe the warning simply because I ignore it. Tell me, what is your first impulse when you see a sign that says, “Do not touch, wet paint?” I want to know, “Is it still wet?”

Ignoring warnings often leads to dangerous situations.

HEED BY HEARING

7Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, 9 where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.

10 Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.’ 11 As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’”

We all know the problem and failure of the Children of Israel. They were spoiled. They were dependent. They were unfaithful. They wanted a system instead of the LORD. They hardened their hearts which simply means “to become obstinate or stubborn.

The psalmist and the writer of Hebrews, clearly points out that there was an issue at Meribah. The Israelites’ constant unbelief and grumbling against Moses came to a boiling point at Meribah and Massah. This happened early into their escape, where they had seen the LORD act in their behalf. He sent them out of Egypt as riches were heaped upon them. God acted on their behalf when he drowned the Egyptian army. And yet they refused to honor God.

The people chided Moses and Aaron because they had no water to drink. They tempted the LORD. “Why have you brought us out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?” (Exodus 17:3) The LORD provided water, but “because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying “Is the LORD among us, or not?” (Exodus 17:7)

Because of their sin, “They did not enter into God’s rest.” That generation did not see the Promised Land.

Notice the emphasis is on “Today!” Paul emphatically quoted the prophet Isaiah to the church at Corinth (Isaiah 49:8);

2 Corinthians 6:2 (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)

The writer of Hebrews implores his readers not to procrastinate by emphasizing making a decision “today” three times in this passage: v. 7, 13 and 15. It is urgent that the reader do something, this hour.

THE FALLACY OF FALLING AWAY

12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

Therefore, with the idea of the issue with the children of Israel in the wilderness, the writer of Hebrews warns his readers to “Take care, brothers.”

Throughout scripture, we receive warnings. The previous chapter declared; “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” Jesus warned Nicodemus, “Ye must be born again.” (John 3:7).

This warning compels the readers to hold fast their faith so that they do not become hardened.

15 As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” 16 For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? 17 And with whom was he provoked 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 unable to enter because of unbelief.

Historically, remember the rebellion:

1. Remember why the rebellion took place. – they hardened their hearts with unbelief
2. Remember who rebelled – all of the children of Israel who God had just delivered from Egypt.
3. Remember why they rebelled – they were disobedient and in sin
4. Remember what they lost – their lives and the chance to enter the Promised Land, God’s Rest.

Look at the compassion in which Paul tried to get their attention:

Hear His voice – v. 7

Do Not Harden Your Hearts – v. 8

Take Care – v. 12

Fall Away From the Living God – v. 12

Exhort One Another – v. 13

Do Not Be Hardened by the Deceitfulness of Sin – v. 13

Hold Your Original Confidence Firm to the End – v. 14

Conclusion

For years I carried a Scofield Bible. I was told by a friend, “If you are going to study the word of God, you must have a Scofield Reference Bible.” So I bought one. Recently I learned about his conversion.

“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 name 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 question 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 their faith is dead.” [Kent

Hughes. Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul. Vol 1. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1993) p. 102]

The writer warns that if the believer hardens their hearts to the point of secluding God from their lives, then there is NO REST.

We need more than just a belief system in our hearts and minds. We need to totally rely on God in every aspect of our lives so that we do NOT HARDEN our hearts.

The question is, “Will we listen to God and then act on our beliefs?”

Bob Crowder