

“JESUS IS SUPERIOR TO...” SERIES

HEART DISEASE

HEBREWS 4:1-13

*1 Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us **fear** lest any of you should seem to have **failed** to reach it. 2 For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by **faith** with those who listened. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said,*

“As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’”

although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” 5 And again in this passage he said,

“They shall not enter my rest.”

6 Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted,

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. 9 So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, 10 for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Introduction

In the previous chapter we were introduced to some folks that had a heart condition. You have heard of “hardening of the arteries” well these people had “hardening of their attitudes.”

A whole generation of the children of Israel died because they refused to listen to God's diagnosis of their problem. They had a sin problem that led to hardening of their hearts which led to rebellion against God and His message, which finally led to them not entering His rest.

Repeatedly, God said: "Don't be like them."

Hear My Voice

Three times God says: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (3:7; 15; 4:7) God told them, "You have a heart problem! You don't need selective surgery. You need corrective surgery. You must allow me to reach into your heart and fix what's broken."

Christianity today has "heart disease." Pure and simple. As a whole, we do not know how to say "No", to the call of the world.

We live in a democratic society where the majority rules, whether we like it or not. If we conform to the majority's view, then the going is easier. If you don't then the options are narrowed. Every day we are faced with decisions: Critical Moments of Decision or CMD as Charles Stanley refers to them. It really comes down to two options.

1. Follow the crowd by abandoning your belief, position or values.
2. Hold fast to your faith and face the consequences of that society.

Initially Jewish Christians were considered an oddity, part of the sect of the Jewish faith. But as those early Christians proclaimed the Gospel and lived radical lives, they were seen as a danger and not allowed to take part in the synagogues. The Jews hated them for their beliefs. The Romans hated them for their beliefs. Society despised them. They were outcasts:

1. Follow the crowd.
2. Hold fast to your faith.

The predominant value and belief system in today's society is not the Judeo-Christian faith but rather materialism and humanism. Christians face daily pressures to conform in today's society. The temptation to follow the crowd is strong. To conform means to abandon our ethics, beliefs, and doctrines. Many of the weak fall to the pressure or the temptation.

Charles Swindoll in his book *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity*, p. 225 gives an illustration to show how difficult peer pressure is for teens and young adults:

"A few years ago psychologist Ruth W. Berenda and her associates carried out an interesting experiment with teenagers designed to show how a person handled group

pressure. The plan was simple. They brought groups of ten adolescents into a room for a test. Subsequently, each group of ten was instructed to raise their hands when the teacher pointed to the longest line on three separate charts. What one person in the group did not know was that nine of the others in the room had been instructed ahead of time to vote for the second-longest line. Regardless of the instructions they heard, once they were all together in the group, the nine were not to vote for the longest line, but rather vote for the 2nd longest line. The experiment began with nine teen-agers voting for the wrong line. The stooge would typically glance around, frown in confusion, and slip his hand up with the group. The instructions were repeated and the next card was raised. Time after time, the self-conscious stooge would sit there saying a short line is longer than a long line, simply because he lacked the courage to challenge the group”.

The writer of Hebrews is trying to help his readers combat this temptation to conform. Like the Hebrews, Christianity today must recognize the folly and dangers when we become attached to the world’s attractions.

Well, how do you do that? How do you go about letting God perform surgery on our heart?

That is the message in chapter four. The surgeon is the Holy Spirit. His scalpel is the Word.

*1 Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us **fear** lest any of you should seem to have **failed** to reach it.*

“*Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands*” – The *therefore* is a continuation of the previous argument. Promises are key throughout the book of Hebrews. God’s promises, His covenants, are key to Christians then and today. We stand by the promises in God’s Word.

The rest being spoken of is a “spiritual rest”, offered by God’s promises: 1) to the children of Israel in the great exodus, 2) to the brethren in the time of this epistle being written, and 3) to the Christian today.

“...*let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it*” - *Fear* is a reverential fear, in this case concerning the hardening of the heart of the believer against the promises of rest.

The fear to which we are exhorted is not any uncertainty of hope, but *solicitude against careless indifference*. It is a wholesome fear taught by wisdom (Phil. 2:12).

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2 For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest,"" although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.

The good news is the same for the children of Israel in the desert as it was to the readers of the Book of Hebrews. The difference is that we can read about the failure of those in the desert to enter into God's rest. The focus of this book is to sound the alarm against the same sin of disobedience.

God's promise of spiritual rest was given "from the foundation of the world." It is easy to see the Love of God for fallen man in every chapter of every book in the Bible. John's proclamation

16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

The writer of Hebrews could have taken John's words and slightly changed them for his purpose of explaining his point.

16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal rest."

¹ Farrar, F. W. (1893). *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, With Notes and Introduction* (p. 65). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

4 For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." 5 And again in this passage he said, "They shall not enter my rest."

God gave the example of resting during the creation. There was a pause at the end of each creation day and finally, after six days of creation, God himself gave the example of rest; the Sabbath. It is obvious that God did not need to rest as He never tires. It was for an example.

Mark 2:27-28 And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: 28 Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

Those that have *hardening of the arteries*, so to speak, will not enter into the spiritual rest that God has prepared for them.

6 Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

The writer continues with the idea that some have not entered into His "rest" through disobedience and others have not entered because they are not aware of the "rest" that God has promised.

His argument is stated here following the previous section:

- 1) There is a rest spoken of in the Scriptures.
- 2) That rest is to be enjoyed.
- 3) Some of those first promised rest did not inherit it through disobedience.
- 4) Since God's promises are faithful and true, that rest must still be available for those that believe.
- 5) The day to make the decision is "Today."

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. 9 So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, 10 for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

The King James Version translates verse 8 as "*For if Jesus had given them rest*". Obviously, the writer is not speaking of Jesus, for He is the one who leads to rest, he is speaking of the leader of the children of Israel. The Greek word for "Joshua" is "Jesus."

Joshua is responsible for leading the children of Israel into the Promised Land. But he did not lead them into “rest”. They entered a very long period of war and conquering. That is not God’s rest.

“...another day later on” – The time of rest is “another day later on.” That day is “Today” as mentioned in verses 3:7, 15; 4:7.

11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

“Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience” – the perfect place for any Christian is in the will of God, doing the work that God has given you to do, and finding perfect peace and rest in Him, no matter what the circumstances are going on in the world around you.

May I say to you, you must win a war before you can have peace. You have to have a victory before you can have peace. He says here, “Let us labor in order to rest.” After all, when you have worked at something and come to the end of the day and sit down, isn’t there a satisfaction in what you have done? Oh, today, we need to lay hold of God! To lay hold of God in prayer, and in faith, and to be used of Him. Oh, my Christian friend, let us *labor* toward that end.²

Satan will steal your rest and peace. Through disobedience, comes unrest. That is NOT God’s plan for you. He wants you to enter His rest. Learn to trust God in every aspect of your life...every action, every word, every thought. Lean on Him as a child leans his head on his mother’s shoulder. Peace, contentment and rest come from the Father:

BUT, to get there we must allow the Word of God into our hearts. It is the Word of God that can perform the surgery that is oftentimes needed.

² McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed., Vol. 5, p. 533). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Look at the description of what the Word of God achieves:

It is living – it is full of life and strength...it is fresh and strong...alive. It is always new.

...and active – full of energy and power, the Spirit urges response

...sharper than any two-edged sword – the definition of the word sword is not the broad sword used in battle, but the short sword or dagger carried for close combat. The Word of God is placed where it will make the sharpest cut.

...piercing to the division of soul and of spirit – the Word of God is a diagnostic tool that penetrates in between that fine line sandwiched between the soul and spirit. Many times soul and spirit are synonymous but when they are listed together, soul identifies the affections and spirit identifies the intellect.

Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, uses the words, when he prays God to keep their spirit, and soul, and body blameless until the coming of Christ, (1 Thess. 5:23,) he meant no other thing, but that they might continue pure and chaste in mind, and will, and outward actions. Also Isaiah means the same when he says, “My soul desired thee in the night; I sought thee with my spirit.” (Is. 26:9.) What he doubtless intends to shew is, that he was so intent on seeking God, that he applied his whole mind and his whole heart.³

...of joints and marrow -

...and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart – Nothing can escape the Word of God. God’s word, applied by the Holy Spirit, can sense the believers thoughts and intentions. When our life is placed next to the measuring stick of the Word of God, our thoughts and intentions are laid bare.

³ Calvin, J., & Owen, J. (2010). *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (p. 104). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Simply put, no one can escape the notice of God. For believers that would mean that all insincerity, unbelief, hypocrisy, will be detected by him. If we allow the Word of God to penetrate our hearts and minds, all is laid open before him. Therefore, we should be sincere in our words and actions and not attempt to deceive Him. We cannot. It is just that simple. If you are trying to outwit God, you can't so stop trying.

Conclusion

The question of the day is; "Do you have heart disease?" It is easy to point at the children of Israel and all their faults as we can read all about it. But what about you this morning? Do you have hardening of the heart?

Comparing the rebellion of the children of Israel and yourself today, there are four questions you can ask yourself:

1. Do you care more about your ideas, wants, needs and human opinion than the counsel of God? If so you might have a hardened heart.

2. Do you fear the "giants of the land" who prevent you from accepting the promises of God in your life? If so you might have a hardened heart.

3. Do you constantly grumble and complain? If so you might have a hardened heart.

4. Do you have a tendency to conform rather than to follow your conviction? If so you might have a hardened heart.

According to the writer, today is the day to make things right. For those that have yet to accept the rest that God provides and for those that have a heart disease, today is the day to make that right.

Bob Crowder