

“The Unbelieving Heart”  
Hebrews 3:7-19  
(Preached at Trinity, November 26, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citation will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. The author has been stressing the superiority of Jesus over Moses. Moses was the servant and steward of God's household. Jesus, on the other hand, was God's Son. God's household refers to the elect, God's people. In the NT they find their expression in the church.
2. Who are members of God's household? How do you know if you are a part of God's household? They press on until the end.  
**Hebrews 3:6 NAU** - "whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end."
3. From **Verse 7** to the end of the chapter we find warnings against the person who does not continue. It is significant that the author quotes significantly from **Psalms 95**. Both **Psalms 95 & 96** were frequently used in synagogue worship. They were known as psalms of invitation to worship.  
**Psalms 95:1-3 NAU** - "O come, let us sing for joy to the LORD, Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. <sup>2</sup> Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. <sup>3</sup> For the LORD is a great God And a great King above all gods,"  
**Psalms 95:6-7 NAU** - "Come, let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. <sup>7</sup> For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. "  
**Psalms 96:2-4 NAU** - "Sing to the LORD, bless His name; Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day. <sup>3</sup> Tell of His glory among the nations, His wonderful deeds among all the peoples. <sup>4</sup> For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised;"
4. In the midst of these glorious calls to worship we find the solemn words:  
**Psalms 95:7-11 NAU** - "Today, if you would hear His voice, <sup>8</sup> Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness, <sup>9</sup> "When your fathers tested Me, They tried Me, though they had seen My work. <sup>10</sup> "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. <sup>11</sup> "Therefore I swore in My anger, Truly they shall not enter into My rest.""
5. We have to presume that these psalms were also used extensively in the early church. And they speak to us today. They speak as both a glorious call to worship as well as a warning against hardening our hearts against God.
6. We also need to notice how the early church viewed the Scriptures. They were well aware that there was a human author. David authored most of the psalms. But they knew the human authors were only secondary authors. Scripture is the Word of God. The author affirms this: "Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says . . ."

As Paul wrote in 2 Timothy.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17 NAU** - "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

7. We also need to remember the context of this section. It begins with "therefore." In other words, those who are of the household of God are those who:  
**Verse 6** - "hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end." Since we are holding fast and standing firm let us beware.
8. Many in this Christian community were paying the price for their commitment to Christ. Some were being tempted to drift back to their former life. The author is calling their attention to the multitude who were not allowed to enter into the Land of Promise.  
**Hebrews 3:19 NAU** - "So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief."
9. This passage gives us several reasons why they were not allowed to enter.

I. Hardness of hearts – Verses 8, 10, 15

A. The idea is hearing God's Word and hardening your heart against it.

**Verses 7-8** - "Today if you hear His voice, <sup>8</sup> Do not harden your hearts"

1. Worship demands submissive hearts prepared to listen. Hearing demands obeying.

**Ecclesiastes 5:1 NAU** - "Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen"

2. James Montgomery Boice: "Worship begins with listening. Worship must be based on the preaching of the Word of God. First, we must hear God's Word. Second, we must obey it. Only then can we praise God joyfully for what we have heard. . . So the warning is this. If you want to worship God, make sure you do not harden your hearts against God's Word, or quarrel with Him, or test him, as the ancients did. On the contrary, true worship is: (1) hearing the Word of God, (2) obeying the Word of God, and (3) praising God for it."<sup>1</sup>

B. The author gives a historic context

1. It was during Israel's testing in the wilderness. They couldn't find water.
2. They murmured and complained.

**Hebrews 3:8 NAU** - "Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, As in the day of trial in the wilderness,"

3. This was their heart against God for forty years.

**Numbers 14:2-3 NAU** - "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! <sup>3</sup> "Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?"

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<sup>1</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms: An Expository Commentary*, Vol. 2. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 778-779.

4. The point is, these Hebrew Christians were suffering. But would they harden themselves against the promises of God and forsake God.
5. This is a powerful admonition for us. In this life we will often face various trials and afflictions. Will we harden ourselves against God's purposes and against God's goodness in all His actions.

## II. Unbelief – Verses 12, 19

- A. Israel in the wilderness continued in doubt and unbelief.
  1. Their hearts were continually filled with distrust.  
**Numbers 14:11 NAU** - "The LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?"
  2. God worked wondrous miracles before them. They saw it in Egypt. They saw it in the parting of the Red Sea. They saw it in God's provision. But they refused to believe God and so they refused to obey God.  
**Numbers 14:22-23 NAU** - "Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, <sup>23</sup> shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it."
- B. These verses are applied to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.
  1. In the Old Testament they speak of Israel entering the Promised Land. The author of Hebrews is applying it to saving faith.
  2. Normally, we must be very careful about reading beyond the intent of the original author except perhaps by way of illustration. But here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit it is applied to our entering heaven. The promised rest is not only Israel's Canaan but our salvation. This allows us to make some important analogies between Israel in the wilderness and our journey of faith.
  3. Like the Israelites those who have come to faith in Christ have been delivered from the house of bondage. Israel was delivered from their bondage in Egypt. We have been delivered from our bondage to sin. Also, like Israel, we are heading towards the land of promise—Israel heading to Canaan and Christians to a heavenly inheritance. And, as Israel was to cross the Jordan River, we must make a passage through death. And, as Israel was enduring a time of testing in the dessert, Christians are also going through a time of testing this side of eternity. We have not yet entered into our rest.
  4. This puts the suffering of this life in context and also the importance of remaining steadfast in following Christ.  
**Hebrews 3:12-14 NAS** - "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end;"

5. The sinful heart of unbelief always manifests itself in turning away from God. Through the sin of unbelief many will fail to enter into their rest. **Verse 12** describes it as an "evil, unbelieving heart that falls away."
6. In **Verse 16** the author calls us to take notice of those who denied God in the wilderness. They were the very ones that Moses led out of Egypt. These were the ones who saw the miracles, who ate the manna, who saw the pillar of fire leading them.  
Here is the message for us. How much more have we seen?  
**Heb. 2:3** - "how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"
7. Only those who hold firm to Christ until the end shall be saved.  
**Hebrews 3:14 NAU** - "For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,"  
By faith we hold firm to Christ.  
**Hebrews 11:6 NAU** - "And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."

### III. The deceitfulness of sin – Verses 13, 18

#### A. Sin blinded their eyes.

1. They longed to return to their servitude in Egypt.  
**Numbers 11:5-6 NAU** - "We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, <sup>6</sup> but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna."
2. They continually insisted in doing things their way. Even when God judged them they still followed their own devices.  
**Numbers 14:39-41 NAU** - "When Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people mourned greatly. <sup>40</sup> In the morning, however, they rose up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying, "Here we are; we have indeed sinned, but we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised." <sup>41</sup> But Moses said, "Why then are you transgressing the commandment of the LORD, when it will not succeed?"
3. Because they refused to continue as God's chosen people God judged them. God said they would not enter into their rest.  
**Hebrews 3:10-11 NAU** - "They always go astray in their heart; And they did not know My ways'; <sup>11</sup> As I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest."

#### B. This is directed to us.

1. **Verse 12** has been called a summary of the pastoral exhortations in the Book of Hebrews.<sup>2</sup>  
**Hebrews 3:12 NAU** - "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God."

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<sup>2</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, vol. 15, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 93.

2. The warning here is to those who have heard the Gospel and have appeared to respond to it and then they turn away from it.
3. The readers of this epistle had professed Christ. They were in the fellowship of the church. But some were departing from Christ.  
They are described in **Chapter 6**  
**Hebrews 6:4-6 NAU** - "those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> and *then* have fallen away"
4. Sin is usually attractive and desirable. It seems pleasing, like a good choice to make us happy. It lies and deceives.
5. Satan is the arch deceiver. He spreads his lies and they seem like a good choice. Satan often appears like an angel of light.  
Calvin – "Truth (Satan) assails with lies, light he obscures with darkness. The minds of men he involves with error; he stirs up hatred, inflames strife and war, and all in order that he may overthrow the kingdom of God, and drown men in eternal perdition with himself."
6. There is also the danger of God's judicial hardening. God gives us over to the foolishness of our own heart.  
**Romans 1:21** – "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."

#### Conclusion:

1. These warnings draw us back to **Verse 6**. If you are a member of God's household you must press on in steadfast faith. You must not turn your back on Christ.  
**Hebrews 3:14 NAU** - " For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,"
2. The good news is, those who are apart of God's household have been bought, they are preserved and protected. They endure to the end because God will not let them fall away. But we must never presume all is well when we are not following Christ. Simon Kistemaker reminds us: "The experience of the rebellious Israelites must serve as a warning that should not be taken lightly. Christians must thoroughly examine themselves and one another to see whether anyone has a sinful, unbelieving heart."<sup>3</sup>
3. If you are not one of the true worshippers of Christ there is still time.
  - a. Where there is life there is hope.  
**Heb 3:7-8** - "Today if you hear his voice, <sup>8</sup> Do not harden your hearts"
  - b. Hebrews 3-4 repeats the word "today" five times. "Today" is the day of Gospel invitation. It has been almost 2000 years since the Book of Hebrews was written. It is still just as relevant. It is still just as urgent. Today is the day to heed the call. Today is the day to believe and turn to Jesus Christ. Delay can be deadly.
  - c. There is an approaching deadline for all men  
Every tick of the clock, every beat of our heart brings us one step closer.  
The Gospel call is, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart."

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.