

Do Not Harden Your Hearts

Hebrews 3:7-11

Reading: Psalm 95

Bethany Baptist Church

July 15, 2018

...prayer...

Jesus' *Great Commandment* calls you to *love God w/ all your heart*.

Jesus' *Great Commission* sends you out to offer your neighbor a *new heart*.

? But how can you *obey* Jesus if you have a *hard heart*?

Turn in your NT to Hebrews 3:1-11 (today, vv.7-11)

The Holy Spirit has called you to *consider Jesus* (1) – because He is better than *anything*, better even than *Moses*!

The Spirit has urged you to *consider your faith* (6) – is it the kind that will *keep you to the end*. Because that's the *only* kind of faith that will *save you*!

Now the Holy Spirit *warns you* – if God is *talking* to you, *don't* ignore Him – **don't harden your heart**!

Because the worst *heart disease* you can imagine is a heart that is *hardened* against *Jesus*.

Three words from the Holy Spirit about your heart health.

1. An urgent *diagnosis* (vv.7-8).
2. A famous *case history* (vv.8-9)
3. A sobering *warning* (vv.10-11)

An urgent diagnosis (read 7-8a).

1. Sometimes your *doctor* looks up from your *chart* and says: “*See you next year.*” ☺
 - a. Sometimes he furrows his brow and says: “*I want you try something. Then come back again in 3 months.*” ... Maybe it’s a change in your *diet*, or a new *prescription*.
 - b. ***Sometimes*** he frowns and says: “*We need to get moving on this – now!*”

2. The *Great Physician* has an *urgent spiritual health warning* for every one of us this morning: ***do not harden your hearts.***
 - a. The *warning* begins (7) w/ the ordinary but important word *therefore*.
 - b. Which means this *exhortation* is a *follow-on* to the **two admonitions** of vv.1 & 6:
 - i. ***Consider Jesus*** (1) – look long & hard at Him, every day. *Fix your eyes on Jesus, the Apostle & High Priest of our [Gospel] confession.*
 - ii. ***Hold fast to a confident faith in Jesus*** (6) – look to Him *all the way* to the heavenly finish line. It’s not your *holding on* that saves you, but *holding on* is an evidence of real saving faith.
 - iii. You could sum it up like this: *keep your eyes on the prize & your feet on the path!*

3. To be *perfectly clear*: when you read about the *heart* in your Bible (OT/NT), you know that you your are studying a ***spiritual organ!***
 - a. Your *heart* is your *mind, will, emotions*...it’s *all that you are*, on the *inside*...your *heart* is like the *command center* of your *life*.
 - b. And it can grow *sick*...

4. I said your *spiritual heart health* is an *urgent* concern. It's the *main point* of our text.
- a. If you've got *spiritual heart disease*, you have to do something **now!** The *urgency* of the Holy Spirit's *command* is emphasized *twice*:
- i. The *first* hint is in the simple word "*says...the Holy Spirit says.*" My point is that this is *present tense language*, which means the *Holy Spirit* is talking to you *right now!*
 1. Not just **2000** years ago to the **1st** century church. Not just **3000** years ago to **OT** Israel. Not just **3500** years ago in the Exodus.
 2. Yes, the Spirit spoke *then*, but He is still *speaking now!*
 - ii. The second indication is, "*today...today if you hear His voice*" (8) – It is *too* easy to *put off* doing the right thing! But the *Spirit* says do it **now**.
 1. "*Today*" – is not necessarily the next **24** hours!
 2. "*Today*" – is the *window of opportunity* that God gives you have to *soften your heart*. To *look to Jesus*. To *trust* that He *died* for you. Some *Bible teachers* call it the "*time of grace.*"
 3. Honestly, that *window* might stay open for what seems to be a *long time...* But it might *slam closed* if you *walk out of this place* today, still telling yourself you'll get around to God **later!**
- b. When the *doctor* says you better get on over to **ER** "*today,*" he means "**now**"! The *Great Physician* is *listening to your chest* & *looking over you spiritual EKG*, and He says...**now!**

5. **OBTW – v.7** teaches us something important about the *Holy Spirit*.
- a. In 2 Tm 3:16 Paul writes: *All Scripture is inspired by...**God***.
 - b. Here, the writer of Hebrews ascribes the *inspiration* of the **OT** psalm in vv.7-11 to ...the *Holy Spirit*. Because the *Holy Spirit* is deity and He is there in the *inspiration & communication & clarification & application* of all Scripture!
 - c. Compare **2 Tm 3:16** to **Hb 3:7** and your *conclusion* should be that the *Holy Spirit* is God!
6. Still, the *critical lesson* here is that when God *speaks*, then you have a *spiritual health choice* to make:
- a. You can *ignore* God, *question* God, and even pursue the *polar opposite path* from His *directions*.
 - b. Or you can *soften your heart* and *listen* to God and *obey* Him!

Beloved, the Spirit says, listen to God and soften your heart...now!

A well-known case history.

1. I've pointed out that the writer of Hebrews supports every *important section* of his letter with verses from the **OT**. Most of them are well-known passages from the *Psalms*.
 - a. He did this because he was writing to churches attended by people with a *Jewish background*.
 - b. He wanted to use their *reverence* for the **OT** to *persuade* them to *hold on* to their *faith in Jesus*.
 - c. Here in chap.3 he cites the second half of **Psa 95** (read vv.7-11).
 - i. This was a well-known text because the Jews read **Psa95:7** to begin every Sabbath service (3:7&8): “**Today**, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts! “
2. Let's call these verses from the Psalm a *case history of hard heart*.
 - a. The *patient* is Israel and the *incident* is the Exodus. The *spiritual disease*, of course, is their *hard hearts*.
 - i. Israel demonstrated *symptoms* almost immediately after *crossing the Sea!* In **Ex 17** they *ran out* of water and *grumbled* against Moses. They *questioned* whether or not God was still *with them*. God ordered Moses to *strike a rock* and *out* came water.
 - ii. But the *symptoms* continued: *grumbling, insubordination, unbelief, & idolatry*.

- iii. One of the most *serious incidents* occurred when they finally reached the border of the *Promised Land*. Moses sent in **12** spies.
1. **Forty** days later they returned: **ten** were *afraid* of the Canaanites, but *Joshua & Caleb* urged the people to *trust* God and *enter* the land.
 2. But the people *listened* to the **10** and *refused* to go in. They *grumbled* again against Moses & Aaron and decided to *return to Egypt*!
 3. They even complained against God: “*Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword?*”
- iv. ?Do you remember the *rest of the story*: God sentenced the Israelites to *wander* in the wilderness until every adult *died* – **40** years in the wilderness for the **40** days the spies were in the Promised Land.
- v. God performed mighty works for Israel for **40** years, yet because of *unbelief* that **40** years was just one long “*day of trial in the wilderness.*”
3. When you place Israel under the *microscope*, you make some important discoveries about the development of a *hard heart*. What you *see* is:
- a. *Provocation* (8) – or **rebellion**. This was an *sad, recurring symptom* in Israel. The people *rebelled* against God’s plan time & again.
 - b. *Testing* (9) – as in, *testing God’s patience*. Thru *repeated rebellion*.
 - c. *Wandering* (10) – *Wandering* was Israel’s *lifestyle*, and I don’t mean their *wilderness wandering*. God said, “*they always go astray in their...hearts.*”
 - d. *Ignorance* (10) – Even though the people followed Moses, the *hero of Israel*, & possessed the *very first edition* of the Law, they *didn’t know* God’s ways.

- e. **Unbelief.** By the end of **ch3** we'll find that the *root cause* of a *hard heart* is a **refusal** to *believe* God's promises & provisions. **Read v19**
- i. Israel's *unbelief* came despite of *plenty of miraculous proof* (9).
 - ii. From the *plagues in Egypt* to the *parting of the Sea* to *miraculous provisions* to *poisonous serpents* (&more)! → *Forty years worth of proof!*
 - iii. God Himself put it like this (Num10b,11): "*How long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs that I have done among them?*"

Israel's case history is a clear warning that a repeated refusal to *believe & obey* God leads to a *hard heart*.

And if you won't soften your hard heart, the outcome will be fatal (read 10-11)

1. There are **two** related terms here that describe God's response to the sinner's *rebellion, testing, straying, ignorance & unbelief ... to a hard heart.*
 - a. They are the *kind of words* that you *don't want to hear* when God is *diagnosing* you!
 - b. *Anger & wrath.* God loves *righteousness* & **hates** *sin.* God loves *faith* (Heb 11) & **hates** *disbelief.*
 - c. God is *angry* w/ the *hard hearted.*
2. Do you see the *sad outcome (v.11)*? "*I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'*"
 - a. *No Promised Land for Israel.*
 - b. *No rest for the wicked. ...for the hard of heart.*

Is there a cure for a hard heart? Can a calloused heart be softened?

1. Let's begin w/ the context of **ch.3** and its opening command (v.1) – **consider Jesus!** Friend, *turn your eyes upon Jesus.*
 - a. Kent Hughes points out that if *Jesus* is **better** than *Moses*, then if you *ignore Jesus* that is far worse than Israel *ignoring Moses*. And that was *plenty bad!*
 - b. So if you will *set your mind on things above...*,
 - c. ... if you will *trace His steps* through the *Gospels...*,
 - d. ... the *Great Physician* will *soften your hardened heart!*
2. **Repent of unbelief. Let's read v.19 again.** Israel refused to be *softened*, even by God's repeated *miracles*. What Bible claims are *you* refusing to *believe*?
 - a. Jesus' *incarnation*? His *resurrection*? His *deity*?
 - b. His claim to be *better* (than *prophets, angels, ... Moses*)? → His *claim* to be the *only way*?
3. *Take a step of obedience. Then take another!* Do what God *commands*.
4. *Hang out with other Christians.* The *theological term* is "**fellowship!**" 😊
 - a. Let's *sneak-a-peak* at next week's text in **v.13 (read)**. *Did you catch the end of that verse...?* Fellowship is a *vaccination* against the **heart hardening effects of sin!**
5. So here are the *ingredients* of our *gospel prescription*: *a focus on Jesus, a readiness to believe, a life that obeys, a circle of Christian friends.*

...the Holy Spirit is saying, 'Today if you have heard God's voice, do not harden your heart.'

...pray...