

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **Harden Not Your Hearts**

Scripture: Hebrews 3:7-19

Code: 1608

I'll ask you tonight, if you would, to take your Bible and turn with me to Hebrews chapter 3 for our continuing study in the book of Hebrews we come to verses 7 to 19. Hebrews 3, 7 through 19.

From Genesis to Revelation the Bible is full of warning signs and they are meant by God to deter men from the inevitable wrath of God if men continue in the course of sin. All the way through the Bible in different settings and by different phrases and by different words God warns men. Because the old testament tells us that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The new testament tells us that God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. And because it is not the purpose of God in the creation of man that man should be doomed to hell, God then, throughout all of His revelation continues to warn men.

And as we come to chapter 3 of Hebrews verses 7 to 19, we have just another of God's warnings to unredeemed men, men on a sinful course to turn to Jesus Christ before it's too late. Now let me just give you a little background in regard to this clear imperative that we find in these verses. As you remember the book of Hebrews was written to a Jewish community. A Jewish community which had been visited by certain first apostles and prophets and under the preaching of those apostles and prophets had heard the gospel some had believed . unto salvation, others had believed but had not committed themselves to that belief and were hanging on the edge of believing but weren't willing to commit themselves because of the fear of persecution and the love of their own sin. Then a third group weren't convinced at all and they were just there. So that when we look at the book of Hebrews we must be reminded that it was written with all three groups in mind. Parts of it are directed right at those new Christians, parts of it are directed to those non-Christians who aren't really accepting anything and parts of it, this part for example, are directed toward those non-Christians who have intellectual understanding, who know the gospel and are hanging right on the knife edge of decision.

And this passage that we come to tonight is one of those critical passages by which the Holy Spirit wants to give a great big supernatural shove to anybody hanging on the edge of faith in Jesus Christ and hasn't yet committed himself to that faith. And you know, there are many people like that. There are many people who intellectually have responded to the gospel. They believe it but they have never committed themselves to that faith. They've never gone all the way to commitment to Jesus Christ accepting Him as Savior and Lord, repenting from their sins and turning fully and wholeheartedly to Him.

And may I hasten to add that to know the truth and not to accept it brings upon a man a worse judgment than to really not know it in full and not to accept it. God does not think you've done Him a favor just because you like His gospel. In fact, if you hear it and you know it and intellectually assent to it but never commit your heart to it then the retribution and the judgment of God on you will be much sorer, much more serious than that on those who barely even heard the content of the gospel. And to whom much is given much is required.

And so verses 7 to 19 then, are the Holy Spirit's warning to one who knows the gospel, who knows the truth but because of the love of their sin and the fear of persecution or whatever it may be has not committed himself to the truth that he knows is real. It's as if there's a fire in a hotel and you're on the tenth floor and the firemen below are yelling 'jump' because there's a net available, maybe on a lower roof about the fifth floor and you look out the window and you really just can't figure out whether or not you ought to trust yourself to those firemen but the fire is moving through the apartment and you don't have a lot of choice. But rather than commit yourself to the trust of those firemen and jump out you're concerned with being able to hang on to your possessions so you grab them hoping you can make it by running back in and going down the stairs and you're consumed by the fire. Well if you want to put this passage in that context this is the Holy Spirit saying at the top of His voice - jump, that's verses 7 to 19. You didn't know that did you? This is the Spirit of God moving on those hearts and saying to those who know the truth but as of yet because of the love of their possessions or because of their own concentration on their own ability and their own plans are figuring out their own escape and they find out that there is no escape unless you jump in total faith, committing yourself to Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews has a great fear for these Jews because they've heard the gospel. They heard it right from the mouths of the apostles and the prophets but because of the love of sin and because of the fear of persecution which is the sin of pride they shrink back. They would fall away from an initial profession in faith or an initial statement of confidence in Christ and begin to fall back. Maybe they had run up and said - you know, I like this thing about Jesus this is great. I might give my life to this - and then they started getting fired at by their friends and they begin to fall away from the initial statement that they made. They're never willing to throw their whole weight on Jesus and as a result of that they become what the Bible defines classically as an apostate. You know what an apostate is? An apostate is an individual knowing the truth willfully rejects it and falls back. That's an apostate.

Now in order to get this warning across the Holy Spirit uses an old testament account because He knows He's talking to Jews and He wants to talk to them out of their own context. And since Moses is already the subject of the passage in verses 1 to 6 He just picks up on Moses and uses an illustration from Moses that fits in perfectly. Now we have just seen in verses 1 to 6 the proof that Jesus is greater than Moses and the point of that proof is the whole book of Hebrews, for those of you who are with us maybe for the first time, the whole book of Hebrews the writer is endeavoring to present Jesus better than everything else. And that Jesus is the mediator of a new and better covenant than the old

and if He is, He must be better than all the people of the old covenant. He's got to be better than the old prophets, He's even got to be better than the angels who mediated the old covenant, He's got to be better than Moses, He's got to be better than Joshua, He's got to be better than Aaron, He's got to be better than that whole group of people and so one by one the writer of Hebrews shows Jesus greater than all of these. And by the time we come to chapter 3, Jesus has been proven greater than prophets, greater than angels, and in the first six verses of chapter 3, greater than Moses who is the greatest of all. Some of them even assumed him to be greater than angels. And Jesus is greater than Moses. And since He's already talked about Moses He wants to interject this tremendous, powerful emphasis to those hanging on the brink of decision and He does so by using an illustration right out of the experience of Moses. Now this falls into four parts just for our study. They're not profound but they'll help you to break the passage down.

It falls into four parts, the illustration - Israel, the invitation - take heed, the instruction - exhort one another daily, and the issue unbelief. The illustration, the invitation, the instruction and the issue.

Notice, first of all, the illustration. Now very many times when you preach, you know, you sit in your office and you try to figure out - now, how am I going to start this sermon so I can get everybody's attention before the first half-hour is already gone? How am I going to begin? Well, very often, you begin one way, this way or that way but sometimes it's good to begin with an illustration. And, then, once you've given the illustration, back up to the Scripture and begin to prove your point. That's what the Spirit of God does here. Many sermons begin with a backdrop or an illustration and then comes the invitation and the instruction and that's the format the Holy Spirit chooses here. And the Holy Spirit chooses to begin this plea to that person who knows the truth, who knows the gospel but has never committed himself, by picking out something right out of the history of Israel during the time of Moses. But His quote, interestingly enough, is from the time of David. Because David, hang on to this, is quoting about the time of Moses.

So He goes clear back to Moses' occasion in the wandering in the wilderness as quoted by David and requotes it. And David chose this particular statement a thousand years before and now this time the Holy Spirit makes the very same point. In verses 7 to 11 here are exact translations of Psalm 95, 7 to 11, the same portion. Psalm 95:7 to 11 and Hebrews 3:7 to 11 are identical.

Now let me give you the backdrop. David in Psalm 95:7 to 11 says the very same thing we're going to read right here in a moment and it refers to Israel in the wilderness and what went on in the wilderness.

And It's a classic example for the point that the Spirit of God wants to make because the Psalm, Psalm 95, reflects on Israel's disobedience and rejection of Moses in the Exodus wanderings. Now let me give you the history. Israel's in the land of Egypt, in captivity. They've been there 400 years making bricks. It even got so rough Pharaoh made them make bricks with no straw and the straw

was what held them together. They were oppressed, they were beaten and so God brought in plagues. You remember the series of plagues and they finally ended with the death of the first-born, a great miracle. And then God said All right, Moses, gather them together and get them out of there. And Moses gathered them together and he marched them out of that place and Pharaoh said - Get out of here is right, I've had it with you, can't take the plagues any longer. And they moved out and God said -Moses, you've got a problem in your way, it's called the Red Sea, and you don't have a boat. So God said - Moses, only one thing to do, just ask the Red Sea to part. And Moses said - Okay - and the Red Sea parted. And the children of Israel walked across on dry land and Pharaoh thought - that looks easy and marched his whole army in there and the Red Sea closed on them. And God was working miracles in Israel, miracle after miracle after miracle. And they got in the wilderness and immediately they didn't believe God, you see. That's a classic illustration of unbelief in the face of overwhelming evidence. God had revealed Himself, they knew how He had revealed Himself, they knew the truth of His revelation, they saw the disclosure of it and yet they did not believe. They would not commit themselves to faith in God. And so, they as a result had to wander and wander and wander and wander. And they wandered for 37 years in circles, just like this - in the same little area because of their unbelief.

Now this becomes a picture for us. It becomes a picture for what David says in Psalm 95 as he warns in his day, see David was warning a thousand years before Hebrews was written, by saying, - People, don't you in my day -- in David's day, don't you harden your heart against God like Israel did in the wilderness. And now the writer of Hebrews is saying, - Now you Hebrews, living when I'm writing, don't you do what David warned the people not to do in his day which the people in Moses' day had done. You see, things haven't changed a lot. And I can stand up in front of you tonight and say - Now, friends, what I'm going to say to you is don't do today what the writer of Hebrews told the Hebrews not to do because David told the Hebrews not to do it and Moses said they did it. And so we see the pattern tracing itself all the way along.

Now, let's begin in verse 7, and we're really quoting out of the Psalms, "Wherefore," (of course that ties it with what's just been said and you could put all of this as parenthesis, you could jump down to verse 12 and say wherefore take heed brethren because this part in the middle is a parenthesis) "Wherefore as the Holy Spirit saith, Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation in the day of trial in the wilderness; when your fathers tempted me putting me to the test, proved me and saw my works forty years". The Holy Spirit here says to these Hebrews who are on the edge of decision but have never made that commitment, Don't harden your hearts, here today and do today what God wants you to do and don't do what the children of Israel did even after they had seen the proof of it for forty years, they continued not to believe Go Don't do that. Now I want you to notice something in verse 7 that's tremendously important. Verse 7 begins, "Wherefore, as the Holy Spirit saith", isn't that an exciting statement? Because in Psalm 95 guess who's talking? David. In Psalm 95 David is speaking but when this account goes back to Psalm 95, it says - wherefore, not as David saith but what? As the Holy Spirit saith. What does that mean? That is one of the classic

illustrations of what divine inspiration is. Inspiration is the Holy Spirit speaking through the mouth of God's agencies. And, my friends, what David said was not his own opinion, what David said was not his own choice of words, when David opened his mouth the Holy Spirit spoke. That's divine inspiration. The Bible is written and you open it's pages, when you read a verse those are not the choice of men those are the words of the Spirit of God who is the author of Scripture. And so, isn't it fantastic, the Bible says the Holy Spirit was speaking in Psalm 119. II Peter 1:21 says, "For the prophesy came not at any time by the will of men but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit". The Holy Spirit wrote every word of Scripture. That's why we believe it is gross injustice, it is sin in the first degree and it opens the flood gates to every kind of heresy possible when you deny the absolute verbal inspiration of Scripture, we believe God wrote it and original autographs to the very word. And that's why Jesus could say, You can remove one tittle from My word - because God is the author. That's a footnote.

"Wherefore, as the Holy Spirit saith, Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts". What does today mean? Well, He uses it in verse 7, 13, 15; chapter 4 verse 17, verse 7, I mean, He uses it repeatedly the word today. It's the word of urgency. Today doesn't mean, necessarily, 24 hours, it means in the day of grace. It may mean less than 24 hours, it may mean now, this very moment. If you know the truth of Jesus Christ, if you know the gospel of Jesus Christ don't do what Israel did when they knew God's truth, when they saw God's revelation, don't harden your heart. It's so foolish. II Corinthians 6, verse 2, "I have heard thee in a time accepted and in the day of salvation have I helped thee: behold now is the accepted time: behold now is the day of salvation". God always says - now, is the day of salvation and I always think of Moody when he preached and he said go home and think about what I've said. And one night, in Chicago, he said - Go home and think about what I've said, come back tomorrow night ready to make a decision. That night the Chicago fire broke out, half his congregation was dead. He said, -That's the last time I ever told anybody to go anywhere and think about it. Now is the moment of salvation. And so the word of God says, "Harden not your hearts but today hear His voice". You see, salvation is a now thing.

You may not have it tomorrow. Today signifies the present time of grace and men today as in the time of Hebrews and in the time of David and in the time of Moses had the privilege of hearing God's voice as God spoke. And notice that it says, "If you will hear". Hearing God is a matter of your own will but as always there's that possibility of hardening the heart as Israel did and seeing the sad results.

And so in verse 7 He says, "Harden not your hearts as they did in the day of provocation in the day of trial in the wilderness". You know, hardening your heart is also a matter of personal action. In I Tim.

I think it's chapter 4 isn't it verse 2 where Paul says that the heart of a man or the conscience of a man can become seared as with a hot iron like scar tissue? You can harden yourself against the

gospel.

You can become, and the word seared means burned and when it's once burned the skin then, is insensitive. When I was in college I was thrown out of a car going about 75 miles an hour and I slid about 100 yards on my southern hemisphere and was thrown out and I slid and, of course, initially I had third degree burns because of the friction. And then from then on my back was cleaned out about a half-inch deep, 64 square inches of it, and all of the scar tissue that has replaced that is now insensitive. It's been seared. And you know, it's what happens so many times to somebody who hears the gospel repeatedly, that the today, my friends, the today only lasts as long as your conscience is sensitive to God then when today is over it's tomorrow and it's too late. That's what He is saying. Today if you will enact your will to hear God's voice, don't harden your heart. And your heart gets harder every time you say no to Jesus Christ when you know the truth. When your heart is soft and when your conscience is convicted and when the intellect is sensed to Christ and when the understanding admires Him, that's the time to move when you're still pliable you're still responsive. Cause someday you may experience that kind of hard heart that Proverbs 21:29 talks about. That kind of hard, stiff, stubborn and rebellious insensitiveness, then all of a sudden it doesn't mean anything. And there are people who because their wife brings them or because their wife wants them to come to church or their kids because their parents bring them they sit here, they've heard the gospel so many times they can't respond to it because their conscience has been seared and there may be only little places of sensitivity the Spirit of God has left to appeal to. And so, says the Spirit of God, don't harden your heart. You know the truth, respond to Christ.

Now notice in verse ? how He picks out a specific illustration.

It says, "Don't do it as in the provocation in the day of trial in the wilderness". Now the words provocation and trial or testing are important words. And they take us immediately right back to a record of Exodus chapter 17 which I want to take just a moment to share with you Exodus 17, verse 1; "And this is their record of their wandering in the wilderness and all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of sin (it's with a capital S but it could well be with a small s) after their journeys according to the commandment of the Lord and camped in Rephidim and there was no water for the people to drink". Now their camping around with no water. "Wherefore, the people did chide with Moses and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? Wherefore do ye tempt the Lord?" In other words, what are you tempting God for, God's provided for us all along, what are you bringing up this big issue, making an issue out of it. You know that God's provided, why are you testing God again? This is inevitably what they kept doing. They never would believe God so they kept saying -God, just do some more things so that we'll know you're for real.

And God said - I'm sick and tired of being on trial by you. And so h says - Why are you putting God to the test? "And the people thirsted there for water and people murmured against Moses and said -

Why hast thou brought us up out of Egypt? To kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?" Grippers. "And Moses cried unto the Lord saying What shall I do unto this people? They're almost ready to stone me.

And the Lord said unto Moses, Go on before the people and take with thee of the elders of Israel and thy rod wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thy hand and go. Behold I'll stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb and thou shalt smite the rock and there shall come water out of it that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel." He hit the rock and water gushed out. Now watch this, "He called the name of the place Massah (which means trial or tested) and Meribah (which means striving) because of the striving of the children of Israel and because they tested the Lord saying, Is the Lord among us or not?" The stupidest thing they could ever test God on at this point. God has just released them from Egypt by fantastic miracles, fantastic plagues that He brought, the opening of the Red Sea, manna in the morning every day, the cloud, the whole thing leading them through the wilderness as a people and now they say - Is God among us? Ridiculous. But you see that's the character of unbelief. It never has enough proof. You don't need more proof, don't my friends, about whether God is real, you/need more proof about whether Jesus is real, you need to come to the place in your life where you hate your sin enough to commit yourself to what you know is the truth. That's what you need. And as long as you keep putting God to the test, you're never going to know the truth. And so you see what happened, they put God to the test so he called it Massah and Meribah because there was striving and testing. And the word Meribah or striving is the same word provocation back in Hebrews chapter 3 verse ?. And Moses called that place provocation or striving, provoking and trial or testing. So we know exactly to what he refers in verse ?. Don't harden your hearts like the people did when they got thirsty at Meribah and Massah. That's what he is saying. Don't do it. And don't be always testing God, the Bible says, "Thou shalt not tempt thy God", Jesus said that very statement, didn't He? From Deuteronomy to speak to Satan. So they had failed to believe God's promise. God had given them enough evidence to convince anybody ten times over but they loved their sin, they loved their selfishness, they loved their own plans and their own ideas and they would not put themselves in God's hands.

Notice verse ?, "Don't do it as when your fathers put me to the test". Kept on putting me, it wasn't just at Massah and Meribah they did it, they did it all the way through the wilderness. They kept on putting me to the test, kept on proving me and saw my works for forty years and still they never believed. Don't be like that. Don't be that person that hangs around all these years, all these days, all these months you've seen what He's done, you've seen what He's done, you've seen what He's done; you've never commit yourself to it. You keep asking for more evidence, more evidence, more evidence and, my friend, it's a cop-out. You don't need more evidence you're just unwilling to commit yourself to Christ because you love your sin.

That's the whole thing. So they kept on testing God. Course, the classic illustration of this is Numbers 14, you know, where the majority of spies brought back to Kadesh, they went in there from

Kadesh to spy out the land, remember that? And they all came back and said - Oh, are we in trouble. Those guys are giants and we are like grasshoppers. And I call that the grasshopper complex. The grasshopper complex, you walk by sight you end in defeat. Oh, they' too big. You know what happened because of that? Cause they brought back an evil report God said - Not one single one of you of male age to be in the army of Israel will ever enter the promise land because of your unbelief. Two of the spies brought back a good report, Joshua and Caleb and out of that whole generation the only two that entered the promise land were those two because they believed God. And God answered Moses as Moses pleaded that God not wipe out the whole nation because of their unbelief God said this - "All those men that have seen My glory and My signs which I wrought in Egypt and in the wilderness, you would have tested Me ten times and have not hearkened to My voice surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto the fathers neither shall any of them that despise Me see it". He said in effect, they had enough evidence to believe that I could lead them into that land and lead them into a land of glory and milk and honey but they wouldn't believe Me so they're not going to see that land.

My friends, that's when today is over. Did you get that? You can stand on the verge of receiving Jesus Christ so long and you can flirt with the idea and you can say - God, prove it some more I'm not sure, I'm not too ready - and one day God's going to say - You've had enough evidence, my friend, from now on it's over. It's not today, it's tomorrow. You shall not see My promised land. And that's why the Bible says today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts. In Deuteronomy 2:14 it says, "Until all the generation of the men of war were consumed from the midst of the earth, they wandered". They wandered for 37 years until that generation died out because of the depth of - unbelief. It's a sad thing. They thought they needed to test God, they didn't. And all for 37 years, they murmured and murmured and murmured. In Deuteronomy 9:7 the Holy Spirit said, "remember and forget not how thou provoked the Lord, thy God to wrath in this wilderness from the day thou did depart from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you've been rebellious against the Lord The whole time they rebelled. They tempted God. They kept saying -God, if you're for real, do another trick. And they tested Him and they tested Him and they tested Him. And it was only a cop-out because they weren't willing to give up their sin. They saw forty years of proof, look at verse 9, they saw forty years of proof. You know, I don't know, but there may be somebody sitting in this place today who for forty years has heard the gospel. God help you if that's true and you've never received Jesus Christ. God help you if you've heard it four times and never received Him.

Oh, what a warning for all men. The evidence is in, my friend.

If the evidence was in to Israel in that day, the evidence is in to us on this day that Jesus Christ is Lord. Is it not? The evidence that Jesus Christ the Son of God died on a cross, rose again the third day, He lives and saves men. The evidence is in, the evidence is secure, Christ has manifested God the only begotten Son of the Father, He has declared Him, He has displayed His love, He has displayed His grace, He sent the Holy Spirit. We don't need any human Moses we have the third



person of the Trinity to reveal Christ on top of all historical evidence. And unbelief in the face of such overwhelming evidence is tragic indeed.

And so He says to these Hebrews who know the gospel and have even made an intellectual assent to the gospel, Don't harden your hearts. It's so easy to go cold and to grow callus to what God is trying to do in your life.

Verse 10, continuing from this account of Israel in Psalm 95, "Wherefore, says God, I was grieved with that generation". And that word grieved, my friends, doesn't just mean - I was just unhappy.

That word means - I was aggravated. The word means vexed, displeased, wroth, angered. God doesn't just say - Oh, I'm so sorry about them.

God is angry with sin. And God was angry. I was grieved, vexed, disturbed, aggravated and determined to punish them. And said, "They do always err in their heart and they have not known my ways". God said I got aggravated, they kept erring in their heart, they kept it up, they kept it up, they kept it up, they kept it up. And the Septuagint Hebrew tells us that the word could be rendered - God loathed them. God was disgusted with them. God was willing to spew them out.

God rejected them. God abhorred them. God repudiated them. Why?

Because they always err in their heart. And they have not know My ways. That's the problem. They erred in their hearts. Sin deceives, you see. They made a mistake. They thought they could go their own way and do their own thing their own way and get there and they couldn't. Mark it friends, sin is deceit. Sin calls darkness light, bitter -sweet, bondage liberty, wrong - right and everything else. Sin deceives. And it deceives in the heart. It's the heart that's the whole problem, you know?

But notice what it says. And this is so important in interpreting the passage from a critical standpoint. In verse 10 it says, "They do always err in their hearts". This is an inclusive term, this entire generation that died off was totally evil, always erred. They just didn't have faith, were radical and habitual evil. And I don't think because of that that this passage can be referring to believers who are out of quote - fellowship - unquote.

These are people who constantly habitually follow evil. As we read in Deuteronomy, He said to them, "You have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you". That's what He said. Nothing changed. From the day I first knew you, you were rebellious. But He says, don't harden your heart and make a greater mistake by being deceived by sin, grieving God and being repudiated by Him.

Then the powerful closing of the illustration in verse 11. This is just powerful. God says, "So I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter into My rest". Now the word rest here refers in the illustration to Canaan, the land of milk and honey, the promised land. And the word rest implies resting from wandering and toil. God was leading them to the promised land and because they had sinned and continued to be disbelieving He said that whole generation will die and their children only will go into the land for they had believed. This whole crowd will die in the wilderness, they will never enter into My rest.

He swore it in His anger. He swore it in His anger and when God makes an oath to Himself, it's a binding oath. The patience of God was exhausted. The inveterate unbelief and continued rebellion incensed Him. The sentence He pronounced against them was that they couldn't enter to Canaan. The whole generation, as you know, from the book of Exodus and the book of Deuteronomy, died in the wilderness. It's a sad thing. And you want to know something? The generation that did enter into the land never did know rest in the true sense. Did they? They got in there and God said the first thing I want you to do is wipe out the Canaanites. The Canaanites needed to be wiped out. They were godless, unbelievable people. And God was going to use Israel as a tool of judgment. The Canaanites were so pagan, they buried live babies in jars in the walls of every building they built. They were such a gross immoral and Godless people that God wanted them wiped off the face of the earth in a judicial act whereby He was going to use Israel as His instrument of judgment. But instead of Israel wiping out the Canaanites they moved in with them.

So, consequently, they never knew the rest that God had for them.

And they were governed, then, following that by a successive, Gentile empire until the Roman era. They were scattered over all the earth in 70 AD. And just now, in our day, God is gathering them again for the kingdom. And Israel's final rest comes in that kingdom. And when Jesus comes He'll set up that kingdom and that will be rest.

So there's the illustration. How God treats those who know the truth but hardens their heart. Who keep saying give me more proof, give me more proof when the real problem is they love their sin too much to give it up for Him. Now on the basis of that illustration, I want you to see the invitation in verse 12. Verse 12 is the invitation on the basis of the illustration. It says in verse 12, "Take heed, brethren, take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God". Having taken an illustration from thousands of years ago He now says, Now, I'm talking to you, friends. You look at your own heart. And I say this to you tonight, 1972 - April 16th, I say to you, Look at your own heart.

Do you know the truth? Do you know the truth of Jesus Christ? In love I say to you, don't allow yourself to harden your heart so that you have an unbelieving heart and you wind up departing from the living God. This is a warning against rejecting the knowledge of the truth. You say, but I've never

heard the gospel. My friend, you'll never be able to say that again, because you've heard it tonight.

The judgment of the wilderness days fell on those who rejected God's word through Moses and the warning here is on those who reject God's word in Christ. Take heed brethren, and brethren there is not a reference to Christians, holy brethren chapter 3 verse 1 is Christian This brethren is to Jews. It's used as such throughout the book of Acts to refer to Jews. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."

You'll come right up to the edge. Maybe you've got religious feelings Maybe you even like Jesus Christ. Maybe you're even open to the whole thing but you've never committed yourself. When you decide you can't take the pressure, you can't take the persecution, you don't want to give up your sin, you turn around and walk away you have departed from the living God. Now hang on to that thought.

You say, What's an evil heart of unbelief? Well it couldn't be any more simply defined, it's an evil heart of unbelief. You know what the greatest evil in the world is? Unbelief, unbelief - failure to believe God, that's the greatest sin you could ever commit. You say - I thought murder, this that. No, the greatest sin you could ever commit is unbelief for that locks you out of God's blessing forever.. An evil heart of unbelief. Here are these non-Christians on the verge of faith, maybe even professing to be Christians. They'd never admit to being actively, aggressively against Christ but they are. They are. No matter how close you are I'll say this to you, dear one, no matter how close you are to Jesus Christ if you never come to Him you have an evil heart of unbelief and your punishment will be all the more sorer punishment because you have departed from what you knew to be the living God. And in Hebrews chapter 6 I read you this statement, it says; "If they should fall away to renew them to repentance is impossible". You say - what's he saying?

When you've heard the truth of Jesus Christ, when you have acknowledge that it is true, when you know the revelation of God as He has revealed it and you stand in the face of it and then you turn your back and you walk away, there is nothing God can do. Once you've been to the point of revelation and understood the gospel in it's fullness, once you've said 'no' to Jesus Christ and moved backwards then you'll never get any higher than you were before, you've apostatized. You've become an apostate.

And so does the Holy Spirit say to us, respond to Jesus while the Spirit still warms your heart, while your heart is still sensitive and while it is soft, respond to His sweet love and His call of grace.

You wait too long and you find your heart getting hard and you have an evil heart of unbelief and then it says you're literally departing and the word which is apisteemi, a combination of two words which mean to stand afar off from, stand apart from. You wind up standing apart from God, apostate doomed. If you're sensitive, I say to you respond today. There's the invitation. Simple. If you've heard the gospel and you know the gospel, I plead with you as did the writer of Hebrews - today,

receive Christ before your heart grows cold and unbelieving and you wind up forever departing from the living God.

And I want you to just catch one little thing there. You'll notice that it says that He's a living God. My friends, let me say this, to reject Jesus Christ is not to reject a pattern of religion. To walk away from Jesus Christ is not to reject the quote - unquote the bag Christianity. To walk away from Christ is not just to reject a form of creed it's to walk away from the living God. That's what it is.

All right, so we see the illustration and on the basis of the illustration, the invitation to us. Now look at the instruction, verse 13 and down through verse 17. Here is the instruction and this we'll see very briefly, verse 13; "But exhort one another daily while it is called today lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin". He's saying to these Jewish people in this place to which He's writing, Get along side each other and call to each other urgently. Parakaleo from which we get parakleeto which is the name of the Holy Spirit, really the parakleet, the one called along side to help. He says, Get along side each other and call urgently to them to turn to Jesus Christ. So the recipients of this letter are urged to exhort one another not to harden by rejecting the Messiah and falling back but beg one another to come to Christ. And, you know, I'm not ashamed to beg people to come to Jesus Christ at all. The apostle Paul said that in II Corinthians chapter 5 he said, "We beg you in Christ's stead be reconciled to God"

didn't he? He even said, "I could almost wish myself accursed for the sake of my people Israel". And so we say to you in verse 14 as we have been asked to say by the Holy Spirit, Today, come lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin". And the word deceitfulness means trickery or stratagem. Sin is so tricky, sin never makes it look like it ought to look. It always masks it.

It lies. And men get hard on the inside and they don't even realize it. And you can hear the gospel of Jesus Christ time and time again and not respond. My dad use to always say, the same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay. And the Son of God when presented to you does not melt your heart to faith can harden your heart to unbelief if you're not willing to respond. And the deceitfulness of sin is trying to draw the Hebrews back and that would be deadly, just deadly In Hebrews chapter 10 verse 3? let me just read this to you, you don't need to look it up, Hebrews 10:3? says, "Now the just shall live by faith", great statement, "but if any man draw back my soul shall have no pleasure in him but we are not of them who draw back unto perdition but of them who believe to the saving of the soul".

There you have it. You stand on the edge of decision. Either you believe to the saving of the soul or you fall back to damnation.

And sin would tell you that falling back isn't as bad as you think, that the price is too high to be a Christian that you've got to do all those crummy little things Christians do. That you've got to sacrifice

all the goodies in life. That people will persecute you.

That you don't need that, that you're self-sufficient, you can hack it on your own. What are they saying that to me for? I'm citizen number-one, I give to the Red Cross, the Community Chest, I pet dogs and I give sugar to my neighbor, what's the deal? Since when do I need this? And that's what sin will tell you and that's the biggest lie sin could possibly tell you, it's a deceit.

And so the word of God says to exhort one another to faith. Verse 14, "For we are", now watch this, it should be translated for we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end". There it is. Now, some people might say -Wait a minute, I do believe. Well, I believe. I've come this far, I'm standing right here and I believe all that stuff that whole deal about Jesus, that Messiah thing, I'll go along with that, I believe that. But He says that's not enough because if you really believe it and you've committed your life to it the evidence will be the fact that when it's all over and the day ends, you'll still be there.

What is the greatest proof that somebody is a believer? Continuance, continuance in the gospel. The true ones are around. People always say to me and we preach this so many times but it's all over the Bible. People say to me - what about so and so, he use to come to church, he use to say he believes, now he's gone. I say to you that' proof pudding that he never was saved to begin with because the Bible says if you're for real, you'll stay there. If you keep my commandments then are you my disciples for real. The true branch does what?

John 15, what does a true branch do? Abides. That's the whole point of John 15. The true branch doesn't go like this, disconnecting itself. The true branch abides. That's the point. And so it is that a real believer stays there. He remains. Go back to verse 6, the same thing. Whose house are we? We're the house of Christ if we hold fast to confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. Some people will come along and say - Well, I believe that stuff I believe it. And He's saying to them well, you've never committed yourself to it so that you secured that faith permanently. It's not enough to come up and say - yea, I believe all that stuff. The point is if you really believed it you wouldn't be being pulled back. You' be in there, staying in there, abiding there. That's the point. And when somebody departs from the faith, when somebody backs away from the faith, I quote you what the Bible says in reference to them in I John 2:19, it says, "They went out from us but they were not of us for if they were of us they would have continued with us but they went out that they might be manifest they were not of us". When somebody leaves, they're not for real. And He says here it's so strategic for you Jewish people, it's so strategic for you who hear the gospel and know the truth, now don't go back but be the for real ones that commit themselves to Christ and abide permanently and thus truly be said you are partakers of Jesus Christ.

Oh, there's such a great danger in hearing and hearing and never receiving Christ. I say to you, my friend, if you keep coming and keep hearing and hearing and hearing and not receiving better you

should get out of here and run the other direction and don't go near a church thus by hearing and hearing and hearing you become harder and harder and harder. And some day you'll wake up to discover that grace is over and you're an apostate. How many people I've met, how many people you've met who affirmed an initial confidence in Christ and they appeared to come to Him but it's not real, they're never at prayer time, they're never desirous of witnessing and sharing Christ, they don't want anything to do with family worship, they seldom or never read the Scripture, they never talk about the things of God, it's foreign to their conversation and they walk in a worldly pattern and yet they claim to be Christians. I say, my friends, that can't be.

They are not of those who believe to the saving of the soul, they are those who come up to the edge know all the facts but are falling back because they never were real to begin with. And the tragedy of it is they may fall back into a hardened heart of unbelief and depart from the living God and grace may be done. There's a lot of them. According to Matthew chapter 7 verse 21 at the judgment it says this, "Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, it's us - You know us , and He'll say to them - depart from Me, I never knew you".

A few will say to Me, Lord? No, what? Many, oh, there's so many.

So many are on the knife edge of decision, don't receive Jesus Christ and they fall back to perdition. Hard hearts, doomed for eternity. And, thus, the injunction is repeated again in verse 15, "While it is said today if you will hear His voice harden not your hearts as in the provocation". Do you think the Holy Spirit wants you to get that message? He repeats it twice. Don't harden your heart. For now watch this, verse 16, "For who when they had heard did provoke, did not all that came out of Egypt by Moses". The whole pile of them did. Who was it that didn't believe God and was striving and putting God to the test? The whole group were.

Only two exceptions, Joshua and Caleb that we know about.

Verse 17, "But with whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?"

God was angry with the whole group of them who had been unbelieving.

And God called them in Deuteronomy 32, I think it's verse 20, He called them a very perverse children in whom there is no faithfulness.

God was angry with the whole nation. God was angry with a whole generation of people. And He sentenced that whole generation so that they could not enter into His rest.

And I'll tell you something, friends, as God judged the apostate unbelief in the wilderness, He'll judge you today. They rejected the forty years of evidence, added to the evidence they had seen in Egypt and the evidence they had seen in the Exodus and that is knowing and willful unbelief. That is apostasy, that is falling away and it is damning to the soul. It didn't even matter to God that a whole generation had to be set aside, if they didn't believe that's what God had to do because that's the principle in which the universe is built You violate God's principles, you are failing to believe, you bring upon yourself the consequences.

Verse 1?, "To whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest but to them that believed Not?" There's the key friends. There the key. And that leads us to the issue which is the fourth point verse 1?. The illustration and the invitation and the instruction point to this crux. "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." Unbelief. We're saved by faith. In verse 1? it says they shouldn't enter into His rest. Which ones? To them who believe not. And verse 1? repeats the same principle in different words, they couldn't enter in because of unbelief. My friend, God has bless for your life. Did you know that? Some of you do, don't you? God want? to pour out riches for you and not only in this life but through out all eternity and there's one commodity that is demanded if you're going to take hold of those riches and that's faith. That's faith.

I've talked about faith so many times but what always comes to my mind is the illustration - you say, well, I can't believe. I have one of those pragmatic, empirical minds that has to see the fact.

Oh, that's ridiculous, everybody lives by faith. You live by faith when you eat, you go into a restaurant you eat the food you don't ask any questions, you don't say - Well, let me inspect the meat and see if it's grade - A tomatoes, that hamburger could be horsemeat and you'd have it down before you even knew what was going on.

I mean, even in your own home you eat what your wife cooks without any question. If you go to school, I mean, really what goes on in that cafeteria only God knows. I mean, we all live by faith. I always think of this when I'm driving. Nobody drives in constant terror that in their lane around the next bend is going to be a forty-foot concrete wall, just like that. You trust the people who make the highways. You drive along a mountain road and you don't expect a bridge to go out halfway then ends. You live by faith and if you can put your faith in the highway department and the people who make your food, you can put your faith in the God of the universe. He's worth your faith. And I say to you that you'll never enter into God's rest in this life you'll never experience blessing you'll never experience the unfolding of His love, you'll never experience eternal life unless there is within you a soft, pliable heart that is committed to Jesus Christ in trusting faith.

And, my friend, the longer you stand on the brink and say 'no' to Jesus Christ the harder your heart becomes and the easier it is to say 'no' to Him.

Jude said this, "I will, therefore, put you into remembrance though you once knew this, that the Lord having saved the people out of the land of Egypt afterwards destroyed them that believed not". Did you get that? To be unbelieving brings upon you the destruction of God. I read you again in Hebrews chapter 12, startling, startling words. Verse 21, and this is Moses getting the law on Mount Sinai, 'And so terrible was the sight that Moses said I exceedingly fear and quake". His knees smote one against the other When I got the law up there on the Mount, I was really shaking.

"But ye are come unto mount Sion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven and to God the Judge of all and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

You know what he is saying? He's saying - Man, it was scary enough on Mount Sinai, when I saw God move I was shaking all over but he says you, you're not coming to some kind of physical mountain you've come to the mount of God, you by faith have entered into the presence of God and all that's involved. There it is, it's right before you.

Verse 25, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh for if they escaped not who refused him that spoke on earth much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven". Who was it that spoke on earth? It was Moses. Who was it that/God's voice come to the world from heaven? Jesus Christ. And if they didn't escape who heard not Moses how shall you escape who hear not Jesus? "Whose voice then shook the earth but now he hath promised saying Yet once more I shake not the earth only but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain". Listen to this. "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear For our God is a consuming fire." The judgment fell on those who did not hear Moses and judgment falls on those who do not hear Christ.

Listen to the words of Solomon, he said this, "He that being oft reprov'd", listen to it, "He that being oft reprov'd and hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy". To harden yourself against God is to depart from the living God and to bring upon yourself judgment without escape. And so I say to you simply tonight as the Holy Spirit says, Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart. Let's pray.

Father, we're thankful tonight for Jesus Christ. We're thankful for His wonderful, marvelous love for us. Father, we haven't talked about Your love, we haven't talked about Your mercy so much as we've talked about Your judgment tonight but that's because this is what You've brought us to in our study



of the Bible. And Father, I pray that it's put some holy fear in the hearts of people. God, I would pray that you would give no rest, no peace, no comfort to anyone here tonight that doesn't know Jesus Christ. Let their hearts be full of anxiety, may they have no rest, may they above all things desire to accept Christ as personal Lord and Savior and go all the way and commit themselves by faith in Him.

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