

Hebrews 3:7-19

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Date: 05 May 2019

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[0 : 00] Our text for this morning is Hebrews chapter 3 verses 7 through 19. Before I read them I want to remind you beloved that this is God's word to us.

He is written for his glory and for our good. And as such we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and to obey its commands.

Hebrews chapter 3 verse 7 and following. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.

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

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

[1 : 24] For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.

For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt, led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years?

Was it not those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?

So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. The author of Hebrews begins this portion of this very pastoral letter, a letter addressed to a group of Hellenistic Jewish Christians who had suffered greatly.

We get evidence of that throughout this letter. And they were being tempted to forget the surpassing excellency of Jesus Christ and to return to Judaism.

[2 : 38] And he begins this with these words, therefore, as the Holy Spirit says. Here we have another in a series of therefores.

Chapter 2, verse 1, verse 14, verse 17, chapter 3, and verse 1. Which means that the author of Hebrews is building a case.

He's elaborating and developing an idea. And we must pay careful attention to these therefores. In this text, the therefore refers generally to all that he has said concerning Jesus' superiority to Moses, that great and venerated figure of Jewish history.

And it refers specifically to the preceding phrase. I'm going to get it out. Found in verse 6, the last part.

Which says, And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

[3 : 45] It's coming off that phrase. Like, we are God's house. We belong to him if we hold fast. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says.

This letter was written to address the temptation that these beleaguered Christians were facing. The temptation to leave the faith.

To not persevere to the end. And he sets about this work of teaching them a startling truth. It is possible to have every appearance of beginning well, but to end very poorly.

It is possible to have every appearance of beginning well, but to end very poorly. This is so timely for the church today.

In an age of rampant, cheap grace gospel offers, we need such a word. So many caught up in what I like to call decisionism.

[4 : 55] So many, I say with trembling, led astray because they believe that they have the power to save themselves. And they tie that to a solitary event in their lives.

In order to show this Hebrew audience and us this, he does what every faithful pastor does. He opens to them and explains the Scripture.

He appeals to God's authoritative word on the matter. And we can know this is what he is laboring to do because he says, as the Holy Spirit says.

He knows about, he believes in the inspiration of Scripture. And he does so, he quotes from Psalm 95. So the text for his sermon in our text today is Psalm 95, the last part of verse 7 through verse 11.

And he declares, right, this is the authoritative word of God, right? The Holy Spirit has spoken this. It meant something back then. It means something for the church that he's writing to.

[6 : 08] And it means something for us today. So in the last half of verse 7 of Hebrews chapter 3 and through verse 11 of Hebrews chapter 3, he quotes from Psalm 95.

He's quoting from the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. This would have been their Bible in their day, much like me quoting from the ESV.

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion on the day of testing in the wilderness where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for 40 years.

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

So our text's author, for the sake of their souls and ours, picks up from Psalm 95 the Exodus story in order to instruct them and us about the dangers of having every appearance of beginning well, but ending very poorly.

[7 : 28] The Exodus story was always meant to serve us in this way. It is a type for the deliverance, the ultimate deliverance, of God's people, the church.

Recall that God has a people under the bondage of slavery. And in order to make his name known, God delivers his people from that bondage through a judgment that they are spared from by the mark of a sacrificial lamb.

In 1 Corinthians 5 and verse 7, Paul states, Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Paul saw this great connection between the Exodus story, the great redemptive story of the Old Testament, and the deliverance that was theirs and is ours in Christ.

God's people are then led out of Egypt by Moses, who the author of Hebrews has just told us that Moses prefigured Christ. In Hebrews 3, verse 5, in the first part of 6, he wrote, Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant to testify to the things that were to be spoken later.

But Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. Moses was the type. Christ is the anti-type. He's the fulfillment of what Moses was meant to picture as one leading his people out of bondage to sin.

[9 : 05] The Israelites are met with the obstacle of the Red Sea not long after their departure from Egypt, being pursued by the fickle-minded Pharaoh when God delivers them through the parting of the water and judges the Egyptians by its reunion.

They were led miraculously by pillars of cloud and fire. They were provided for miraculously, right, food from heaven and water from rocks.

In all of their unfaithfulness, God was faithful. And what the author of Hebrews is doing is showing those who claim to follow Jesus Christ what their unfaithfulness ultimately cost the Egyptians or the Israelites and warning us not to do the same.

The Apostle Paul does this very thing. He picks up again the Exodus story in 1 Corinthians 10 verses 1-6 where he wrote, For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea and all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink for they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them and the rock was Christ.

We don't have time this morning to unpack all of that but it is cool. Verse 5, Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

[10 : 47] Now, verse 6, these things took place as examples for us that we might not desire evil as they did.

They're given to us as an example that we would pick them up and see how it is that we're to remain faithful to the way of Christ.

So join me, if you will, for a moment. Please mark Hebrews chapter 3 but join me in Psalm 95. I want to draw your attention just for a moment to verses 7 and 8.

Amen. Let me remind you that in Hebrews chapter 3 as he's citing the Septuagint and he says today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion on the day of testing in the wilderness.

I want you to see the difference here in Psalm 95 last half of verse 7 and verse 8. Today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as at Meribah as on the day at Massah in the wilderness.

[12:15] Their locations in Psalm 95 isn't that interesting? But the Hebrew words Meribah and Massah mean to quarrel or to rebel.

That's Meribah and Massah means testing. So he's picking up the event what was happening what was going on what was the intention of the Israelite people as they were rebelling against God and putting God to the test.

Now you can leave Psalm 95 we'll look at it a little bit more in Hebrews chapter 3 but turn with me in the middle to Exodus chapter 17 and let's look at the place where this actually happens.

I want to remind you that we're not first century Hellenistic Jews so we have to do a little more work than he had to do he could simply just quote Psalm 95 and they knew exactly what he was talking about.

we may need to be prompted a bit I know I needed to actually go find the place this happened my mind did not go Exodus 17 first seven verses listen to what happened Exodus 17 beginning in verse 1 all the congregation all the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of sin by stages according to the commandment of the Lord and camped at Rephidim but there was no water for the people to drink now this is not long after they've crossed the Red Sea it has not taken much time for this people to not have their apparent need met watch what happens therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said give us water to drink and Moses said to them why do you quarrel with me why do you test the Lord see those two words but the people thirsted there for water and the people grumbled against

[14:23] Moses and said why did you bring us up out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst so Moses cried to the Lord what shall I do with this people they are almost ready to stone me and the Lord said to Moses pass on before the people taking with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go behold I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb and you shall strike the rock and water shall come out of it and the people will drink and Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel and he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah testing and rebellion because of the quarreling of the people of Israel and because they tested the Lord by saying is the Lord among us or not okay so this is the event that the writer of Hebrews is pulling upon right but this was not the only time that the people quarreled in fact there's quite a history of quarreling we find out in

Numbers chapter 14 God says there were ten times they put him to the test and as you read through that narrative you'll see that cycle again and again and again of them not believing that God would do what God had said he would do in preserving them as a people but to bookend this I want you now to turn with me to Numbers chapter 20 and then I promise we'll go back to Hebrews 3 and stay now we know that because of Israel's unfaithfulness right they were set to wander in the wilderness and they did so for 40 years a journey from Egypt to the land of Canaan could feasibly have been done in two weeks and they spent 40 years wandering around as a people in the desert this comes this event in Numbers chapter 20 right very close to the end of that wandering and again a similar event starting in verse 2 now there was no water for the congregation and they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and the people quarreled with Moses and said would that we had perished when our brothers perished before the Lord why have you brought the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness that we should die here both we and our cattle and why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place it is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates and there is no water to drink then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces and the glory of the Lord appeared to them and the Lord spoke to Moses saying take the staff and assemble the congregation you and Aaron your brother and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water so you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle so a very similar event they have no water they are grumbling about water

Moses goes and pleads for them to have water and God gives him instructions but they are different this time did you notice the difference the first time he was told to take a staff and strike the rock when he strikes the rock the rock I'm presuming breaks open and water comes flowing out abundant water for this mass of people this time he's told to do something different verse 8 says tell the rock before your eyes to yield its water right say to the rock give me your water and it will happen it's important that we pay attention to God's good instruction for us verse 9 and Moses took the staff from before the Lord as he commanded him then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock and he said to them hear now you rebels!

shall we bring water for you out of this rock? and Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice and water came out abundantly and the congregation drank and their livestock now God in his kindness gave them water anyway notice that he gave them water anyway and we are very quick to say well the result is good right the water came the means don't really matter God doesn't feel that way at all about it God has a much different perspective in fact I think most people read this text and go fantastic Moses obeyed and it happened again but then God does a very curious thing verse 12 and the Lord said to Moses and Aaron because you did not believe in me they disobeyed what he had told them to do to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them these are the waters of Merivah there it is again rebellion where the people of Israel quarreled with the Lord and through them he showed himself holy this was a judgment that was passed on that generation you recall that none of that generation got to see the promised land none of them got to enter into the rest of Canaan so the author of Hebrews is warning them and us in this way the last half of verse 7 of Hebrews 3 today today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion on the day of testing in the wilderness and again in verse 15 and I believe repeated for emphasis as it is said today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion do not be like the Israelites that faithful faithless excuse me faithless generation learn your lesson from post exodus Israel this is the plea of the author of Hebrews there were those who had every appearance of beginning well but ended very poorly they did not enter God's rest do not be counted among them don't merely say you're a follower of Christ be a follower of Christ and in verses 12 and 13 and 14 the author of Hebrews gives three exhortations to help us number one protect your heart number two press one another toward holiness and number three persevere to the end number one protect your heart verse 12 says take care brothers lest there be in any of you an evil unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living

[22 : 26] God he's saying to us this morning be very careful be vigilant Sin is deceitful our hearts are fickle pay attention to what's going on in you trace the contours of your affections what do you love the world or the ways of Christ they stand in opposition to one another to fall away means to willingly apostatize it means to turn away from the faith you once proclaimed this kind of turning away bears a huge penalty to reject Moses meant not entering into the promised land to reject Christ means not gaining the blessings of eternal life but rather eternal death this is a grander thing a greater thing an eternal thing that the writer of

Hebrews is talking about he's using the temporal example of the Exodus story to teach us this and we can know this because Moses didn't enter Canaan but when Jesus was transfigured who did he meet with on the mountain Moses Moses was there right Moses was found in Christ right Moses was taken off to glory but he didn't enter that earthly rest of the land of Canaan and that's to show us something greater about our eternal rest take care watch over your heart be sure that you are in Christ the author of Hebrews wrote in Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 31 it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God apart from the righteousness of Jesus it is a scary thing to be judged to be condemned by God almighty right we need the righteousness of Christ to carry us through that judgment right that we would be found complete and whole set apart in him that we would stand before God and then live with him forever in Mark chapter 4 and Matthew 13 and Luke 8

Jesus tells the parable of the sower and this is so instructive for us in our day there's a sower who goes about sowing about the word right the gospel of Jesus Christ and we know that that word falls on various types of ground that word is sown along the path and it's snatched away by birds and we find out in Jesus' explanation of the parable that this is Satan taking it away it's those who hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and never respond in faith there's word sown in rocky soil and because it's shallow it yields quickly right the greenery pops forward right starts well but when the sun of

tribulation comes out it scorches them when life gets hard it withers up and it dies in Mark chapter 4 in verse 17 Mark records Jesus saying that it immediately they fall away some phrase found in Hebrews they fall away some of that word is sown among thorns and we learn that those thorns are the cares of the world the desire for riches and those thorns choke out the word and it never brings forth fruit and some of that word is sown among good soil and seed sown in good soil bears fruit bears the fruit of righteousness and beloved what the author of Hebrews is saying to the original audience and to us this morning is let's be careful having been people who started off well who claim to be Christ followers I would presume that at least most of you this morning would say that you're a follower of Jesus you're not the word sown along the path I pray that you're the word sown among good soil bearing the fruit of righteousness he's saying be careful that you're not rocky soil or thorny soil that you don't end poorly and this is the trouble of our day is what we simply do as we go about asking the trees what kind of tree they are what kind of tree are you can you imagine an orchard farmer

I didn't start that sentence off well a fruit farmer in his orchard what kind of tree are you I am a peach tree what kind of tree are you I am an apple tree you know the tree by its fruit and we know that the trees that don't bear fruit are cut down and thrown into the fire right they're not good trees they're not good for the production of fruit and so they're cut down and other trees are planted in their place we ought not let there be a self proclamation that's not evidenced by fruit bearing second peter chapter one verse ten apostle peter wrote therefore brothers be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election right be diligent set yourself to the work of confirming your calling and your election be assured how for if you practice these qualities you will never fall fall same language being used there once again and he has just listed off a bunch of qualities that should be possessed by the

[28 : 42] Christian not in perfection but in growing degrees of glory protect your heart ask the question the good and honest question am I in Christ has he changed me do I say I follow Jesus because it's the comfortable and easy thing to do in this culture or do I really treasure him above everything else have I really forsaken the world in order to follow him have I really denied myself taken up my cross that I might gain Christ it's a serious question it's a question that must be asked for the sake of your heart secondly he exhorts us to press one another towards holiness verse 13 but exhort one another every day as long as it is called today the church exists for your good that you would be affirmed that you would have assurance of your salvation we talk about this kind of thing trying to help those who may think they're in

Christ and are not it's always a fear of mine that we beat down the broken hearted in the process we beat down a person this morning that is struggling with their sin maybe in Christ trapping sin and they're trying to shake it loose and they're working at it and it's just not happening and they contend to go maybe I'm just not a Christian maybe God has not saved my soul brothers and sisters this is why you need a church you need the church to tell you when you're living in sin that you do not see because sin is deceitful our text tells us you also need the church to say to you brother sister I know you're feeling particularly ashamed at this moment but you are in Christ we have seen good fruit and we've seen it in abundance we spend that kind of time together we work together in that way that we might finish well to the glory of

God we need one another to do this if you are trying to live the Christian life on your own I fear for you because of this reason author of Hebrews says later in chapter 10 verse 24 and 25 and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works not neglecting to meet together as the habit of some but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near the finish you see what he's saying he's picking up this idea all the way back from chapter three the finish it's coming you see it coming so be sure to finish well be sure to be found in Christ having your affections changed by him we're supposed to help each other in that process thirdly persevere to the end verse 14 for we have come to share in

Christ this is true of us we've come to share in Christ if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end we we always have to be so very careful at this point because we are never saying that we work to earn our salvation ever are we saying that salvation is fully a work of God on our behalf he changes us because of the work of Christ if we're saved by works it's Christ works and not our own but being found in him we've been given a new nature and that new nature is evidenced by our working it simply proclaims!

who we are so we have to be so careful about this but this is exactly what he's saying to us here we've come to share in Christ if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end I don't think there's really too many in our day that don't love the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints there's few that reject it many will reject the system that it belongs within but few will reject the doctrine itself you will not often hear it as perseverance of the saints you will often hear it as once saved always saved right but what's tragic is that is so often taught right alongside decisionism right so merely raise a hand walk an aisle we're going to be sure not to embarrass you in the process of that right and now once saved always saved and so so so very damaging to the church of Christ so very harmful this might be the most needful thing to be spoken about with conviction and clarity in our day

[34 : 32] I'm extremely troubled even by our own maybe I should even say particularly by our own denomination and the way we're in this cycle of giving people false assurance John wrote in 1st John chapter 2 verse 19 and just take this just take this verse thinking about in our own association the partnership of churches in our area the average weekly attendance as compared to the membership of those churches is 32 percent they have a greater membership than average weekly attendance and it comes out to 32 percent so there's a massive number of people who are never gathering with the church is what that means a massive number not part of a fellowship on a consistent basis at all listen to 1st

John chapter 2 and verse 19 they went out from us but they were not of us for if they had been of us they would have continued with us but they went out that it might become plain that they all are not of us if you love Christ you love Christ's church you love his people you love his work in the world which beloved whether we want to admit it or not happens primarily in the church I mean in this building I mean the life of God's people it is possible to have every appearance of beginning well but to end very poorly I'm going to give you we probably all could think of some examples from our own living let me give you a couple of examples from the

Bible it is possible to have every appearance of beginning well but to end very poorly take for example Demas Paul mentions this man in his letter to the Colossians and in his letter to Philemon he's a partner with them he sends greetings on behalf of Demas to the churches and to Philemon in Philemon Paul refers to him as his fellow worker but in Paul's final letter in 2nd Timothy we discover something troubling quite startling about Demas 2nd Timothy chapter 4 verse 9 and following Paul says do your best to come to me soon for Demas in love with this present world has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica he abandoned the faith he abandoned the mission of

God he abandoned the way of God because he loved rather than Christ and his purpose the present world he appeared to begin well but as far as we can tell as far as the biblical narrative tells us he ended very poorly it is also possible take heart to begin poorly but to end very well and the truth is if we're in Christ this is all of our story I don't think any of us were very astounding when we first came to faith in Christ but hopefully bit by bit degree by degree he is working a holiness in us an example from the scripture is John Mark Mark in Acts chapter 12 verse 25 we read and Barnabas returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service bringing with them John whose other name was Mark and then in Acts chapter 13 and verse 13 we read now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos where they had experienced quite a bit of persecution there's a lot of rejection of the gospel there and they came to Perga in Pamphylia and John this is Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem and as you're reading that in a timeline it's just the detail John left okay John left maybe there was some other reason that he needed to go to Jerusalem but we find out more about why he left in Acts chapter 15 verse 36 and following and after some days Paul said to Barnabas let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaim the word of the Lord and see how they are now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark but Paul thought best not and had not gone with them to the work and there arose a sharp disagreement so that they separated from each other

[39 : 49] Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus so there is a reason behind Paul's thinking right he withdrew from them and it's understood largely that Paul didn't think he was in the faith he because of fear ran back to Jerusalem he wasn't willing to follow the way of Christ the way of suffering and he separated and Barnabas who was his cousin didn't think so and so a disagreement arose amongst them and Barnabas and Paul went their separate ways well praise God we get some more information about Mark in 2nd Timothy chapter 4 verse 11 just after Paul speaking of Demas he says Luke alone is with me get Mark and bring him with you same Mark get

Mark and bring him here the one that he had rejected as a missionary partner he's now saying get him and bring him with you for he is very useful to me for ministry and this is the very same Mark that authored the gospel he!!