

Cost of Unbelief
Hebrews 3:12-19

Deuteronomy 28:1-20
Revelation 21:1-8
Responsive Psalm 62

So last week we focused mainly on verses 7-11 which is a quote from Psalm 95 about the rebellious nature of the Israelites. Who having been given all that was needed still seemed to rebel against God every chance they had. Today I want to spend a little more time in these verses for I think that there is more here than I was able to get out of them last week. As we have seen, The Author here in Hebrews is making a direct connection between Psalm 95, and to the Hebrews that he is writing, As I had mentioned last week, he understands the inspiration of scripture, he understands the fact that it is the word of God and does not see it as just a collection of stories or wise sayings but rather as a living vibrant word which is applicable today, just as much as it was to these Hebrews, and to these Hebrews just as much as Psalm 95 was when it was first written.

In verse 12, which we touched on last week, but will be spending a bit more time in this week shows us the reason and the thoughts of this author, for he is concerned that this group that he is writing to may be in danger of falling into apostasy. So this morning, I want to read starting in verse 7, through the end of the chapter, and today we will be focusing mainly on verses 12-19. So as we can see, in verse 12, the author quoted psalms and applied to his reader. Leading up to this point he had been warning them of losing focus, of being deceived into believing things that were false, even in danger of elevating things to the level of Christ, making other things just as important and worthy of worship. And he has spent the last 2 chapters and part of this chapter showing why that is not true, and here he warns them the dire consequences of continuing in this line of thought. We must remember that he is writing to them as brethren, as fellow Christians and in doing so is imploring them to listen to the working of the Holy Spirit which if they truly are children of God would have the spirit indwelling in them.

But with this warning comes a stark reality of the consequence of rebelling against God, of apostatizing, falling away and denying that which you first believed. Peter warns of these dire consequences in his 2nd letter, chapter 2 talking about being deceived, and those who come to deliberately deceive. Verse 1, of 2 Peter chapter 2. “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who brought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.” This is one reason why pastors and leaders of the church must not be tempted to use the authority they have been given to push their own personal agendas. This is why it is paramount that leaders within the church be sure that what they teach, and what they say is from scripture itself for if not, then they are a deceiver, using this faith for their own gain, or their own prideful reasons and as Peter says, these false teachers who are leading others astray will bring upon themselves swift destruction.

And this is why, he continues on, verse 2. “And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of the truth will be blasphemed.” We tend to hold people higher than we should, what I mean by that is, we should not just take someone that we respect, or trust at their word when it comes to this faith. Yes, that's right, I am inviting you to double check my preaching to make sure that it aligns with scripture.

This is how people can be deceived, how they can be caught up into false beliefs, it is by blindly following those who they esteem as leaders, or experts without keeping open a critical eye to see if what they are being taught is actually scriptural. One sure sign, is if the pastor barely even refers to the bible in his messages, or if you try to confront them even to ask for further explanation they attack you for being untrusting, or for your lack of respect toward them. Those are red flags, that leader likely like one mentioned by Peter here, who's purpose is not the gospel, but is one of their own, whether it is for their own gain, or to deliberately deceive and lead people astray.

Verse 3, in Peter, says “By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words.” They covet your money, your servitude, your attention, everything except your souls which is the concern of a true pastor. A true pastor is concerned for your souls, God has called him as a minister to encourage, and exhort his flock to not only believe, but to remain faithful. In the following verses Peter goes on to list accounts of God's judgement for those in sin. He lists, the angels, saying those who sinned were cast into hell, he lists the Ancient world, which he destroyed in a flood but spared Noah, and his family. Only 8 people in total. He goes on to describe the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah being turned into ashes and condemned to destruction to make them an example to all those who would live ungodly.

If God had done these things in judgment of Sin and rebellion, then we can be assured that all those who use his word, or set them selves up as leaders in the body of believers for their own personal gain and glory, or even worse, to deliberately lead God's children astray, we can know, without a doubt just as Peter had said there will be swift destruction. But his warning does not just stop to leaders of the church, in verse 20 he warns of those who claimed christ, but turned away in rebellion. “For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and over come, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, then having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb, a dog will return to his own vomit and a pig, having washed to wallowing in the mire.”

And this is what the Israelites did, this was in fact their defining sin in the wilderness, they did not heed the blessings they were given, they despised the law and divine covenant they swore to keep, As Peter says, it is far more serious to commit apostasy after professing belief than to have never come to faith. This apostasy that Israel is guilty of, is the one that Author believes is threatening these Hebrews he is writing to, and it is one that I am afraid threatens the church today as well. Forsaking the living God always leads into a fall into idolatry. Which by definition isn't only creating idols and worshipping them, but it is when we elevate anything, or anyone in our lives above the living God. These Hebrews were being tempted to give up the light of the gospel in exchange for other religious practices, to trust in the appearance of human figures in the case of Moses, and angelic beings rather than in the appearance of Jesus Christ.

The way that we can guard ourselves against apostasy, and against being deceived into believing false beliefs, is through mutual exhortation, or admonition. We have a responsibility to each other just as much as we do to our selves individually. As Paul wrote in Romans, “we, though being many are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.” To only be concerned about our selves and forsake the rest of the body of Christ is not only selfish, it is not the traits of those who are of the body of Christ. Those who are the adopted children of God are called to love one another, we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves, if we are to love our neighbors and unbelievers how much more should we love our brothers and sisters.

To neglect the body of Christ, is not only sinful, but is not a trait of one who is born of the spirit. For it is Christ's love working in us to love one another, if we do not have this love for one another, then it is a pretty good indicator that we do not have the love of Christ working in us.

That is why the practice of corporate worship, of fellow shipping together is actually quite important in the life of a Christian. How are we to encourage, and exhort one another if we do not interact with one another? That is one of the many functions of the body of Christ, Mutual encouragement and concern for one another in the very least guards against deception and falling into false teaching. That is the Authors intention here in verse 13, "Exhort one another daily, while it is called Today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" If Israel had this mind about them, if they made such exhortations a daily practice while they were in the wilderness and fostered a constant faith in God among each other instead of inciting rebellion and unbelief it may have been a different story. But as it is, they stand as an example to us of the dangers of such an apostasy, of turning our back upon God.

This passage here also reminds us that this is a duty of each member of the body of Christ. The author here is not only writing to the leaders, but to the congregation. This is not a responsibility that is only for the pastor and elders or the church, but it is for each of us in our own personal relationships with one another. We get a larger sense of this being about the congregation of believers and not just instruction to leaders in verse 12 and 13. In verse 12, he says, Beware Brethren, lest there be any of you and evil heart of unbelief. It would seem that his concern was not for the wider congregation there falling into sin and rebellion, but rather there being one or two who was causing an issue which is why in verse 13 he implores everyone to exhort one another to remain faithful, to flee from sin and rebellion and not be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

I can not stress enough that this is one of the main functions of the local body of believers. We gather together to fellowship and praise and worship God together, but one of the effects of doing so is this very thing, a calling each other to remain faithful. To encourage each other, and to bear one another's burdens. This can not be done if we fail to gather together, the reality is, we need each other not only to encourage, and worship together, but to also watch out for one another. Often times I think that many people have an issue with having this kind of intimate relationship with others in the church, they want to slink in the back row and rush out, or would rather avoid church all together convincing themselves they can gain just as much through their own studies, or listening to messages preached online. And while there is a time and place for such thing, overall general rule we need to gather together, we need to meet for the body of Christ to be fully nourished.

The last 3 verses here in chapter 3 sum up the point the author is making in the previous verses and points to the importance of as he says, "exhort one another daily, while it is called today." He points back to the example of the Israelites in the wilderness that he first posed quoting psalm in verses 7-11. They did not listen to the voice of God, but instead hardened their hearts and rebelled, the result, we see he lists here in verses 16-19. "For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was he angry 40 years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who did not obey? So we can see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."

This also gives a clue into the dire situation of the Israelite in the wilderness, they hardened their hearts, they angered God because they did not know his ways. They refused to listen, to obey, and chose instead to rebel so he swore in his wrath that they would not enter his rest, they would not enter the promised land.

And as we see here in verse 16, it was not just a few, or a couple, but the entirety of those who left Egypt, the entire first generation who were directly lead by God out of bondage in Egypt, given his holy law, saw his presence daily in the pillar of fire by night, and the pillar of smoke by day yet even right in his presence they rebelled against him.

The point here is, that this generation that had been lead out of Egypt and had first hand experience of the provision and goodness of God in bringing them out of slavery and making them a free people, and not only that, establishing them as a nation, are the very last people that one would think would rebel against God. Yet, think of those now, who have heard the word of God, have seen his grace and mercy and just like the Israelite, choose to rebel. But they did not just rebel against the law of God as the Israelite did, but they rebel against the blood of Jesus Christ. IF the punishment for Israel rebelling against the commandments of God was death, should we think that we can rebel against God and escape punishment? On the contrary, for rebellion against God who sent his Son to die for the sins of his people is not just a mere physical death as it was to this generation of Israelite. The promised land and rest that Christ's promises those who lay down their sin and rebellion and follow him is not a parcel of land like it was to the Israelite, but it is a matter of eternity. One spent either in heaven, or one spent in eternal judgment in hell.

What is the root cause of the judgment to those who were lead out of Egypt? Well verse 19 says, They could not enter the promised land because of unbelief. As time keeps moving on, and generations come and go, one constant is God, his word, his promises, and his judgment. Unbelief, and disobedience goes hand in hand, one always leads to another as Westcott says, disobedience is unbelief in action. Is this not what happened when man first fell from God? Were not Adam and Eve deceived by Satan into unbelief, if you eat this fruit, you will not die, you will be wise like God himself. The seeds of unbelief were sown, and were carried out by disobedient action. The same is true with Israel in the wilderness, and it is the same disastrous sequence that we see is now threatening this group of Hebrews, and it is the same disastrous sequence that threatens Christians today. And in all 3 of these examples we see God's judgment of them not entering his rest, in Adam and Eve they were tossed out of the garden and out of the fellowship that they had with God.

The rest that was lost by the rebellious Israelites was that of the promised land, and the dire effect to those who rebel against God now is the judgment to never enter the everlasting rest. Also notice, that in each case it was their own unbelief that made them unable to enter into God's rest, in each of these cases they disqualified themselves. This is the natural state of man, one of rebellion and unbelief. From the fall of Adam mankind has been cursed, we are estranged, separated from God our creator. The reality of this is that each and every person is on a path, straight to hell and everlasting judgment. I think the best way I can explain this is to borrow language from our current society. I am not going to get into this subject other than it lends itself as a good example here. Right now we are dealing with the concepts and ideas of what is being called systemic racism. It is the idea that this is not something that you choose to be, it is ingrained in you, you are a racist simply by being born a certain race. You can't help but be a racist because you were born into it.

It is that way with unbelief and rebellion. Man is born into sin, they can not change that, it is a part of who they are. Our sin, and rebellion is systemic, it is the natural state of mankind. So the only way that we can escape it, is not by willing it, or working our way out of it, but if one who is perfect and holy takes upon himself the punishment for the curse that we are born with. That is why this warning here is so important, that is why the exhortation of fellow brothers and sisters to be constantly reminded and encouraged to remain faithful is so important.

Our conduct throughout our Christian walk serves as a witness, and as proof of our salvation. Which was one of the Major themes in the book of James, faith proven by works, and we see the same here with this author As is said in verse 14 “ For we have become partakers of Christ, we are a part of Christ, his blood has been applied to us...IF we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.

The dire result of apostasy, of turning away from God is the proving out that we are still lost in our sins, we still have a rebellions heart like those who left Egypt, of whom God said, “They always go astray in their hearts and have not known my way.” Gods people will persevere, they will remain faithful and true to the gospel which was first given to them to the end. The trials and hardship of life only work to solidify the faith of God's children, but it also has the effect of weeding out those who have hardened their heart in unbelief. That is why it is imperative that if you hear his voice Today, to not harden your heart but instead turn and believe, lay down your rebellion and sin and follow him. And likewise that we also examine ourselves that we are not deceiving ourselves in our belief, for the most dangerous of deception is the one were we believe ourselves justified by our own actions or decisions. For it is only by God's grace and his quickening of our souls from death to life that we are even able to see or hear the truth of his word. If you are listening to this today, and you are a child of God I implore you, just as the author was here to these congregation of Hebrews, to remain faithful to the gospel for which you have been saved, exhort, and encourage one another in the word, in fellowship, and in prayer.

Be a body knit together in Christ, strive to be one body of many parts, not many separate parts of one body. And likewise, if you are listening to this today and you hear that voice of doubt in your head questioning your faith, or if you have yet to come to faith and you hear the calling to believe, do not wait, do not harden your heart and put it off for another day, for today is the day you have been given, you have not been promised tomorrow. Repent, lay down your rebellion and turn from your unbelief, and enter into that rest which is promised through Jesus Christ the son.