

Today

Hebrews 3:7-15

Exodus 17

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Responsive Psalm 1

I want to start off this morning by reading our passage but also including the verses that we looked at last week, so let us read Hebrews Chapter 3, starting at verse 1 and reading to verse 11. (Read Hebrews 3:1-11.) So, here we are, taking up another section of chapter 3 of Hebrews, and finding it starts with another Therefore. As we continue through this book we are going to find that this seems to be one of the Authors favorite words. What it comes down to is that the arguments that the author is writing about are built upon, and follow a logical conclusion. It is the idea and argument of the lesser to the greater, or it can be put in this way, if this thing is true, then this must also be true. He spends much of his time building upon what was previously written, therefore, he uses the word therefore quite a bit. So leading up to this point he has shown why Christ is superior to angels, and to Moses, being the son and heir of God, not just a messenger or a teacher.

So now that we know that Christ is superior, and we know why that is true what do we do with that knowledge? As we know from our previous studies in the book of Mark, such knowledge and understanding of heavenly things can only come to those who have been given the ability to see, and to hear. We are not talking someone who just seeks to reform themselves, or is seeking to live a better life, but someone who truly has had the working of the spirit in them, someone who has been awoken, and is now able to see the truth and the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As we see here in verse 7, what we do with this knowledge, is the opposite of what Israel did in the wilderness. “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, Today if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in th rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness.”

We have not been given the new birth to squander, but we have been given the new birth to follow and obey. The faith that we have been given is a vibrant, living faith that seeks to please our father. As we have talked about before when we were going through the book of Galatians, and then we went through the Book of James to deal head on with a perceived controversy between the two books. Namely, Galatians teaching of the new birth by faith, and by the hearing of the word granted to us by God alone, not through the law, not through actions, but by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Then James says, If you don't have works, you don't have faith, hmm, seems the opposite right? Well we know it isn't, because faith produces in us good works, the difference is that we do not do good works to gain salvation, or to gain justification, we do good works because it is the holy spirit, and it is the faith working in us to do so. Out of our new birth, flows good works, I is not the good works that produces in us a new birth. All of that to say, the faith working in us is living, it works in us each day, personally through the holy spirit, convicting, teaching, admonition us to follow the will of God.

Israel was given the law right? And what did they do with it? The disobeyed, they did exactly what this author here in Hebrews is instructing his readers to avoid, it was elevated above its purpose, above its meaning and was given ultimate importance in the faith of Israel. In it, they believed it brought salvation, that it was the law which was given to them by God that they found their justification and sanctification. But that is not really what the law was given for was it? Galatians 3 “ Oh foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you; Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law? (by keeping the Mosaic law?) or by the hearing of faith?.”

Now sure you could say, Paul was writing to the Galatians, to gentiles in the new Testament, that doesn't apply to the Israel of Old who God gave the law to. Well, continue on, verse 6. "Just as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness therefore know that only those who are of faith are the Son's of Abraham." Abraham was hundreds of years before Moses, and he was justified by faith, not by law. Verse 9, So thn those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse, for it is written, cursed is anyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," And it is here that we see the purpose of the law, " but that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident for the hust shall live by faith.

The law, does not bring salvation, the law brings condemnation, it brings with it a curse which is only broken by the fulfillment of the promised messiah who took the punishment of God's law, and died so that we may live. It is through faith in Christ, not through the law, it is through faith in Christ, not in our good works. Verse 19, in Galatians Paul answers this question, so if the law does not save, then why did God give it? " It was added because of transgressions till the seed should come to whom the promise was made. " verse 24, the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, so that we might be justified by faith, and now that faith has come we are no longer under a tutor." The law points us to the complete impossibility of anyone of us being able to earn our salvation, it teaches us that there is nothing in us as broken sinful creatures that can be found as being just so therefore, we need something else, something that can free us from the bondage of the law, and the only thing that can is Jesus Christ, and the faith granted to us by God.

So how is this all relevant to this morning, well I bring it up because we see here in verse 7 Israels response, when given God's word, they did not hear his voice and understand but rather hardened their hearts and rebelled. The author here in Hebrews is imploring his readers to not be like Isreal and instead to listen and head the call of the holy spirit. The author understands the working of the holy spirit in God's children, that it is a minister, a tutor, a teacher, and if need be a chastiser. Which is why even though what we see here in verse 7-11 is a direct quotation of Psalm 95, he attributes these verses to the Holy Spirit. Doing so has the effect of demanding serious attention of the readers and emphasizing the extreme seriousness of the warning that is set forth in this passage from Psalm. And it is the Holy Spirit admonishes us to listen, and to follow through such passages such as these.

This also shows at least at a basic level the infallible inspiration of scripture, and its timeless nature. The word of God is not just some set of stories, or wise sayings and teachings, but is a vibrant, living word which as the scripture says, cuts right to the heart. This passage, which was written thousands of years previously we see recorded in the book of Psalms is quoted and used here with just as much importance and effectiveness as its original intention. Aquinas writes about this passage saying " The authority of the words arises from this, that they are not the products of human invention, but of the Holy Spirit. He adduces the words of the Old Testament for the New, lest it should be thought that their reference is only to the Old Testament and a former time, instead of also to the New. And they are words of the Holy Spirit because as declared in 2 Peter, no prophecy ever came by the impulse of men, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. Even David himself says in 2 Kings, speaking of himself, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me" This therefore demonstrates the genuineness of the authority because it derives from the Holy Spirit."

The author here quoting this passage from Psalms 95 hearkening back to the time that Israel was lead out of Egypt and wandered in the desert for 40 years would be a very appropriate example to a group of Hebrews who would be very familiar with this account, and their heritage. And using this example shows the seriousness of hardening your hearts, and being rebellious toward this superior Christ that he has been writing about. This illustration of the Israelite's used here points back to time where after haven been lead out of captivity were questioning God's provision and faithfulness toward them. The Goodness of God had never failed them, raising up a leader for them to lead them to the promised land, yet over and over and over they rebelled against God.

The time mentioned here in this quote of Psalm 95 is known as the day of testing, and is described in Exodus 17 which we read this morning. They had been lead into an area and were lacking water and began to blame God, they were close to rebellion and insurrection, as Moses had said, What shall I do? They are ready to stone me! After Moses struck the rock and it sprang forth water, he called the place Massah which means testing, and Meribah which means embitterment, because they had put the Lord to the test by saying, is the Lord among us or not? Instead of meeting their hardship in faith, relying upon God's provision which he had been faithful to supply this entire time, they began to question God, asking Moses, "why have you brought us out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock? But the reality is, they were not testing God as they may have believed they were doing, rather it was God who was testing them. They had set themselves up as Judges and determined that they would not trust him unless he met their demands.

So to put this in another way, they had seen the works of God, they have been beneficiaries of his grace, mercy and prevision even during their times of rebellion. Yet, having seen, having experienced all of that we see a reaction of unbelief and ingratitude. After all they have seen, they still did not know his ways. Sounds familiar doesn't it? Sort of like the teaching in Mark? They have seen, but have not known. Many witnessed Christ in his ministry, heard his teaching and seen his miracles, but many sought more proof, wanted more evidences, did not believe, hardened their hearts to what they saw. They have squandered their opportunity, they did not respond the day they heard his voice, but instead hardened their hearts and did not believe and rebelled.

The result of this rebellion, the result of not responding Today if you will hear his voice, is the coming day of judgement. Verse 8. "Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of Trial in the wilderness, where your fathers testing Me, tried Me, and saw MY works for 40 years...the result? Verse 9 " Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, They always go astray in their heart. And they have not known my ways. So I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest. "

The ramifications of not responded to the call of God is that of life and death. Either, one responds in faith, or one hardens their heart and will suffer the wrath to come, they shall not enter his rest. God caused Israel to wander the desert those 40 years before bringing them to the land he had promised, resulting in an entire generation to die off. He punished them by causing them to forfeit the blessing of the rest that was promised, in case of Israel here, it was a rest from the slavery of Egypt, and the wanderings of the desert. While this may have been true in the physiscal sense to Israel, it has an even deeper, more dire consequence to the world today. For you are either in God's rest, or you are in God's wrath.

So what exactly is he warning these Hebrews here by quoting Psalm 95, and using this account of Israel's rebellion as an example? Well quite simply, I think it is to be wary not to stray away from the gospel, not to stray away from Christ and the provision of his atonement supplied by his death upon the cross. Looking to anything other than Christ, or looking for salvation by any other means outside of the one that God has provided will only leave you outside the rest of God. The Author of Hebrews here is I believe at one level concerned for these that he writes too, for it seems that they may be starting to stray away from the gospel itself. But he also realizes that their response in such a time will either prove, or disprove their confession. That is why the urgency of hearkening to the voice of the holy spirit Today.

This works not only in the process of the new birth, in the calling of one to belief, but also in the conviction of Sin. What is your response when you know the path that you are on, whether in thought, or in deed is going to lead you into sin? Do you harken the voice inside warning you that you are sinning? Or do you harden your hearts, continue on your path and entertain that sin for a time. There is an urgency in this as well. When the holy spirit convicts you, that your thoughts, or your actions are wrong, are sinful, are not pleasing to God we should respond immediately to that calling. Turning from the sin and rebellion that we are drawn too. And carrying out this application even further, there is a element of resting, or peace when we are near to God right? What happens to that when we stray? We start to feel separated from God, we may begin doubting, or become driven further into despair. For a christian the result of dabbling with sin, does not bring lasting comfort and rest, but instead brings a whole host of negative emotions and thought patterns. We become separated as it were, from the peace and rest that we have in Christ.

Now I am not saying that we lose our salvation, we do not leave the rest of salvation that God has provided for his children, I am talking in a more immediate, sense. Our own rebellion and hardening of our hearts only brings with it chastisement, just as the 40 years of wandering did for the Israelite. For a time, we lose the comfort that God's rest has provided for us, and it is not because of God's provision has failed, but it is because we have hardened our hearts and rebelled and allowed sin to come into our lives. And that brings us to verse 15, which tells us what our response should be to this warning. "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, but exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." This is what the Author here is doing, exhorting his readers to remain faithful and true to the gospel which they had first received and to not be deceived and lead astray. He is also exhorting his readers to do the same among each other, to encourage, and help one another in avoidance of sin. He has already alluded that he does not have any doubts in the genuineness of their faith, calling them brethren in verse 1, identifying them as being one with Christ, just as he is. While he determines that it is necessary to rebuke them quite sternly, he does so believing that there is a true faith among them.

He still considers them a christian community, a part of the family of God, but as Paul says in 1 Corinthians, "a little leaven, leavens the whole lump." A little sin can spread, many can be corrupted by a few. That is why the Author here implores his readers to to exhort one another, to not be deceived, and to not allow each other to fall into sin. There maybe times if you see a brother or sister in a pattern of sinful behavior that you should confront them about it, but we are not to do so in judgment, but rather out of love seeking to draw them back into the fold. The urgency here is the same, he says not only do we do so daily, but we do so today. Do not let such things fester, for as we know sinful things such as anger, or jealousies, or lust seem to have a cancerous effect, not only on the person caught up in them, spreading and consuming them, but it can also have the same effect to all of those around them as well.

And we can see that the goal of such rebuke, or exhortation is to remind, and to draw one back to Christ for in verse 14 it says, "For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end" Knowing that the response of the knowledge of sin within a believer should be one of repentance and of turning away. For those of faith will persevere until the end, those of faith when convicted of sin will repent. That is why, it is imperative that, Today, if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts, but instead turn, and enter into the rest and comfort that can only be provided by a sovereign Lord who shows grace and mercy to all those who believe.