

Jesus is better: So let us keep listening to him

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[0 : 00] Please do be seated.

The Olympic sprinter Linford Christie used to talk about the bee of the bang. If you want to do well in a race, you have to get out the blocks on the bee of the bang.

Starting things well is important. How a sprinter gets out of the blocks, that's important. In a rugby game, you want the person to catch the ball from the kickoff and not drop it.

That's important. You want to get round to tidying the garage as you promised your wife you would. Thankfully, mine's left now. That's important. But what's more important is how you finish.

It's great to start things. And that's what the writer is getting at here in Hebrews in chapters 3 to 4. Imagine, put yourself in these shoes.

[1 : 13] It's the first century AD, you're in a local church and you're sitting beside your ancestor. And we old ancestor. Well, to be honest, to be honest, she's struggling a bit.

Catching up after the service over a cup of tea and you find out she's really struggling in her faith. And she says to you, do you know, when I was a Jew, I would go to the temple.

I saw the priest when I sinned. I saw that sacrifice being killed before me for my sin. I saw their blood being sprinkled.

Now I have nothing. Now I have nothing. I don't have those physical things. I can see. I can touch. I can smell. All I have now is this word.

And you're thinking in your head. How can I encourage my ancestor? But before you're able to help counsel her, she lifts her head, looks you in the eyes and said, you know, when I started following Jesus, I thought it would be easy.

[2 : 20] But life got harder. I preferred the things I could see. I almost preferred the things I could touch. And I didn't suffer as much before I followed Jesus.

I actually welcomed in the market. Not now. My friends don't really want much to do with me. They don't think much of me following Jesus. See, we antest her.

She started well. But she's in danger. There's a huge temptation for her to go back to Judaism. And the temptation for her, it's real.

And it's real for this church as well in this letter. Just remind yourselves, look at verse 1 of chapter 2. We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

Or look at verse 6 of chapter 3 in your Bibles, which you looked at last week. But Christ is faithful as the Son of God's house. And we are his house.

[3 : 25] If indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory. This church is in danger of going back. And the author, what's he done so far at this point?

He's been talking about how Jesus is better. About his superiority. Superior to angels. Superior to humans. Superior to Moses. And if you turn your back on that, that's a serious thing.

In the section last week, you saw that he's been comparing Moses and Jesus. And now, it's in our passage, he compares their followers. He'll say, if you turn your back on Jesus, you're just like your ancestors who followed Moses.

So don't do that. Keep going. And encourage one another to keep going. Before we dig into our passage and look at that, let me pray and ask God for his help again.

Let's pray. Speak, O Lord, from your word, we ask this evening.

[4 : 36] Give us ears to hear what it is you have to say. Give us obedient hearts who will seek to follow you.

Make us a people, we ask, that spur one another on. And so incline our hearts to your word, we ask, not to anything else to see. Open our eyes to see truly wonderful things in it.

Unite our hearts in reverent fear of you and satisfy our hearts. In your steadfast love. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So two points for us this evening.

First off, we're going to see a warning. Don't be like your unbelieving ancestors. And then an exhortation to listen to God and to encourage one another.

Let's look at the warning first together. The author, I'm sure, of the Hebrews, as you picked up while looking at this book, he is a bit of a genius. He knows the people so well he is writing to and he constantly uses things that they get.

[5 : 42] Images they understand. Metaphors they use. And here in our section, with quoting Psalm 95, he does just that again. The original readers were almost certainly Jewish and they would have known the story of the Exodus.

Where God used those ten blows, the ten plagues, to free them from slavery in Egypt. He brought them through the Red Sea. He led them on a journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land. It is truly epic. And the story we read of in the Exodus, it's a bit like our Christian life as well. It's a great visual aid for us.

As Christians, we were once in slavery to sin. And we were freed not by the blood of a lamb, but by the blood of Jesus Christ. And we are on a journey not to the Promised Land, Canaan, and rest there, but to the new creation.

And eternal rest in the Lord Jesus Christ. And in that original journey in the wilderness, the people, they all started off together.

[6 : 48] They all received the blessings of the covenant. But they didn't all make it. The journey was hard. People wanted to go back to Egypt.

And the author of the Hebrews used a Psalm 95 here. Referring to Exodus chapter 17. I think numbers 14 as well, as he does so quote in this section.

And remember the story. They'd seen these amazing things. They'd seen the rescue. The people were running out of water. And all of a sudden, they think God's somehow forgotten about them. They'd just been on the most daring rescue mission ever.

Overnight, he provided for all of his people's needs. He was clearly committed to them time and time again. He gave evidence for it time and time again.

He gave instructions to show them how to live as his people. And despite all that God had done, they whinged. But more than that, I think it also refers to numbers 14.

[7 : 50] When the people refused to go into the Promised Land, where they rebelled against God. They couldn't, or rather they wouldn't believe that God would lead them into this rest. It's there.

It's in front of them. It's on the cusp of receiving it. And they don't believe God. They hardened their hearts. Like Pharaoh before them.

God had spoken to them. And they ignored it. They ignored it. And so what was meant to be a two-week journey was 40 years.

A generation gone. And the author of the Hebrews says to these people in this church, don't make the same mistake. And the Holy Spirit says the same thing to us today.

Don't make that same mistake. See how verse 7 begins? So as the Holy Spirit says, Psalm 95 was written long before Hebrews was.

[9 : 01] And yet, God's speaking to us through it. Through the letter to Hebrews. And what's the heart of the warning? So as the Holy Spirit says, verse 7, today, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

It's a stark warning, isn't it? And what I think is even more surprising is when you read the context of Psalm 95. You read the Psalm, and it's amazing.

It's this Psalm that causes you to praise God. The first two thirds are majestic, and then there's this, oh, this clunky gear change it feels into this section.

Why is that? Well, I think it's because it's easy to praise God with your lips. And then in your heart, be far from him. The journey to the promised land, to God's rest, it was hard, it was tiring, there was temptations to turn back, and that's the same for us.

Our journey to our eternal rest, and Lord Jesus Christ, the new creation, it's long, it's hard, it's tiring, and there's temptations to turn back.

[10 : 23] Think again of their life, living in tents, never in houses. Houses were around at the time. Living in tents, that's what we're like here in our home, in our journey.

Home's not here. It's to come. So we don't want to get comfortable. Keep pressing on, to enter the eternal rest, because Jesus is better.

Now here's the question, which might come to your mind. Is it possible then, to be a Christian, and to not reach that finish line?

To not enter that rest? That's a fair question, I think. That's the warning here, the end of the passage it seems. Well, I think the Bible's clear on this.

You read chapters like John 6, John 10, Romans 8, all that are saved are safe. No thing, no one, can pry you out of the Father's hand.

[11 : 35] But then you read chapters like Matthew 24, 1 Corinthians 10, that causes us to check, are we saved?

We read passages like these warnings in Hebrews at the start of chapter 2, verse 6 of chapter 3, our section today, how do we hold these in tension? Well, think of it this way, again, looking at the Israelites, who the authors of the Hebrew uses.

Let's remember, they all heard the message, but not all of them believed. Their lack of faith showed that they didn't believe the message.

They weren't saved because they rejected God's word, despite having all the blessings of the covenant. They presumed they were fine, but they disobeyed because their hearts did not believe. And we see this in church too, don't we? People know the Bible. They listen to sermons. They have the Lord's Supper. They look like Christians.

[12 : 40] People think they are Christians. Perhaps they think they're Christians. And yet, at heart, they don't believe the gospel. We can sometimes slip into that way of thinking.

We think we're fine because we go to this church, not that church down the road. We think we're fine because we're a well-known family in the free church. We think we're fine because we're in the CU exec, or we use our annual leave to help with camps, or this, or that.

And yet, we can enjoy the blessings of being part of God's covenant people, and yet have unbelieving hearts. See, like the Israelites in the wilderness, so it is in the church where you have the visible church, those who seem to belong to Christ, but within that, there's the invisible church, those who truly belong to Christ.

All here, but not all are saved. But make no mistake, when God breaks into someone's life, when He puts His Spirit into their hearts, He saves them forever.

And the danger when looking at topics like this is that often the wrong people are unsettled. If you're here listening and you're a bit worried about what you're hearing, that's probably a good thing, because it means that your heart is soft and not hard.

[14 : 17] We are warned in this passage, don't be like your unbelieving ancestors. Then notice the exhortation in the middle to listen to God and encourage one another.

The way to keep going, the way to persevering to the end is to listen to God's Word. So the question is simple, isn't it? When God speaks, when we sing, speak, O Lord, do we listen? When you listen to God's Word being explained here, are you listening? Is it in one ear, out the other? When you go to a midweek Bible study in a one-to-one in your own quiet time, how do you respond to God's Word?

See, because how we relate to God's Word tells us a lot about how we relate to God. Think back to the start of Hebrews 1, verse 1, if you've got your Bible open. Long ago, at many times, and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

But in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son. I think we can infer from this that to reject God's voice in the Bible is to reject God's Son. So it's a serious thing, isn't it, if we're not listening?

[15 : 38] Or think about when someone says something to you and your conscience is pricked. What do you do? God's Word cuts us to the core, as you'll see next week.

I think this passage is immensely challenging, isn't it? But also really encouraging. Did you see the repeated words here as the section went through?

Today. We aren't called to worry about our faithfulness tomorrow. Just today. Doesn't ask us to fight all temptation we'll face at once.

Just today. Not asked to think if we'll trust God tomorrow or if we'll listen to Him tomorrow. Just make sure you listen today.

See that three times in our section? Verses 7, 13, 15. Today, today, today. See, listening to God is what's essential for a believing heart.

[16 : 49] But here we see that a believing heart manifests itself in another way. A believing heart looks like is seen in encouraging one another in their walk with God.

Have a read with me from verse 12. See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

But encourage one another daily as long as it is called today so that none of you may be heartened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.

How often do you need encouragement to follow Jesus? How often do I need encouragement to follow Jesus?

More importantly, what does God's word say? How often does God think we need encouragement to follow Jesus? Every day. Every day we need encouragement to follow Jesus.

[17 : 53] And who does this encouragement? Is it James and the elders? Yes. It's not just them, is it?

See to it, brothers and sisters, one another, encourage one another daily. It's something we're all called to do with one another. So what does that mean practically?

It means that after church tonight, we don't just want small talk. We want proper talk. We want to encourage one another. We want to encourage one another every day.

So it means we probably need to see Christians more than once a week on a Sunday. If you're not part of a CDG, that's the website, it says you call them brackets, community discipleship groups, CDGs, join one.

Because we need encouraged. If you genuinely can't be part of one, get good friends who will spot when you drift, when your zeal goes.

[19 : 04] It would be good for us to ask ourselves as well, are there the beginnings of an unbelieving heart in me? What does that look like?

Well, am I giving opportunities to suggestions, clothed in fine words, that God is not wholly good, that I can't really trust his way to live? Be careful, because sin's deceptive, as we see here.

Satan's the deceiver. Satan's the deceiver. To keep going to the air, we're called to encourage one another, called to exhort one another.

Sometimes that hurts, but we don't do it out of spite, because we don't want our friends' hearts to harden, to drift. We don't want our own hearts to harden and drift.

I love the proverb, the kisses of an enemy multiply, but faithful are the wounds of a friend. What else does that look like to encourage one another? Well, when with Christian friends, we don't want to spur one another on into banter that's gone too far.

[20 : 12] I'm guilty of that, to be honest. We think we're fine, we get, enjoy the banter, and sometimes we get caught up in a moment, and things go too far. Or when we're with our spouse, be careful that we don't play one another on, inside and sin, egg each other on.

There's someone perhaps who, who does your head in, so you mention it to your spouse, then you, it's a very gossip session about them. Encourage one another.

Don't let your anger, be an excuse either. I said, encourage one another in holiness. Play one another on side in holiness. Friends, friends, what we see here in the section is that we are never cruising to glory.

There is no cruise control, there's no autonomous driving to glory. Together, we are heading to glory. And to help us keep going, we need one another.

We need to share the generous gospel word of encouragement. And anyone who's a Christian can do that. You don't need a PhD in Hebrew syntax or anything like that to say, how was your week?

[21 : 24] I was praying for you. Why don't we read Psalm 130 we looked at in church this morning? Be reminded of how good the gospel is. So friends, if you're a Christian, if you've come to share in Christ and in his salvation, as the author to the Hebrew says, if today you hear his voice, and you have, we've been looking at it, don't harden your heart.

Instead, use what God has given us, his word, that firm foundation, and one another to speak the gospel, to encourage one another, to keep going, so we fight sin together.

Let me pray. Our Father, in one sense, this section here is really straightforward.

And in another sense, it is really hard to live out. But thank you that you have given us all that we need to keep going. Your word to hear your voice, and one another to speak it to you.

May you help us here in Becloof Free Church, in our CDGs, to be a people who are known for encouraging one another. Friends who we can just drop a text to, and we need that encouragement.

[22 : 54] And the words to say to one another, to remind ourselves that you are good, and the gospel is true. That Jesus is better, he is worth it, so let's keep going together. And Father, for those who are, who are shaken by the warnings here, may they know that no one can pry them out of the Father's hand.

And for those here who, perhaps have hard hearts, may tonight your word have softened them, and cause them, again, to turn to you, and to want to go hard after following the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, by your grace and for your glory, help us to keep going to the end, to persevere to the end, and enter that rest in Christ. It's in his name we pray.

Amen. God's word is a firm foundation in our lives. Let's thank him for that. Let's praise him for it, and sing the great song together, how firm a foundation.

Then afterwards, please remain standing for our benediction. Let's stand and sing. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[24 : 11] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith, in his excellent word.

What more can he say, than to you he has said? For you who for refuge to Jesus have led? Fear not, I am with you, O be not dismayed, for I am your God, and will still give you weight. I'll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand, and cause you to stand, upheld by my gracious, omnibult and happy.

when through the deep waters, when through the deep waters I call you to go, the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow.

[25 : 40] for I will be with you, for I will be with you, your trouble to bless, and sanctify to you, your deepest distress.

when through fiery trials, your pathway shall light, my grace all sufficient, shall be your supply.

the flames shall alarm you, I only decide, your trust to consume, and your gold to refine.

the soul that our Jesus does not lead or impose, I will not, I will not desert to his foes.

That soul though I'll have, should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

[27 : 06] Here's God's blessing from Hebrews 13. Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good, that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory, forever and ever.

Amen.