

The Peril Of Unbelief

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[0 : 00] I appreciate those who came up and prayed over us. It was literally added to the bulletin last night, and I just told people about it this morning right as service was starting.

So I appreciate you guys and your support and continued prayers. If you'd please take your Bibles and open up to Hebrews chapter 3, where we left off.

This is not a traditional sermon in the way that I usually prepare them. I tend to go through passages and break down, try to get points, main points, and focus on those.

I really feel Hebrews 3, verses 7 through 19, I could actually make the argument that through chapter 4, verse 13, would be probably a better stopping point.

But I'm realistic sometimes, and I realize I'm not going to get from 3.7 to 4.13 today. But as I was reading through this and preparing for it, I really feel like just kind of reading through and giving some background, some explanation to it as far as how we can understand it may be the better approach rather than three points and an illustration and all those things.

[1 : 43] So I'd like to just share with you what I've got written and go from there. So in this section, Hebrews 3, 7 through 19, I've given the title, The Peril of Unbelief.

When someone reads through the Old Testament, they're fascinated with the tale of a God who takes a special interest in his creation, built around several covenants of promise from God to his people.

They're also confused by the law and the sacrificial system, very similar to other ancient Near Eastern cultures. But the difference being between the other cultures and the people of Israel is that their law and their system was intended to promote holiness to God.

Then as they read about the nation of Israel, they're amazed at the miraculous ways that God delivers them from the hands of their enemies and provides for them in their wilderness wanderings.

And then are left confused, again, at how the people of God can so easily turn their back on him. And have we not had that type of question come up when we're reading in the Old Testament and we see the children of Israel, after being delivered and provided for by God, then turn away from him.

[3 : 06] And we're like, how in the world could these people, who have seen so much, turn their backs? The Apostle Paul informed the church in Rome concerning the things that were written in the Hebrew Scriptures when in Romans 15, verse 4, he says, for whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction.

So even though the Old Testament may be hard to follow and understand at times, it is beneficial for us to read it because the things that happened are written for our instruction. One very important lesson that is learned is that over and over and over again, throughout the Bible, God warns mankind of the dangers and penalty of sin.

He warns his people. He tells them, if you do good, you do this, this, and this, and this, you're going to be blessed. However, if you don't, then he says, this is going to happen, this is going to happen, this is going to happen.

It's always bad and curses and a negative ending for them. Not a good thing. Penalty. This is made most obvious in God sending the prophets to the people of Israel when they went astray.

And even though God made it clear that the people would be punished if they did not turn from their wicked ways and obey him, he made it clear through the prophet Ezekiel that was not his desire.

[4 : 44] And I think that's something very important that we need to grasp because people in our culture, society, think they understand or know the God of the Old Testament. They've maybe read a few verses or read a few stories and they say, oh, he's so vindictive and evil and horrible.

How could you ever come around to worship such a God? But the reality is that that is not God's desire.

It is not his desire to punish people. Ezekiel 33 verse 11 says, Say to them, as I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.

Turn back. Turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? God does not desire to punish the wicked.

That is not his intention. He desires the wicked to turn from their way and turn to him. And just like God gave the Israelites fair warning of what would happen if they did not turn from their wicked ways, he's given us fair warning as to what will happen if we reject his offer of salvation through his son, Jesus Christ.

[6:11] I took it from a passage that John 3, 18, with that section of John, John 3, 16, probably one of the most well-known verses in all of Scripture, and by both Christians and non-Christians alike.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. And by and large, for a lot of people, that's as much as they learn from that passage.

But if you continue reading to verse 17 and verse 18 and verse 19, you get a more complete picture. Yes, God loves the world. Yes, he did give his Son so that we can believe and not perish. But in John 3, 18, it says, whoever believes in him is not condemned. That's a good thing. Not having condemnation from God is a great thing. Believe in Jesus, you will not be condemned. But whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. So though God punishes mankind by condemning them to hell when they reject his offer of salvation, he did not create man to be doomed to hell.

[7:32] I don't know about you. I've had these conversations with people who are, they're not saved, they don't know Jesus, they've never read the Bible. And maybe they've heard some things here and there, like they understand the concept of a heaven and a hell, they've heard it somewhere, and they'll make statements like, I don't understand how God, how a loving God could send people to hell.

But the reality is that loving God sent his Son to take the penalty for us so that we don't have to. And the requirement is that we believe and put our faith and trust in him alone. I'd like to read now Hebrews 3, verses 7 through 11, which is also taken from Psalm 95, verses 7 through 11. Hebrews 3, 7. 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 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.

[9:03] Psalm 95 is what's referred to as an enthronement psalm. It calls for the people to come and acknowledge Yahweh as the great God and King above all gods that mankind has conjured up.

And the psalmist, if you read from beginning to end, the psalmist encourages the congregation to come and worship their creator, but then he warned them against unbelief as in the days of the wilderness wanderings.

So what is that all about? Are you familiar with the wilderness wanderings? Are you familiar with what they're talking about? Because if you go back to Psalm 95, it's a little bit of a different rendering.

Why don't you turn there? I wasn't planning on it, but we'll turn there. Psalm 95. Psalm 95. I'll start in verse 6.

I'll read it to the end. O come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord, our maker.

[10:19] For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness.

Those two are not found in Hebrews, by the way, three. Those two words, Meribah and Massah. We'll get to that in a second. When your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

For 40 years, I loathed that generation and said, there are people who go astray in their heart. They've not known my ways. Therefore, I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest. So a few things that are brought up here in Psalm 95 that I don't have in my notes, and who knows, I'll probably mention it later anyway. But first of all is that he is frustrated because they have put him, verse 9, 95, 9.

And your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. They had seen what God had done for them and the goodness he had done for them in bringing them out of Egypt and providing for them into the wilderness and such.

[11:41] But they still put him to the test. So after being brought out of Egypt, Meribah and Massah, they're two names for the same place that this takes place, that this testing takes place.

So after being brought out of Egypt at Meribah, the Israelites were extremely thirsty and they quarreled with Moses about the lack of water, Exodus 17. You can go there and read that yourself sometime.

And because of their thirst, they grumbled against Moses and they said, why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst? Moses brought this problem to the Lord and the Lord enabled Moses to strike the rock so that the Israelites would have water and know that God was with them.

It's a miracle in the wilderness there that I never really heard much about growing up. Actually, I never heard about it, I don't think, growing up.

And when I read through it, every time I'm reading through Exodus, I get to that, I'm like, wow, this is so amazing. That God told Moses, take your staff, strike a rock, and I'll provide water for the people.

[12:55] You know, like the two million people that he had with them out of this rock. God provided this. It was a miraculous thing. Because of their grumbling and testing of God, Moses called the place Meribah, which means quarreling, and Masah, which means testing.

So that's what Meribah and Masah mean, it means quarreling and testing, because that's what happened at that place. And not only did the Israelites demonstrate doubt in God's provision, they also tested him because of their complaints and distrust.

Like, from the time, it was almost like Moses kind of had to force them along out of Egypt. That was like, they, oh, I don't know about this.

I'm not sure what it's going to be like. I don't know what it's like out there in the wilderness, but I know what I have here in Egypt. Have you ever found yourself kind of being led and prodded by God to go and do something?

And you're like, I don't know. What if a lion eats me? Well, then that happens, I guess. That's right.

[14:11] Absent from the body, present with the Lord. But no. So the Israelites had to kind of get pulled out of Egypt, and then when they're out in the wilderness and there's nothing, they have no assurance of anything.

They're like, oh, why did you bring us out here to die? Was there not enough graves in Egypt? No, oh, no, now there's no water. No, there's no food. Like, it was just, rather than saying, wow, God used to get this guy Moses.

We didn't like him at first, but he's growing on us, especially since he led us across all that water and separated it. It was dry land. It was a pretty amazing thing. And rather than saying, oh, well, that was a miracle, and the Egyptians didn't get us.

That was pretty miraculous. And there's this pillar of fire and smoke all the time with us that seemed to give us, that seems to be a blessing to us. Instead of observing all these things that God has done, and they can say, well, Lord, how are you going to provide water for us?

We're getting thirsty. We don't know where there's water. How are we going to get this? They're complaining. And they're not really trusting the fact that God has led Moses to lead them out to this point.

[15:24] And he's brought them this far through his own miraculous provision. Now fast forward about 40 years. So toward the end of their 40 years of wandering, a similar situation occurred at Meribah Kadesh.

This is a same name, different location. Okay, and I think the name is probably because of what happened there in Numbers 20. So Exodus 17 is the first occurrence. Numbers chapter 20 is the second occurrence.

And again, complaining about a lack of water for their livestock and themselves, it says in Numbers 20, the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. They quarreled with Moses, Meribah, and said, if only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the Lord.

Why did you bring the Lord's community into this wilderness that we and our livestock should die here? Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates, and there's no water to drink.

Man, you would think sometime, you know, where God judges them for their unbelief, ultimately choosing not to go into the promised land.

[16 : 41] 40 years later, they see that generation die off. Now they're like, why didn't we just die with them too? Man, how could God put up with this for so long?

The patience is impeccable. The love is amazing. These people are just, ugh.

So appealing to the Lord at the 10th meeting, Aaron and Moses were told by God to speak to the rock which would bring forth water. It's almost like they were thinking, man, this is deja vu.

Did this really happen before? Okay. So, last time, they were told to strike the rock. This time, God said, speak to the rock.

So instead of demonstrating God's glory and provision and speaking to the rock as the Lord had instructed, Moses struck the rock and claimed that he and Aaron would bring forth water for the Israelites.

[17 : 46] See, the first testing was for the people of Israel. The second one, I think, was more for Moses and Aaron. Now, the Lord still kept his promise in providing water, but then that's when he told Aaron and Moses that they would not enter the promised land because of their failure to obey him.

And it's clear from other portions of scripture that God tested the obedience and faithfulness of the Israelites, including Aaron and Moses at Meribah Kaddush. You can get Psalm 81, verse 7, Psalm 106, verse 32, there was a testing of faithfulness and obedience.

There's a lot of background for this section in Hebrews, but I thought it was very important to cover it. See, they knew who God was and what he had done to bring them out of Egypt, through the wilderness and to the boundary of entering the promised land.

Yet, they still did not exercise faith in God's provision. The warning here in Hebrews is that it is to those who know the gospel, who affirm its truth, but who, because of love of sin or fear of persecution or whatever it is, they don't want to commit themselves to it, have not committed themselves to the truth that they know is real.

And there are people who sit in pews Sunday after Sunday. They come to every event, every meeting of the church, and they've heard the gospel over and over and over again, and they understand intellectually this makes sense.

[19 : 24] Intellectually, I've heard somebody who has made a great case for the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, but I just don't believe it.

I can't believe it. But you still come Sunday after Sunday choosing to reject this offer by God.

I like the illustration that John MacArthur gave in his commentary on Hebrews. He says, It is as if there were a fire in a hotel and they were on the 10th floor. Because there is a net below, the firemen are yelling, Jump!

But they do not jump. They hesitate. They are well aware of the danger. They know the net is their only way of escape, but they do not act on what they know is true and necessary.

They are concerned about saving some of their possessions, or perhaps they think that somehow they can find another way out. They may be afraid of being hurt from the fall. Some might even be concerned about how they would look while jumping, afraid of embarrassment.

[20 : 33] But the point is this. Simply knowing about the danger and knowing about the way out of it will not save them.

If they do not jump, they will die. When your very life is at stake, nothing else should matter. What is it that keeps people from committing to Jesus, believing in Him, calling on Him for salvation?

Is it embarrassment? Is it wondering what it's going to cost them? What's my family going to think?

What's my friends going to think? How am I going to look if I make that decision right now?

If there's an invitation a pastor offers you to raise your hand or stand up or come forward or whatever, what does that stop people? The embarrassment?

The ridicule? The life change? The loss? What is it that they're going to gain by not fully trusting and believing?

[21 : 45] Let's continue to read the exhortation here in Hebrews. Look in verses 12 through 14 of Hebrews 3. The writer says, 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's called today that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

These words take care, the Greek word is blepo which is usually translated to see. So basically the writer is encouraging their readers to see to it which is the way the NIV actually puts it see to it that they don't have an unbelieving heart that will cause them to turn from God.

The Apostle Paul addresses this issue with the Corinthian believers in 2 Corinthians 13.5 when he tells them examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.

Test yourselves or do you not realize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you fail to meet the test. We cannot simply assume that because we went forward at a Billy Graham crusade or a camp meeting and signed a slip of paper or threw a stick in a fire that we are indeed in Christ.

[23 : 17] those are often emotionally charged events and we can be duped by our emotions. Jeremiah 17.9 says the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick.

Who can understand it? The most dangerous thing a person can do is follow their heart. One test that is given to us here in Hebrews that can reveal where we are in relationship to God is by answering the question.

It's not the only test by the way but I really feel like this test is here based on the background and everything that's leading up to what's written here in Hebrews. How do I respond in times of trial when my circumstances are in opposition to my needs and desires?

I'll repeat that for you again. How do I respond in times of trial when my circumstances are in opposition to my needs or desires?

The writer of Hebrews quotes from Psalm 95 which is in reference to events in the times of the nation of Israel when they were at a point they were facing a trial.

[24 : 34] They were thirsty. You know and their circumstances were such that it was opposite as opposed to their needs or desires. They were in the wilderness. The wilderness is basically a desert.

There is no water. It's not like the Red Sea is right there. So they're thirsty. They're like I'm going to die. Our cattle our livestock it's going to die if we don't get water.

And how is it that they responded? Not in faith. How is it that Aaron and Moses responded?

Not in obedience. How is it that I am responding?

when I thirst and there seems to be no provision of water anywhere nearby. And I'm not talking about physical thirst.

[25 : 41] I'm talking about that trial that you endure. Whatever it is for each and every one of us and it seems like there is no provision. What's our response? continuing in Hebrews 3 verses 15 through 19 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 40 years?

Was it not with those who sinned whose bodies fell in the wilderness?

And to whom did he swear that he would not enter his rest but to those who were disobedient?

Verse 19 So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Listening to God and obeying him are matters of will. And so as hardening the heart to him as Israel did. Or as people sitting in the pews who hear the gospel week in and week out or who have heard it many times and have no, not ready, no, not now, no, no, no.

You are making an active choice not to receive the truth, not to commit to the truth of the word of God and in saying no you are actively hardening your heart against God.

[27 : 21] Paul warns that our hearts or our consciences can become seared and insensitive kind of like when skin does when it's badly burned. The scar tissue that replaces the skin has very little feeling.

And something very much like this happens to a conscience that is repeatedly disregarded. You've heard the word, you've heard the truth, you've heard the gospel.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But God demonstrates his love for us that while we were sinners Christ died for us.

The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore call on him for salvation and anyone who calls on him will not be disappointed.

What's to say today if you hear the voice and we're to encourage one another as long as it's still called today. See today lasts only as long as there's opportunity to decide.

[28 : 40] And as long as the conscience is sensitive to God as long as you keep saying no your conscience will continue to be desensitized and you will no longer feel the need to make that decision.

You will no longer realize that hey I do need to make this decision to escape eternal judgment which is what God told me I need to do.

When a person's today is over it's then too late. Their opportunity to decide is gone it's too late. His heart gets harder every time he says no to Jesus Christ or to any part of his truth or will.

And when the heart is soft when the conscience is sensitive when the intellect is convinced about Christ that is the time to decide when one is still pliable and responsive otherwise he'll eventually become spiritually hard stubborn insensitive and the gospel will no longer have any appeal.

You keep saying no eventually it's of no interest. Many say I can't believe I have an empirical mind that has to see the facts and weigh all the evidence but the reality is everyone lives by faith.

[30 : 04] We live by faith when we go into a restaurant and we eat the food without questioning its safety. We live by faith when driving down the highway and we're not in constant fear that around the next bend the road will lead us into a river where there's no bridge.

We trust the people who made the highways and the people who have traveled them before us. We live by faith almost constantly and if we can put our faith in the highway department and the people who prepare our food we surely can put our faith in the God of the universe.

Not to trust him is fatal. God does not send people to hell. Contrary to popular belief God does not send people to hell.

Rather our unbelief is what prevents us from entering his rest. heaven. Let's pray. Lord I thank you for this time in your word.

Thank you for understanding. Lord I thank you for the folks who've heard this. Lord maybe they need this to realize that the time is now for salvation.

[31 : 20] The time is now to commit to Jesus Christ. Lord I pray for anyone here who has come here they've heard the gospel but they've responded with the I'm not ready I'm not sure I need to weigh the evidence.

Lord I pray that they would realize the convicting work of the Holy Spirit to bring them along to make a decision to trust Christ Christ. Because when that window closes their today is no longer available it will be too late.

Thank you Lord. Though we are wretched sinners though we persistently fail though we constantly have experiences in our life where maybe we don't exhibit faith and obedience as we ought to.

You still love us. You still care for us and provide for us. Lord please help my unbelief. And please help me Lord to continue to have faith and obedience in the one who created me.

The one who has called me. The one who desires to save me. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.