

The Future Hope

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[0 : 0 0] Our reading is from Hebrews in chapter 3, starting at verse 4 and going on to chapter 4 in verse 1, which can be found on page 1204 in the Church Bibles.

For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now 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, and we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confession and our boasting in our hope.

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, Therefore, I was provoked with that generation and said, 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. For we share in Christ if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

[1 : 5 5] 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 with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?

And to whom did he say 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.

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. Morning everyone, my name is Charlie.

We haven't met before and I'm also a member of the church family here. There is an outline on the back of your service sheet and that might be helpful for where we're going this morning. Before we start, let's say a quick prayer.

[3 : 0 5] Father in heaven, thank you for your word that you are a speaking God. We pray that you would help us to listen carefully now. In Jesus' name, amen. Right, warning signs.

How much do you pay attention to them? I have here some warning signs and some road signs. And as you see them, I want you to think, how much attention do you actually pay to them?

So, first one. This sign means that there are low-flying aircraft ahead. I imagine it's not a sign that we pay too much attention to.

The likelihood of a Boeing 747 landing on the road that you are driving along is very unlikely. You might take a quick glance at the sky, but nothing more.

You just carry on. Next one. Hump bridge ahead. Now, you might pay a bit more attention to this one. Nothing radical, unless you're an adrenaline junkie sinking a bit of airtime.

[4 : 0 9] We might give a little tap on the brakes. Not too much. Next one. Roundabout ahead. Now, this one you do have to pay attention to.

Press the brakes. Kill all of, if not, well, sorry, kill some of, if not all of your speed, depending on how busy the road is. The consequence of ignoring this sign means plowing into a roundabout far too fast.

And either you will damage your own car, or worse, collide with someone else and cause loss of life. How much attention we pay to the warning depends on two things.

How likely and how serious we think the consequences are of ignoring it. As we heard this passage read to us, did we see the big red triangle around it?

This is a warning passage. The writer's aim this morning is to convince us that drifting away from the God of the Bible, whether by accident or on purpose, is serious.

[5 : 24] The consequences are severe, and they are certain. This is not a warning that you drive past and ignore, think, it'll probably be okay.

This is one we hear, and we act on. If you're here this morning with us, and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, you are very, very welcome here.

We're delighted to have you. This warning is for you too. Due to time constraints, I'm afraid we're going to skip past verses 1 to 6. If you'd like to chat about them afterwards, I'd very happily do that with you.

But for now, let's get into our first point. Do not harden your hearts. It's serious. Do not harden your hearts.

It's serious. We're going to spend the bulk of our time on this first point, and then the second point will be much shorter. So if you feel like this first point is dragging on a bit, please don't worry.

[6 : 25] The second one is much shorter. Now, before we get into these verses, some context might be useful. These verses are riffing off a quote from the Old Testament.

They're originally taken from Psalm 95, spoken some 3,000 years ago, and then they're quoted again here 1,000 years later in Hebrews. And the quotation recalls the generation from the wilderness.

If we're not very familiar with the Bible story, right back towards the beginning, God's people were enslaved in Egypt. But then God brought them out of Egypt, and for a period of 40 years, they wandered in the desert, also known as the wilderness.

wilderness. They were the wilderness generation. And as a headline, they were not a good generation. In fact, they were a very bad generation, because they were a rebellious generation.

And our writer today is saying, in fact, God is saying, as the Holy Spirit says, look at that generation. Be warned. Learn a lesson.

[7 : 42] And this is serious. There is a big red triangle around them. Let's read from verse 7 again.

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart, 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. Do not harden your heart. Quite a jargony phrase, isn't it?

What does that mean? What does it look like? The quotation alone actually shows us quite a lot of what it means to harden our heart. It is rebellion against God when we hear his voice.

[8 : 47] And just a note on what the writer means when he says, if you hear his voice. He is not imagining God creeping into our dreams or speaking to us in some ultra-spiritual way that only we can hear.

If we take it that way, then we may become disheartened that God has never spoken to us and then drift away even more. Or, we might try and excuse our drifting because the fault lies with God.

Well, he never spoke to me. That's not right. We shouldn't take it like that. Notice verse 7. As the Holy Spirit says, and then what does the writer do?

He quotes from Scripture. Scripture is the way God has spoken and it is the way he speaks to us now.

In fact, Hebrews chapter 1 verse 2, God has spoken through his Son and the apostles have recorded his words for us. To make the point really sharp, it means that our reaction to God is being tested now.

[10 : 00] As we come and hear his voice this morning, as the Scripture is read and as it is taught, as we look at the Bible, God is speaking. Are we listening?

So, hardening the heart, it means rebellion, putting God to the test, seeing his works and yet not trusting him to deliver.

For an even more vivid picture of what that hardening looks like, I've put a verse on the handout from Exodus 17. Exodus 17 is the moment in history to which our psalm, Psalm 95, refers.

It is a moment for the highlight reel of absolute worst moments in Israel's history. A moment that they would probably look back on and cringe that they ever behaved this way.

For context, Israel have been rescued by God out of slavery in Egypt. Now they're being taken to meet God at Mount Sinai, which we've just looked at in growth groups.

[11 : 11] And they've reached a place called Rephidim, but there's a problem. There's no water. And instead of trusting God to sort out the problem, Israel quarreled with Moses.

And the people grumbled against Moses and said, and here's the verse that is printed on your handouts. Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?

And do you know what makes this even worse? Literally in the two chapters beforehand, Exodus 15 and Exodus 16, Israel have come up against two similar problems.

One with no water and then no food. And both times, God has fixed the problem despite them behaving in a similar way. Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full.

For you, speaking to God here, you have brought us out into the wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger. That is what God means when he says, they have not known my ways.

[12 : 35] They have already seen him provide water and bread for them and yet still, they do not trust him. They still think that he is either out of his depth or worse, actually out to kill them.

Now, if we're part of a Bible study group here at Grace Church, we call them growth groups, then we'll know that both of those two things, they could not be further from the truth.

God showed his almighty power with the ten plagues of Egypt. When Israel reached Mount Sinai, the whole mountain trembles just because God is there.

God is not out of his depth. But nor is he out to kill them. And the God of Genesis 1 and 2, the God who spoke to Abraham just after the Tower of Babel, is a God who delights in blessing his people.

He is not out to kill them. They do not know his ways. Can you think of a more ungrateful response to God? Why, God, did you rescue me from slavery?

[13 : 49] Do you realize how much you have inconvenienced me? And don't you know I was happy with my life of slavery? To sum that up, then, what does it look like to harden the heart?

It is to grumble against God for pulling us out of slavery, to long for our previous lives of slavery, slavery, despite seeing all of his mighty works.

And at the heart of it is an unbelief. Verse 19 sums it up well. So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

I take it that means not trusting God to provide and fulfill his promises. promises. Now, it's easy to look at Israel and scoff at them for the way they treated God, but let's not be too hasty.

The slavery we long for isn't a forced labor in a particular land to a particular people. Our slavery is, or was for the Christian, to sin.

[15 : 05] Crucially, sin primarily being a turning away from God. Do you ever find yourself longing for it in your heart? If we've been a Christian for any amount of time, we'll know that fighting sin is just that.

It is a fight. We want it, but we know we shouldn't want it. And sometimes it can turn into a very subtle, or not so subtle, grumbling.

Everyone is doing this, but I know I can't join them because Jesus tells me to avoid it. In fact, not only does it feel like I'm on the outside, but I'm actually being poked at for not doing it.

Couldn't I take a night off being a Christian? I wish I had more money to spend on this or that. Not things I need, just superfluous things I want.

A bigger motorbike, maybe. But it turns out that Jesus teaching on money is costly and sacrificial. And what a pain in the neck that he tells me to invest in the kingdom to come.

[16 : 15] Not now. Do I have to go to church on a Sunday? All my friends are meeting up and I can't join in. If I weren't a Christian, I'd be free to join them.

Perhaps we receive some heat for being a Christian. It might come from within your own family, at work. Did you really have to make it so hard, God? Don't you realize that being saved makes my life really difficult sometimes?

None of this is to say that being a Christian isn't difficult. It is, or it can be. But our author is warning us today that if our trials lead to a grumbling against God, a longing for our past lives of slavery to sin, an unbelief in his goodness and power to provide for us until we make it home, despite everything we've seen about his power and his works, that is really serious.

And it's serious because of what it leads to. The Israelites did not enter God's rest. Read with me from verse 10.

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.

[17 : 54] God's rest here refers to the land of Canaan, the land that he was giving to the Israelites to be theirs. And yet here, he swears that they will not enter it because of their grumbling.

Verses 16 to 18 drive the point home even more. When God swears it, he means it. Verse 16, for who were those who heard and yet rebelled?

Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? We said at the beginning of this sermon series that we wouldn't consider anyone to be above the warning of Hebrews.

And verse 16 shows why that is right. was it not all those who left Egypt? It means that even the oldest member of our family here needs to be careful.

Even the person who has been the Christian the longest. Even the person who seems to be on fire for the Lord right now. Even a staff team member. This is not just a warning for the fringe.

[19 : 08] This is for all of us. verse 17. And with whom was he provoked for 40 years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?

One of the devil's oldest lies from Genesis 3 is that sin does not lead to death. No, no, it does.

Verse 18. 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.

Their rest was Canaan. Our rest is heaven or the new creation. I won't say too much about that now because we're going to think much more about God's rest next week.

But take away this, to see the Lord's works and yet unrepentantly go on grumbling against him for saving us, that is not a small thing.

[20 : 13] That is a really serious thing. It will disqualify us from entering heaven. I think the point has now been made quite clearly, but there's just one other thing I'd like us to notice which should help us not to drift.

You see, the drifter or the skeptic might still say in their heart, but I haven't seen God do anything. And to that I think our author would say this, we don't need to.

In fact, he would actually go even stronger than that. He isn't just saying look at the wilderness generation and be warned. If we zoom out from this passage a bit, he's saying we have even less of an excuse to drift than they did.

In fact, we live in a time where we have as much help as we could possibly have to make it to heaven, as much as we need. Hebrews chapter 1, verse 1, long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

That is, he spoke to the wilderness generation through Moses, never directly to them. But verse 2, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son, who is the exact imprint of his nature.

[21 : 46] They had Moses. We have God himself. Chapter 2, verse 3. How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

God's salvation? It was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to his will.

people. There's no denying that the wilderness generation saw some miraculous things. Bread from nowhere, water from a rock.

They didn't see God defeat death by raising his own son from the grave. We have. And we may not have seen it with our own eyes, but it's been attested to us by those who heard.

In fact, Jesus himself says at the end of Luke 16 that if we won't believe what is written about him, then neither would we believe if we actually saw the things. If you look at the religious leaders in the Gospels, that is obviously true.

[23 : 06] Brothers and sisters, do not harden your hearts. It's serious. Look at the wilderness generation and be warned. We have even less reason to grumble than they did, and yet even they were disqualified from entering God's rest.

How much more will we be disqualified if we neglect this salvation? God is faithful. That's the warning done.

Breathe. Now the encouragement. Hold firm your original confidence. we share in Christ. Hold firm your original confidence.

We share in Christ. Let's read from verses 12 to 14. Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

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. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

[24 : 20] two commands for us then, to help us hold firm to our original confidence. Take care and exhort.

Take care means there must be no complacency. I'm a Christian now, so I'll always be a Christian, so it doesn't matter if I take my foot off the pedal. No, no, take care.

At home, Alice and I have a fern plant, add a bit of greenery to the place, and they said it was a low-maintenance plant. I don't think that's entirely true.

You see, the problem with a fern is that the symptoms for underwatering and overwatering are the same. So when it turns brown and crispy, working out what we've done wrong is really hard.

We have to be careful. It requires regular attention. Take care of your heart. Regular attention. And exhort one another every day that none of us may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

[25 : 30] I take it a good exhortation would be where we landed last week. Chapter 3, verse 1. Consider Jesus. We have opportunities to do this corporately.

Growth groups on a Tuesday, church on a Sunday, women in partnership, men on track, prayer gatherings. Brother, sister, have you considered Jesus?

Come on. Keep going. together. We can do this more than just at corporate meetings, and we should. Husbands and wives exhort each other every day.

Parents, exhort your children. Prayer triplets, friends, exhort each other. This is not to patronize at all, but as a church family, we need to be really diligent to encourage those who live on their own.

Of course, it is everyone's responsibility to draw near to Jesus, sisters, but we have a corporate duty to look after everyone in our family. Let them not be out of sight, out of mind.

[26 : 50] Perhaps this is something we think is quite difficult. It just feels like another thing to do on top of already very busy schedules. It will mean caring about and looking out for other people, and that can be emotionally taxing.

But I don't think it's our individual job to look after every other individual in the church family. That would be impossible. Perhaps think of two or three, or six or seven, whatever your capacity can manage.

Encourage those people regularly. And remember, we do this as a family. We all have each other's backs. As we close, a final encouragement about why this diligent care, this exhortation is worth our time and energy, we share in Christ.

To share in Christ truly is the greatest privilege that any of us here are in possession of. Think of last week, Hebrews chapter 2 verses 9 and 10.

Jesus has been crowned with glory and honor. verse 10, he has brought us to glory with him as his brothers and sisters.

[28 : 16] If we share in Christ, we share in his glory and honor. In the presence of God where Christ is now. Again, if we've been following Exodus in growth groups, we'll know just how baffling and awesome that is.

Remember, the Israelites couldn't step onto the mountain without being cleansed, let alone come face to face with God. And yet, that is where Jesus has taken us, to be allowed into the presence of God.

God. Friends, hold firm your original confidence. Keep considering Jesus. We share in Christ. To close, let's read chapter 4, verse 1.

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.

If you are with us today or hearing this through the website and you haven't yet considered Jesus as your Lord and Savior, the chance to enter his rest still stands. Do not harden your heart against him.

[29 : 30] We'll think more about God's rest next week, but for now, let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that one of the ways that you keep us is by warning us.

And we pray, Lord, that as we hear your word, we would not harden our heart against you, but we would listen carefully, that each day we would consider Jesus and encourage and exhort our brothers and sisters to do the same.

For we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.