

Text: Heb 3.7-11

Last week we talked about Hebrews 3.6, focusing on the caution warning about letting our confidence slip.

Heb 3.6 but Christ *was faithful* as a Son over His house— whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

Today our passage involves a quotation of Psalm 95.7b-11. Psalm 95 is a meditation on Numbers 14, esp. vv. 20-25.

The issue in Numbers 14 was Israel's unbelief, leading them to refuse the Lord's instructions at Kadesh-barnea, to enter the promised land. Here God thus refused that generation to *ever* enter the place of promise.

The Psalmist takes up that occasion, beginning with an exhortation to follow God as God, submitting to Him and worshipping Him, based on the fearful results of ancient Israel's refusal to follow their God.

Read Heb 3.7-11

Read Ps 95.1-11

The author of Hebrews uses the LXX, which changes some of the Hebrew terms, and adds in a few extra words of his own to make the emphasis he wants to make with his use of Ps 95.

The first addition in Hebrews I want to point out is the first word of Heb 3.7: "Therefore" (or "Wherefore")

The word draws an inference from the preceding and leads to an exhortation that follows. There are two possibilities in our passage:

1. We are his house, therefore ... do not harden your hearts (3.8)
2. We are his house, therefore ... take care ... that [you have] no unbelieving heart (3.12)

Either one, or both connections are possible. Perhaps both are intended.

1. Do not harden your hearts as they did
2. Do not disbelieve as they did

And either way, a frightening possibility exists for believers. It is possible for believers to put themselves in deep spiritual jeopardy through hardened, unbelieving hearts.

The reference to ancient Israel serves as a warning to us.

The author isn't talking about something theoretical. He has a concrete example to lay before us. The people of God in the OT failed their God. Do not think that NT saints stand so high above them that the same cannot befall us.

Do Not Harden Your Hearts

Proposition: The course of life will put pressure on your testimony of faith; keep your heart soft to the voice of God.

I. The example of Israel

A. The day of trial

1. Let's read Numbers 14.1-12 to describe the day of trial
2. The story is well known
 - a. After the Exodus
 - b. After Sinai
 - c. After the water from the rock, the manna from heaven, the law
 - d. After the command to head out to the land of promise
 - e. Then they decided to send in the 12 spies
 - 1) Ten said, "We can't do it, there are GIANTS there!"
 - 2) Caleb and Joshua said, "Trust God"
 - f. After all this, the people refused

The Lord delivered Israel from Egypt with a *mighty* deliverance, yet they refused to follow at the last moment.

"Kadesh became the symbol of Israel's disobedience, the place where God's past redemption was forgotten and where the divine promise no longer impelled the people to obedience."¹

¹ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), 85.

B. The hardened generation

1. The quote from the Psalm describes their hearts: “hardened” (8)
2. The focus is on this one event, but there were many: “they always go astray” (10)
3. A difference between Ps 95.8 and Heb 3.8

Ps 95.8 Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness,

Heb 3.8 DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS,

a. This difference comes from the Gk translation Hebrews follows

- 1) Instead of “Meribah,” Heb has “provocation”
- 2) Instead of “Massah,” Heb has “trial” (or “testing”)

b. What are these two names?

- 1) Massah came immediately after the Exodus (Ex 17.2) “Give us water” (God told Moses to strike the Rock) [also called “Meribah” at that time]
- 2) Meribah came again in Num 20.13 “give us water” (God told Moses to speak to the Rock)

This event occurred just before they turned to go out of the wilderness and head through (or around) Edom.

c. In other words, the provocation and testing came as Israel *constantly* exhibited unbelief through 40 years of seeing his works (9)

4. Hardening one’s heart doesn’t happen overnight

a. You don’t go along in a state of sweet submission to God and get up the next day and be as hard as stone

b. Hardening is a process

- 1) Hardening is something you do to yourself (step 1)
- 2) Hardening is something that is done to you (step 2)

3) Rinse and repeat, you go through this over and over if you aren't tender before the Lord

Great example in Scripture: Pharaoh

- a) He hardened his heart
- b) God hardened his heart
- c) His heart was hardened

All these things happened in the process

C. The Psalmists meditation

- 1. The Psalmist calls for revival (Ps 95.1-7a)
- 2. The Psalmist warns of hardening (Ps 95.7b-11) [like ancient Israel]

The warning to the readers of Hebrews: don't draw back lest you be hardened

And what warning should we take? Christians can get hard to God and the things of God.

II. The withdrawal of rest

A. When they aroused the anger of the Lord

- 1. The word for anger is "derived from the dashing of waves against a bank"²
- 2. The Lord was angry with "this generation"
 - a. In Ps 95, he refers to the Exodus generation
 - b. The warning is that it could refer to the Hebrews generation of Christians
- 3. Their rebellion was persistent "they always go astray" (10)
 - a. The focus is Kadesh

² F. W. Farrar, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, With Notes and Introduction.*, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), 61.

- b. The breadth (40 yrs) is the whole generation, the generation that didn't enter
 - 1) When the one generation all died, then the rest turned to go into the land
 - 2) It took forty years

B. Resulting in the removal of rest

1. We will do a message on what "rest" means in Hebrews, but what did it mean for Israel? Not entering Canaan
2. What would it mean for Ps 95 Israelites?
 - a. There is a connection with God's sabbath rest (God ceased from his works)
 - b. There are works God lays before each generation
 - c. The Ps 95 generation risked the joy of the Lord (Ps 95.1-7a) if they hardened their hearts

What do we risk?

3. But let's consider one more thing about the generational risk
 - a. The Kadesh generation took 40 years before they came to their final shutting out of rest (Last man kept out: Moses)
 - b. The Hebrews generation – when did they exist
 - 1) Our best reckoning, approximately AD 67, 68, or so
 - 2) Remember their temptation: Go back to Judaism, relieve persecution (from Jews probably)
 - 3) What happened in AD 70? Destruction of Jerusalem
 - 4) How many years was that from the crucifixion? Almost exactly 40 years

Was going back to Judaism a great idea at this time? (or any time?)

III. The test of the saints

A. When someone becomes a Christian, there is a period of immense peace and joy

1. Sin is forgiven
2. New opportunities arise
3. All is fresh, the Joy of the Lord is your portion
4. Great zeal for the Lord and the things of the Lord

B. Over time, what happens to Christian zeal?

1. Many trials beset you: your faith is tested
2. Many years becalm you
 - a. The Lord is long in coming
 - b. The world is large in growing perversion
 - c. There is a weariness that comes to our well-doing

Do not harden your hearts!

Conclusion:

Proposition: The course of life will put pressure on your testimony of faith; keep your heart soft to the voice of God.

- Cultivate the joy of the Lord
- Sing! (Ps 95.1)
- Give thanks! (Ps 95.2)
- Exalt God! (Ps 95.3)
- Worship and bow down before him! (Ps 95.6)

Above all: don't harden your heart! (Ps 95.8, Heb 3.8)