

Pastor Mark Hardy
May 3, 2015

Christ is Superior to Moses
(Part 2)
“The Warning against Doubting God’s Word”
Hebrews 3:7-19

Introduction:

Dwight L. Moody said that his “**greatest mistake**” occurred **October 8, 1871**. On that night in **Chicago**, he **preached** to the largest audience of his career. His **message** was based on **Pilate’s question** to the Jews in **Matthew 27:22**, “Then **what shall I do** with **Jesus** who is called Christ?” As **Moody concluded** and presented the **gospel** he said, “I want to give you a **week** to **think** about what I have said. Next **Sunday** I will ask you “**What will YOU do** with Jesus.”

Then **Ira Sankey**, **Moody’s song leader**, came up and sang the **closing song** that included the words, “**Today** the Savior **calls**; for **refuge fly**. The **storm** of **justice falls**, and **death** is **nigh**.” But even **before** he **finished** the song you could **hear** the **blare** of sirens and the **roar** of fire engines on the street outside. That **very night** about **9:00pm** the famous **Great Chicago Fire** began and almost **destroyed** the **entire city** before it **ended** early **Tuesday** morning. The **fire** had **reduced** the city of **Chicago** to ashes, **killed 300 people**, **left** more than **100,000** residents homeless and **caused** an estimated **\$200 million** in damages.

A few months later **Moody** made this comment about his **message** on that **fateful night**, “I would give my **right arm** before I would ever again give an audience a **week** to **think over** the **message** of the **gospel**. **Some** who **heard** that night **died** in the fire.”

This same sense of **urgency** to immediately **give heed** to the voice of God is the theme of the passage we will be looking at this morning. Turn to **Hebrews 3**. Having just shown that Christ is **superior** to Moses in **3:1-6**, the author of Hebrews again **pauses** in his **proclamation** about **Christ's superiority** to make **application** and give the **second** of his **five warnings** in the book. In essence he is calling for a **decision**, "**What will YOU do** with Jesus."

In **Hebrews 3:7-19** we see ***four aspects*** of the warning against doubting God's Word, so that **believers will not repeat the same mistake the Israelites made during their wanderings in the wilderness.**

The ***first aspect*** is this:

I. The Example of Israel's wilderness Experience

- A. In **Hebrews 3:7-11** the author **begins** this section with a quotation **Psalm 95:7-11** from the **Septuagint (LXX)**, the **Greek** translation of the **Hebrew** Old Testament. Look at the **first part** of **Hebrews 3:7**: Therefore, just as the **Holy Spirit** says... (Stop there)
1. Although **Hebrews 4:7** says the **human author** of this psalm is **David**, who was speaking about the **time of Moses**, here the author of Hebrews ascribes this directly to the **Holy Spirit**, who is the **ultimate Author of Scripture** (2 Pet. 1:20-21).
 2. It was **originally** the **Holy Spirit** who spoke through the **psalmist** to **warn** the people of his day. And using this **same warning** the **Holy Spirit** spoke through the author of Hebrews to warn the people of his day **1,000 years later** and again to us **2,000 years** after that.

B. Look at vv. 7-8: Therefore, just as the **Holy Spirit** says, “**TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS.**”

1. The **basic warning** “Today if you **hear** His **voice**, do not **harden** your **hearts**,” is used **3 times** in **chapter 3** (vv. 7-8, 13, 15) and once in **chapter 4** (v. 7). The word “**Today**” here indicates **urgency**.
2. Since the **voice** of God is sounding, **immediate action** is **imperative**. Respond **now** while the words of God are **fresh** in your mind, **don’t wait!**
3. And what is to be **responded** to? The author says, “...do not **harden** your **hearts**.”
4. To “**harden** your **heart**” is to become **spiritually calloused** and **insensitive** by **stubbornly disobeying** God’s voice. And this is **exactly** what the **people of Israel** did as God says about them through the **psalmist** “...they **provoked** Me, as in the **day of trial** in the **wilderness**.”
5. The word “**provoked**” means “to make **angry** and **embittered**.” We can understand how God was provoked when we remember all He had done for them.
6. After **430 years** of **bondage** in **Egypt**, God miraculously delivered them by afflicting **ten plagues** upon all of Egypt. He then **guided** them out of Egypt toward the Promised Land of Canaan by an immense **pillar of cloud** during the day and a **pillar of fire** at night (Ex. 13:20-22).

7. When **Pharaoh** changed his mind and led his army after Israel, God miraculously parted the **Red Sea** so the people of Israel could pass through on dry ground. And when the entire Egyptian army had **entered** the sea bed, God then **returned** the water and **drown** all of them (Ex. 14: 13-31).
8. In **addition** to all of that, God continued to **bless** them and miraculously **provided** them **manna** to eat and **water** to drink. But in light of all that, the **first occasion** the **psalmist** has in mind where Israel **provoked** God “as in the **day of trial** in the **wilderness**” is at the **beginning** of their journey in **Exodus 17:1-7**.
9. This is where the people **quarreled** with **Moses** at **Reph-i-dim** because of a **shortage** of **water**. Listen to how Moses **replied** to them in **v. 2**, “Why do you **quarrel** with me? Why do you **test** the LORD?”
10. Moses then **followed** God’s direction and **stuck** the **rock**, out of which **water** flowed for Israel to **drink**. But in **v. 7** we see that God “...called the **name** of the place **Mass-ah** and **Mer-i-bah** (the names given in **Psalm 95:8** in our **English Bibles**) because of the **quarrel** of the sons of Israel, and because they **tested** the Lord, saying, ‘**Is the LORD among us, or not?**’”
11. In essence they were saying, “**Where** are you God? **Use** Your power to **make** our lives **better!**”
12. “**Mass-ah**” means “**testing**” and “**Mer-i-bah**” means “**rebellion.**” Their **complaint** about **lack of water** demonstrated their **rebellious lack of faith** in the Lord.

13. Now since the word “**Mer-i-bah**” is also used at the **end** of their **forty year** wilderness wanderings in **Numbers 20:1-13** where Israel was again **out of water** at **Kadesh**, Israel’s “**day of trial** in the **wilderness**” should not be **restricted** to one **24-hour day**. Instead, it refers to their **rebellious lack of faith** and **testing** God that lasted the entire **40-year period**.

C. Israel consistently **provoked** God and their **testing** of God continues in **v. 9**: “**WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED Me BY TESTING Me, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS.**”

1. The word “**Where,**” not “**When**” as in the **KJV**, refers to Israel’s **wilderness experience**. It was **there** that Israel continually **tried** and **tested** God for “**forty years.**”
2. Although they “**saw**” the **miraculous “works”** God had **repeatedly done** on their behalf and they should have gone to Him and **trusted** Him to **provide** when they were in **need**, instead they constantly **tested** Him when things didn’t go their way. **How often** do we do the same thing?
3. **No matter** what God did for them, they constantly **doubted** Him, were **ungrateful** and **acted** as if He had **abandoned** them. They always **demanded more** and **more proof** of His **reality** and **care** for them.
4. **Unbelief** never has enough **proof** because it doesn’t **want** to believe. Jesus said in **Luke 16:31**, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be **persuaded** if someone rises from the dead.”
5. Notice **God’s anger** towards Israel’s **unbelief** in **v. 10**, “**THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION,**

AND SAID, ‘THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS.’

6. Since God is **perfectly holy** and **just** He is not **indifferent** to sin. **Romans 1:18** says, “For the **wrath of God** is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who **suppress** the **truth** in unrighteousness.”
7. And **God’s anger** was towards Israel’s constant sin of “**go(ing) astray** in their **heart**.” The “**heart**” is the **mission-control center** of our being that includes our mind, will and emotions.
8. Man’s **core problem** is a “**heart**” problem (Jer. 17:9; Matt. 7:21-23). Instead of **knowing** God’s “**ways**” and **trusting** Him to accomplish His **will** in His **time**, their **hearts** always **rebelliously** went **astray** from God and they wanted to do their own thing.
9. They didn’t **know** God’s ways because they didn’t **want** to **know**. They were **culpably ignorant!**
10. Therefore, the **hardness** of Israel’s **heart** was **rooted** in their **unbelief** of God. And the **apex** of this **hard-heartedness** was seen **two years** after leaving Egypt in their **unbelief** shown at **Kadesh** in **Numbers 13-14**.
11. The **twelve spies** who had been sent into Canaan to spy out the land had just returned from their forty-day mission. As they do, **ten** out of **twelve men** give a **bad report** to the people.
12. Because of their **unbelief** in God and the **promises** of His Word, they are **controlled** by **fear** and **negativity** as they tell the people that the **enemy** are **giants** and they are but “**grasshoppers**” (Num. 13:32-33). This only **terrifies** the

people and inflamed their own **unbelief**, which leads to **grumbling, quarreling** and **disobedience**.

13. They want to **appoint** another leader instead of Moses and **return** to Egypt (Num. 14:1-4). And they even wanted to **stone Joshua** and **Caleb**, the **only two men** who gave them a **good report** and tried to get them to **believe** that **God** was more powerful than their enemies and would give them the land (Num. 14:10).
14. God **took them out** of Egypt to **take them into** the Promised Land. But they would not **trust** Him to do what He said!
15. As **judgment** for their **hard-heart unbelief**, God gave Israel His **solemn oath** in v. 11, “**AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.**”
16. Because of His “**wrath**,” the strong, passionate and settled opposition of His holy nature to all that is evil, God did not allow these **sinning** Israelites to **enter His rest**.
17. The word “**rest**” has various meanings, as we will see **next time**. But here it refers to the **earthly rest** God promised to give Israel in the Promised Land of Canaan (Deut. 12:9-10; Josh. 21:44; 22:4; 23:1; 1 Kgs. 8:56).
18. Because of their **rebellious unbelief** every Israelite **20-years-old and upward** was **denied** entrance into the Promised Land, except **Caleb** and **Joshua** and the next generation (Num. 14:11, 20-24). They all **died** in the wilderness (vv. 28-30, 35).
19. **John MacArthur** states, “The **application** of this picture is an individual’s **spiritual rest** in the Lord, which has precedent in

the **OT** (Ps. 116:7; Isa. 28:12). At **salvation**, every believer enters the **true rest**, the realm of **spiritual promise**, never again **laboring** to achieve through personal effort a **righteousness** that pleases God. The Lord wanted **both kinds of rest** for that generation who was delivered from Egypt.” (Mac Study Bible p. 1870)

20. The **second aspect** of the warning against doubting God’s Word is this:

II. **The Warning to Believers against Unbelief**

- A. Having a **tender concern** for all of his readers, the author of Hebrews says in **v. 12: Take care, brethren**, that there not be in any one of you an **evil, unbelieving heart** that **falls away** from the **living God**.
1. Based on the **tragic example** of Israel’s **unbelief** in the wilderness, the author **pleads** that his “**brethren**” not **follow** Israel’s **example** and **repeat** the **same mistake** they made.
 2. He gives them the **command** to continually “**Take care.**” This means to “**take heed, beware of** or **earnestly examine** their **true spiritual condition** before the Lord.
 3. And the **danger** to watch out for is “an **evil, unbelieving heart.**” All men are born with such a heart, and it was this heart that **characterized** Israel in the wilderness.
 4. The heinousness of this unbelieving heart is that it “...**falls away** from the **living God.**” The Greek word for “**falls away**” gives us our English word **apostasy**, which refers to **disbelief** and **rebellion** against “the **living God.**”

- B. Now **remember** that the **Holy Spirit** knows that all those who **claim** to be **Christians** can be a “**mixed group**” of **true believers** and “**false**” **believers**—those who have **intellectually accepted** the gospel but have never **personally committed** themselves to Jesus Christ as their **Savior** and **Lord**.
1. Therefore, the Spirit **applies** these **warnings** like the **blast** of a **sawed-off shotgun** intending **hit everyone** as He **knows exactly** where we all are in our **heart relationship** with Jesus Christ. For **true believers**, these **warnings** do at least **three things**:
 - **First**, they **cause** us to **examine** our **motives** and **behaviors** as to how they **match** with what God’s Word **requires** of us (1 Jn. 2:3-6).
 - **Second**, they **convict** us and **cause** us to **strive** for holiness of life.
 - **Third**, they **drive** us to **dependence** on God and His **grace**, which alone **enables** us continually live as He **wills**.
 2. Although we **can** and **do** sin, God will not allow His children to do so **completely** and **indefinitely**, for He **disciplines** those who are His (Heb. 12:5-11).
 3. But the Holy Spirit also uses these **warnings** to **reveal** to “**professing**” **believers** who “**fall away**” or **apostatize** from Christ that they were **never genuine believers** in the first place (Mk. 4:5-6, 16-17; Jn. 8:31; 1 Jn. 2:18-19). It is **impossible** for anyone to **reject Jesus Christ**, the **highest revelation** of God (1:2), and **possess a true saving faith**.

4. The **third aspect** of the warning against doubting God's Word is this:

III. The Command to Encourage each Other

- A. Look at **v. 13**: But **encourage** one another **day after day**, as long as it is still called "**Today**," so that **none of you** will be **hardened** by the **deceitfulness** of **sin**.
 1. The word "**encourage**" is a command that means "to **exhort**, to come alongside to give help." It is in the **present tense** in the **Greek**, indicating that this is to be done **continually**.
 2. As believers we are **responsible** to constantly "**encourage one another**" by doing such things as "**speaking the truth in love**" and helping each other be **strengthened** in our **faith** and **obedience** to Christ. This is because God has made us **interdependent** upon one another for our **spiritual growth** and **health** (Eph. 4:11-16).
 3. We are all **finite, weak, sinful** and surrounded by **trouble**. And since we don't always **respond** to situations the way we should, we **need** people in our lives that will **love** us enough to **confront** us when we are not **right**.
 4. **Why** is this so **important**? The author says, "...so that **none** of you will be **hardened** by the **deceitfulness** of **sin**."
 5. **Sin lies** and **deceives** and seldom **appears** as it really is. It tries to **convince** us that we can **make life work** apart from Christ. It wants us to use our **pain** to **justify** our **unloving** and **sinful attitudes** and **actions**.
 6. Therefore, to help **keep** our **hearts** from becoming **hardened** by **sin's deceitfulness** we **daily** need each other's **help** in our

lives. Notice again the author says, “...encourage one another **day after day**, as long as it is still called ‘**Today**.’”

7. Since **sin** in our lives is a **daily battle**, the word “**Today**” again shows the **urgency** that we are to **encourage** one another **daily**. And a way to faithfully do this as a church family is to be in one of our **small groups** we are starting.
8. Since this is how we can **most effectively shepherd** people, our **desire** is that **everyone** in the church will be in a **small group**. This is where we go beyond merely **discussing** the **meaning** of God’s Word to **practically applying** its truths to **where we are really at** in our Christian lives.
9. This is a **safe place** where **love** and **acceptance** is shown to each other. A place where we can be **real, transparent** and **vulnerable** about our **hurts** and **struggles**, so that we can “**Bear** one another’s **burdens**, and thereby **fulfill** the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

B. And by **encouraging one another** we help each other stay **faithful** to Christ in the midst of our **trials**. Look at v. 14: For we have become **partakers** of Christ, **if** we **hold fast** the **beginning** of our **assurance firm until the end**.

1. And as we saw **last time** in v. 6, this statement is not speaking about **how** to be **saved** or **remain saved**. The **fact** that all **true believers** are “**partakers of Christ**” is both a **present** and **future** reality.
2. We have **already** “become partakers of Christ” at regeneration—“the **beginning** of our **assurance**” but our **salvation** is **not yet** consummated “**until the end**” when we see Him face to

face. **Remember** that **God’s warnings** against apostasy **function** as a **means** to encourage **believers** to **persevere** in order to **secure** their future salvation.

3. **Thomas Schreiner** accurately states that “all the **warning passages** in Hebrews carry a singular message: **Promised salvation** is the **inheritance** that comes only to **those** who, after **entering** into **salvation**, **persevere** in **faithfulness** to the **end**, for God **reserves** His **promise** until the **second advent** of Christ (Heb. 9:28).” (The Race Set Before Us p. 202)
4. Therefore, the **greatest proof** of our salvation is our **perseverance** in the Christian life.
5. The **fourth aspect** of the warning against doubting God’s Word is this:

IV. The Descent of Hardness of Heart

- A. The author of Hebrews **concludes** this soul-searching section by **repeating** the **basic warning** of **Psalm 95:7-8**, in order to **make personal application** to his readers and **show** who these people are. Look at **v. 15**: While it is said, “**TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME.**”
 1. Those who **provoked** God are those who **harden** their **hearts** against Him in **unbelief**. The author then **presents six questions** in **three pairs**; while the **first question** of each pair **asks** the question, the **second question answers** it.
 2. Look at the **first pair** in **v. 16**: (Question) For **who provoked** Him when they had heard? (Answer) Indeed, did not **all those** who came out of Egypt **led** by Moses?

3. The **point** is this: Although the Israelites **began** their glorious exodus with **great hope** and **expectation** and experienced **firsthand** all the miracles God did on their behalf, this **privileged people** was **characterized** by **rebellious unbelief** that **provoked** God.
 4. The **second pair** is in **v. 17**: (Question) And with **whom** was He **angry** for forty years? (Answer) Was it not with **those** who **sinned**, whose bodies **fell** in the **wilderness**?
 5. The **point** is this: For **forty years** the Israelites **provoked** God to **anger** as they “**sinned**” against Him by **refusing** to **trust** Him. And as a **result**, they all **died** in the wilderness.
 6. The **third pair** is in **v. 18**: (Question) And to **whom** did He **swear** that they would not **enter** His **rest**... (Answer) ...but to **those** who were **disobedient**?
 7. The **point** is this: **Unbelief** always leads to **disobedience**. Although God did **so much** for Israel, they **disobeyed** Him. And as a **result**, they **missed** the blessing of God’s **rest** in Canaan.
 8. Here we see the **descent** of their **hardness** of **heart** as they left Egypt with **hope** but it soon turned to **rebellious unbelief** which led to **disobedience** and resulted in **judgment**. They were **entirely** to **blame** for their **sin**.
- B. The author then **concludes** by putting his finger on the **core problem** in sinful man’s heart in **v. 19**: So we see that they were **not able** to **enter** because of **unbelief**.
1. It was **unbelief**—not **God** or their **circumstances**—that **hindered** the Israelites from **entering** the **rest** God had

planned for them and that had every reason to **expect** when they came out of **Egypt**. **How sad!**

2. **Sin** is always **self-defeating!** It promises **life** but always delivers **death** in the end.
3. And the **same** is **true** for us **today**. **Doubting God** and the **promises** of His **Word** will always **prevent** us from **receiving** His **best**.

Conclusion:

May we all **learn** from the **example** of Israel's wilderness experience and not **repeat** the same **mistake** they made! Just because we **begin well** and have great **hopes** and **expectations** for the future, doesn't mean that we will necessarily **end well**.

Our **lifelong** Christian journey requires **remaining faith** in Christ. As believers we are **repeatedly** told "the **just** shall live by **faith**," that we are to "**walk** by **faith** not by **sight**," and "without **faith** it is **impossible** to please God." May Israel's **refusal** to **trust** God not **happen** to us!

Let me ask you: "Have you **put your trust** in Jesus Christ alone as your personal **Savior** and **Lord**?" If you are **already** a Christian, "Are we truly **trusting** the Lord in the midst of the circumstances He is **allowing** you to experience right now?"

Don't **leave** here this morning without making a **decision** to **trust** Jesus Christ for what His Spirit is speaking to you about! Respond **now** while His words are **fresh** in your mind. Please **don't wait!**