**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**Hebrews (9): The Book Of Better Things**

**“Persevering Faith: The Path to Glory”**

**Hebrews 3:7-19**

**March 3, 2024**

Last week we saw how our author developed a comparison between Jesus and Moses (3:1-6). Both were faithful in their ministry to the “household,” or to the family of God (vv. 1-2). But Moses was only a part of that house; Christ was the builder (vv. 3-4). And Moses was only a servant *in* the house, whereas Christ is the Son *over* the house (vv. 5-6a). What then followed was a warning to all professing members of God’s House: “*And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast*” (v. 6b).

That last statement is one of the most important texts in the New Testament. It tells us that persevering faith is the proof of genuine, saving faith. It’s also a fitting introduction to the extended warning that follows (3:7-4:13). It’s a warning against missing God’s promised rest because of unbelief.

Our author begins by quoting a passage from Psalm 95 (vv. 7b-11). In those verses, the psalmist is warning the Israelites of his day not to follow the example of the Exodus generation. They failed to maintain their trust and confidence in God’s promise, which resulted in a tragic loss. While some continued to believe God and entered the land of Canaan, most rebelled and never experienced God’s promised rest (Hebrews 3:7-11).

In the same way, the author of Hebrews uses the Psalmist’s words to warn the readers of this letter (3:12-19). Hence there are three timeframes in view: that of the Exodus, that of the Psalmist, and that of the writing of Hebrews. The message is consistently the same; disbelieving the Word of God because of a hardness of heart can be dangerous to the soul.

**A. The Example of Unbelief: Israel’s Wilderness Experience (Hebrews 3:7-11; Psalm 95:7b-11).** “*So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways. So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.*’”

Once again, our author does not name the human author whom he is quoting (Cf. 2:6). For him, all of the Old Testament is a word from God, or, the voice of the Holy Spirit. His point is that all of these Scriptures are authoritative and relevant, precisely because the voice of the Holy Spirit is still speaking to the Christians of His generation (and to ours!)

This quotation summarizes the sad history of Israel under Moses’ leadership in the wilderness. Repeatedly, throughout those forty years of wandering, they “tested” or “provoked” the God who had delivered them from their bondage in Egypt. That example is now used by the Psalmist to warn his fellow worshippers against the hardened hearts of unbelief.

There are two incidents that are foremost in the Psalmist’s thought. The first was at Rephidim shortly after the Exodus (Ex. 17:1-7). At that time Israel complained over the lack of water, and the Lord authorized Moses to smite the rock. As a result “*he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled* (“*massah*” means quarreling), *and because they tested the LORD saying, ‘Is the LORD among us or not?*’” (“*Meribah*” means “testing.”) That’s the focus of Psalm 95:7b-9.

The second incident was at Kadesh-barnea, near the border of Canaan (Numbers 13-14). When the majority of the spies returned with a negative report about the land, the people revolted against Moses and Aaron and demanded a new leader who would take them back to Egypt. In response to Moses’ intercession on their behalf, God refrained from wiping out the whole nation by plague. But, He said, “*not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times – not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their fathers.* *No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it*” (Num. 14:22-23). The Exodus generation would not be the conquest generation. Only Joshua and Caleb, plus all those under 20 years of age, would live to enter the Promised Land. That’s the focus of Psalm 95:10-11.

But beneath the Israelites’ grumbling and complaining was an unbelieving heart. According to verse 10, “*their hearts were always going astray*.” And in verse 19, our author sums it up by saying, “*They were not able to enter* (Canaan) *because of unbelief*.” Yes, they gave every outward appearance of being saved, so long as God’s miraculous provisions continued. But when the difficulties intensified, the true state of their souls was exposed.

*This was quite similar to what was happening in the church to which the letter to the Hebrews was sent*. They had also seen miracles and had witnessed the work of the Holy Spirit. And they were exposed daily and weekly to truths of God’s Word. But when the tough times continued, and the trials intensified, some began to grumble and to harden themselves and were sorely tempted to turn away from the truth they professed to believe. So, what does our author do?

**B. The Warning Against Unbelief (3:12-19).** In verses 12-15, the author applies Israel’s wilderness example to his readers and warns them not to make the same mistake. In verses 16-19, he offers his own interpretation of the lesson from Psalm 95.

**1. The application of the wilderness example (vv. 12-15):** “*See to it, brothers, 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 be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. As has just been said: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.’*”

**1 Q.** What does it mean to “*turn away from the living God*?” (v. 12) **A.** The word translated “turning away” literally means “to become an apostate.” When the Israelites at Kadesh-barnea repudiated the leadership of Moses and Aaron, they rebelliously turned away from or revolted against the living God. Likewise, when those within the Church repudiate “*the apostle and high priest*” of their *confession*, they “*apostatize*.” For the Hebrews, “a relapse from Christianity into Judaism would be comparable to the action of the Israelites when they ‘turned back in their hearts unto Egypt’” (F. F. Bruce). For professing Christians today, apostasy involves a willful abandonment of faith in Christ in *any* form. They simply return to the world’s way of life.

**2 Q.** What provision has God made to prevent an individual from falling away? **A.** The loving and sustained encouragement and instruction that one finds in a Christian fellowship: “*But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness*” (v. 13). Perseverance in the faith is a community project. Those who isolate themselves from the local church, or avoid genuine Christian fellowship and regular interaction with other Christians, are a disaster waiting to happen!

**3 Q.** What’s the simple test by which we can know whether or not we are genuine believers in Christ? **A.** A genuine “believer” continues to believe: “*We have come to share in Christ**if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first*” (v. 14). A true “partner” in Christ perseveres in the faith, and therefore, cannot apostatize from the faith.

**2. The interpretation of the Lesson from Psalm 95 (3:16-19).** “*Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief*.”

The important truths raised by these rhetorical questions are these: **(a)** the people who failed to enter Canaan were the same people who had “heard” God’s promise concerning the land; **(b)** they refused to believe and act on what God had promised; **(c)** this failure is described as rebellion (v. 16), sin (v. 17), disobedience (v. 18), and unbelief (v. 19). Consequently, God in His anger closed the doors of Canaan to that whole generation of Israelites (Num. 14:21-35). Their exodus from Egypt did not guarantee their entrance into Canaan.

The land of Canaan was the ***physical rest*** toward which the Exodus generation journeyed. But that rest was a “type,” or “prophetic preview” of the ***spiritual rest*** we receive now through faith in Christ. It also points to the ***eternal rest*** we will experience when we dwell with the Lord in the new earth, when Christ returns (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; Rev. 21:1-4; Heb. 4:1, 9). But persevering faith *is* the path to glory.

That’s the reason this warning is directed to *all* Christians within the church. We need to be very, very careful that no one in our fellowship falls away from the living God. If they do, it reveals that they had never become a partaker with Christ in the first place (Heb. 3:6, 14). If they persist in their rebellion against the Living God, they run the risk of reaching the point of no return. For as we shall see in our future studies, apostasy is irredeemable; apostates can never be saved.

Sadly, our churches are filled with people who were raised in the church, but who never fully embraced Jesus Christ in genuine, repentant faith. They have heard thousands of sermons and prayers; they have participated in worship services, and youth group meetings, and may have even been on a short-term missions trip. But when God didn’t do things *the way* they thought He should or *when* they thought He should, they become disillusioned and hardened. They slowly but surely turn away from God.

But *you* are the means by which God desires to keep *others* faithful and full of hope. *Others* are the means by which God desires to keep *you* faithful and full of hope. We are all placed in this local church to encourage one another to persevere in our faith, because persevering faith *is* the path to glory!