

## Hebrews 3:7-15

As we start our study today, I want to remind us of the reason for this letter, so we keep it in context. The letter is written primarily to the Jewish (Hebrew) believers in Jesus who were **1)** under immense pressure to depart from their faith in Jesus to return to Judaism, **2)** or to water it down by adding back in the keeping of the Law and the sacrifices (which this very letter will tell us is in fact a departure from grace. Without which, there is no salvation). Yet it also speaks powerfully to the gentiles who have put their faith in Jesus.

- And as we began **Ch. 3**, there was a transition in one of the focuses being covered previously, and that was in **Jesus being greater than angels**. Because the Jews had high regard for angels because the way in which God had used them to minister to the nation.
- But now the focus shifts to **Jesus being greater than Moses, the Law, and the sacrificial system**, because of far more importance and prominence in the minds to the Jewish people was Moses. And the majority of the nation, even after Jesus had come, died for the sins of all who would receive Him, and ascended to the Father, **still held Moses (a servant [3:5]) in higher esteem than Jesus (the Son [3:6])**. Folks, you don't want to make the mistake of worshipping a created being over the Creator (**1:8-9, Rom. 1:25**).
- And where we pick up today is also the beginning of **the second of five warnings** given in this letter. This section goes from **3:7 to 4:13**. But we will take it in two parts. So, let's go ahead and jump in.

<sup>7</sup> *Therefore* (because Jesus had come and His message and position were superior to anything that had or could come), *as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice,* <sup>8</sup> *Do not harden your hearts* (take on a heart of unbelief) *as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness,* <sup>9</sup> *Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years.*

The Holy Spirit is now identified as speaking and **what He is saying here, He has said before**. The first time He said this was through David, over 1,000 years earlier, **before saying it again in this letter to the Hebrews**. And the warning is so important (because of the propensity of the problem) that He will say it **three times** by the time we get to **Ch. 4:7**. That doesn't happen often, so you know God really wants us to hear and get this. And it starts with the command to **hear God's voice**.

- What an incredible place to just hover over for a minute, due to the implications and realities. So let's start by considering that David is calling the people of his nation to learn from what another generation failed to do some 400-500 years earlier, **which was to hear and obey God**.
- And then the writer of **Hebrews** (obviously inspired by the Holy Spirit) gives that same warning, but adds one significant word- **Today!** Which made it clear to the readers of this letter, in that time, that **this wasn't just a history lesson, but a current warning and call to action**.
- And being that the bible is the living word of God, that same **today** is echoing to us today! This is not just their **today**, it's ours also. So the two questions that should immediately spring up in those who claim to have placed their faith in Jesus are, **1)** am I tuned into the voice of the Lord **today** (not living off of yesterday or yesteryear) and **2)** **how do I hear the voice of the Lord?** Because what He is going to say today is obviously vital. But what He says **everyday** is vital.

The answer to that **first question** (am I tuned into the voice of the Lord today) **has everything to do with desire**, because the Holy Spirit has just informed us **God is speaking**. God never asks you to do something He hasn't made possible. **If you seek to be in communion with the Lord through a relationship with Him, you will hear Him**.

- But if you are one who tends to come only when you need something from Him, you might find your ability to hear is not what He has intended or desires for it to be. And when it is diminished to something superficial like that **on your end**, it's been my experience this warning (which we'll cover next) needs to be taken seriously by you. Because you are in the danger zone. (washed out road example)
- So let's focus on the **second question** (how do I hear the voice of the Lord?). To start with, **1)** God spoke to Moses face to face (**Ex. 33:11**). **2)** And as we started this letter we heard how God spoke through angels at times (**2:2**). **3)** And we specifically heard in **1:1-2** "**God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets**". And reading through the prophets makes it very clear God is a precise and skilled communicator (He's not like those from the Psychic hotline). **5)** But then in **verse 2** He goes on to say He, "**has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...**".
- So how does the Son (Jesus) still speak to us today? First of all, **we know Jesus is the word (John 1:1 & 14)** and that the whole bible is the word of God. **Meaning when you are reading your bible (which is the living**

word [Heb. 4:12]. We will come back to this next week), **God is speaking** (it's not a dead conversation of the past). The question is, are we listening? But this is the most sure place of communication, for even the other ways He speaks will most often be **initiated** from what you are or have **meditated** on in the bible. And because the Spirit of God is living inside of us, we can also have conversation with God from within. Yet, because we can deceive ourselves and play god in our own minds, even those conversations will be verifiable by scripture, if they are with Him. Another important piece being our familiarity with hearing the voice of God (which speaks to our relationship with Him).

So, how do you hear God? Because He is still speaking **today!** That very important word is not found in **Psa. 95:8**, but is found here because God was speaking to these believers in Jesus; those under the New Covenant. And He was telling them that **today** (in that day and in this day), **He is still speaking!**

But back to those who came out of Egypt and are being used as the example (Ex. 17:1-7). We need to take note that **the warning for all of us is not to harden our hearts like they did theirs**. And they **hardened their hearts**, not because of lack of evidence of who God is and His faithfulness, but **due to a rebellious spirit**. They witnessed Gods works with their own eyes; both the works of miracles and the works of His just vengeance (Psa. 99:8).

- And He says here they **tested** and **tried** God when they were going through their **trials** in the wilderness (the wilderness they caused themselves to have to travel through for 40 years) **because of their unbelief**. And I feel we need to take this one in deep, **1)** because **there is a limit to what God will put up with**. **2)** And He expects us to learn from the mistakes of others (see Jer. 3:6-11).
- So please hear me. When trials come (and they do for all of us), those with hearts tender for God can cry out for answers (think of Habakuk, David, Job). But even in our distress and searching for answers, **we need to never treat God irreverently or make accusations against His goodness**. Because in belief of who He is and the way He cares for us, we need to travel through the valleys of this life without hardening our hearts towards God or treating Him contemptuously.
- This bares repeating - they hardened their hearts, not because of lack of evidence, but due to a rebellious spirit. They witnessed Gods works with their own eyes; both the works of miracles and of His just punishment (Psa. 99:8). And having witnessed these things, they hardened their hearts towards God anyway.

**Folks, be real with God, but get real with yourself first.** How much have you seen and experienced since putting your faith in God? I cannot speak for you, but what He has done for me, demands of me to worship and surrender to Him, even when I am in the deepest of valleys. Because I have an ongoing relationship with Him and know Him. **THAT IS KEY HERE!** Do You?

<sup>10</sup> *Therefore I (God speaking) was angry with that generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.'* <sup>11</sup> *So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'*

There are a few things we need to clarify here. The **first** being that God is addressing a very specific generation. It was the generation who came out of the Egyptian bondage. This is where God is focusing His comments here. **And that generation established a pattern of disobedience to God**, far more than their demonstrations of what appeared to be genuine worship and respect. Because there were moments when they did, at least, outwardly or emotionally, honored God **1)** Ex. 15:1-21 the song after the Red Sea crossing [not before], **2)** Ex. 24:3-8 the ratification of the Sinai covenant [a very strong proclamation publicly], **3)** Ex. 40:34-38 & Lev. 9:22-24 The completion of the tabernacle followed by the glory of God descending, **4)** Num. 7 the 7 days of offerings at the dedication of the alter, **5)** Num. 9:1-14 keeping the Passover in the wilderness].

- So, the text very accurately states **they always go astray in their heart**. Meaning that even when they did give momentary honor and worship to God, they **always** then went **astray**. Why is that important? Because there are people all over the world who give momentary displays of honor and/or worship to God. And some of those moments are also **1)** only outward, **2)** or simply fueled by emotion, **3)** or even part of crowd mentality. But are always proceeded by continuing to **go astray in their hearts**, because they have **not** (truly) **known Gods ways**. **Meaning they really do not have a relationship with God, in which they both know and cultivate His heart in theirs.**
- And in the Old Covenant, they did not have what we have in the New Covenant in Jesus. Because when it comes to cultivating the heart of Jesus, God has not only given us a new heart (a clean canvas), He's also sent the Holy Spirit to live within our hearts. **That's a significant upgrade and advantage for us today.**

- So, when a professing believer today lives in the same way that generation did in that day, what is Gods response to them? A big piece of that question resides in what is being referred to in the “*rest*” they could not enter. We will come back to that in a moment (and more so next week), so put a mental bookmark here on what the *rest* is.

The **next** piece we need to acknowledge is that as God is indicting that generation, it wasn't 100%, but rather the vast majority. Because two men of that generation would enter the promised land (Joshua and Caleb- more on that next time). As a matter of fact, Joshua would be delegated by God to lead that next generation in.

- And the group Joshua would lead into the promised land (or *rest*) were those who were under 20 at the time of the rebellion (Num. 14:29-31) or were born in the wilderness. They had a brand-new opportunity to make their faith their own and decide what they would do with their relationship with God, regardless of what their parents and those of the generations before them chose.
- So let me tell you why these pieces stand out so powerfully to me. **First**, Joshua and Caleb were part of a generation who plaid religious games with God, **but they chose not to follow the crowd**. When everyone else went to a heart of doubting God, **they doubled down on trust**. So much so that the rest of the people of Isreal wanted to kill them for doing so (Num. 14:10). **We all know even your own people don't always cheer for you when you choose to put and keep your faith in God**. Including those who say they put their faith in God.
- And **then** you have this new generation who saw the hypocrisy of their elders (parents, aunts and uncles, neighbors, officials, even this religious leaders...) and instead of making that an excuse to not follow God, they chose real and deeper faith.

Folks, I have heard so many excuses as to why some person doesn't follow Jesus (even from those who grew up in the church). And I want to just say that is simply their (your) decision to **harden their hearts** towards God. They can blame this or that, **but it's a choice**. Just like it's a choice to **trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding**. Joshua, Caleb, and this next generation chose faith, not lame excuses. What will you choose? God will not hold you accountable for the decisions of those before or around you. But He does require you to choose this day if you will put your faith in Him or not. That you are accountable for.

And I want to lightly touch on the *rest* he is talking about here, because we will cover it in much greater detail next time. If you would indulge me, I will provide three realities of *rest* referred to in the bible, **1)** the *rest* they would have when coming into the promised land. **This is not a foreshadowing of heaven**, but rather the rest that God would provide for them **if they obeyed Him**. **It would be a rest from their enemies and would include all of the provisions and blessing God had promised them**. For example, while they were in the land, they were supposed to take every seventh year off and rest every seventh day. During which, God would provide and take care of them for their exercise of faith and faithfulness. I'd like that deal 😊 today (under the new Covenant of course). **But it did come as a condition of obedience**.

- Next, **2)** what this is a foreshadowing of is the *rest* a believer in Jesus would find while still walking though this world. God has not removed all the trial and losses the rest of the world encounters from the believer. But God provides us with a hope and peace they cannot know. **Its inward for now, because He is in and with us in all the challenges**.
- And finally, **3)** there is a *rest* coming when all the labors we can now do to serve the Lord will come to an end because **the curse will be fully undone in heaven**.
- And obviously, the rest being spoken of here covers both of the first two. And is not a reference to heaven- yet.

<sup>12</sup> *Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;*

He's done quoting **Psa. 95** now, and here is where he has now summed the main point up in this warning. So let me put this another way, **a lack of faith in God, is an act of evil against God**. **1)** It was certainly true under the Old Covenant that Israel had with God (as we have just heard about).

- But you must understand, **2)** **it's even more evil to refuse to place your faith in Jesus**, who died so horrifically to pay your sin debt (that will be covered in 10:29). **And 3)** if you have put your faith in Him but then turn back to something like the sacrificial system, you are denying the very work He accomplished on the cross. Or if you simply turn away from putting your trust in Him any longer, this is still an act of evil against God. This is not my opinion, but Gods warning here.

- There needs to be a **starting point** of our faith in Jesus. But there must also be a **continuation** of that faith (hopefully a growing faith) all the way through eternity.

<sup>13</sup> *but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* <sup>14</sup> *For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,* <sup>15</sup> *while it is said: “Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”*

Now, I like that just as we have been called to hear God today, we are now called to exhort one another **today**. Folks, encouragement to keep going means more than you might think. And that’s not just in the storms. It might be even more important in times of ease or prosperity. Because *the deceitfulness of sin* can (and does try to) speak to our old nature in any, and all, seasons. Saying things like, “If God loved me, He would have delivered me by now”. Or on the other side, saying something like “look how good I’m doing all on my own. Do I really need God right now?”

- I will tell you these Jewish believers needed 1) some encouragement 2) and a little push. And it’s no different today. So, 1) God flat out prescribes it 2) and calls each of us to do it. It’s a call for every believer to *exhort one another*. Are you an exhorter? Is that how others would describe you? **It needs to be**. We’re in a battle.
- And I want you to catch something so important here. For when he says, “*we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end*”, it means if we have not held our confidence steadfast to the end, we are not partakers of Christ. In 1 John 2:19, he says “*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.*” Now John was speaking of false teachers, but I think the same is true of those who started in faith but did not continue in the faith.
- How do you differentiate between them and others who are believers but have backslidden? **Whether or not they repent and continue in the faith** (how long can the period be in-between-I don’t know). But ultimately, **God knows who are His**. And I’m making sure I’m one of them, because (as I said before) I’m not going anywhere but closer to Him through greater communion and conversation with Him. What about you?