

{1}. **Hebrews 3:7-19** **When God’s People Fail to Trust**

A. Introduction

- 1. The Point – Faith is the steadfast trust in God in the most threatening and disturbing situations and any other reaction is sin.

B. Warning Example 3:7-11

- 1. 7b ... Today, if you would hear His voice, 8 Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness, 9 “When your fathers tested Me, They tried Me, though they had seen My work. 10 For forty years I loathed that generation, And said they are a people who err in their heart, And they do not know My ways. 11 Therefore I swore in My anger, Truly they shall not enter into My rest.”

(Psalms 95:7b-11)

- a. this is the passage of Scripture, spoken by the Holy Spirit, that the writer of Hebrews quotes as a warning to us today

2. Massah and Meribah (8)

- a. Exodus 17:1-7 – 1 Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. 2 Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water that we may drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?” 3 But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, “Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” 4 So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, “What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me.” 5 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 “Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may

drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 He named the place Massah (i.e., tempting, testing) and Meribah (i.e., striving, quarrelling) because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" (Exodus 17:1-7)

- b. consider what this people had seen and done in the past two months
 - (A) the ten plagues that destroyed the gods and rulers of Egypt
 - (B) the parting of the Red Sea so that they could cross on dry land, and then the joining back together of those waters so that their enemy and oppressors the Egyptian army was slain
 - (C) they had joined with Miriam in singing praise to God about this
 - (D) at Marah the bitter waters were made miraculously sweet
 - (E) and all through these things the people repeatedly grumbled
 - (F) a month out of Egypt they complained about their lack of meat – God sent them quails that day, and manna daily thereafter
 - (G) and every day all the way, the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night lead them through the trackless wilderness

3. Seeing But Not Believing (9)

- a. now they are thirsty
- b. now they petulantly ask, "Is the Lord among us, or not?"
- c. this is practical unbelief – that although knowing all these things, they nevertheless acted as if they were false, that God couldn't be trusted
- d. for Paul says in Romans 14:23, "... whatever is not from faith is sin."
- e. and God, to be righteous and holy, must deal with sin

4. God's Strong Language (10-11)

- a. strong words
 - (A) 'I loathed that generation' says Psalm 95:10
 - (1) 'I was angry' or 'I was grieved' really do not do justice to the meaning in either the Hebrew or the Greek
 - (2) that is God's response to sin in His people – it is intolerable

(3) in Ezekiel 20:43 God says His people should feel the same way for the same reason, and uses the same word: "There you will remember your ways and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for all the evil things that you have done."

(B) they always go astray in their heart, and they did not know my ways

(1) those are God's words – what an inditement!

(2) always going astray – wandering – erring – sinning

(3) they didn't know God's ways, things for which they had no excuse for not knowing; theirs was a wilful ignorance

(4) it is small wonder that God was angry with them and took

b. strong action

(A) at last they were brought to the border of the promised land, and their lack of trust in God came to a climax for despite Caleb's encouragement they considered the people of the land too strong

(B) which brought about the oath of God concerning what this people would be doing for the next forty years – "as I swore in my wrath, 'they shall not enter my rest.'" (Hebrews 3:11)

c. these strong words and actions – human terms applied to God – are not to say that God is like man, but so that we can appreciate the force with which God must deal with sin

C. A Sickness, A Remedy 3:12-15

1. The Malady: A Heart Condition (12)

a. "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God."

(A) I plan to return to these three or four verses next week from another perspective, that of our community responsibility

(B) but look now at the heart problems of the children of Israel to which we Christians, too, can be subject

b. the heart

(A) 'do you mean that organ that beats in my chest,' you may ask

- (B) no: the heart in the Bible does not mean that
 - (C) nor does it mean, as is popular today, the seat of love
 - (D) the heart in this context represents a person's whole, inner being: the thoughts, the emotions and the will
- c. it was these – thoughts, emotions, will – of the Israelites that were evil, unbelieving and setting themselves apart from God
- (A) they didn't want to follow God and his ways
 - (B) they didn't feel like doing what He said
 - (C) they didn't choose to trust in Him
 - (D) those are severe heart conditions

2. The Cause (13)

- a. too much salt in one's diet can lead to hardening of the arteries
- b. what causes the hardening of the heart? ... the alienation of a person's thoughts, emotions and will from God?
- c. **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.**
- d. that is the cause: sin's deceitfulness
- e. sin – and the temptation to be involved in it – never comes labelled with a big red stamp – "Danger! Sin"
- f. listen to Eve's reaction to the words of the serpent: "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate." (Genesis 3:6)
- g. watch out! Sin is crafty; tricky; fraudulent; but ...

3. The Cure (14)

- a. **For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,**
 - (A) note, for just a moment, if you will, the tenses – that is the time stamps – of the verbs in this verse
 - (B) "we have become" – this is called the perfect tense: it describes an event that took place in the

past, but continues to be in effect up until the present and, presumably, into the future – at some time in the past we became sharers, partners of Christ, and thereby participants in His kingdom and today we still are; and will be; then comes the condition

- (C) “if indeed, if in reality, we hold fast” – that is in the present tense – and it means now; and now; and now – holding fast today is the confirmation of the validity of that past event
- b. this holding fast covers the whole period from the beginning of faith, our conversion; until the end of faith, our glorification with Christ
 - (A) to what are we to hold fast so firmly and so continuously?
 - (B) to our assurance; to our confidence
 - (C) this is not a feeling, emotion or reasoned conclusion on our part
 - (D) this assurance and confidence is based, not upon ourselves, but upon a very stable foundation – upon Christ’s person and work

4. So, Take Warning! (15)

- a. the writer of Hebrews repeats it: ‘while it is said, “Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked me.’

D. Israel Failed to Trust 3:16-19

1. Those Redeemed from Egypt (16)

- a. while the next verses can be translated as statements – ‘some provoked Him...’, it is better to treat them as a series of rhetorical questions – questions answering themselves – each leading to the next
- b. “For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses?” (Hebrews 3:16)
- c. who were these people who so provoked God?
- d. it was the very people that He had redeemed from the bondage of slavery in Egypt
- e. to whom was Hebrews addressed? ... did it apply?
- f. to the very people whom He has redeemed from the bondage of sin
- g. and we who are born-again are not immune from such failure

2. Under God's Anger (17)

- a. **And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?**
- b. it was upon His redeemed people that God's anger fell, so that they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years
- c. who because of sin, died there; to these,

3. Rest Was Denied (18-19)

- a. **18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.**

b. Disbelief Equals Disobedience

- (A) in fact, sometimes that word 'disobedience' has been translated 'unbelief'
- (B) 'unbelief' and 'disbelief' are a matter of the will rather than of the intellect – it is choice not to put trust in God and Jesus Christ
- (C) the other word has the thought of failing to be persuaded, and therefore failing to govern one's actions accordingly: 'disobey'

c. Disobedience Denies Blessing

(A) The Blessing of Rest

- (1) of this we shall look into more deeply when, Lord willing, we come to chapter 4
- (2) for those who wandered in the wilderness for forty years, it was the land of Canaan that represented God's rest
- (3) all those over age 20 who came out of Egypt, excepting Caleb and Joshua, never entered the land of promise

(B) A Blessing Denied

- (1) God solemnly determined that they would not enter His rest
- (2) their disobedience, disbelief, failure to trust in God, had its dire result ... they were powerless – unable – to enter His rest
- (3) at first they tried, failed; and spent 38 more wilderness years

E. Conclusion

1. The Key Word, "Today"

a. Today if you hear his voice, ...

2. When God Speaks

a. ... do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked me.

b. do not harden; hearken

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

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| Barnes | - | <i>Notes on the New Testament, et alia</i> , by Rev Albert Barnes, Gall & Inglis, Edinburgh |
| BM | - | <i>Biblical Museum</i> , Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870 |
| EBC | - | <i>The Expositor's Bible Commentary</i> , © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan
<i>Hebrews</i> , by Leon Morris |
| EGT | - | <i>The Expositor's Greek Testament</i> , Hodder & Stoughton
<i>Hebrews</i> , by Marcus Dods |
| Gill | - | <i>Exposition of the Old Testament, Exposition of the New Testament</i> , by John Gill, D.D. |
| Kerux | - | The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com . |
| NICNT | - | <i>The New International Commentary on the New Testament</i>
<i>The Epistle to the Hebrew</i> , by F. F. Bruce |
| RWP | - | <i>Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament</i> , by Dr. A. T. Robertson |
| TYN | - | <i>The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries</i>
<i>Hebrews</i> , by Donald Guthrie |