

Sermon Transcript
07.13.2025
Hebrews 3:7-15

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- Good morning. Please open to Hebrews 3. We'll be in vss. 7-15 this morning.
- As you turn there, I want to recognize that this week marked the 284th anniversary of the most famous sermon in American history. It also happened to mark the 15th anniversary of my first sermon, but that's only slightly less well known. BTW, the text of my first sermon just so happened to be Hebrews 3:7-8, the first two we are looking at today.
- But back to the actual most famous sermon. The date was July 8. The year 1741. The context was the first Great Awakening spreading throughout the colonies. And the location was Enfield which was at the time part of the Massachusetts territory, but is today a town in CT. Interestingly enough, Enfield was known at the time for being resistant to the revivalism sweeping the area.
- The preacher was perhaps the greatest thinker in American history, Jonathan Edwards, who famous studied some 14-15 hours per day and wrote on everything from science to philosophy, but theology was his true passion. He learned Latin at age 6 and Greek and Hebrew by 12, at which time he graduated high school and started at Yale where he matriculated as valedictorian.
- Edwards was a central figure in the revivalism of the awakening, but also one of the biggest critics of many of the emotional excesses associated with it. He seems to have tried to walk the line between skepticism and naivete.
- And this was not Edward's first time to preach this particular sermon. He had done so before at his own church in Northampton, Mass. But as there was no dramatic response to that sermon, its his preaching it on July 8th in Enfield that has gone down in history. In fact, I remember reading this sermon in a history class in public school. I doubt they do that today.
- Another interesting fact is that Edwards didn't actually finish the sermon. The outcry and chaos of the church's response was so disruptive that he eventually had to stop and the pastors just led the people in prayer.
- The main point of the sermon was, in Edwards' words, "*There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God.*"
- Now, almost anytime someone references this sermon or Edwards or puritan theology today, its often critical. When I read it in high school, it was alleged as evidence of the dour and harsh picture of the puritan God. And there are certainly things to criticize about Edwards and Puritans and the revival.
- But one of the main subjects of criticism was the idea that this sermon in particular and Edwards in general preached too much on the idea of hell or the anger of God.

- Which is interesting because one of the main themes of the sermon is that though man's sin arouses God's anger, it's really God's mercy that's on display. God's mercy is what holds the sinner out of hell.
- But our culture has become resistant to the image of an angry God. We've emasculated God. Domesticated God. Caricatured God. We don't want a God of wrath or jealousy, we want a fluffy God of bunnies, skittles, and rainbows, ironically forgetting that the rainbow originated in a story about God destroying the world.
- The contemporary god proclaimed in many pulpits and believed upon in many hearts more closely resembles Santa Claus, our own grandparents, or Mr. Rogers than it does the God of Scripture.
- But in our passage today, we'll see the wrath of God on clear display. Far from being something that Scripture avoids, it highlights the anger of God in order to awaken us to the dangers of righteous wrath & to the glories of His mercy so that we might flee the former & rest in the latter.
- So let's pray that God accomplishes that purpose among us today.
- Self, others, me.

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.' " (Hebrews 3:7-11)

- Before we dive into this passage, let's set the scene.
- The book of Hebrews is dealing with a problem. A group of Jewish Christians are being persecuted and are thus facing a temptation. As anyone who has experienced pain knows, the goal is to stop the pain. If you're getting bit by ants, get out of the ant bed. If your finger is burning, get it off the stove. If you're freezing, put on a coat.
- So, these Christians are facing persecution and they're tempted. And here are some words or phrases that the author of Hebrews uses to describe the dangers that they are facing.
 - Drifting, Neglecting, hardening, going astray, falling away, failing to reach, falling, being sluggish, throwing away, shrinking back, growing weary, failing to obtain, refusing Him Who is speaking, rejecting, being led astray.
 - In other words, the temptation is apostasy, falling away from Christ. Running from the church and running back into the synagogue. Turning from the new covenant and back to the Mosaic Law.
- So, in order to combat these dangers, the author commends the following duties. He encourages:
 - holding fast, taking care, holding firm, striving, drawing near, showing earnestness, entering, enduring, being preserved, seeking, laying aside weight and sin, running with endurance, struggling against and resisting sin, striving, going to Jesus, seeking the city that is to come.
- These are the responses and responsibilities to the new covenant. And all of that is owing to the fact that Christ is better. That's the overarching theme of the book, the

supremacy of Christ. Christ is better than the angels, better than Moses. He offers a better rest than Joshua. A better law than Sinai. He's a better priest, who's offered a better sacrifice, accomplishing a better salvation, built on better promises, because of a better covenant. Christ is better. That's the book in a nutshell.

- Last week we saw Christ compared and contrasted to Moses. Like Moses, Christ is faithful. But unlike Moses, Christ is faithful as the son and not the servant, as one who is over vs. one who is in the house. Christ is the builder because Christ is God.
- And since he's compared Christ to Moses, so he now compares the church to Israel. That's what we'll see in our passage today.
- And this isn't the only place where that happens.
- Look at 1 Corinthians 10:1-5 for an example of this:
 - *For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. (1 Corinthians 10:1-5)*
- Notice how Paul references Israel's wilderness experiences. And then see what he does with that in 6-12
 - *Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10:6-12)*
- See what he does? He says that the experiences of Israel in the wilderness provide an example for us. They're written down for our instruction that we might learn from them.
- Well, that's what Hebrews is doing as well. He is saying that there are similarities between OT Israel & the NT church as there are similarities between Christ & Moses, but there are also some dissimilarities. And one of those dissimilarities is that the law is written on our hearts such that we won't make shipwreck of our faith as that first generation of Israelites in the wilderness did because we have received a better covenant. We'll see that emphasis on the circumcision of the heart and the accomplishment of the new covenant as we move further into the book. But for now, let's pick up the narrative in vs. 7-11.
- As we do, we notice the phrase "as the Holy Spirit says." Don't skip over that too quickly. Think about the implications of this. First, this argues for the idea of the inspiration of Scripture. As 2 Timothy 3:16 says:
 - *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness... (2 Timothy 3:16)*
- In other words, whatever Scripture says, God says.

- Not only that, but we can also infer the deity of the Spirit. Notice the Spirit is speaking. He is a person, not a force or thing. And compare this to all of the passages in chapter 1 where the author says that God spoke the words of Scripture and in chapter 2 where the author says that the Son spoke in Scripture. So in the first 3 chapters, we have all three persons referenced as the authors of Scripture.
- One other thing that I find interesting about this passage is the multi-faceted nature of the Spirit's speech. Notice how there are 4 successive stages of speech.
 - First, the Spirit spoke to the people in the wilderness
 - Second, the Spirit spoke to the people of the psalmist's day
 - Third, the Spirit spoke to the audience of the author of Hebrews day
 - And, finally, the Spirit still speaks today through this Scripture
- So what is the Spirit saying?
- Well, the author quotes from Psalm 95:7-11. Let's look at that, starting in vs. 6 for some context:
 - *Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways." Therefore I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest."* (Psalm 95:6-11)
- You'll notice a reference to Meribah and Massah which the author of Hebrews doesn't include. Why not? Well, because he instead translates those terms into quarreling and testing. Massah means testing and Meribah means quarreling. Now, you don't need to know Hebrew to know that. Just go back and read Exodus 17:7 which says:
 - *And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"* (Exodus 17:7)
- One of the things that I love about this Hebrews passage is that it reminds me of the movie Inception in which there are layers upon layers of dreams. That's what is happening in Hebrews. In order to understand Hebrews 3, you have to go down a layer to understand Psalm 95 and in order to understand Psalm 95, you have to go down another layer to understand the events of Exodus 17.
- So what happens in Exodus 17? Well, the same thing that happened a number of times in the wilderness. Israel rebels, they quarrel, they grumble and mumble and complain and moan and groan...not merely against Moses, but ultimately against the Lord God. Over and over and over and over again they fall into that same pattern of bitterness and discontent.
- Now, take that context and compare it to the content of the book of Hebrews. Those in the wilderness were being tested by their thirst. And they failed the test by failing to hold fast to God's promises. And that's exactly what the author of Hebrews is concerned that his audience might do. They are being persecuted, they are tested. So will they

quarrel and rebel like Israel or will they hold fast and stand firm on the promises of God, the supremacy of Christ?

- Israel was tested and therefore tempted to go back to Egypt. Remember how they actually begin to miss the slavery and long to return? Well, that's what's facing the Hebrews. They are tested and tempted to want to return to the Mosaic law. That's the analogy.
- But there is an even deeper level because notice the reference to the 40 years. The events at Massah and Meribah were before the 40 years even began. In fact, they were part of the series of Israel's rebellion that ultimately coalesced into God's judgment leading to the wilderness wanderings.
- But the author fast forwards 40 years to reinforce how foolish Israel's pattern of rebellion was. They hadn't just seen God's power, mercy & provision once or twice, but for an entire generation. They had seen it in the plagues on Egypt, in the parting of the Red Sea, in the destruction of Pharaoh, in the provision of manna, in the provision of quail, in the pillar of fire and cloud, and in the water from the rock. Not for a week or a month or a year or a decade, but 40 years God had shown himself faithful and yet they continued to grumble and groan.
- And lest we think we're much better, consider how long you've seen God's provision and yet how often you're tempted to grow anxious or afraid. We've seen the ultimate exodus in the deliverance of Christ and yet we too are often tempted to grumble and complain about God's timing and wisdom and provision and protection. But for the grace of God, you and I are Israel.
- So Israel's problem was that they always go astray. They have not known His ways. And therefore, they were unable to enter God's rest.
- We'll see the theme of God's rest taken up quite a bit over the next few weeks so we won't dive into that now.
- Instead, I just want you to notice that the problem is a problem of the heart. They go astray in their heart. In fact, they quote always go astray. Not occasionally or frequently, but continuously. They always go astray. They do so because of hardened hearts, uncircumcised hearts.
- This was the fundamental inadequacy of the old covenant and the Mosaic law. Laws were given, but because of man's natural depravity, man was unable to keep those laws. In fact, the laws merely increased our sin. So the solution was always for God to intervene by overcoming our innate resistance. We see that foreshadowed even in the OT:
 - *And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. (Deuteronomy 30:6)*
- Here a circumcised heart is the antithesis to a hardened heart, a heart of stone. Or look at one of the clearest prophecies of a new covenant in the OT. Jeremiah 31:
 - *Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after*

those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:31–34)

- Hebrews will quote Jeremiah 31 in chapter 8 so we know that on his mind. But the fundamental distinction between the old covenant and the new is that the old covenant didn't necessarily include the power to obey whereas the new comes with certain promises as we'll see as we move through Hebrews.
- Notice he says that the new covenant is not like the old and the specific point of dissimilarity is that God will put His law in the people and write it on their hearts. In the family of Israel, you could be a member of the community and not be a believer, not have your sins forgiven. But in the family of God that is the church, God promises forgiveness. I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.
- As has been said before of the difference between law and gospel, old covenant and new:
 - Run John, run, the law demands, but gives me neither feet nor hands. Far better news the gospel brings, it bids me fly and gives me wings!
- So Israel failed to enter God's rest because they failed to obey and they failed to obey because they failed to believe and they failed to believe because their hearts were hard, dull, insensitive.
- So what does that have to do with us? I'm glad you asked. Look at vs. 12.

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. (Hebrews 3:12)

- One of the interesting aspects of Hebrews is the way that the book jumps between description and exhortation. Some books do all of the description up front and then back load the application in the final chapters. Kinda like most sermons leave the application for the end, but Hebrews just kinda goes back and forth between indicative and imperative.
- We see that in this verse.
- The command is to take care. Literally, see to it, or watch out. It's a call to stand guard. Now, remember the other commands that the book has encouraged. In chapter 2, it said to listen and hear, then last week it said to consider and now to see, to look out.
- And notice the word brother and the phrase any of you. You can't say this doesn't apply to me. I don't have to watch out. I'm all good. No one is immune from this. We should be perpetually vigilant as to the condition of our own hearts.
- So what are we supposed to watch out for? Well, an evil, unbelieving heart. The very thing that God accused the Israelites of possessing.
- We'll see that more clearly in vs. 19 which reminds us that Israel was:
 - *So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. (Hebrews 3:19)*
- So, notice the implication. Notice the result of an evil, unbelieving heart is falling away. Turning back. That is ultimately rooted in unbelief, a symptom of the underlying

sickness of faithlessness. In other words, faith has an active component. To some degree you can assess the validity of your faith by virtue of your works. As James says, our works prove or demonstrate our faith. Turning back is evidence of unbelief, moving forward is an evidence of faith.

- And if the Hebrews were to ultimately apostasize then it would be an indication of a lack of faith. Now, let me clarify that.
- Biblically, all sin is unbelief. Every single time that you sin, you're expressing a lack of faith in the promises of God. You think that that affair, or those images on the internet or your reputation or security or whatever is more valuable than Christ.
- So, in that sense, every single one of us is lacking in faith to some degree. But that isn't what the author is primarily talking about. He's talking about a pattern of unbelief that culminates in apostasy.
- And to avoid that, one of the best ways is to confess the little unbeliefs along the way. Confess and repent of the small stuff so that it won't avalanche into the big stuff. As we talked about in chapter 2, beware the danger of drifting.
- A single sin or even a handful of sins, even egregious ones, won't keep you from God's rest, but a pattern, a habit, sin upon sin upon sin, unconfessed, unconforted, unchanged, calcifying over time, beware that danger. Don't presume upon God's kindness when God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance.
- And again, this passage is presupposing the reality of the new covenant in which the heart has been transformed such that evil and unbelief are no longer the natural state because we've been given a new nature that desires new and better things. In the old covenant, mankind was defined by an evil, unbelieving heart. In Adam, that is our natural state.
- But we are no longer in Adam, but in Christ, if we've been born again and given a new heart. Look at Ezekiel 36 and the promise of a new covenant there
 - *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:26-27)*
- You've been given a new heart, a new nature, but you need to learn how to live in light of that. And that takes practice. It takes watching out and holding fast. Like relearning to walk after a stroke, so we have to relearn how to walk in light of receiving a new nature. We have to relearn how to love and think and feel and obey.
- Sin has been so habituated into us that we need to learn new habits and so the author is saying don't go back to the old nature, don't nourish the flesh. Don't drift. Don't look back like Lot's wife. Don't apostasize.
- And again, remember what we said last week. When we talk about apostasy, we're not saying that genuine regenerate elect believers can fall away and lose their salvation. But we are saying that its possible for someone to have false assurance. It is possible that someone will call Christ Lord, Lord and he will respond, I never knew you. We'll get into that a bit more with some of the warning passages that we'll see later in the book.
- But as for apostasy, this warning against falling away is actually the Greek word *apostenai*, which is where we get the English word apostasy. We see it throughout the

NT in contexts of falling away and rebellion. For example, we see it in 1 Timothy 4:1 which says;

- *Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons...* (1 Timothy 4:1)
- Notice some similarities between that passage and our Hebrews passage. The Spirit is speaking, there is the mention of faith, there is a reference to apostasy, and there is deception.
- And we see the term for apostasy in the LXX as well in passages like Number 14:9 where Joshua pleads with the people to enter the land rather than rebel or apostatize.
 - *Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.* (Numbers 14:9)
- So that's the danger. And the author says to watch out, take care, be on the lookout. Like an amber alert or a tornado watch. There is a danger and so the exhortation is to stand guard.
- One more note before we move on. Notice how he refers to God. He calls him the living God. That too is a phrase we see throughout Scripture and in particular in contexts where YHWH is being contrasted with the idols of the pagan world. They are deaf, dumb, mute. In the language of Psalm 115:
 - *Their idols [of the nations] are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.* (Psalm 115:4–8)
- In other words, the idols are lifeless, dead.
- In contrast to that, God sees & speaks because He is the living God. I mention that because the presupposition that you'll often see in the prophets is the futility & foolishness of forsaking God. In order to turn away from God, you're actually turning back to something not only inferior, but impotent & vain. And that's the case as we find in Heb as well. As we'll see later in the book, the old system of Judaism has been rendered obsolete. The altar is closed, the veil is torn, the temple has been replaced and will soon be destroyed. Going back to OT Judaism isn't just silly, its futile, as silly and futile as Israel going back to slavery in Egypt.
- Let's keep going. Vs. 13.

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:13)

- I've alluded to this a few times over the past couple of months, but here we see the communal, corporate dimension of the book. Notice that one of the ways that we take care and watch out is by watching each others backs.
- Hebrews isn't just saying, you do you and I'll do me. Its saying that you have a responsibility toward me and I toward you. We'll see this again in chapter 10 where we read:

- *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* (Hebrews 10:24–25)
- And if we're going to exhort one another, then we need to know one another, spend time around one another. That's why it's not enough to simply attend services and think you've done the whole church thing. You've gone to church, but you haven't actually been the church and that's a major distinction.
- God's desire for you is to live in community, to know and be known. In fact, to be known so well that others can tell when you are drifting and you can tell when others might be drifting. Like spotting the signs of a stroke in a friend, are you so connected that others would notice if you are being hardened?
- Community is a means of grace that God has given in order to avoid the dangers that he's describing. Some of you may think of community as an obligation, but one of the things that Christ constantly reminds us of is that his commands aren't burdensome, they're actually means of grace.
- God has given you others so that they might aid you in your walk. And they do that primarily through exhortation. We are to exhort one another and that word exhort is interesting. In some places we translate it as exhort, others as encourage. In some contexts it could be a word of comfort, in others a word of rebuke. As we talked about last week, we need to bear in mind that exhortation of 1 Thessalonians 5:14 which says:
 - *And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.* (1 Thessalonians 5:14)
- And that presupposes knowing someone well enough to assess if they are idle or fainthearted or weak.
- You see our faith, like a fire, needs constant stirring. We read that in Hebrews 10. We are to stir one another up. It doesn't say to stir yourself. It says that you stir each other. That sounds weird in English, but oh well. As Calvin said:
 - "unless our faith is repeatedly encouraged, it lies dormant; unless it is warmed, it grows cold; unless it is aroused, it gets numb." (John Calvin)
- Or think of the analogy of concrete. You must continually stir it or what? It hardens. And that's what the author says will happen if we aren't stirred. We are to exhort each other so that none of us may be hardened.
- Again, this idea of hardening would have been familiar to those acquainted with the OT given that Pharaoh was famously hardened. I think it was mentioned 19 times in some way or another that Pharaoh's heart was hardened.
- So earlier we read from Psalm 95 that we are not to harden our hearts and now we read that we are to exhort one another lest our hearts be hardened.
- BTW, that word translated hardened is where we get the English word sclerosis as in multiple sclerosis which refers to a hardening of the body tissue.
- With multiple sclerosis, the symptoms include numbness and muscle weakness and even paralysis. Well, that's kinda what happens with the hardening of the heart. When the heart is hardened it becomes numb, paralyzed, unable to move, it's fixed in place, no longer sensitive to the voice of the Spirit speaking in Scripture. As Jonathan Edwards, whom I mentioned in the intro writes:

- “Now, by a hard heart is plainly meant an unaffected heart, or a heart not easy to be moved with virtuous affections, like a stone, insensible, stupid, unmoved and hard to be impressed” (Jonathan Edwards)
- We see similar imagery in Scripture of stiff necks, a metaphor for stubbornness, an unteachable, arrogant refusal to change one’s mind. Frighteningly, Scripture holds out that a refusal to change can eventually lead to an inability to change.
- That’s why the psalm began by saying, today, if you hear his voice. In other words, do this before you can no longer hear. Before your heart is so hardened by sin that its unresponsive & unable to move. We’ll read about that danger in chap 6 & in the example of Esau’s inability to repent.
- And notice what it is that hardens the heart. Its the deceitfulness of sin.
- That’s sin’s strategy summed up in one word. Deceit. Indeed, Satan is called the father of lies. In the garden he lies. He says, surely you won’t die. He suggests that God is withholding. He suggests that freedom is found in autonomy. And now, thousands of years later, that’s still his strategy. He’s running the same play.
- All sin consists in denying the goodness and sovereignty of God. Its saying that I will fundamentally be more fulfilled by pursuing my own path rather than God’s. That’s sin. Its the false belief that God and His ways are not satisfying, fulfilling, life-giving. Its drinking from broken cisterns that can’t hold water rather than the fountain of life. Serving a dead idol rather than the living God.
- And this is staved off by means of exhortation which occurs in community. Its relatively easy for the enemy to pick off a lone Christian, but it is much harder to deceive an entire community.
- Think about one of those escape room games. A single person might be fooled by the clues to get out, but get enough people on your team and you’ve got a chance. As Ecclesiastes 4:12 says:
 - *though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.* (Ecclesiastes 4:12)
- So exhortation is the means of resisting, fighting, enduring.
- Notice again that the danger of falling away in chapter 3 shares similar language with the danger of withdrawing from the congregation in chapter 10. As we read earlier, there is an overlap in language there. And that makes sense because 99 times out of 100 someone drifting from the Lord is preceded by drifting from community, drifting from encouragement, and rebuke and exhortation.
- The arrogance that is demonstrated when someone says, I can do without the Lord is first manifest by the thought, I can do without the church. Because in effect, you’re saying, I can do without God’s prescribed means & God’s commands. That’s the beginning, the first symptom of drift & hardening. The start of a pattern of habituating yourself into spiritual stubbornness...of listening to the lies of the flesh, but without anyone to speak truth into those lies.
- So I want to go back to the idea of the necessity of this happening regularly. He writes that this should even be happening daily. We need daily encouragement. Think again of concrete, what happens the minute you stop stirring? It starts hardening.
- Or a few weeks ago, we used the illustration of drifting on currents. What happens the minute that you stop paddling against the current? You start drifting with the current.

- So don't put off until tomorrow, what God commands today. We'll come back to that. For now, let's look at vs. 14.

For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. (Hebrews 3:14)

- You may recall that we read something similar last week in vs. 6 which said:
 - *...And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. (Hebrews 3:6)*
- As we talked about then, perseverance is a condition that is placed upon God's people. We must endure if we will be saved. But one of distinctives and the good news of the new covenant is that we will persevere because God will preserve us. God has given conditions, but He Himself has fulfilled those conditions on our behalf and in our lives.
- Notice the text doesn't say that we WILL come to share in Christ, but we have come to share in Christ if we persevere. So perseverance is not really the cause of our confidence, but the expression, the outworking of our confidence.
- In other words, the author envisions two potential responses. First is apostasy and second is perseverance. Who will persevere? Those who truly share in Christ.
- So perseverance is the final proof of possession of Christ.
- Since we worked through that a bit more in-depth last week and we'll come back to it as we work through some other passages on perseverance later in the book, I'll move on for now. Look at vs. 15.

As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." (Hebrews 3:15)

- The author again repeats this call from Psalm 95. And anytime an author repeats something, he is doing so for the sake of emphasis.
- In effect, he's now raised his voice. He's said, look at me. Maybe you didn't hear me before, well now stop and listen. Pay attention.
- Again he stresses the importance of immediacy. Today.
- This means both not yesterday and not tomorrow. Not yesterday, in other words, its not too late to obey. If you hear his voice, there is time to relent. And not tomorrow, you mustn't delay your obedience. I'm not sure if you will have an opportunity to repent tomorrow, but I presume that you do today. So don't neglect it.
- Beware of subtly deceptive thoughts like I will heed the voice of the Holy Spirit tomorrow. I will confess my sin tomorrow. I will read my Bible tomorrow. I will pray tomorrow. I will repent tomorrow. I will reconcile with my wife tomorrow.
- Do it today.
- Jesus speaks about this immediacy when he says in Matthew 5
 - *So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23-24)*
- He's speaking these words in Galilee. Even if someone were offering a gift in Jerusalem, they should first go. All the way back to Galilee to reconcile and then all the way back to

Jerusalem to offer the gift. That's uncomfortable, that's inconvenient, but that's what is commanded. Do it. Immediately. Today. Don't delay. As Calvin writes:

- "As, then, we know not whether God will extend his calling to tomorrow, let us not delay. Today he calls us; let us immediately respond to him, for there is no faith except where there is such a readiness to obey." (John Calvin)
- And here's the thing, obedience not only proves our faith, but it strengthens our faith. Each step of obedience helps to create a new pattern, a new habit that staves off the hardening. Each time we obey, it becomes a bit easier to obey the next time.
- Most of us do not wake up in the morning and think, "What do I have to do today? It's garbage day so I need to take out the trash. I have that big presentation at work so I need to remember to prep for that this morning. Need to call my friends and wish them a happy anniversary. Oh yeah, I almost forgot. I really need to set aside some time to harden my heart against God. It got a little soft there overnight so I need to make sure I set aside enough time to really harden it up in rebellion against my Maker."
- That's not generally how the heart is hardened. Rather, our hearts are hardened through gradual neglect. Passivity hardens the heart. Negligence hardens the heart. Disregard hardens the heart. Complacency hardens the heart. It's not hard to harden your heart, the same way it isn't hard to drift. Simply do nothing.
- Stop coming to church, stop reading your Bible, stop fasting, stop praying, stop gathering with friends who can encourage you and whom you can encourage, stop serving others, stop confessing sin, stop taking communion, stop listening to rebuke, stop being accountable, stop trying to walk in faithfulness. It's not hard to harden your heart. Simply do nothing.
- So how do you not do nothing? Well, by doing something. Confess your sins, prioritize the weekly gathering so you can sing and pray and hear the word and partake of communion, order your life so that you can regularly pray and read Scripture. Invite others over so you can be hospitable and mutually encouraging, serve others, be accountable with others about your faults and fears and struggles, fast and pray, sing regularly, apply what you are reading in Scripture, and so forth. Do some of that, or better yet, do all of it.
- Watch for the first signs of apathy and disinterest and bitterness and grumbling and take those thoughts captive and put them to death.
- Do something. And do it today.
- Ironically hardening isn't hard. You don't have to do anything to make concrete harden. If you stop stirring it, it simply hardens on its own. The same is true with the heart. The heart hardens simply by failing to stir its affections for Christ. A day goes by, then a week, then a month...there is little to no grace-driven effort to see and hear Christ...no looking and listening for Jesus...the heart begins to drift and harden.
- Today's fleshly desires become tomorrow's sin. Today's flirtation is tomorrow's adulterous affair. Today's little argument is tomorrow's brawl. Today's anger is tomorrow's murder. Sin has a way of gradually sneaking up on us.
- And even if that has begun in you, there is hope. If you can still hear His voice, then you can still repent. You can change.
- God has not promised milk and honey in the desert. Perhaps you've mistakenly believed that faith comes with pixie dust and so you've become discouraged by the sand.

- But the gospel has not promised that we won't wander through the wilderness, it promises that we won't get lost and abandoned there, that God will be with us in the midst of the desert, giving us the daily bread that we need today, and that He will eventually lead us out of the wasteland and into rest.
- So, until then, keep walking. When you fall, get back up in reliance upon the Spirit and pray for strength and take a step and then another.
- A heart isn't hardened by a single sin, but rather by a long pattern of unwillingness to repent of that sin.
- Maybe you're tired of pursuing reconciliation with a spouse, tired of trusting God in the midst of sickness & pain. You're tired of fighting your sexual inclinations. You think you've waited long enough, prayed hard enough. God must be unfaithful to His promises you begin to assume.
- Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts because Christ is better.
- Let's pray.

Communion

- Fence table
- In light of the corporate aspect of this text, the call for communal application. We are to exhort one another, many of you know where I'm going to encourage us in communion.
- Some of you introverts are inwardly groaning because you know what's about to happen.
- But one of the things that we want to stress often is that communion is not a private affair just between you and Jesus.
- Communion is a communal affair. As we are reconciled to Christ, so we are reconciled to each other. That's what is symbolized by the single loaf and the single cup that Christ instituted.
- So today, I want to exhort you to consider the body. We'll do so by looking around the room and making eye contact.
- This might make some of you uncomfortable. Good! That's my goal. Relearning to walk is uncomfortable. Obeying Christ is uncomfortable. A commitment to comfort is sure path toward a hard heart.
- As you look around, I want you to just think about the implications that we are called to be one body, one family.
- Ask yourself if you really believe that and whether you live like it. If not, ask the Lord to strengthen your resolve. Consider who you can encourage. Are there people toward whom you have some growing bitterness? Resolve to make peace.
- Are there people you don't know? Resolve to introduce yourself.
- Are there people you know facing some hardship? Resolve to offer some encouragement.
- Are there people you normally see that you haven't been noticed for a few weeks? Resolve to reach out and check in to make sure everything is alright.
- So take a second and look around and consider the common bond that we have in Christ by the Spirit.
- Let's partake together...
- On the night...