

Text: Heb. 3:7-19

Title: "The faith that truly saves"

Time: 8/24/2014 pm

Place: NBBC

Introduction: With this passage we have come to the first of many passages in Hebrews that deal with readers who are known as Christian brothers as though some of them may in the end not be brothers at all. We see this at the heart of the passage before us this evening in verses 12-13.

Clearly, as a local assembly of professing believers, we are called to be concerned about the reality that some among us may in the end not be true believers after all. Some of us may have hard hearts of unbelief that are deceived by sin.

Our author points to Israel in a special way to make his point. The New Testament is clear that there is a correspondence between the nation of Israel and the local church. The nation of Israel was the Old Testament visible assembly of those who by virtue of their natural birth were the chosen brotherhood of God. The local church is the New Testament visible assembly of those who by virtue of their profession of faith are the chosen brotherhood of God.

Our author brings up this correspondence with a quotation from Psalm 95 (vv. 7-11). That is a passage that refers to a part of Israel's history that was a special concern to this author as he thought about the condition of the church he was writing to. That church was facing discouragement and the temptation to quit on Christianity and go back to Judaism, and the point our author makes is that doing so would be very much like what happened to the nation of Israel after their exodus from Egypt and prior to their entrance into Canaan.

The entrance into Canaan is called *entering God's rest* in this passage (vv. 11, 18). A whole generation of Israel was not allowed to enter into God's rest, which was found in the promised-land. Because of hardness of heart and in spite of their redemption from Egypt, that generation died in the wilderness in unbelief (vv. 16-19).

So as we attempt to interpret this passage and apply it to our lives as members of a local church today, it is very important that we understand what *the rest of Canaan* means to the author of Hebrews. What does *entering Canaan* correspond to in the life of the believer? Many see this as entrance into heaven's rest in contrast to a believer's life on earth, and they see it this way largely because Paul sees Israel's history this way. But I detect a difference in the approach of our author from the approach of Paul. Our author adds something to Paul's understanding.

To illustrate this, I have put together a chart on the way Paul sees the correspondence between the local church and the nation of Israel, and then one on how our author adds to that understanding in our passage. To view the chart, click on [Israel-local church correspondence in Israel](#).

So what our author is saying is that, just like there was a whole generation of the nation of Israel that did not enter Canaan's rest because of unbelief, so also there may be a number of church members who never enter the true joys of salvation by faith alone for the same reason – unbelief. To enter Canaan's rest is not to enter heaven rather than earth, but to enter salvation by faith rather than works (4:3, 10). Saving faith is the key to this rest, and there is a counterfeit kind that we need to protect our assembly from.

Jonathan Edwards: "They that receive only the easy part of Christianity, and not the difficult, at best are but almost Christians; while they that are wholly Christians, receive the whole of Christianity, and thus shall be accepted and honored, and not cast out with shame at the last day."

Note some passages that speak of the profession of faith that might make you a member of a local church, but still will not save you in the end: John 8:31-47; James 2:14-26; Matt. 13:3-9, 18-23. I have titled the message this evening, "The faith that truly saves," and I want us to understand three things about the faith we must have in our hearts today if we are going to be faithful to the cause of Christ tomorrow as those who are truly saved.

I. The faith that truly saves is grounded in the Word of God (v. 7, "The Holy Spirit says [in the Bible (Ps. 95)]").

Application: We must have the faith that says we believe that the Holy Spirit wrote the Bible. This is clearly the faith that our author possessed in the Bible (v. 7; 9:8; 10:15).

When he quotes from this book, he knows that he is quoting the Holy Spirit. He also understands that God has said what is written in the Scripture (4:4, He = God). Therefore, because the Word of the Holy Spirit is the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is God.

If we are to be faithful tomorrow, we must be able to say that we have a faith today that is grounded on the sure Word of God, the promises of Scripture, that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). Saving faith is not faith in an emotional experience, it is not faith in the promise of our mom and dad who tell us we are believers, it is not faith in coming from a Christian home or in attending a Christian church. It is faith in the

Christ we find in the Bible, and we find Him self-revealed there as the sure Word of God.

II. The faith that truly saves is responsive to the Word of God (vv. 7-11, “do not harden”).

Illustration: Doctors can look at symptoms to help predict what is going on in our heart. We cannot see the heart to test its faith, but we can see symptoms.

Application: The episode referred to in Psalm 95 is recorded for us in Exod. 17:1-7. From this passage I want to emphasize two things about the unresponsive, hard heart that we are seeking to protect our assembly from.

1. Hard hearts fail to respond to the messenger of the Word of God. In the case of Israel, that messenger was Moses (vv. 2-4). He had led the people of Israel to a place that had no water, but he had done so at the command of God (v. 1). It was part of the hardness of the hearts of these people in response to that command that they quarreled with Moses. They complained against him in such a way that Moses even felt his own safety threatened. But to complain against Moses like that was to test the Lord (v. 2, 7). When we quarrel with the man who tells us the command of the Lord, we quarrel with the Lord, and it is only the deceitfulness of our sin and our hardened hearts that tell us otherwise.

2. Hard hearts fail to respond to the requirements of the Word of God. God has some commands that need to be obeyed (Heb. 3:18), and some ways that need to be followed (Heb. 3:10). Hard hearts reject those commands and refuse to follow those ways. Saphir’s description of a soft heart: “God wishes us to be delivered from hardness of heart, that is, from dullness of perception of His love and beauty, from ingratitude and lukewarmness towards Him, from pride

and impenitence, from self-seeking and unrest. When we receive God's word in the heart, when we acknowledge our sin, when we adore God's mercy, when we desire God's fellowship, when we see Jesus, who came to serve us, to wash our feet, and to shed His blood for our salvation, the heart becomes soft and tender." What kind of heart do we really have? That answer will tell us if our faith is faith that truly saves.

III. The faith that truly saves may not be possessed by all we call *brothers* (vv. 12-19).

A. This reality should make us concerned for the testimony of Christ (vv. 14-15). Christ never fails true brothers with saving faith. Those with the beginning of that faith hold fast to it unto the end or they had never become partakers of Christ (v. 14). This is true because the beginning of our faith has Christ as its author, and the ending of our faith has Christ as its finisher (12:2).

So the fact that we may have among us people with evil hearts of unbelief in departing from the living God should make us concerned about the damage they can do to the testimony of Christ. They profess to be a partaker of Christ, yet they do not hold fast, proclaiming Him a liar and a failure. We must be concerned for the testimony of Christ in facing this reality of Christian ministry, the false profession. False professions do not glorify His name, they bring it shame. Our church needs its process of membership to protect it as best we can from false professions.

B. This reality should make us concerned for encouraging one another (vv. 12-13). Because we have become partakers of Christ and are concerned for the glory of His name, we must be actively engaged in daily encouraging one another

to not fall away from our profession with an unbelieving heart and to not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Unbelieving hearts, apostatizing backslidden lives, hardened hearts deceived by sin – they all bring dishonor to the name of Christ. We must not be satisfied to be a congregation filled with that kind of thing. The Scripture is clear that both believers and unbelievers can live this way, with a profession of faith that conflicts with a life of hardness and unbelief. As the brethren, we must minister to the lives of every professing brother, not able to see his heart, to help that one live true to his profession. He may have to come to true saving faith to get there, or he may need only grow in grace, but the exhortation here is for us to care enough about this situation to minister passionately to it. The next chapter will begin by telling us to fear this kind of thing.

F. F. Bruce: “The exhortation to mutual encouragement was wise: in isolation from his fellow-believers each individual among them was more liable to succumb to the subtle temptations that pressed in upon him from so many sides, but if they came together regularly for mutual encouragement the devotion of all would be kept warm and their common hope would be in less danger of flickering and dying. In isolation each was prone to be impressed by the specious arguments which underlined the worldly wisdom of a certain measure of compromise of the Christian faith and witness; in the healthy atmosphere of the Christian fellowship these arguments would be the more readily appraised at their truth worth, and recognized as being so many manifestations of the ‘deceitfulness of sin.’ Where the right path lies clear before the eyes, a disinclination to follow it can be reinforced in the mind by many beguiling lines of rationalization; but to surrender to them results in a hardening of the heart, a reduced sensitivity of conscience, which makes

it more difficult to recognize the right path on a subsequent occasion. But in a fellowship which exercised a watchful and unremitting care for its members the temptation to prefer the easy course to the right one would be greatly weakened, and the united resolution to stand firm would be correspondingly strengthened."

Conclusion: Ultimately, we cannot answer the question who among us has an evil hard heart of unbelief that will not enter God's rest, and who among us are truly saved but struggling with sin.

What we can answer is this question: "Am I a part of a fellowship determined to exercise a watchful and unremitting care for its members?" We are either encouraging hardness of heart and unbelief and complaining and rebellion and unresponsiveness to the word of God in our congregation, or we are encouraging love for and imitation of Christ in one another. We are not doing nothing.

What if there were 10 Joshuas and Calebs and only two nay-saying spies on that fateful day at Kadesh-Barnea, when Israel decided not to enter into their promised rest? How might the history of that assembly been written differently? Does not our assembly need such men as these?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*