

The book of Hebrews: “Confident Faith in Turbulent Times”

Lesson 3 – “Forward in Faith” - Hebrews 3:7- 19, 4:1-12

In the previous lesson, we learned about the Glory Jesus has as the Son of God and the Son of Man. Our faith becomes stronger when we learn to see Jesus in His glory. Jesus is introduced with His new title: the High Priest, who stands before God as our representative. ***“For this reason he had to be made like us, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest” Hebrews 2:18***

In this lesson we begin with the Holy Spirit, who urges us to go forward, with faith in Jesus.

“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 wilderness.” Hebrews 3:7-8

“So, as the Holy Spirit says:” The writer is quoting from Psalm 95, but instead of writing “David says”, he attributes this Psalm to the Holy Spirit. He does this several times in the book of Hebrews. The writer wants us to understand, that the words he is quoting are the words that come directly from God, by the Holy Spirit. The Bible is true, because its words were breathed out by the Spirit of Truth. Paul wrote to Timothy:

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,” 2 Timothy 3:16 “God-breathed is another way of saying “inspired” or “Given through the Spirit.”

The Apostle Peter writes:

“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1:20-21

When Moses, David and the prophets wrote, the Holy Spirit spoke through them. And when we read the Bible today, the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the written word.

As the Holy Spirit says: ***“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”***

- Why are the books of the Old Testament still relevant for us today?

- How do you know that when you read the Bible, the Holy Spirit will speak to you?

The writer of Hebrews begins this passage by quoting from Psalm 95: 7-8. The book of Hebrews was written to a group of Jewish believers, so the writer uses examples from Israel's history to help them understand his message. Because they were very familiar with the Old Testament scriptures, quoting one verse was enough for them to remember the whole story. Read Psalm 95: 5-11

“Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if only you would hear his voice, “Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested me; they tried me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, ‘They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.’ So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’” Psalm 95: 6-11

These lines describe one of the most important events in Jewish history. God led His people out of bondage in Egypt, and took them on a journey to a new land He promised to give them. But because of lack of faith, and disobedience, they were not allowed to enter.

There are several incidents in which the people rebelled against God. When Moses sent men to spy out the promised land of Canaan, they came back with such a negative report the people refused to enter. As a consequence, a trip that should have taken a few weeks, took 40 years. You can read the story in Numbers chapters 13 and 14.

Psalm 95 speaks of similar events recorded in Numbers chapter 20 that happened at Massah and Meribah. These names mean “complaining” and “quarrelling”. When the people could not find water they asked, “Is God with us or not?”

“The Lord said to Moses, “Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.” So Moses took the staff from the Lord’s presence, just as he commanded him. He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, “Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?” Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.” Numbers 20:7-12.

God told Moses and Aaron to speak to the rock, but instead, Moses angrily struck it with his staff. God told Moses that because he didn't trust God he would not enter the Promised Land.

"And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" Exodus 17:7

"There on the mountain that you have climbed you will die and be gathered to your people, just as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people. This is because both of you broke faith with me in the presence of the Israelites at the waters of Meribah Kadesh in the Desert of Zin and because you did not uphold my holiness among the Israelites. Therefore, you will see the land only from a distance; you will not enter the land I am giving to the people of Israel." Deuteronomy 32:50-52

- Why wasn't Moses allowed to enter the Promised Land?

Group Discussion Questions:

- When Moses struck the rock, water miraculously gushed out for the people to drink. Why do you think God was angry? What was Moses' mistake?
- What lesson do you think the writer of Hebrews wants his readers to learn from Psalm 95?

"See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." Hebrews 3:12

The lesson we need to learn from Massah and Meribah, is about the condition of our hearts. Just as we read in verse seven: ***"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts..." Hebrews 3:8.*** When we hear God, we hear Him with our heart. And faith in God comes from our heart. The Bible says ***"For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified" Romans 10:10.*** If our hearts are hard, God cannot speak to us and we cannot hear Him. Hardness of heart prevents God's word from penetrating our hearts, and it keeps faith from growing.

"But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." Hebrews 3:13

- The writer of Hebrews is writing to people who are believers in Christ. How could a Christian develop a “hardened” heart?

- What can you do to keep a soft heart?

Group Discussion Question:

- Compare Hebrews 3:12 and Hebrews 3:13. In what ways are brothers and sisters in Christ responsible for each other?

- How can staying connected to other believers in the church help us?

An unbelieving heart, ***“turns away from the living God.”*** But if we have faith, the opposite is true: ***“We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.” Hebrews 3:14.*** Through faith, we will share in Christ. We will share everything He is, everything He accomplished, and everything He promised.

The kind of faith this verse describes is “our original conviction”. The Hebrews were believers who had started believing in Jesus with a strong assurance that He was everything they needed. Now, faced with difficult times, and persecution, their faith had been shaken. The writer tells them to remember the kind of faith they had at the beginning, and hold on to it until the end; then they will have a share in Christ.

- According to Hebrews, what is the most important part of a journey, the beginning, or the end? How do you think this applies to faith, and the Christian life?

“So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.” Hebrews 3:15-19

The writer of Hebrews is writing to believers, and he is warning believers about the danger of unbelief. Unbelief is dangerous. It is a sin. The writer of Hebrews tells us that unbelief comes from a sinful heart that is turning away from the living God.

Let’s be clear what unbelief is, and what it isn’t. Unbelief is not the same as small faith. Even a tiny amount of faith is massively different than unbelief. If you have a small amount of faith, it can still grow. Doubts or questions are not the same as unbelief. Questions are not a problem. Questions can be answered, and we can ask Jesus to turn our doubts around to faith. (See Mark 9:23-24)

Group Discussion Questions:

- What was the tragic result of unbelief for the people who Moses led out of Egypt?
- What is your definition of “unbelief”?
- Read Hebrews 3:12-19 and Hebrews 4:1-2. Why is unbelief so dangerous? What damage can it do to believers today?

Now we who have believed enter that rest.” Hebrews 4:1-3. The writer of Hebrews has given us examples of unbelief and failure. But his reason for doing this is so we can know that the promise of entering God’s rest still stands. Just because they failed to enter God’s rest, doesn’t mean that we can’t enter in.

God wants us to enter His rest. That’s we need to listen to His voice. That’s why we need to be careful not to harden our hearts. That’s why faith is so important. Because the Holy Spirit is still speaking to us and still calling us to move forward, in faith: ***“Now we who have believed enter that rest” Hebrews 4:3***

What does the book of Hebrews mean by “entering His rest”?

Clearly, entering His Rest doesn’t mean marching into the promised land of Canaan. Hebrews says that even though Joshua led the people into Canaan, that isn’t the rest God is talking about in Psalm 95: ***“For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.” Hebrews 4:8***

Entering His rest isn’t a description of reaching heaven after we die. One of the main features of the promised land of Canaan is that it was full of enemies who had to be conquered. Almost the first thing the people did after crossing the Jordan River, was to attack the stronghold of Jericho. The people of Israel faced many battles, but God fought for them and gave them victory. Joshua faced many battles, and God fought for him, and gave the victory.

“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.” Hebrews 4:9-10

The writer goes back to Genesis, and the establishment of the Sabbath day, when God rested from all His works. “Entering His rest” means to come into a place, in God, where we rest from our works, and rest in the works of Jesus Christ who lives in us.

We know that we cannot depend on our works of righteousness to save us. We depend on what Jesus has done. Now that we are saved, and living for God, the same principle applies. Everything we hope to accomplish in the Christian life must not be by our own “works” but in dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit.

We enter this rest through faith when we trust God and yield to His Will. We enter when we trust God for victory over sin, - the enemies who possess the land. We enter this rest when we lay down our own works and surrender to God. Entering God’s rest is a life filled with the Holy Spirit that follows the Spirit’s leading and receives the Spirit’s strength every day through faith.

- What do you think the writer of Hebrews means by “Rest” in Hebrews 4:3-11?

- Why do you think the writer of Hebrews wants to encourage his readers to “enter His rest”?

Group Discussion Questions:

- What are the benefits of “entering His rest”? What difference would entering His rest make to the Christian life?

- **“Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest” Hebrews 4:11.** What should believers do to make sure that we enter God’s rest?

Our study passage began with the Voice of God speaking by the Holy Spirit: **“So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice”;** and we will end with the same idea of hearing God’s voice through His word.

“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” Hebrews 4:12-13

The word that God is speaking to us today through the book of Hebrews is alive and active, it is meant to make an impact on us. When we hear God’s word, it should be like a sharp, double-edged sword that can cut through to the heart of every issue, and determine our thoughts and motivations.

How we respond to God's word shows if our hearts are tender and have faith in God, or if they are unbelieving and hardened. We will give an account to God for what we did with His word, and what we did with our faith.

We live in turbulent times. Every day we face new challenges. But there is still a Sabbath rest for us to enter if we keep moving forward by faith. His Rest is a place where we hear God's voice, and where peace reigns in the middle of the storm. As the Holy Spirit says: today, if you hear His voice, believe God, put your trust in Him, and let Him lead you into the wonderful place where we Rest in Him.

- How does God's word expose our motivation and the state of our heart?

- What can you do to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to you today?

Group Discussion Questions:

- If you had to give an account to God for how you responded to His word, what would you want to tell Him?

- What is the Book of Hebrews telling us about how to face turbulent times?

- What is the Holy Spirit telling us today?