“Book of Hebrews – Chapter 3”

The Danger of Disobedience

[ Series Title ~ ‘In Christ Alone - Towards spiritual maturity!’ ]
Or
[ Jesus … Simply The Best! ]

9.30a.m. Sunday 19 March, 2017

Delivered by Senior Pastor Marshall Muller @ the Laidley Baptist Church (Qld).

Introduction:

My gratitude & thanks to Bill who stepped in to preach last week for me.
We’ve been tracking now for a few weeks in the first few chapters of the Book of Hebrews.
What can you remember about what we have learned so far?

• The Book of Hebrews was written to Jewish believers in the Churches in Judea around AD 64-66
• Under pressure to give up their faith in Jesus because of local persecution
• Author unknown
• Readers know the author
• They are 2nd generation Christians who have been Christians for a while but are still spiritually immature.
• Considering going back to Judaism with it’s rules/regulations.
• It explains that while Judaism is good, Jesus is better.
• Hebrews written to show that Jesus is simply the BEST!

How did you go with your homework?

I’ve given you a fortnight this time to read 19 verses of Hebrews Chapter 3.
Can I say that this passage is one that is a bit contentious, because some suggest that it speaks about losing one’s salvation? As we rightly divide the Word of Truth today, we will see that it is not talking about losing your salvation, in fact, more the opposite.

Let’s read Hebrews Chapter 3 together, and then we’ll pray that God will reveal it’s truth to each of us, demonstrating again that Christ alone is simply the best.

Don’t forget, if you missed any of the messages on Hebrews and would like to catch up, you can download the notes from the Laidley Baptist Church website.

Get your Bibles out. We’re going to read through Hebrews Chapter 3 together ...

Let’s pray ...

Gracious God & our Heavenly Father,

Thank you that Jesus is simply the best thing that has happened, and can happen to our lives. I pray that it could be the best thing that could happen to many others in our area. Equip us to understand your Word correctly so that we can not only discern through knowledge of your Word, but application that demonstrates and practices your grace to others. Thank you for the grace you have shown us through the cross. Thank you for paying the price and giving us an eternity with you. We sit in awe of who you are. May our lives be a worship prayer to you each day.

Amen

Jesus greater than Moses

In Hebrews 1 & 2, the writer of Hebrews has told us that Jesus is so much more superior to the angels. But here in Chapter 3 the author goes on to the 2nd pillar of Judaism – Moses. The background is Numbers 12:5-8. Moses’ brother & sister challenge Moses’ authority & so God intervenes by talking about his faithfulness and the fact that God & Moses talk face-to-face. (it’s pretty good when God’s got your back!!)

Jesus, the Son of God – you would think it would go without saying that He is bigger than Moses. But you’ve got to understand 1st Century Jewish thought – Moses was almost God-like. Bigger than the Kardashians!!!

Moses’ name appears more in the Old Testament (and the whole Bible) than any other name other than Jesus or David. [847 times total & 762 times in the Old Testament]
Jesus superior to Moses in His Person & Work (v1-4)

Even though Moses’ faithfulness was recognized and used as a comparison in the first couple of verses here, defection took place under this faithful Moses. People still grumbled and complained. So now that one greater than Moses is here, will there yet be another defection.

The author is writing to believers – the proof is in his terminology here. He calls them ‘holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling’.

He’s not writing to those who came close to believing … no, he’s writing to true believers, whose heavenly calling they share is salvation. Other translations use the word ‘partakers’. This term is used several times to describe the believers in Hebrews (3:14 – partakers of Messiah; 6:4 – partakers of the Holy Spirit; 12:8 – partakers of divine discipline).

The reason they are described as ‘partakers’ of all these things is that ‘they are a part of it’ … they are real believers. And it’s because they are real believers that the writer calls on them to ‘fix their thoughts on’ the Apostle & High Priest, Jesus. The original meaning means to study / investigate carefully.

They not only were to confess Jesus, but next they were to ‘learn of me’, as Jesus mentions to his disciples in Matthew 11:29.

28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Jesus wanted them to gaze on Him, the Messiah, not the Levitical system which was trying to entice them back.

Jesus is interested in RELATIONSHIP NOT RULES!!

How often in our lives/in our leadership/through conflict have we learned through our relationship with Christ to just gaze upon Him (and learn from Him), rather than to inflict/enforce the rules? Are you a RULES person … or
have you learned by gazing upon the Messiah, Jesus as you walk & talk with Him?

Apostle & High Priest – this is the only place in the Scriptures where these 2 titles are used together of Jesus.

**APOSTLE** – this term used as a messenger (one who has been sent) through whom a new dispensation & covenant is given, *representing God to man*. Through Moses, the Covenant of the Law (The Mosaic Covenant) was brought in. Through Jesus, the New Covenant of Grace was brought in. God sent Moses (Exodus 3:1-6) and Jesus was one who had been sent (John 3:34; 5:36-37; 17:3).

**HIGH PRIEST** – someone who *represents man to God*. As an Apostle, Jesus is like Moses, and as High Priest, Jesus is like Aaron. These themes will be developed later in the Book of Hebrews (Chapters 4-7). Jesus, as their High Priest, has received their confession that He is their Messiah. But now they are to consider what it means for Jesus to be their Apostle & High Priest of their faith.

Moses is held up as the highest example of human faithfulness – faithful in all of God’s House (i.e. the House of Israel). Jesus is greater than Moses in his faithfulness, because occasionally Moses failed, but Jesus NEVER failed. To prove the superiority of Christ, the writer states that the builder of the house is greater than the house itself. Moses was IN the House of Israel (v5), but the Messiah built the House. And in verse 4 the writer suggests that the Messiah is viewed as one who has built everything … that puts his greatness above everyone else, even Judaism’s hero – Moses.

In summary of verses 1-4, Jesus is shown to be superior to Moses in His person & His work.

**Jesus superior to Moses in his Position (v5-6)**

In Verse 5, Moses is presented as a servant in the House of the Lord. The word for servant here means ‘to heal’. As a minister to the moral &
spiritual needs of the nation of Israel, Moses brought healing in his lifetime to the people of God, nationally. But Moses’ ministry was only preparatory … bearing witness to what God would speak in the future. This is referring to Jesus who was to come as the Messiah.

The comparison continues in verse 6. Moses is the servant in God’s house. Jesus is over all of God’s house. The house referred to here could be referencing the Church, because in Ephesians 2:19 the Church is referred to as a household. But it most likely refers to the House of the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) . Either way, Moses is the servant, Jesus is the Son.

**The marks of a True Believer in Christ (v6)**

The end of verse 6 shows the true marks of a true believer in Christ. It doesn’t mean that believers are saved if they just hold on to the end. This would mean that their faith is one based on their own efforts – a faith based on works. This would mean that salvation is attained by works, not by faith.

Rather, continuance in faith is the evidence that a person actually believed.

The lack of continuance in faith does not mean that the person is not saved, but it only means that the person does not have the evidence that faith exists.

**THE 2ND WARNING – THE DANGER OF DISOBEDIENCE**

The background here is Numbers 13-14 – the sin of Kadesh-Barnea. Israel was one year into their wilderness journey. The Mosaic Law had been given, the Tabernacle had been built. They were now on the edge of the Promised Land at the oasis of Kadesh-Barnea. They can see the Promised Land of Canaan.
So before they can take the land, Moses wisely sends in 12 spies to check it out. 40 days later they return to give their report. Two of the spies (Joshua & Caleb) declare that with God’s help they can take the Land. The other 10 spies came up with all the excuses of the flesh – numerical superiority and the military might of the Canaanites. It would be impossible to conquer the land.

So guess who the people listened to? There was a major revolt against Moses & Aaron and they would’ve been killed had God not intervened. This was a major turning point for the children of Israel.

Yes, there had been murmurings and revolt in the past, but now God pronounces a judgement on that whole generation. The Exodus Generation that came out of Egypt would wander in the desert for 40 years until every person, except Joshua & Caleb, and those under 20 years of age, died (outside of the land).

So 40 years later, there would be a new generation that would enter the Promised Land, under Joshua’s leadership. Moses (the most faithful one) would not even enter the land. Only the ones who had been born as free men would enter. The Jewish generation that left Egypt would not enter the Promised Land. They had reached a point of no return. The decision was irrevocable, and their judgement was one of death outside the land.

So here’s the application for this section of Chapter 3 of Hebrews – these believers, the readers of the Book of Hebrews, are in a similar dangerous situation. They could be placing themselves into a situation where they could make an irrevocable decision and suffer the penalty of physical death.

The principle in Scripture is that once a point of no return has been reached, the offenders are subject to divine judgement – a judgement that leads to physical death, rather than a spiritual judgement/death. The judgement is physical, not spiritual. IT DOES NOT MEAN THE LOSS OF SALVATION.
How can we tell this? If we look back at Numbers 14.20 it tells us that the people repented. In fact, it even says that God forgave their sin. It didn’t affect anyone’s individual salvation, but the consequences of their sin had to be paid physically.

Once a point of no return has been reached, it doesn’t matter how much repenting is done, the fact of coming physical judgement cannot be changed. This is what happened at Kadesh-Barnea. Even Moses suffered the same penalty – he died outside the land, because of a specific sin he committed. It didn’t affect his individual salvation, but he had to pay the consequences of his sin physically.

In the Old Testament, the concept is physical death and loss of temporal blessings, but not the loss of salvation.

Verse 11 talks about the Egypt Generation not entering God’s rest. There are 3 references to rest that can be applied here:

- **Creation Rest** – the completed work of God in his creation over 6 days, then He rested. This includes the redemptive & completed work of Christ (not having to rely back on the law for redemption).
- **Canaan Rest** – the reward of finally entering the Promised Land & enjoying it’s blessings, no more fighting/enemies etc. Correlates to our rest when we subject our mind/will and heart to God’s power, enabling us to conquer sin.
- **Sabbath Rest** – this is a prophetic and spiritual rest, pointing to spiritual maturity. Lost at the Fall, but regained through Christ. Mostly it’s application is future. Firstly, the rest that comes in this life through spiritual maturity, and secondly, the rest of the next life – the rest of the Kingdom.

The Old Testament Lesson here for the readers of Hebrews is that the Son is greater than Moses, so not to do to the Son (Jesus), what they did to Moses through their disobedience. The word ‘today’ is used to indicate a sense of urgency. In other words, do it now!

In verses 7-11, the author quotes Psalm 95:7-11 which references 2 earlier situations from Exodus 17:1-7 & Numbers 20:1-13. These mark
the beginning & end of the Wilderness journey. He calls it the rebellion because it marked a significant turning point. The children of Israel provoked God ten times, but this was the turning point (at Kadesh-Barnea).

It was significant because they wandered for 40 years in the wilderness. For the readers of Hebrews, it has been almost 40 years since the crucifixion. In verse 10, God’s reaction is one of anger. He was incensed with the generation that left Egypt because ‘they always go astray in their hearts’ & they ‘do not know my ways’.

The writer is drawing a parallel between the Jews in the wilderness and the generation of Jews in his day. The result of their provocation of God (v11) at Kadesh-Barnea is that they would not enter into rest. So, BE CAREFUL, because God has the same option of manifesting His wrath against His people for continued disobedience.

Many hymns we sing used the imagery of the Promised Land as referring to Heaven. But in the Bible, the Promised land is a place of rest, no more struggling with the enemy. **The point is that a redeemed people can lose blessings intended for them because they do not continue in faith to enjoy them.**

Israel had been redeemed from slavery in Egypt but lost out on the blessing of the Land, because they did not continue in faith. They failed to enter the Canaan Rest.

It was Joshua who gave them their Canaan rest by conquering their enemies & leading them into the Land. This rest was for the Wilderness Generation, but they didn’t receive that blessing. Even though they were forgiven their sin (Numbers 14:20) they suffered the consequences of their unbelief & forfeited the rest they could’ve had in the Promised Land. Their judgement was a physical judgement – a physical death.

The issue here is not eternal salvation, but rather disobedience may result in temporal physical judgement and the loss of future rewards.
THE APPLICATION (v12-15)

The application has both a negative a positive side. The negative side is found in verse 12. He calls them ‘brothers and sisters’ so he’s writing to believers. He is saying to beware not to fall away from the Living God (apostasy). Do not stand off or move away from your former beliefs, otherwise you could corrupt and bring down other believers.

The positive side of the application is found in verse 13. Believers are to encourage each other daily. (Greek – ‘to come alongside & help’). In John 14:16, the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Comforter. The same word is used here in Hebrews 3:13 (but as a verb). Believers are encouraged to come alongside each other & help. Particularly if they see another believer in trouble or drifting spiritually. In other words, try to counteract the ‘deceitfulness of sin’. The translation means a specific sin – THIS sin.

In other words, if you see a believer about to fall away from the faith, you must come alongside & help them, because it will trick them into believing that this is the best solution out of their present situation – which is being persecuted for their faith. So, the antidote for developing a hard heart is to encourage & care for other believers in our community.

The application here asks us the question, ‘Do we have a loving caring heart that encourages other believers’?

Verse 14 explains the reason/need for the encouragement. It is NOT the retention of their salvation is based on the persistence of their faith, BUT that the possession of salvation is evidenced by the continuation of faith. They are already partakers in Christ (present tense used here).

So how does someone else recognize them as a partaker in Christ (one sharing in Christ)?

If they hold steadfast till the end, if they maintain their faith till the end. This is the proof (evidence) that they really were partakers in Christ.
They were already partakers in Christ, but continuing to do so to the end would be the final evidence.

Verse 15 the writer quotes Psalm 95:7, re-emphasizing not to fall away.

The application of the lesson is found in the final few verses. There are 3 questions asked.

The FIRST question (v16) - Who were the rebellious ones (the provokers)?
The answer is the very ones who God rescued from Egypt. These were the ones who started off in faith for the Promised Land, only to miss out on their rest in Canaan because of their unbelief.

The SECOND question (v17) – Who was it that sinned?
Answer – the rebels/provokers. They sinned & suffered the consequences. It wasn’t a one-time sin. It festered throughout the 40 years of wandering, and as a result their bodies fell in the wilderness. Their punishment was a physical punishment, not a spiritual one. Their punishment was a physical death, not a spiritual death. Joshua & Caleb were sinners, but not guilty of this specific act of disobedience worthy of death. They were allowed entry into the Promised Land and they found their rest.

Important to note that the author emphasizes the physical punishment of death here. We are tempted to misinterpret the consequences of going beyond the point of no return. The punishment is physical death. This concept is mentioned many times throughout the Book of Hebrews.

The THIRD question (v18) - to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed?
Answer – He said it to the same group of people. Those who rejected God & disobeyed.

Conclusion (v19) – BECAUSE OF UNBELIEF, THEY COULD NOT ENTER THE REST THEY WERE PROMISED.
Their rebellion meant the loss of promised blessings. Notice that Israel did not lose its status as a redeemed people; that is, they did not go back to become slaves of Egypt again. They were still the redeemed, chosen people of God. Nevertheless, they lost the blessing of a life of peace and rest in the Land.

They failed to continue in their faith – in a progression of 3 stages:
1. They fell into unbelief
2. That unbelief led to active disobedience
3. Active disobedience led to wide-scale, open sin.

This sin brought upon them an irreversible judgement – 40 years of wandering in the wilderness & physical death outside of the Land. It was true of the Exodus Generation, and now the generation whom the writer is addressing here in Hebrews is in danger of the same thing. It has been almost 40 years since the Messiah died. The judgement of AD70 (destruction of Jerusalem, Temple etc.) will occur at the end of the 40 years. If the readers of Hebrews go back into Judaism, they too will die a physical death, like those in the wilderness.

We can mistakenly assume that those that fell in the wilderness will be eternally damned. This is not so. If this is so, Moses (the greatest prophet), Aaron & Miriam would also be condemned to damnation. Few would argue that! Moses appearance at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:3) should remove any doubt regarding Moses’ life in God’s presence.

In Numbers 14:20, God forgives Israel by pardoning them. Forgiveness and eternal damnation are mutually exclusive, so we know that their failure to enter the Land equates to damnation (losing their salvation). However, before we can understand judgement, we need to have a knowledge of the Old Testament concept of rest.

That’s next week - **Hebrews Chapter 4 – Finding our rest in God**
- we will talk further about rest – Sabbath rest. All will be explained.

Your homework for the next week is to read Hebrews 4 – just 16 verses!
CONCLUSION:

I mentioned to our leadership team at Thursday night’s meeting that I would hate to be the generation that wanders around Laidley in the wilderness for 40 years, and never gets to see the ultimate blessing of being the generation that God will trust with building His Spiritual House, because of our disobedience against Him. Will we fall in the wilderness outside of the Land. Will we never get to see it?

I pray that we will be faithful, that we will persevere in our faith till the end, that we will see the wonderful blessing of redemption for this community, because we, with God’s help, know that we can take the Land. How many are with me here?

It is up to your heart & my heart. Is it sold out for God? How can God trust a half-hearted, double-minded, distracted people to lead the attack against the enemy? I pray that we will stand firm, persevere, and not be convinced to go back into the rules and law, but recognize that the way forward, with God’s help, is Jesus and His grace. Simply the Best!!!

Let’s pray …

Loving and Mighty Father God,
I thank you for your lesson from your Word today. May we never underestimate your sovereignty and your judgement as your people. You have chosen us, called us out to be a holy people. May that be our station as we lean on you more, and as we move forward in your grace and power to the Land you have promised to us.

Continue to reveal more of yourself & more of your will as we seek your forgiveness for sins of the past. We thank you for Jesus, the author and perfecter of our salvation. Keep us nearer to the cross each day that we might see the ultimate sacrifice that was given for each of us. Amen

Closing Song ~ Be Thou my vision
Jesus Greater Than Moses

1 Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. 2 He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God’s house. 3 Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. 4 For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. 5 “Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house,” bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. 6 But Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.

Warning Against Unbelief

7 So, as the Holy Spirit says:

“Today, if you hear his voice,
8 do not harden your hearts
as you did in the rebellion,
during the time of testing in the wilderness,
where your ancestors tested and tried me,
though for forty years they saw what I did.
10 That is why I was angry with that generation;
I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray,
and they have not known my ways.’
11 So I declared on oath in my anger,
‘They shall never enter my rest.’”

12 See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. 14 We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. 15 As has just been said:
“Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts  
as you did in the rebellion.”

16 Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? 17 And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? 19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

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