

October 11, 2015

Hebrews 3:12-19: **“Take Care”**

- I. *The Past and the Present.*
- II. *The Testing.*
- III. *The Issue.*

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Hebrews 3:12-19

Dear Friends in Christ,

You might recall the story about a young man who plodded through knee deep snow one cold, winter night to ask the girl he was dating if she would marry him. After asking the question the girl replied, "When you have several thousand dollars, I will seriously consider it."

Six months later, as the two walked hand in hand through a park, he stopped, gave the girl a kiss and asked, "When are we going to get married?" She asked, "Well, you remember my condition. Just how much money have you saved?" He answered, "Exactly seventy-five dollars. She sighed and smiled, "Oh well, I guess that's close enough!"

I read that story under a heading called flexibility. I would say it's closer to extreme compromise. I like the story because, in a humorous way, it illustrates the tragic compromises that have been made by the Americanized church. As you know, I call it *Americanity* because what we are mostly seeing cannot be called Christianity. And there's another term for it: rebellion! Rebellion against God's Word in order to appease social wants and desires. The warning rings out . . .

TAKE CARE

I. The Past and the Present.

Well, let's get right to the point: the falling away of God's people at the time of Moses. Our text says:

For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. (vss. 16-19)

Nothing difficult here. These people witnessed one miracle after another. They were miraculously fed. God saw them through one conflict after another. And what did they do? Grumbled. Constructed and worshiped a golden calf. Challenged God's goodness. Challenged Moses' God-given authority. Actually believed they were better off under Egyptian enslavement. In fact, if you back up to the 7th verse of Hebrews 3, the writer says:

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."' (Heb. 3:7-11)

It's like this: the people at the time of Moses fell away because they thought life was too hard, God was unfair and they were deserving of better. The people at the time of our text - the New Testament Book of Hebrews - were in danger of falling away because of persecution. Look! The writer of Hebrews said, "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." (Heb. 12:4) And he said that after he stated to them, "Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." (Heb. 12:3,4)

It's like this: the people of our time are falling away in order to avoid pressure because being culturally acceptable is more important and less threatening than the Word of God - until, of course, you take that last breath and stand before God. They're falling away because life is focused on the stuff of this world. They're falling away because there is little to no reverence in worship, and little to no study of and or perceived value in the study of God's Word.

II. The Testing.

And let me take us back to that statement preceding our text: "...do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness..." (Heb. 3:8)

The words have a way of glaring at us, don't you think? "On the day of testing in the wilderness." *The day of testing.* God tests His people - then and now. In the twelfth chapter, the writer of Hebrews says "...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." (vs. 1b) Some of you know this: the Greek word used here for "endurance" is "agona". The word is obviously akin to our word "agony". Run with agony. That just doesn't fit with the way most see it or want it, does it? And you surely caught the words, "the race that is set before us." Its difficulties are no accident.

Peter writes that we have been "born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." (I Pet. 1:3b) And then he says, "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (I Pet. 1:6,7) "The tested genuineness of your faith." God tests our faith, not so He can see where we are, but so we can see where we are relative to our walk with Him. That's devastating to all the fluffy teachings of this day. **Take care** regarding what you're going to chase.

III. The Issue.

And that brings us to the issue: the danger of an unbelieving heart and several truths associated with it:

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 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. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. (vss. 12-14)

First, there's the truth that one can fall away. The Holy Spirit addresses the readers as "brothers", believers. The reality is that given time - associating with the wrong people and wrong goals; fear of what others will think and do; to actually believe that human wisdom does, can and will answer all human problems, suffering, dying, conflict - given time and pursuit of the wrong things, **the teaching is not once saved, always saved.** The teaching is "Take care...(lest) you...fall away from the living God." The Holy Spirit has the writer of Hebrews ultimately say:

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance... (Heb. 6:4-6a)

Only someone who has believed can fall away!

Secondly, there's the truth that we are to "exhort one another". It's the importance of God's people meeting together, worshiping together, loving and caring for one another. Outside of illness, death, complete isolation or the need to get to family, there are few excuses. How significant these words from the writer of Hebrews:

"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..."

“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.” (Heb. 10:24-26)

And, thirdly, the truth of “we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.” (vs. 14)

Seriously, do you honestly think that all the things we have and do, our awards and rewards, will mean anything to us (if given time to think about them) before our last breath and departure from this world? I don't believe so for a second. But I can promise you that, if we're not careful, painful regrets will stab at us. It is very significant that in the fifteenth verse of our text, the writer exhorts us: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” And if you back up to the thirteenth verse, once again this admonition: “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.”

Considering what this world is and where it is headed; considering that none of us here know for certain the moments to come; considering that God has numbered our days and, at His beckoning, we will be called home; considering the depth and width and height of His love for us in Christ; considering all this, God have mercy and help us to **take care**.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott