

Do Not Harden Your Hearts

Hebrews 3:7-19

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, July 17, 2022

Please turn to the book of Hebrews this morning and while you're doing that, if you're joining us for the first time this morning, we're in the middle of a series on the book of Hebrews that we started earlier this year called the *No Greater Saviour* series because that's what the book is about. It tells us that there's no greater Saviour than Christ, there's no better friend than Him for the sinner because he came to do what no one else could do. And that is to take away your sins once and for all. Now, in light of the cross, you don't have to keep offering sacrifice after sacrifice after sacrifice in the temple anymore. And you don't have to keep giving offering after offering after offering the way the Jews did. You can go through Jesus and that's it. You can be saved through one offering one sacrifice one death, and it will take care of it all. We started talking about this back in February, which has caused some of you to ask me, Pastor, how long do you think this series will last? You sound a little nervous when you say that. And the answer is, "I don't know." But let me remind you the great Puritan John Owen took 20 years to get through the book of Hebrews. So I think I'm doing fine. But he preached on it for our study that from 1668. Until about his death, it's 1684. He wrote seven books and 2000 pages, and we're not going to do anything like that. We'll get through it long before that.

This morning, we are in chapter three. And if you want to read this with me, this is our passage for today. It says,

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house--whose house we are if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tried Me by testing Me and saw My works for forty years. Therefore I was angry with this generation and said, they always go astray in their heart, and they did not know my ways; as I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest." [And then verse 12,] Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is called, "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, while it is said, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me." For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He angry 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 not able to enter because of unbelief.

We will stop the reading of God's word there. But as you can tell by reading it, a key word in this passage is the word "hardened." Down in verse eight it is repeated three times in this passage for emphasis. You see it in verse 13. You see it in verse 15. And it occurs in verse eight, where it says, "Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me." It means you shouldn't stiffen your heart against God or steel your heart against Him. Because verse 11, says, you won't be able to enter God's rest. If you do that, just like it was with Israel, you won't be able to go to the promised land.

To say a few words about this, when you read the Bible, one thing that jumps out to you is how much it talks about the people of Israel, which is what you see right here. One thing that strikes you is how much it says about the Jews, because the Old Testament was written with Christ in mind when he was given to the Jews. In the New Testament was as well, because the events that occurred in the gospels came to the Jews first and then later to the Gentile, Israel first and then everyone else, because it began as a Jewish story. The same way with the first because all 12 apostles were Jewish, which means Matthew was Jewish and Mark was Jewish. John was Jewish, and James was Jewish. So it was Peter and Paul. It was the same way with the first converts: Mary, Martha, Lazarus, people like that came from a Hebrew background. The first church in Jerusalem was Jewish. So when they sent out preachers, they sent out Jewish preachers. And when they ordain missionaries, they ordained Jewish missionaries, when they put elders in place, they created Jewish elders, because the Lord did not start His church with Gentiles in the first century. He started with the Jews. He didn't do it with people like you and me, he did it with people from this particular race. Which should really surprise you, because if you think about it, if you weren't God, you would probably do something different. You would have started with the Romans, you would begin with the most powerful people at the time, the one who calls the shots, the one who were on the throne, or you might have done it with the Assyrians before them, because they were rich, and they had all the money, and they could bankroll all your work. Or you might start with the Greeks because they were the smartest. And they were the ones who had all the philosophers and schools and universities. But God didn't do that. He didn't start with any of those great peoples of the earth, he started with the smallest. And that was the Hebrews.

In Genesis 12, verse one, it says, "Now the Lord said to Abraham, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house to the land which I will show you, and I will make you into a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing to all the families of the earth.'" And the interesting thing about that passage is that before it was written, we don't know hardly anything at all about Abraham. Before the promise comes, he's hardly mentioned at all. And the reason is, because this isn't about Abraham, it's about God. And the promise is not about Israel's power and Israel's strength and Israel's mind. It's about the Lord's. Deuteronomy seven, verse six, if you want to write that first down, says, "For you, Israel, are a holy people to the Lord your God, the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His possession. But He did not choose you because you are more in number than other people, but you are the fewest in them. He chose you because He loves you." And I love that passage, because it tells you that God didn't choose the Jews because they were big or special. He chose them simply because He cared and He loved them.

And it would probably be helpful to say a few words about this subject because it really sheds a lot of light on what we're going to talk about today. But when you read the sermons of the early church, it's surprising how much they talked about this issue because they're constantly telling the Jews how much God loved them. And you can see this in the sermon that Steven gave to Israel in Acts chapter seven if you just want to hold your finger in the book of Hebrews, and turn over with me to Acts chapter seven. This is Stephen's final message to the Sanhedrin or the ruling council of the Jews. Before he died, these are his last words. And they're pretty interesting. We are

just going to fly through this for the sake of time, I just want you to see some highlights in it. But if you look in Acts seven, verse two, it say Steven said to them,

Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, "Leave your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you."

And then if you look down in verse nine, it says,

The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt, yet God was with him.

And then if you look down in verse 20, it says,

It was at this time that Moses was born and he was lovely in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father's home. After he had been set outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son. Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.

And he goes on to say that he killed an Egyptian murdered him, and ran away. Then verse 45, farther down, it says that after the Lord revealed Himself through Moses and saved Israel through him, He did it through Joshua; He revealed himself to Joshua. Then verse 46, says, after he revealed himself to Joshua, he did it through David. Then verse 47, says, after he revealed himself to David, he did it through Solomon. Then verse 52, says, he did it through the prophets.

Now the question is, what Steven talking about here? Why is he going on and on about the history of Israel? I mean, you would think if you're about to be stoned, you would keep it short if they are about to kill you, you wouldn't give a history lesson. Why is he giving a history lesson to these Jews? He's doing it because he's telling them that Jesus is the next stage in their history. He's showing them the Christ is the next part in their story. And they crucified and they put Him on a tree and killed him instead of listening to Him, which was a terrible thing to do, because it shows that all this other stuff was lost on them. The Jews who bragged on Abraham and Joseph and Moses shows that they didn't understand what God was doing through them. Because if they did, they would have believed in Christ. If they would have followed Him, they would have put their heart's trust in Him. Because He was the next piece in the puzzle. It all built up to Him.

I remember when my wife and I were visiting the Wailing Wall several years ago. You all have probably heard of that and seen pictures of it. So on the western-most side of the temple in Jerusalem, where the Jews go every day, to ask the Lord to give the temple back to them, the Dome of the Rock is up there now. So they can't worship on top of the hill. So they go there and pray for it. And I'll never forget it because it's such a powerful image, because they're still doing that. The Jews are still praying in that part of the world. But on the other hand, it's also tragic because they don't believe in Him. They don't trust in God, because if they trusted in God, they would trust in the One He sent, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. This what Stephen is saying here, you don't want to miss this, because I've told you last time, the Eastern mind doesn't think like the Western one does. Because to them, when something happens in the present, it has a direct link to the past. And it's like God is building a house to them. He's building a great structure with one little room here, and another little room there. And that's what all this was

to Stephen. And the story of Israel was like rooms in a house. Abraham had one room, Moses had another, then came David, and Jesus is the next part of it. He's the one it all builds up to. And you have to see it that way. Otherwise, the rest of Scripture won't make sense to you. I had someone tell me before that when you get saved as a Gentile, or you get saved as a Canadian, or you get saved as an American, or South African, wherever you're from, and you start to read the Bible, it's like you're stepping into a conversation at nine o'clock in the evening that started at noon. Because a lot of the terms don't make sense to you. A lot of things you read about in the Bible seems strange. And that's because you're coming in from the outside as a non-Jewish person, you're being invited into a discussion that started before you got there. And in order to understand it, you've got to go back to noon, where it first began. You have to back the truck up and see where this whole thing started.

And that's what we're going to talk about this morning, if you want to go back to Hebrews chapter three. This is what the author of the book of Hebrews is referring to when he says this. He says in verse seven, "Therefore just says the Holy Spirit says, 'Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness.'" I'll say a few words more words about this in a moment, but a key word here is the term "hardened." It's the Greek word *skleryno*, from which we get the word skeleton; it means to stiffen your soul like a skeleton and harden it like a bone. And the author says, you don't want to do that with God. You don't want to stiffen your soul that way against Him, because that's what Israel did in the wilderness. That's what the Jews did in the desert and look at what happened to them. They acted that way, and the Lord shut them out of his rest. He never let them come in to the Promised Land. Not because they committed some deep dark sin, but simply because they were hardened. He did it because they didn't care. And the principle here is He will do the same thing with you if you act the same way. So don't do that. If you look in the passage here, Verse eight says that they provoked him as they did this. That means they irritated Him or aggravated Him with one little sin here and one little sin there. They did it with one little complaint in this place, another complaint and another subtly, quietly under their breath, murmur, murmur, murmur, whine, whine, whine.

Verse nine says, they tested him as well, which means that every time He gave them a miracle, they said to God, that's not enough. I want you to do something more. And every time the Lord performed a sign by bringing Manna down from heaven, or turning, getting water out of a rock, they said, "That's nice, but You're going to have to do something else before we believe You," to the point that it drove Him crazy. And He finally said, that's enough. Which sounds pretty bad. I mean, to be honest, you got to wonder how could anybody act this way toward God. But the author also says, before you judge them, you have to remember that we often do the same thing ourselves knowing we often act like this. That's the reason he brings it up. Let's face it, we often come to church on a Sunday morning with this attitude, because we hear a sermon and say, you know, who cares? We hear a message and we say, what does it matter? That's not enough for me, God, I need you to do something more. I want to hear John MacArthur preach. I want to hear Charles Spurgeon, give a sermon. And I hate to break the news to you, but you're not going to hear Charles Spurgeon give a sermon. He's gone. But we often come with that kind of attitude. Or on the flip side, we have a tendency to go home after church and open up our Bibles and do the same thing in our quiet times. Because we say why do I even bother with this anymore? What's the use, because I've read it a million times. I study this book since I was a child. It's so boring to me. And we begin to complain to God and murmur, murmur, murmur, and whine, whine, whine. But the problem with that attitude is it is sinful in the eyes of God. He hates it when you act that way, because it shows that you have a hard heart. It's the proud attitude that says, I already know it already. I've got it figured out. But the reality is, you don't. And if you're not careful, this passage says God will punish you for it, just like He did with the people of Israel. And I've told you before, there's five warning passages in the book of Hebrews. And they're really interesting, because they

all go back to the same thing. And that is the idea of letting your hearts grow cold to the things of God. Because it's so common in church settings and it's so often that we see people do this. Listen, you guys are in church. So the chances are, you're not going to go out and murder someone this morning. That's not the kind of sin church people do. And you're probably not going to go out and rob somebody. It's not a very Christian thing. But you know what you will do, you will go home and say, I don't care anymore. That's what church people do. You will go home and become apathetic. Just like the Israelites. And that's why this passage is in here to remind us not to do that.

One pastor said it this way, "The saddest thing about many Christians today is that they don't have any passion anymore about their faith. They eat, they drink, they dress, they work, they amuse themselves. They make money, spend money, invest money. It's all about money, money, money to them, they have a passion for those things, but of the great spiritual warfare and fight of the soul they know nothing about because they simply don't care." And we need to take a warning from that this morning. You would think of anything that Jews would have grown and their love for God after all this time. You would think that after spending 40 years with Him in the wilderness and seeing all the wonderful things that He did, and experiencing all the miracles and all the signs and in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, all that great stuff, they would care about Him more. But they didn't. And that needs to be a sobering reminder for all of us today.

And that's what we're going to talk about this morning by looking at four ways to keep our heart from becoming hardened against the Lord. So if you're taking notes today, this is what we're talking about. In Hebrews three, verses seven through 19, we're going to look at four ways to keep our hearts from becoming hard. And the first one is probably the most sobering. And that is that you need to see how much it provokes God when you act that way. Which means that you need to see it the way He does, because He hates it. And if you look in verse seven, it says it like this. It says, "Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tried Me by testing Me and saw my works for forty years. Therefore, I was angry with this generation. And so they always go astray in their heart, and they did not know My ways. As I swore in my wrath, "they shall not enter my rest."'"

As you read that, you can see what the author is doing here, because he's giving you a snapshot from Israel's history, or a glimpse from their past, which is something that he does all throughout this book. I've told you before, we don't really know the exact audience this letter was written to, because it doesn't tell us, but we know that they were Jewish, because there are references to the Old Testament over and over and over again in here. And this one is found in verse seven, when it says, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me in the wilderness." And we'll say a little bit more about the wilderness in a moment. But if you notice, this passage is in quotation marks, because it's a quote from Psalm 95 in the Old Testament, and it might help to turn back there so you can get the setting for it. So if you would keep your finger in the book of Hebrews and turn to Psalm 95. This is the passage that the author is talking about. And it's called the psalm of invitation or Israel's call to worship because Psalm 95 was written to invite the people of Israel to worship God. One commentator said, you can almost hear the sound of church bells ringing as you read it. And if you guys grew up in a town like I did, on Sunday mornings, at about nine o'clock, 10 o'clock, the church bells would start ringing and it was your indication, it's time to go to church. I don't know if it ever helped anybody and got them out of bed and got them there. But that was the whole intention of it. And that's what this psalm is like. Because if you look in Psalm 95, it says,

Oh, come, let us sing for joy to the Lord. Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving. Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods, in whose hand are the depths of the earth, the peaks of the mountains are His also. The sea is His, for it was He who made it, and His hands formed the dry land.

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 would hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, in the day of Massah in the wilderness, when your father's tested Me, they tried Me, though they had seen My work. For forty years I loathed that generation, and said they are a people who err in their heart, and they do not know My ways. Therefore I swore in my anger, truly they shall not enter into My rest.

The main point of that psalm is found in the first verse there where it says, "O come, let us sing for joy to the Lord, let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation." Why? Because verse three says He is a great God. We should sing to Him because He's strong and mighty. And verse four says in His hands are the depths of the earth, and the peaks of the mountains. And that means His hands hold the highest things and the lowest things, because verse five says, He created them. God is the one responsible for making them and even furthermore, this is what He did with all that. Verse seven said He made you into the sheep of His pasture. He's talking to Israel here, but he says, "This is what God did with his creation, and with all the things that he made. He made you an insignificant race into his own dear children. He didn't have to do that, but He did it. Nothing forcing him to act that way. But He chose to behave in that manner, which is why the rest of the passage says, "Today, if you would hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, in the day of Massah in the wilderness," and when you compare that to the passage in the book of Hebrews, you can tell it's a little different. Because the terms *Meribah* and *Massah* are not in Hebrews three. That's because the book of Hebrews is quoting from the Septuagint, or the Greek translation of the Old Testament, but the meaning is the same, because Hebrews three verse seven says, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the days of trial. And the reason it does that is because the terms *Meribah* and *Massah* translate into the word *provoking* and *trial*." They refer to the places where Israel failed the Lord in the wilderness, and tried Him and provoked Him because they complained about their thirst. So as a result, God said, You won't enter my rest. And the author brings it up here to say, you don't want to worship the Lord like that. When you come into His presence, and you come into His temple, and you enter the tabernacle, or the church, or wherever you're worshipping Him, you want to do it with a joyful heart.

From what I can tell, this psalm is actually still read in many synagogues today, every Sabbath. It's the psalm they read as you go through the door, because it reminds the Jews even now that there is a good way and a bad way to worship, there's a right way and a wrong way to do it. And the wrong way to do it is by complaining. The wrong way to do it is with a bitter, sour attitude like Israel had. So you don't want to do that. In fact, if you want to turn back to the book of Hebrews, you can see that the word *provoke* in verse eight. It's helpful term because it means to aggravate someone or make them angry. But it means even more than that, because some of your translations render that word *rebel* here. And the idea is that to act like that is to rebel against the Lord and to complain against Him is to reject His authority. Because the Psalm says, God created you, and He takes care of you, and He formed you and He framed you and He sustained you, and made you into the sheep of His pasture. He brought you in from the outside, and you refuse to acknowledge that now, you won't even take the time to say thank you.

And that's what makes God so angry. It's an act of ingratitude. It's an act of pride. In fact, to add to that, if you're reading this passage, and you're wondering, well, what does it mean to provoke God? Well, the passage gives you some answers. For example, verse seven says that you can provoke God by ignoring His voice. You provoke Him by refusing to pay attention to Him, when He calls out to you through the Bible, and through the church and through the things that you hear when you come in this room. Verse eight says that you can also provoke Him by testing Him, which means you can do it by saying to the Lord, if you would just do one more miracle, I would believe in you. If you would give me one more sermon from Charles Spurgeon, then I would follow. Verse 10 says that you provoke Him when you go astray, which means you do it by being distracted and wandering off, because you come to church, and you're not really a church. You show up here, and you're not really here. But the point in all of this is all of this is what it means to be hardened against God. You get to a place, if you're not careful, where you don't even feel anything for the Lord at all. Everything just bounces off of you. Prayers bounce off of you. Sermons bounce off of you. Scripture reading bounces off of you, counsel from the elders bounces off of you. Conviction bounces off of you, encouragement bounces off of you, God's grace bounces off, bounces off, bounces off.

I don't know about you, but I've met people who act that way when they come to church, because they show up here and they don't feel anything at all. Their heart is just as hard as a brick. You preach to them on the doctrine of hell and they don't feel anything. You preach to them on sin, they don't feel anything. You preached to them on the gospel, and the death of Christ and His work on the cross and what He did in order to save you from that and it's also the same way, nothing sinks in. And this passage is put here to remind you that the best way to deal with that is to stop it before it even begins. You need to repent of that as soon as you see it springing up in your heart.

In fact, to show you how big a problem this was for Israel, verse nine says that for 40 years, the Lord was angry with them. Why? Because for 40 years they acted like this. Can you believe that? For almost half a century, they were hard against God. Talk about stubbornness. And it also says they did this for an entire generation. And that means they did it until a whole group of them died. Day after day, week, after week, month after month, they were hard until an entire generation of them perished in the wilderness. Which is staggering. But the same thing could happen to us. And in fact, before you want to point his fingers at Israel about this and judge them, I want to remind you that they didn't get off the hook for this. They paid a terrible price. Because scholars have done some research on this and found that Numbers one, verse 46, says there were 603,550 fighting men in Israel, who left Egypt at the time of the Exodus. And that means that if you include the number of women and children and non-fighting men, older men or even younger men into that number, it comes to something like two to 3 million people. That's the population of Vancouver. That's the size of the great city to our west, which means that it would take about 30 railroad boxcars of food per day to feed them if you wanted to put that in perspective. And if the Israelites traveled 50 abreast, or 50 people side by side as they needed to, one author said that the procession would stretch for 14 miles from here to Abbotsford. And while they were there in the wilderness, Moses watched all of them die. He watched every single one of the adults perish. And when you do the math, that means he saw 300 People die every week. 41 people die every day, and two people die per hour for 40 years. So that everywhere Israel went in the wilderness, they left behind a graveyard. And every time they stopped, they would have to build a cemetery to bury all the bodies. And it was all for one reason. And one reason only. And that was because their hearts were hard against the Lord. They didn't take Him seriously. It's also interesting that the next generation of Jews that would come around did take Him seriously. They learned a lesson from their ancestors, because when

Joshua invaded the promised land, they went with him and did a lot of things well. But all of this is given as a reminder to us not to do this.

This past month while I was on holiday, I got to watch while one of my unsaved relatives, one of the children did this every time we prayed before a meal. She came from an unsaved family, her parents are lost and pretty antagonistic against the gospel. So every time we started to just pray before lunch, or breakfast, or whatever, she would plug her ears and walk away in anger because it was so offensive to her. And I remember watching that little kid act that way and I thought, "Wow, that is a picture of what some people do today in church. They walk in here and do this with God." We all want to guard against that today.

And that brings us to another way to keep from hardening your heart against the Lord like Israel did and that is to encourage one another. The first one was a little bit negative there. You need to see how much this provokes God, you need to remember how much it angers Him. The second one's a little more positive. We just talked about the putt off and here's the putt on. The second way to keep from hurting your hearts is to encourage one another which means you can keep from doing this by being around other Christians who will hold you accountable. And if you read on in verse 10, it says this, "Therefore I was angry with this generation and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they did not know My ways.' As I saw in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.' Take care, brethren, that there not be in any of you an evil unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called today so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Now you can tell what the writer is doing, because he's applying the Old Testament text to our lives, like any good preacher, he's taking the words of Psalm 95 and driving it home for you. Because he doesn't want you to just read the Word of God and forget what it says, he wants you to do it. And so he says in verse 12 to take care or, in other words, this is what you should do in light of the story of Israel, you need to take care or wake up or pay attention so you don't form an evil, unbelieving heart. He says it's possible to have an unbelieving heart in this room. And in order to prevent that, he says, you need to do this, encourage one another. Don't beat each other down. Don't throw rocks at each other every time you see this happening, but encourage, and that word is translated, *exhort*, or *beseech one another* in some translations. It's the Greek word *parakaleo*, which comes from *para*, alongside, and *kaleo*, to come. And it means to come alongside someone and serve them and bless them. and minister to them in the gospel. So that there's a mutual benefit you gain from the relationship, there's a reciprocal effect here where you help them and they help you.

Because you can't live the Christian life alone. You can't do it all by yourself, you need the help of other Christians. Verse 13, says, "Day after day, as long as it's called today." And that means that this is how often you need to do this. This is how much you need to help other Christians, you need it day after day. That phrase is actually a spin-off of the word today that was used in verse seven. Because there it says "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." Now it says, "Encourage one another day after day, as long as it is called today," to show the urgency and the earnestness of this command. Because it's so easy to get hardened to sin. It's so easy to get apathetic, that you need people in your life all the time telling you to love the Lord, love the Lord, don't act that way. The verse goes on to say so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. And the idea there is that sin is crouching at your door, it's lurking right outside your heart, waiting to deceive you and trick you. And you can't let it do that. It's so easy to look at sin and say it's not that bad, right? It's so easy to look at a thing like apathy and say I can get into it this one time because it isn't hurting anybody. But it is and you need other people around who will say that to you. I think we can all relate to what he's saying here because we've all struggled with something and felt really down and had a bad day until you come into church and see the person

sitting next to you and it encourages you, right? It builds you up. In fact, I've told you before, I can't tell you how many times I thought my life was bad until I talked to the person sitting next to me. And then I realized my life's not so bad. Thank you, brother. That's the way God intended it to be. That's the way the Christian life is supposed to work. If you fight alone, you die alone in this thing. If you fly solo, you crash solo. God has designed the church in such a way that we need each other. This is really come out to the forefront, I think in the life of the church Since COVID-19 started, because there have been a lot of people who stopped going to any church at that time and they never came back. There were a number of people who stopped attending services for various reasons. We never saw them again. And what happened as a result? They started to sin. They started going down some deep and dark things because their hearts began to be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

They had no one in their life saying to them, "Why are you doing that?" They had no one around saying, "Are You Reading your Bible today? Are you loving the Lord? How are you dealing with your children?" Because there is a direct connection between your neglect of the church and your neglect of God. The church doesn't save you, Christ does. The church doesn't get you into heaven, Christ does that. But the church is Christ's bride. And the church is His body, His hands and His feet. And so if you want to be ministered to by all of that, you have to come here. There's just no other way to do it. In fact, as I've talked to other pastors in this area over the past couple of years, one thing I have found is that it's so common for one of them not to see one of their members for a long time only to find them out in the street or in grocery store and hear them say they've gotten involved in something terrible. So that their marriage is over and their family is over. And they feel like their testimony is over. But that's because their love for the church was they've got to go back to that.

And that brings us to another way to keep from hardening your heart and that is to remember that you are partakers of Christ. We are just walking through the text here looking at these as he presents them to us. But a third way to keep from hardening your heart, like Israel did, is to remember that you are partakers of Christ, which means that not only do you have each other to lean on in times like this, and you have the church, but you have something greater than that you have Christ as well. And if you look in verse 13, he says, "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it's still called today, so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, while it is said, 'Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they first provoked Me.'" As you read that, you see that the author is giving you reason after reason not to harden your hearts; motivation after motivation.

And the next one is that you shouldn't do it because you partake of Christ. And that means you have become participants in Him or sharers in Him. Because when you believe, God didn't just save you from a distance, He did it close up. And when you trusted in Him, He didn't just help you from far off, He did it intimately and personally because He came to live inside of you. And if nothing else, He will cure your hard heart, that reality should do it. You have a God who loves you this much. You know, I don't know about you, but I don't think I would want to live in your hearts, no offense. I don't think you would want to live in my heart. It's too wicked. But the Holy Spirit has done that. Because God loves us that much. This is something we like to talk about every time we take communion as we are about to do in a moment. Because when we do that, we say that we partake of His body and blood together, we actually use that expression, we say that we share in it because just as you eat the bread and drink from the cup, and that goes inside of you and becomes a part of you and enters into your inner man, it's the same way with Christ. He does that when you put your faith in Him, saves you from the inside out, He enters into your heart like a piece of bread, so that He leaves no part of you untouched. And that's all wrapped

up in what this author is talking about here. And He mentions it because the Jews encountered God in the wilderness but not like this. And they met God in the desert and talked with Him and walked with Him and followed Him for 40 years, but not this way, at least not the last ones. For the unbelieving Jew, there was always a distance between them and Yahweh; there was always a space between them and God; He was something out there, but it's not that way with you. You have a different relationship with Him. Because you can enjoy Him more intimately than that, in fact, the passage says this, this should do something else for you as well. Because it should make you stable. If you look in verse 14, the author says something interesting. He says For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end. And to be honest, when I when I first studied this, I had a hard time figuring out why that part of the verse is in here. As I was wrestling with this passage this week, I couldn't understand why it was written this way. Because the way it's written, it sounds like you have to earn this. It looks like the author's telling you that you can only partake of Christ, if you work hard enough and try hard enough and hold on to Him that way. But after further reflection, I realized that's not what it means. He's simply saying that if you have partaken of Christ, then you will hold on to Him; and if Jesus lives inside of you, like we just talked about, then you won't let Him go. You will hold fast the beginning of your assurance until the end, because you can't help yourself. Because your salvation is all of grace, but it's a sustaining grace that God gives you and your eternal life is all of mercy but it's an endless Mercy that he provides in a boundless one.

And the idea here is that as you receive His boundless mercy, it makes you stable. It helps you hold on to Him. It's the best way I could make sense of this passage. I heard one pastor explained it this way. He said that before you get saved, your life is like a roller coaster, it goes back and forth side to side. The highs are very high. The lows are very low and up and down and up and down. Because you have no foundation. You have no place from which to stand. But when you get saved, everything changes. Because now you have, by the grace of God, you have a foundation all because of Christ, so that your life still goes up and down. It still goes side to side, but the highs are not so high, and the lows are not so low, because you have a stabilizing influence in your life. Now, Jesus Christ calms you down. Amen? Can you guys testify to that? But the passage says the only way you get that is to soften your heart. The only way you can receive that blessing is to humble yourself. This is why the Jews were such a mess in the wilderness. This is why they were a roller coaster, because they wouldn't do that. They wouldn't soften their hearts. And so they would obey God one moment and disobey and the next, they would follow Him one day, and then the next day; they would stop and go back to complaining again. So it was just up and down with them all because of their pride. I justed talk to you about all those people who stopped coming to church. And as a result, they got into some terrible sin. But I didn't tell you that the real cause of that was that they thought they were self-sufficient. They believe the real problem was that they thought they could make it on their own without Jesus Christ. So they cast him aside, threw him away, forgot about him. And that's what ruined their lives; it wasn't ultimately their relationship with the church that was the problem, it was their relationship with Him. They thought they could make it on their own and they were wrong. You can't do anything without Christ in the Christian life. This is interesting, because it's the only time the author mentions the name Christ in this passage that I could find any way at least in the surrounding text. The rest of the time, he kind of leaves the name out of here. But he puts it right in the middle to remind you that this is where your strength comes from. This is the only way to get over a hardened heart and that is to do it through Jesus.

In John eight, verse 31, it says, If you abide in my word, then you are truly disciples of mine.” And when He said that, He wasn't teaching legalism there either. He wasn't saying you have to earn your salvation, He was just

saying the proof is in the pudding. The real thing abides in Christ; it doesn't just follow Him once; it does it over and over and over again. Because you can't help yourself.

Which brings us to one more way to keep from hardening your heart. And just to review these other ones, the first one is to see how much your hardness provokes God. And secondly, a second way to keep from hardening your heart, you need to encourage one another. Thirdly, you need to remember that you are partakers of Christ. And I love this one so much because Christ never leaves his people hard, right? Jesus never leaves His people sour. That's what this verse is saying. In fact, anytime someone has a sour attitude, when they come to church, the first thing you have to ask them is how are things between you and Jesus? How are things between you and Christ? When is the last time you prayed? When is the last time you talked to God? When is the last time the two of you spent time together? Because Jesus never has that effect on people. So if they are failing in this area, the solution is to take them back to Him.

Which brings me to one more way to keep your heart from getting hard and that is to examine yourself. A fourth way to keep from becoming hard is simply to examine yourself which means you need to take a moment in order to stop and see where your heart is at on these things. That's what the author does here with Israel anyway. He takes a moment to close out the passage and ask some questions about them because he says this in verse 14, he says,

For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, while it is said, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me," for who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He angry 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 are disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

When you come to the end of the chapter here, you may wonder why the author is writing like this, but he's doing it because he's changing tactics. I mean, so far he's been given you examples from Israel's history and glimpses from their past. But now at the end, he gives you a series of questions. They told us in counseling training that one of the best ways to help someone is with a good question because it really draws out what's in their heart. And that's what he's doing here, as it relates to Israel, because he gives you five questions here, and then they overlap. So for example, the first two questions go together when he says in verse 16, "For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, not all those who came out of Egypt, led by Moses," and the way that's phrased, the second question answers the first. In other words, whose fault was it that God was mad at Israel? It was Israel's fault. And who was responsible for making Him mad? The Jews were responsible. Not somebody else. And he goes on to ask them more. He says, "And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And that's laid out the same way? Because the second question answers the first again, who was angry? Who was He angry with for 40 years? The Jews. Who provoked him for all that time? They did. It wasn't the Canaanites or Moabites, or Amorites, who did that. It wasn't the Philistines or Gibeonites or Egyptians who made God mad when they were wandering in the wilderness. The Hebrews did. It's all their fault. The passage tells you again how long it lasted because that was an incredibly long time.

And leads into this last question in verse 18, "And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who are disobedient?" As we're going to see here next week, the term rest can be used several different

ways here, depending on the context, it can have different meanings, because it can be used to refer to salvation, or the believers rest. And it can refer to the promised land or Israel's national rest, or it can refer to heaven or your eternal rest, as we'll see in chapter four, Chapter Four is gonna get into all that. But from what it looks like, all those ideas are kind of intertwined in this last verse, because the idea here is that this generation of Jews didn't get any of that. Whether it be the believers rest, are the national rest, or the eternal rest, it was all lost on them. And nobody, it was nobody's fault, but their own. Nobody was to blame for their sin, but themselves. So humbling way to end the verse here, especially when you're writing to a group of Jews, right? Remember that the audience here.

52:44

He's writing here to say, This is what your ancestors did. Learn a lesson from it. And I think we could stop and chew on this for a moment, because this is something a hard hearted person never gets. They never understand that they're to blame for something. They never take ownership of their sin. Because you can catch them falling asleep during a sermon. And they say, It's not my fault. It's the preachers fault. Pastor Jeremy is not loud enough, he doesn't get excited enough and sharp enough. And I say that as a joke. Nobody has ever said that here. If anything, I shout too much because I get excited. The Baptist in me, you try to leave it back there in Tennessee, but it keeps creeping up. Or they slack off in their church attendance. You know, you don't see them coming to the congregation on Sundays. And they say I can't help it. Because the church is so far away. You're to blame for that you just need to move the building closer to me is if that's an easy thing. We'll just call one of the deacons and get them on that are in a more serious sense. You can catch a hard hearted person committing adultery. And they say it's not my fault. That man seduced me into it. You see them cheating on their taxes. And they say, I'm not to blame. The government made me do it because they're so bad. You see them yelling at their children, and they say, can't put the fault on me. They're so annoying. But the point is that they do all of that. Because they're so proud. So what the word hard hearted refers to because the idea is that nothing goes into the heart. Nothing ever penetrates the surface. Because no matter how bad the deed is, they always have an excuse for it. And no matter how horrible the behavior gets, there's always some reason why it's okay. And that's what Israel did in the wilderness. That's how they began began to act because every time God pointed out their sin to them, they always had an excuse for it. You remember when Moses confronted Aaron? Over worshipping the golden calf? You remember what Aaron said? He said, The people made me do it. He said, They told me to make a god for us and I put the gold in the fire and poof, out came this golden calf. What kind of craziness is that? Then later on, you remember what they They said when they were thirsty and they wanted something to drink, they said, it's not our fault. We're stuck here in the desert, it's Moses fault. They said, We're not to blame for being here, he's to blame me. They almost wanted to stone him over that. You imagine Moses is the one that kept him alive all that time. He's the whole reason they were still around. Later on, they got thirsty again, they started blaming God, because that's what a hard hearted person does. The hardest, the hardest three words for a hard hearted person to say are, I am sorry. And the toughest thing for a proud person to admit is that I was wrong. Which is why this sin is so dangerous for us. That's why it's such a problem in a in a church, because there are people who come to church who would never commit adultery, and they would never cheat on their taxes. And they would never shout at their kids. But at the same time, they would never say I am wrong. And as a result, they'll never be saved. They'll never go to heaven. Heaven is only for people who admit they're wrong. Amen. Heaven is only for people who say it's my fault. I'm the one to blame. I'm the one who sin, I'm the one who broke God's law. I'm the one who deserves judgment and to go to hell. No one else is responsible for that. You have to see it that way friends are the or else all the rest of this text is lost on you. There's only two choices you have at the end of the day after reading this verse. And that is a you can choose Christ. Or you can choose your ego. And you can choose the cross in the mercy of God or you can choose your foolish pride, but you can't have both. So I would encourage your friends, if

you see yourself in this passage, and you see that you are becoming apathetic to the Lord. And you see yourself saying, "It's not my fault," and everything bouncing off of you. There is a solution to that and just come running to the Lord for forgiveness. He will forgive you. The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ came to live a perfect life. He entered this world without sin, and He kept His sinless nature all throughout his days, so that He could provide a perfect sacrifice to God for you. He did it so the Father could punish Him for all the evil things you did and forgive you and wash your sins away. And that means every sin including the sin of apathy, He died for every transgression including this one, if you would repent and believe so will you do that today?

I remember some time ago, my wife and I actually traveled through the desert of Sinai where the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, back on a study trip to Israel in 2009. And I'll never forget that experience because the air conditioner broke on the bus as we went through there. So we got a very small glimpse of what Israel went through because the AC stopped working and it was hot in that bus. And it was dry, and it was ugly. You are sweating the whole time and bored because you had nothing to look at but a bunch of brown rocks. And as we were going through that, I remember thinking at the time, this would be a terrible thing to go through all this and end up lost. It would be an awful thing to experience 40 years of this wandering, and end up going to hell. But the good news is you don't have to do that. It's not necessary because God has provided a sacrifice for you through Jesus Christ. And we're going to celebrate that here in the Lord's Supper. But first let's close in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we come to you this morning as a humble people and a broken people. Because there's not one of us in this room, who would not say that I've never had a hard heart against you. There are so many things that make us apathetic. And Lord, we just want to lay them all at your feet and ask for your tender mercy and forgiveness. I think a lot of us in this room have grown up in church. We've been here our entire lives like Israel and we can become so detached from it. Lord, help us to see the sin of that this morning. Help us to understand something of the Word of God in this area in a personal way. We don't want to read this and go away and forget what it says we want to change as a result. So Lord, please soften our hearts. Thank you for Christ and the cross. Thank you for what our Saviour has accomplished on our behalf. He died for hard hearted people. He had a whole team of disciples that at times were hard hearted. And He showed so much mercy to them. Lord, would you show mercy to us today? And if there are any here who have not trusted Christ for the first time, Father, I pray that you would do a work in their lives. Soften them, and let them see that the blame is on their shoulders. But so is hope through Jesus and we thank you for that and pray this in His blessed name. Amen.