

HEBREWS 4:1-13

HARD HEART AREA! - PART 2

PASTOR DAVID SAYLOR

Hebrews 4:1-13 (one of toughest passages in the New Testament)

A few weeks ago a bomber made an attempt to blow up people in New York City. After that we started to learn things about this man, Faisal Shahzad. He lived right here in Connecticut for a number of years and carried out his terrorist plans from here. Once they figured out who it probably was, there was a manhunt to find him. They sounded the warning for all law enforcement agencies and train stations and airports to be on the lookout for him. Even then this man almost successfully flew himself out of the country to safety, but fortunately, at the last moment, he was discovered to be seated on an airplane and captured at the last moment.

In spite of all the warnings in the entire country being on high alert, Faisal Shahzad almost avoided capture.

It makes you wonder. Were there warning signs that could have been picked up about this man? And if there were warning signs, were they ignored?

And as the writer to Hebrews writes this letter to Jewish Christians, he wants to make sure that he doesn't make that mistake. He wants to make sure that the warning was sounded loud and clear.

The Bible covers a lot of important subjects (love your neighbor, family life, etc). But there is no subject it covers more important than the one in Hebrews. Life and death, Heaven or Hell. Entering God's Rest.

He wants to make sure that nobody goes to destruction because they didn't understand or they didn't hear the warning.

We see that in chapter 2, again in chapter 3, here we see it again, and we'll see it later again in the same book.

Remember, he is writing these warnings to people who are members of the Christian church. He's not writing to pagans, to people who have no interest in the things of God, he's not writing to people who were following a false gospel - no, he's writing to people who are Orthodox, who believe the very same things that we would say that we believe today.

AND he is wanting to help people understand that the religion they are following, faith in Jesus Christ, is

not merely an alternative to other religions. He is making them understand that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to God. There is no alternative. There is nowhere else to go.

He's reminding them that even to turn back to their Jewish roots is a dead end. And he has been telling them about the Jewish people who failed to get into the promised land. Even Moses, as great as he was as a leader, failed to make it into the promised land. That is what he has been telling them about where we begin today. But we're Moses failed Jesus succeeded.

And as we pick up today there are five or six things I want to share with you as we try to clearly sound the warning as the writer of Hebrews does.

I. HEARING IS NOT ENOUGH

Hebrews 4:1-2 *Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. ² For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.*

Also, **3:7, 3:15, 4:7** a quote from Ps. 95 sounded over and over...

Hearing the facts about Jesus, and believing those facts are not enough to save. It is common to "know" things, but not act on them.

True story of a newspaper in London that had a man gives out leaflets outside one of the major subway stations. The leaflets said only this: "If you turn around and return this leaflet to the man who gave it to you, you will receive 5 pounds (about \$7), no questions, no strings attached."

After passing out thousands of these leaflets, only 11 people read it, turned around and received their 5 pounds. (Literally all they have to do is read it, and the man would be only a few feet away, and they would have to turn around and bring it to him and received their 5 pounds.)

The experiment was to see how effective leaflets were and if people really read them (probably a newspaper was trying to show that your money would be better spent putting in In their paper - I don't know).

But the point for us is, so often, we don't heed the things that we are told.

Those of you that have children know they are prone to this. (Some of you wives are thinking that's also true of husbands.)

So hearing is not enough. Here were these people in the wilderness. They heard all about God. Moses brought down the 10 Commandments. They built the tabernacle directed by God. They have all of God's law and they were told about his love for them in his hate for sin. They knew about his mercy and they knew about his wrath.

They had heard it all. Hearing is not enough.

There's an obvious application to us too, isn't there? For the writer says, *For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did;*

The point. If hearing was not enough for them, then it's not enough for us either. Just hearing the gospel will not save us. Hearing the truth about Jesus Christ will not make you a believer. Hearing the Bible preached will not get to heaven. Hearing is not enough.

II. BELONGING IS NOT ENOUGH - vv. 3B-8

vv. 3-5

In vv. 3-8 the author (Holy Spirit) takes us through a fairly complicated argument showing that God rested and is still resting from his creative work, and since then He has made that rest available to His people. The "Rest" spoken of means to be in the presence and protection of God, and ultimately it is a picture of Heaven. The promised land was a picture of that rest.

In **3b-4** it speaks of God's Sabbath rest.

In **v.5** a reminder that the Israelites, because of unbelief and disobedience did not enter into His rest.

But God is merciful – He never withdrew His offer to love and care for Israel, and in spite of their rebellious heart, v. 6 and v. 9 says that God still offers his Rest for those who come for it the right way.

But he reminds us (v.8) that even under Joshua, who did lead them into the Promised Land after the 40 year, that that was NOT the ultimate fulfillment. And in **verse 7**, that even under King David, at the pinnacle of the Nations' wealth, power and prominence, there was still those who had not entered into His rest.

What is His point? That all along Israel *thought* that just because they were God's chosen people that they AUTOMATICALLY received God's promises and blessings (including rest) BUT THAT WAS NOT TRUE! Belonging was not enough!

And the writer of Hebrews is making the same point to us today. Belonging is not enough.

That's the whole point here isn't? He was speaking to those who were in churches were dangerously close to being left behind because they were not connected to God. And they were hardening their hearts against God's voice.

And there are people today who think that just being part of the church is enough. If you prayed a prayer, or walk a mile, or get baptized or become a member, that that is enough. But it is not enough.

There are many people who have grown up in church life, members of the church. Given of their money and given of their time. And then later in life realized that they weren't really part of God's family.

III. FAITH IS NOT NEGOTIABLE - v.3

Up to now we've been looking at the negative side, but there is also a positive side.

³ *Now we who have believed enter that rest,*

Faith is not negotiable. We must believe to enter God's rest. Well what is it that we must believe? Is it believing in the tooth fairy?

Of course not. It is believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what this book is all about... 1:1-3; 2:1,3; 3:1

"Faith" is not just "knowing" or "hearing" the facts about Jesus Christ, it is placing your confidence in, your trust in, your reliance in Jesus Christ to be your Savior and your Lord!

And "Faith" is continuous. It is not "once I did that" but rather it is a vigilant abiding faith that starts at some point and continues on. If there is no ongoing aspect to your faith, then it is not saving faith.

Heb. 3:12-14 – that why we need "each other".

IV. OBEDIENCE IS NOT NEGOTIABLE . v.6, 11

We learned last week, it's not just faith but also obedience that must be there. **Obedience always validates true faith.** It's the evidence of faith.

- When there's an egg, there's always a chicken

first.

- When there's a watch, there's always a watchmaker.
- Then there faith, there's always obedience.

What does this mean?

What was happening when the Israelites did not obey in the wilderness? What prompted their disobedience. Essentially it was that they didn't trust God. (faith issue)

And we see here how faith and obedience are so closely linked together.

- It's not that he's saying here *that "Well here's a list of rules. Follow those rules and you'll get to heaven."* He's not saying that because that would eliminate faith.
- He's also not saying, *"Well what you need to do is accept this doctrine of beliefs that this particular church authorized. Sign your name to those and then you'll be okay."* He's not saying that because that would eliminate obedience.

"True faith and true obedience are intimately linked together." They are two sides of the same coin.

Being faithful is to be obedient.

And to be obedient is to be faithful.

Again, what was the problem in the desert? The problem was time and time again God said, *"I'm going to care for you in these ways."*

Moses is a perfect example. Moses had been told by God that if he hit the rock with his staff one time, then the people would have the water they need. But he did not follow God's instructions. He thought he knew best. And he did not strike the rock once and wait. But he struck it again. And because of his disobedience God told him he could not enter the promised land as well.

He ignored God's ways and decided to do it their way, and this is exactly what disobedience is.

V. THERE IS NO EXCUSE vv. 11-13

What the writer is saying here is that there is no excuse for not knowing. Why? Because of the Word of God. Here we have a book that is *"living and active"* and powerful.

God's word can pierce our hearts.

It *"judges the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts."*

[The Word of God penetrates *very, very deep.*

Like a sword it penetrates thru tough, hard layers. And when it gets down there it starts judging thoughts and intentions.]

And "Judgment" is not just condemnation. Judging is a two pronged activity. "What's your judgment on this car?" (Judges what's right and what's wrong.)

- Word of God – judges what's right and wrong in us.
- Better: Word of God judges what's "believing and unbelieving" in me.

When the Word gets inside, does it find a believer? Does it find faith in the promises of God? Does it find a person who has confidence in the promises of God?

Or does it find somebody who's believing, trusting in other things?

We've been dealing with a warning haven't we?

- Hearing is not enough.
- Belonging is not enough
- faith is not an option
- obedience is not an option
- There is no excuse

This reality comes from a work of the Spirit of God in our hearts and in our life. It begins as we ask Jesus Christ to forgive us and place our trust in him alone. Ask him to be your Lord and your King.

it is a life of continued vigilance. Review of passages.

So the great lesson of this book and the this text is that the Christian life is a day by day, hour by hour trust in the promises of God, and fear in not trusting the promises of God because it's so dangerous to not trust the promises of God. Because it's not automatic.

In America there is this "automatic Christianity syndrome"

vigilance to remain faithful and bear witness to the reality of our selfish. Perseverance and faith validates our conversion. Conversion doesn't excuse a life of rebellion.

Where do you stand today? Are you someone who is merely hearing? Or merely belonging? Or are you someone who is faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ?