



Hebrews 3:7-4:13 – Warning: Don't harden your hearts!

What is the greatest danger facing you at the moment?

You might remember the TV show – Lost in Space and the robot.

Do you remember the famous line of the robot? Warning. And the arms of the robot would go crazy. Whenever the people got close to danger the robot would detect it and warn them. The warning was to protect them. So this week's passage is a warning to us.

Last week we saw that Jesus is greater than Moses in at least two ways.

First, Jesus is greater than Moses because he made Moses.

Second, Jesus is greater than Moses the way a son over a house is greater than a servant in the house. So if there was a comparison between Moses and Jesus last week there is a comparison between Moses people and Jesus people this week.

1. The wilderness generation of God's people didn't listen and missed out on God's rest.

Read: 7-11

This is very serious warning of the way God worked in the past. The way he dealt with Israel after they came out of Egypt. In spite of all that power and mercy God showed on their behalf, they tested God with grumbling and unbelief. The result was that he gave them up to die in the wilderness and swore that they would not enter the God's rest in the promised land.

God had chosen a family to be his people and gave them promises which included their own land. But since those promises had been made the family of Abraham (the Israelites) had lived their lives in slavery in Egypt. Terrible oppression, hardship, they saw their children slaughtered – they were beaten and mistreated. God raised up Moses to rescue them and bring them into the promised land. They witnessed an incredible miracle – exodus, the waters of the Red Sea parted and they walked through on dry ground – about a million of them. And Pharaoh's army as they followed were engulfed by the waters.

The Israelites rejoiced greatly on that day, sang songs about what a mighty God they served – no obstacle was too great for him. Again and again, day after day the people witnessed the incredible provision of God – feeding this huge crowd in the desert. But they kept forgetting, they kept grumbling, their hearts kept returning to Egypt. The final straw was when they arrived at the end of their journey. They were on the edge of the promised land.

This land was a gift from God to them! And it was such a good land – huge grapes and pomegranates... flowing with milk and honey. But the people in the land were big. And the Israelites lost their confidence – more importantly they lost confidence in the God who had brought them this far.

They turned away. They were so close they could taste the goodness of this land that God was giving to them – but they turned back towards Egypt – back towards their slavery.

And God's anger came crashing down. God declared that that generation would not enter the promised land.

Since that time – that wilderness generation have served as a warning to future generations. So 400 years later when the people of Israel were now living in the land of Canaan. The great King David wrote Psalm 95 – and he warned his generation with these words...

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert... I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest." Psalm 95:8-11

The issue of perseverance is not first an issue of behaviour. Don't ask: What actions does God want me to *do*? The issue is one *OF THE HEART*. It is a matter of believing.

Look at verse 10: "Therefore I was angry with this generation, and said, "*Their hearts are always going astray.*"

Why didn't the people get to enter the promised land?

You could say, they sinned and they rebelled and they murmured. Yes. But look at how this writer ends the chapter. Verse 19: "And *so* we see that they were not able to enter *because of unbelief.*" Persistent sin in the face of God's mercy is a sign of unbelief.

Yes, the people were embittered because of God's testing them (v. 8); yes, they sinned (v. 17); but beneath all that was the root problem: they didn't believe God.

They didn't trust his goodness—to lead and protect and provide and satisfy. Even though they saw the waters of the Red Sea divide and they walked over on dry ground, the moment they got thirsty, their hearts were hard against God and they did not trust him to take care of them. They cried out against him and said that life in Egypt was better. They missed out on rest.

WHAT IS THE REST?

At Creation in Genesis God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden where they were at rest. *Rest was life in paradise under the blessing of God in rich fellowship with God.*

No death, disease, defeat of sin or the devil.

It didn't last long. Human rebellion and sin destroyed our access to God's rest.

God gave promises to Abraham that included a land for God's people where they would again be at rest. The land of Canaan was often described in terms of paradise and rest.

Jesus comes along as the one who will bring us into the rest through his death and resurrection.

And Hebrews helps us to see that the promised rest will ultimately be fulfilled not in the land of Canaan but in the new creation when Jesus returns.

According to Hebrews 4:1 the promise of entering God's rest is still on offer. If we trust and follow Jesus then he will bring us into the rest.

Now the example of what happened with Moses' people is applied to us.

2. Our generation must listen to God so we don't miss out on God's rest.

Read: 12-15

This is to US! Brothers & sisters. The wilderness generation missed out, make sure you don't!

What are the dangers? An unbelieving heart. You simply don't believe what God says. That he saved you and will keep you to the end. That His way is the best way. Turning away from

him for the provision of what you need to other things. Thinking what you've given me is not enough or is not good enough. This is turning from the living God.

In verse 13 it is being hardened by sin's deceitfulness. *What is sin's deceitfulness?*
It is being convinced that what you are doing is good when it is bad. Or that you rationalise your actions saying they are not wrong when they are.

It is not just enough to hear. B/c Moses generation heard.

Verse 15 says you must not harden your heart. ie hear what you must do and not do it.

Disobey. Rebel. Think you don't need to do anything. Wilful disobedience.

It is not enough to hear or even know God's salvation. Moses generation had both.

Read vv.16-18

They had God speak to them. They saw and experienced God's great act of salvation when they escaped Egypt. But it is not what is seen that is important but what is unseen. They didn't keep faith in the promise of God. They he would bring them to the land of rest.

I was terrible at art at school. Once of the worst I did was a clay statue of Elvis. You know the project. You get a pile of clay and you have to make something and then put it in the furnace to make it go hard – that is the technical term I'm sure.

We are like clay in that we can be moulded and are being moulded by God. But hearing God's word can be like sitting in the furnace. It can make us hard and the longing we sit not obeying the harder we get. If you get out before it is too late there is still time to be moulded.

So how can we make sure we don't miss out on going to heaven?

Individually

According v. 12 each one of us needs to examine our own hearts.

No one else can take responsibility for the state of your heart.

- Is it sinful and unbelieving?
- Is there sin in your life that is going unchecked at the moment – that you're just not doing anything about?
- Why is that?
- Don't you believe that God's way is best?
- Have you like the wilderness generation forgotten what God has given you already and what he has promised in the future?
- Do you think that God is stingy – that he will short change you?
- Repent and trust in the God who loves you so much he sent his son to die for you!
- Each of us needs to examine our own hearts.

This week has been a searching week for me as is every week I preach.

Please God's word appeals to you. Repent.

If there are relationships that you have been avoiding repent and go today to the people and speak to them. At least say hello.

If there are relationship you know shouldn't be having stop them. To hear is to act.

IT is impossible to think that you can continue to share in God's grace and continue in sin.

Corporately

Verse 13 helps us to see that we have a responsibility to each other in this.

- Sin is so deceptive that we lose perspective – think about the Israelites – they kept wanting to return to Egypt – to their slavery and oppression.

- It sounds unthinkable and yet we have the same problem – we have been rescued from empty, meaningless slavery to our own passions and yet we constantly want to return – we think that we’re somehow missing out!
- We need to constantly encourage one another as we head towards the goal!

After church do you know who the most active person is?

It is the devil! We’ve heard the word of God and he wants us to talk about the weather or the footy, anything but the word of God we have just heard. Let’s remind each other of what God has said, and struggle together to understand and apply it to our lives...

Many professing Christians make a start with God. They hear that their sins can be forgiven and that they can escape hell and go to heaven. And they say: what have I got to lose, I’ll believe. But then in a week or a month or a year or ten years, the test comes—a season of dryness. A weariness with life, and subtly a growing craving for the fleeting pleasures.

This is a terrifying condition to be in—to find yourself no longer interested in Christ and his word and prayer and worship and missions and living for the glory of God.

If that is your situation today, then I plead with you to listen to the Holy Spirit speaking in this text. Listen to the word of God. Do not harden your heart. Wake up to the deceitfulness of sin. Consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our great confession. And hold fast to your confidence and the boast of your hope in God.

And if you have never even made a start with God, then put your hope in him. Turn from sin and from self-reliance and put your confidence in a great Saviour. These things are written (and this sermon is preached) that you might believe and endure, and have life.

This is a warning to bring about repentance not to make you despair about your salvation.

Prayer: By your grace we are clothed with righteousness but in our walk we are still in rags. Our best prayers are stained with sin, our motives impure and actions mixed. Forgive us and change us. Every morning let us wear the robe of righteousness we have because of your Son’s death.

Grant us and exceeding sinfulness of sin

The exceeding righteousness of salvation

The exceeding glory of Christ

The exceeding beauty of holiness and the exceeding wonder of grace.