

**Jesus: Our Great High Priest Forever**  
**(week 7)**  
**Hebrews 3:7-19**  
**“The Hearts Of The Wilderness”**

**“Prone to wander Lord I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love...”**  
***Come Thy Fount of Every Blessing* by R. Robinson 1757**

**Introduction**

In verses 7-19 of the third chapter of Hebrews, we are given our second of five warnings found within the book. This warning is a warning against unbelief. Many of the Jewish readers of this letter would have thought that being a Jew, descended from Abraham, was certainly enough to put them in right standing before God. The writer of *Hebrews* once again relies on an example from *The Old Testament* to make the point that just because a person “starts out” in the right place doesn’t necessarily guarantee that they finish well. Apparently, due to the persecutions and difficulties that accompanied their new found belief in Christ, many were returning to Judaism as a safer and more acceptable form of religious practice. The writer of *Hebrews*, under the direction of The Holy Spirit (vs. 7), forcefully warns them against turning away from the saving grace that can only be found in Christ Jesus. As he had previously demonstrated in verse six, the mark of a TRUE follower is that they will finish what they started and arrive safely at the intended destination. To walk away from Jesus is to prove that you never truly knew Him in the first place.

Moses had been sent by God to lead the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Even today we all are familiar with the Exodus, as was every Jew living in the first century. It is a story that transcends time, a story of God’s might and redemptive power. The original intention of the Exodus was to lead the people away FROM something and TO something far better. Unfortunately, they managed to do the “away” part, but their lack of faith kept them from finishing well. Sadly, as a result, the entire generation that walked out of Egypt after that first Passover never saw the land that God had picked out for them, but instead they all perished in the wilderness. The journey from Egypt to Canaan could have been made in just eleven days, but because of the faithlessness of the people, Israel wandered in circles in the barren wasteland for forty years! They missed out on the blessings of God, because they never came to the place where they could fully put their trust in Him.

Sadly, many church-goers are much the same way. They start out believing in Jesus, Who has promised to lead them out of the bondage of sin to a far better way of abundant living, and yet, they stumble and fall along the wayside, never finding in Him the “rest” that He has promised. They have a knowledge of Christ and have heard of His mighty saving power, but they remain unconvinced that He is truly able to provide for them in every circumstance. Much like Simon Peter, whom we discussed last week, once they see the “waves” around them, they take their eyes off Christ and begin to sink hopelessly in the tides that would so easily sweep away those who doubt. The true believers in Christ are the ones who will keep their focus on Him and trust Him in all things. Anything less than complete faith will cause us to wander in the wilderness and never reach our final destination.

If you have ever studied warfare, you will find that there is a “wilderness” space between two opposing forces on the battlefield. This space is called, by those of the military persuasion, “No Man’s Land”. It is a place where no soldier ever wants to find himself wandering alone, for in “no mans land” nothing but death awaits for those who choose to linger there, and yet, it must be crossed, if a victory is ever to be won. Between Egypt and Canaan lay the wilderness, a veritable “no man’s land” that had to be crossed over, but it was never intended as a place to linger. If the children of Israel had merely trusted in their commanding officer, they would have safely crossed over and found victory on the other side. But, this battle is no place for the cowardly. We too must decide to follow Christ, our Commander, as He leads His army to a better place of victory and rest. We do not want to linger in “no man’s land”, for there we, like those unbelievers who followed Moses, will find only death. The writer of *Hebrews* uses a quotation from *Psalm 95* to emphasize the warning of wandering in the wilderness instead of trusting what we have seen in Christ. We are clearly shown three types of “hearts” that can be found wandering in the wilderness: The Hard Heart, The Wandering Heart, and the Wicked Unbelieving Heart.

**The Hard Heart (vs. 7-9)**

This world is filled with hard-hearted people. Jesus even spoke of them in His parable of the sower (*Matthew 13:1-23*). The hard-hearted person lives only to please themselves. Everything that comes before

them is viewed in the lens of “What’s in it for me?”. Therefore, they are absolutely unwilling to change anything about themselves, if it means the slightest chance of discomfort. Hard-hearted people go to church in droves. They truly want to be saved. They just refuse anything else that goes along with salvation. Repentance, for example, is not a popular topic of discussion for the hard-hearted person. They believe that they are “just fine” and have a ready made excuse for anything that they do wrong. The hard-hearted can often be heard saying things like: “I’m a good person. I work hard, pay my taxes, and go to church. I may not be perfect, but I’m certainly better than ‘most’ people.” It is this attitude of “self reliance” that perpetually hinders the hard-hearted person from truly receiving Christ. After all, they don’t really believe that they need him all that much. In short, they never come to repentance, because their hearts are not “penetrated” by the conviction of The Holy Spirit.

Becoming a Christian begins with having your heart “broken”; to realize that apart from Christ we are wretched sinners with no hope, unless God chooses to have mercy upon us. Jesus called this condition, “poor in spirit” (**Matthew 5:3**), and if the truth of God’s Word doesn’t pierce our stubborn hearts, then we have no chance to enter into the “rest” that Christ has promised us. The hard heart will be forced to wander in the wilderness until it can be broken. In fact, this is the point of the “wilderness” to begin with. The wilderness is the place where God will lead us in order to break us down and compel us to rely upon Christ for our every need. If you’ve never been in a wilderness my friend, then you haven’t been following Jesus! God did not lead the children of Israel into the wilderness to be cruel to them, but rather to bring them to a place where they could come to KNOW Him intimately. He wanted them to rely upon Him for their every need, so that they could learn first hand what a great provider He is. But instead, every single time that they found themselves in a place of discomfort, rather than turning to God, they turned ON God, even to the point of begging to return to Egyptian bondage! Just remember, those who “fail” their wilderness testing, prove themselves to be hard-hearted and not truly believers at all. If you quit on Jesus when things don’t go your way, it is a sign that you never really had Jesus to begin with.

It isn’t as if God had not provided the Children of Israel with more than enough reasons to believe in Him. Remember the ten plagues that The LORD sent to the land of Egypt, so that Pharaoh would send the Israelites away? The water turned to blood, the plagues of frogs, lice, flies, diseased livestock, boils, hail, locusts, three days of darkness, and finally, the one that finished it all off, “The death of the firstborn”. What amazing signs from heaven the Israelites were shown in order that they might be willing to trust in God. And yet, as soon as, they departed from Egypt, they began to question God’s power. In fact, they questioned Him TEN times! That is one for every plague by the way. Listen to what God had to say about that when Moses prayed that God would forgive the stubborn hard-hearted people:

**“The LORD replied, ‘I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, not one of those who saw My glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed Me and tested Me ten times—not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated Me with contempt will ever see it.’”**  
**Numbers 14:20-23**

Wow! They tested Him not once in the wilderness on the way to Canaan, but TEN TIMES. Would you like to see the times that they doubted The LORD and accused Him of not providing for them? Well, here they are. They started doubting God from the very first day that they left Egypt:

1. They doubted His Sovereignty at the Red Sea (**Exodus 14:11-12**)
2. They doubted His Protection at Marah (**Exodus 15:23-24**)
3. They doubted His Provision in The Wilderness of Sin (**Exodus 16:2**)
4. They doubted His Wisdom at Kadesh (**Exodus 16:27**)
5. They doubted His Guidance at Rehidim (**Exodus 17:1-3,7**)
6. They doubted His Uniqueness at Horeb (**Exodus 32:1**)
7. They doubted His Understanding at Taberah (**Numbers 11:1**)
8. They doubted His Sufficiency at the Kibroth Hattaavah “graves of lust” (**Numbers 11:4**)
9. They doubted His Leadership at Hazeroth (**Numbers 12:1**)
10. They doubted His Trustworthiness at Kadesh (**Numbers 14:2**)

Well, there you have it. Although they had been shown incredible miracles from God, so they could believe and come to know Him better, they chose to question God instead. Their hearts were so hard that they missed out on the Promised Land. We, like them, have been given sufficient evidence that we may be

able to fully rely on Christ. We have The Word of God, along with The Holy Spirit to confirm its truths to us. We have witnessed first hand the transformation of many lives that have been led from darkness to light by the saving grace of Jesus. And yet many, in spite of all this hard evidence, will still choose to doubt God's promises. They want more "proof" of His power before they will commit to placing their full weight into His capable hands. They still have doubts that He can provide for their EVERY need, if they but only seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (**Matthew 6:33**). They, in spite of the overwhelming evidence, are still "testing" the LORD of Glory. May I offer a word of warning to you (actually just share one from Jesus Himself)? If The Word of God is not enough to convince you, then nothing else will EVER convince you! (Parable of Lazarus and the rich man **Luke 16:19-31**). My friend, if you're having trouble trusting in Jesus this morning, you don't need another miraculous sign, you need a softer heart! Maybe its time you prayed that God would grant you one, before its too late! The wilderness is no place to live, so don't harden your heart.

### **The Wandering Heart (vs. 10-11)**

The second kind of heart that can always be found roaming the "wilderness" is the "wandering heart". Those who have this heart condition are as unstable as the weather. They are seemingly on fire one minute and cold as ice the next. They pretend to love Christ on Sunday, but live like the devil all week long. Any distraction can draw them away from truth. They are just as easily persuaded by the wrong crowd as the right one. In short, they appear to be whoever they are with at the moment. People with divided loyalties are never a reliable source in which to place your hopes and trusts. God said in **Psalms 95** that He was angry with that generation, because their hearts were prone to go astray and they had not KNOWN His ways. (**Psalms 95:10; Hebrews 3:10**). Within this verse lies the cure for the wandering heart, it is to "Know the ways of God." The word here for "known" (*yada*) is the same exact word that is used in *The Old Testament* to describe "intimacy" between a husband and wife. It is to know someone on the deepest of levels. God says that the reason that the children of Israel could so easily wander away from His truths is because they had never taken the time to get to know Him intimately. This was the reason for their time alone with God in the wilderness. It was preordained so that they might come to know Him on a personal level. Sadly however, they had no real interest in knowing God that way, they only wanted what He could give them. God had predestined them for so much more, and yet they discarded that wonderful opportunity as carelessly as one would throw away their garbage. How foolish is it for a person to pass on the opportunity to know God intimately? And yet, many do it every day. They want the Promised Land, but not The God of promise. They're hearts are prone to wander in the wilderness.

Have you ever thought about the proverbial straw that "broke the camels back", when it came to these people and Almighty God? It was after He had led them so far, through so much, and they were finally on the very threshold of the Promised Land. Instead of just marching in and trusting God, they formed a "committee" of twelve spies to first go in and check it all out. To this day this is why I'm not a fan of "church committees"! They came back from the land with tales of "milk and honey" (a metaphor for abundance), and yet they didn't believe that they could defeat the giants who lived there! In short, they thought that God had met his match in these godless Canaanites. That, my friends, was when God said, He'd had enough. Only two of the spies out of ten encouraged the Israelites to go and conquer the land, while the other ten convinced the people that they would be better off turning around and heading back to Egypt. God was furious. He condemned them all to die in the wilderness, while still keeping His promise by leading their children into the Promised Land in their stead.

Now, let's talk about the two guys that wanted to attack. They were two friends named Joshua and Caleb. Joshua was Moses' personal assistant. Have you ever wondered why God chose him? I believe that I know exactly why. It was his fierce devotion to God and his relentless pursuit to know God intimately. Allow me to explain. *The Bible* says that when God would descend in a pillar of fire over the Tent of Meeting to speak with Moses, young Joshua would always go in the tent with him. The people would stand afar at the entrance of their own tents and worship God from a distance, but Joshua wanted to be right where God was. Even when Moses would leave the tent to go and tell the people what God had said, Joshua would stay behind longing for a little more time with God (**Exodus 33:11**).

You see, to Joshua nothing was more important than being in the presence of God. He wasn't satisfied to worship God from a distance, he wanted to get close. His very name (*Yeshua*) is exactly the same as that of The Lord Jesus. Not only that, but his father Nun (pronounced *noon*) has an interesting meaning to his name as well. You see Nun in Hebrew is a word used to describe how a tree reproduces itself by the bearing of branches. I wonder if ol' Nun's family was in the vine growing business, or maybe even winemakers. But let us look to the picture that we are given here. Joshua, whose father's name

means “to produce branches”, placed above all else his communion with The LORD in order to know Him intimately. Jesus tells us in **John 15** that HE is our “true vine”, and that we are His branches. If we will “abide in Him”, then we will produce fruit. Joshua gives us a perfect picture of what this means. If we are to have an undivided heart then we, like Joshua, should never stray far from the “tent” of God. We are called to “remain” in Christ, that we may know His ways intimately. The more we know the truth of his Word and hide it in our hearts, the less that we will be swayed by whatever winds that blow our way. That’s why Joshua wasn’t afraid to march straight into Canaan, my friends, and that’s why we will be able to follow Christ wherever He leads. Even through the valley of the shadow of death (**Psalms 23:4**), For HE is with us, and we are IN HIM! Want to get rid of that wandering heart and finally get out of this wilderness you are going through? Tired of being tossed about by every wind that blows (**Ephesians 4:14**)? Then make it the desire of your heart not just to know about Christ, but to KNOW Him (**Philippians 3:10-11**). Soften up your heart to hear God’s truth and stop this incessant wandering in the wilderness.

### **The Wicked Unbelieving Heart (vs.12-19)**

**“See to it brothers, that none of you has a sinful unbelieving heart that turns away from God. But encourage one another daily, as long as, it is called ‘Today’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” Hebrews 3:12-13**

And now, we come to it at last. The “sinful unbelieving heart”. This is a term that can only be used of a lost person. The word here in the Greek translated “sinful” is *Poneros* and should be more accurately translated “evil”. No true Believer can have an evil heart, for they have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the writer is warning of the natural progression from hard-hearted to the wandering heart that will ultimately lead to an wicked unbelieving heart. The unbeliever shall never be allowed to enter into the blessings of God. Even though they may very well have started out attempting to “follow” Jesus, but because they were never truly committed in the first place, they subsequently drifted into a state of unbelief. If they do not repent of their sins and truly take up their cross and follow Christ wherever He leads, then they are doomed to perish in the wilderness. You see, how we start doesn’t matter so much as how we finish. It is the finish line that proves that we were really following in the first place (**vs. 14**). There are no “participation trophies” in Heaven. There are only those who finish the race. The children of Israel had “started out” following God, but the condition of their hearts proved that they were never really His (**vs. 16-19**).

I love what the writer of Hebrew’s says in **verse 13**: “encourage one another”. You see, it is the responsibility of The Church to do everything within its power to keep people from falling away from the truth. Just as Joshua tried his very best to persuade the Israelites not to give up on God. He so longed to see them living in the Promised Land, but sadly, it wasn’t meant to be. They refused to listen, but Joshua himself was rewarded for God did in fact allow him to enter the Promised Land (read the book of Joshua)! Why? Because of his unwavering faith. He had tried to warn the others, but they would not listen. They missed their chance, but he got to lead their children into Canaan. As a church, we must do everything that we can to warn people of the error of their ways, so long as there is still time. This is why the writer of Hebrews goes back to the word “Today” from **Psalms 95**. For you see, none of us are promised tomorrow. Today is the day of salvation (**2 Corinthians 6:2**). Do you know someone who has wandered away from God’s truth to follow their own sinful desires? Then warn them... TODAY. They may not get another chance. It is said that the great D.L. Moody, the wonderful preacher from Chicago (1837-1899) used to preach the gospel and ask those in the congregation to “Go home and think about what he had said and then decide what to do about Christ.” One particular night after telling the congregation to think about the message, the Great Chicago fire broke out killing three hundred people, some of whom had been there listening to his sermon the evening before. Moody determined that from that day forward, he would never again ask the people to go home and think about the gospel, rather he would ask for a decision to be made immediately. You see, no one truly knows if today is their last day. We must warn those who are falling away while we still can. It is our greatest responsibility as followers of Christ. God wants the wanderers to come home... for good! We must “see to it”. See to it, that no one has a Hard Heart, that no one has a Wandering Heart, and finally for Heaven’s sake, that no one be able to leave this place with a Wicked and Unbelieving Heart. Isn’t it time to come out of the wilderness and enter in to the Promised Land? Make up your mind to follow Jesus, while it is still called “Today”.

And ALL of God’s people said... TRUTH!!!