

## Sermon

Grace Street Fellowship, Dr. Jim Burgin, pastor

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Faith worth Holding Series #6

### The Danger of Unbelief

Hebrews 3: 7-19

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#### Ignoring Warning Signs

1. Wedding Cake Rock
  - a. An hour south of Sydney, Australia, there is a National Park attraction called Wedding Cake Rock, because the rock formation literally looks like a wedding cake.
  - b. This spot has become the perfect place for selfies, but there is a problem. The National Park attraction has been fenced off and warning signs posted as it could collapse at any time.
  - c. In 2016, a geotechnical survey revealed the rock was highly unstable and could collapse 50m into the ocean.
  - d. But tourists are ignoring the safety warnings for the sake of the perfect selfie, and they continue to climb onto Wedding Cake Rock despite being told it could collapse at any moment.
2. Jaguar Attack in Litchfield, Arizona
  - a. Last week, at the Wildlife World Zoo in Litchfield, Arizona, 20 miles outside of Phoenix, a woman leaned over the barriers of a jaguar pen, when she was attacked by a female jaguar.
  - b. The zoo said it will not put down the animal, because it was the woman who ignored the clear and prevalent warning signs.
3. Ignoring warning signs can have devastating consequences.

#### A Hard Heart Described and Defined

1. Described: For some this morning, you find it more and more difficult to feel anything in your spiritual life. There is nothing in a worship service that moves you – the music, the preaching of the word. You've heard it all before. You find it harder and harder to read the Bible. It just seems like a dry book to you. There is nothing in it for you. You have less and less of a desire to talk with God, and when you do, it feels like a "one way" conversation.
2. Defined: Look at verse 12: "See to it, brothers that none of you has a **sinful**, **unbelieving** heart that turns away from the living God." A hard heart is one that is
  - a. *SINFUL /EVIL*– leaning into our own desires in a way that diminishes or cuts off our fellowship with God. Your desires and your sin are more important than your fellowship with the living God. At first, it isn't that you don't want that peaceful and strong sense of his presence. It's just that you want to sin more in the moment. You feel you can get forgiveness at any moment and get back to God. Slowly the voice of sin becomes more powerful, and the voice of God diminishes. Then, you are cut off from his love.
  - b. *UNBELIEVING* – You aren't actively against God. You aren't an outspoken atheist making fun of Christ followers, or belittling God. You haven't changed Gods and become a Hindu or a Buddhist, and you still believe intellectually that Christ is King. On the other hand, you are living your life like you want to, and you are in charge, yet you know longer live in obedience to

God's commands. You have become, as best-selling author and Pastor Craig Groeschel calls it – a Christian Atheist. You believe in God, but live as if he doesn't exist. Titus 1:16 says, *“They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good.”*

3. Transition – How does a hard heart develop? The writer of Hebrews shows us by giving us two illustrations from the Old Testament.

### Failure to Trust God when Tested

Hebrews 3: 7 – 9: <sup>7</sup>“So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice, <sup>8</sup>do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, <sup>9</sup>where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did.”

1. Do you remember the story? – The writer of Hebrews uses an experience from Moses and the children of Israel in the wilderness. When the Exodus occurred.
  - a. God sent 10 plagues to Pharaoh of Egypt who was holding the Hebrews captive. After the 10<sup>th</sup> plague, Pharaoh said to get everyone out of there. Moses got everyone on the road, and then the Pharaoh changed his mind and started chasing them.
  - b. The Israelites reached the Red Sea. God parted the waters, and the children of Israel walked across on dry land. Pharaoh followed, and the waters closed them off behind, killing them.
  - c. Then, they didn't have anything to eat, and God supplied Mana from heaven. They saw the miracle of God time after time.
  - d. Exodus 17 says they ran out of water at Rephidim, but there was no water. The people grumbled and whined, “Did you bring us out of Egypt to this desert only to die of thirst. Why did they think like this when they had seen God's miracles time after time?”
2. How did God respond? - God was so disappointed in their lack of faith during times of testing that he told Moses to rename the place – calling it Massah (quarrelling) and Meribah (testing). God was angry with them, because they had failed to trust God in their time of testing.<sup>1</sup>
3. Difficulties – **HEALTH CONCERN** in your life or in the life of someone you love dearly; **FINANCIAL HARDSHIP** – you don't know where your next paycheck is coming from, bills are mounting; facing the **BREAKUP OF AN IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP** in your life, and you are wondering if God can take care of your need. Remember how God has provided for you. Do you think I am going to let go of you now.

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<sup>1</sup> Oswald Chambers, Utmost for his highest, says it like this: *It is only a faithful person who truly believes that God sovereignly controls his circumstances. We take our circumstances for granted, saying God is in control, but not really believing it. We act as if the things that happen were completely controlled by people. To be faithful in every circumstance means that we have only one loyalty, or object of our faith— the Lord Jesus Christ.. If we will just learn to worship God even during the difficult circumstances, He will change them for the better very quickly if He so chooses. Being faithful to Jesus Christ is the most difficult thing we try to do today. We will be faithful to our work, to serving others, or to anything else; just don't ask us to be faithful to Jesus Christ. Many Christians become very impatient when we talk about faithfulness to Jesus. Our Lord is dethroned more deliberately by Christian workers than by the world. We treat God as if He were a machine designed only to bless us, and we think of Jesus as just another one of the workers. The goal of faithfulness is not that we will do work for God, but that He will be free to do His work through us. God calls us to His service and places tremendous responsibilities on us. He expects no complaining on our part and offers no explanation on His part.*

4. Testing can do one of two things – draw us closer to God, or drive us farther away from God; make us bitter or better; become a stepping stool or a stumbling block. Someone has said that “the same sun which melts the wax hardens the clay.”
5. People who have passed the Test – Corrie Tin Boom who praised God for the fleas in the concentration camp, because she realized that they were protecting them from abusive guards; Ann Graham Lotz, Billy Graham’s daughter, struggling with life-threatening cancer, but praising God in the midst. 92 year old James Chapman, who I visited in the hospital this week – suffering from a minor stroke. He told me that he had flat lined twice in the helicopter ride over to the hospital, but declared to me, “Jim, I was at peace.” He could go home, or he could stay here, and he was at peace either way.

## Failure to Obey God when Ordered

Hebrews 3: 10-11 – “That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’ 11 So I declared an oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’”

1. Recommendation of 12 Spies - The author of Hebrews is now referring us to a different experience in the Israelite story. In Numbers 13 & 14, we learn that the Lord had told Israel that they could possess the Promised Land. Israel sent 12 spies into the land, and they came back with a unanimous verdict on 2 of 3 points: 1) The land is flowing with milk and honey. It’s rich and beautiful; 2) the land has giants in it (Nephilim). They were united on these two points, but disagreed on the third. 10 spies said they should not enter the land. Two spies (Joshua and Caleb) said they should trust God’s directive. Israel accepted the majority report in direct disobedience to God.
2. God’s Response – Verse 10 says that he was “angry with this generation, because ‘their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’ He then bans the entire generation from entering the Promised Land.
3. Observations
  - a. **GOD’S WRATH** - God isn’t just disappointed, but he is angry. The consequence is that an entire generation doesn’t get to enter the Promised Land. In other words, **God gives the people what they want**. Instead of receiving God’s Blessing, they receive the consequences of their choice, and an entire generation misses the land of Milk and Honey, and has to wander in the desert for another 40 years. They forever miss God’s rest, and then postpone it for their children, because of their unfaithfulness.
  - b. **SPIRITUAL INERTIA IS DANGEROUS** - They chose the safety and comfort of what they knew, instead of risking for the rock solid certainty of God’s will for their life. Are there any areas in your life today that you need to obey the Lord’s voice. Is there anyone here who is holding on to the safety and comfort of what you know instead of stepping out into the will of God for your life? God tells us to do something, but we’re not sure we want to obey, because it involves a risk.
    - i. Perhaps there is someone you need to forgive, or someone you need to ask forgiveness from.
    - ii. Perhaps someone is in a relationship which is spiritually destructive to you, and God’s told you to separate from this friendship, to end it. You know it isn’t a right relationship, but you are afraid of what it would mean to give it up for an unknown future of loneliness.
    - iii. Perhaps some of you right now are thinking about the possibility of obeying God with your tithing and financing as the Bible commands, or even doing more, but you’re fearful of what that might do to your financial future, so you are second guessing God’s promises and choosing to disobey.

- iv. Some of you have been prompted by God to sit down with a friend or family member and to talk with them about their relationship with God, but you are fearful about what that would do to the relationship. You would rather stay in an easy relationship than risk breaking that relationship by being obedience to God.

c. **CHOICES BUILD THE HEART'S HABITS**

- i. *Choices build habits, and habits influence choices* – 1) Verse 8 – if you hear his voice today, don't harden your hearts as our ancestors did. Don't follow their example. Verse 10 –“their hearts are always going astray” – they did it before, and they keep on doing it.
- ii. *Broken Windows Theory of Human Behavior* – an academic theory proposed by James Wilson and George Kelling in 1982 which used broken windows as a metaphor for disorder within neighborhoods. Their theory links disorder and incivility within a community to subsequent occurrences of serious crime. One broken window left alone creates more unbroken windows, and ultimately to serious crime.
- iii. *This is evident in our own lives* – You mess up on your diet today, then it doesn't matter if I have a second cookie. I'll start over tomorrow.
- iv. *These choices affect our character* – Our text calls it a “hardened heart” (verses 8, 13, & 15).
- v. *Character affects our destiny* - Hebrews miss God's rest.

- d. **YOU CAN'T TRAVEL OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS AT THE SAME TIME** – We know how we think. It isn't that we want to be disobedient/unfaithful. We want God & this other thing. Like a man having an affair who wants to come home to enjoy his family every night, and doesn't want anything to change. He wants both.

e. **ILLUSTRATION**

Erwin McManus, a pastor in Los Angeles, tells a great story about recognizing God's voice. When his son Aaron was five or six he began asking his dad what God's voice sounded like, and the dad didn't know exactly how to answer the question.

A few years later, his son went to his first Junior High camp. At the camp, Aaron had started to assault another kid, but was held back by his friends. When his dad arrived at camp, Aaron was unrepentant, wanted to leave camp, and put all of his stuff in the car.

Pastor McManus asked him if they could talk one more time before they drove away. They sat on two large rocks in the middle of the woods. “Aaron, is there any voice inside you telling you what you should do? Aaron nodded affirmatively. What's the voice telling you? That I should stay and work it out. Can you identify that voice? Yes, he said immediately: it's God.

McManus had waited for this moment. Aaron, do you realize what just happened? You heard God's voice. He spoke to you from within your soul. Forget everything else that's happened. God spoke to you, and you were able to recognize him. Erwin says he will never forget Aaron's response: “Well, I'm still not doing what God said.”

McManus told him that it was his choice, but then told him what would happen. If Aaron rejected the voice of God coming from deep within and chose to disobey, his heart would become hardened, and his ears would become dull. If he continued on this path there would come a day when he would never again hear the voice of God. There would come a day when he would deny that God even speaks or has ever spoken to him.

## What is the Remedy for a Hard Heart?

1. Take Action Immediately: When you sense a problem, take action immediately. Don't wait. Verse 7 says "Today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your heart. Verse 13 & 15 say the same thing;
2. Take Care of Your Heart – In verse 12, the phrase in the NIV says, "see to it." Watch out for. Be careful with. Take care of your heart. Make a careful examination of your heart. This is the American Heart Association Motto. It is the only heart you have, so take care of it. This is your responsibility. David asks God in Psalms 139 to "*search me and know my heart. Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.*" Here are some diagnostic questions for your heart.
  - a. **IS YOUR HEART COLD?** – Do you continually find yourself unmoved by the music of the worship service, or tuning out to the preaching of God's word? Are there a thousand other things you would rather be doing than gathering to worship in God's house? Has it been a while since God has spoken to your heart?
  - b. **IS YOUR HEART CRITICAL?** Do you find yourself always criticizing other people instead of dealing with your own faults? Do you find it difficult to overlook or forgive the offenses of others?
  - c. **IS YOUR HEART CYNICAL?** – always suspicious of the motives of others? Do you see the negative possibilities instead of the positive potential?
  - d. **IS YOUR HEART CONSTANTLY DOWN OR DEFEATED?** Never to be fake, but do you have laughter and joy, despite difficult circumstances.
3. Encourage One Another – the word here "to encourage" is a word *parakaleo* – we get the word paraclete, for the Holy Spirit. It is a word which means to come alongside another person to warn them, to bless them, and even to correct them if necessary. We need each other. You need God's family.
4. Hold On to Hope – Verse 6 is a holdover from last week's message, and it is a reminder to "consider Jesus." When your heart begins to get hard, look into his face. When you see him, three things will happen: 1) You will thrive in the most difficult of circumstances; 2) You will find courage to obey him, no matter the cost, and 3) You'll never fall out of love. Remember, when you hold on to him, you discover that he is already "holding on to you."

## Conclusion

Debbie and I have been married for 36 years. We dated 2 years before we were married. I remember a particular conversation we had in the early days of our relationship. Debbie paid attention better than I did. Every now and then she would say, "Are we drifting away from each other?" In my marriage, I've never forgotten that tender question. Every now and then, the Lord speaks to my heart, asking the same question. Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? I don't ever want to drift away.

## Invitation

1. Salvation – falling away here doesn't mean losing your salvation, but the loss of relationship. But you can hear his voice and draw close, but then drift downstream again, far away from Christ. Don't wait.
2. Rededication – Will you come home today?
3. Stepping Up – When you are in love with him, you will feed his sheep.