

The book of Hebrews is called “Hebrews”, because we don’t know who it was written to, but we do know that it was a bunch of Christians, who were well-versed in the teachings of the Jewish Scriptures (our Old Testament)... And this comes through in Hebrews, over and over again, as it refers to the Old Testament Scriptures and various incidents that happened in the Old Testament (both good and bad), helping us to compare similarities and differences between the Old Covenant (the way things used to be), and the New Covenant (the way things are, now that Jesus has come).

And it also helps us to grasp that the Old Covenant way of doing things, was all looking forward to the coming of Jesus...

Today’s Bible reading, refers to 3 separate events. They are events that reveal a pattern of discontent and faithlessness among God’s people. And the point is, **not** that they stumbled (because we all stumble in our faith now and then), but that it was a pattern of discontent and faithlessness. Things would be fine one day, and then the next, they would be discontent with their lot in life. And even though they had experienced God’s amazing miracles, they did not know God, and they did not trust God.

And it’s really important that we grasp this: The comparison is being drawn, to warn **us**, that history is in danger of repeating itself. God’s people of Israel started out following Him – they were released from slavery; They were set free and were following God,,, but they lost faith, and so they didn’t enter the promised land.

And the warning to these Hebrew Disciples of Jesus (and you and me), is “Do not do, what they did”.

Alright, so let's now read Hebrews 3:5 – 4:13. (7 slides)

Righto: There's a lot in that.

As I said before, the reading today is referring to 3 separate events that reveal a pattern of discontent and faithlessness among God's people.

The first two incidents are very similar to each other. In the lead up to them, God had rescued His people from slavery (and this is important. Remember, we've just talked about slavery. Last week we talked about how Jesus Christ has set **us** free from a lifelong slavery to the fear of death)...

Alright, God did a series of amazing miracles as He rescued His people out of Egypt. And I suppose the pinnacle would have to be the dividing of the sea. The people of God, then walked through on dry land, and once they were across, and while Pharoah's armies were pursuing them, God then closed the waters on top of the army, and they were destroyed.... An amazing miracle. And it's the sort of thing that should really increase a person's faith...

After that, would you have any more doubts about God?

Anyway, from there, they set out into the wilderness. And for 3 days, they found no water. When they eventually did find water, it was “bitter”, in other words, undrinkable. And the people grumbled against Moses. So, Moses cried out to God, and the Lord showed Moses what to do. He took a particular

log, and threw it into the water, and the water became drinkable.

Wow!, another miracle.

But, **this** was the beginning of a pattern.

- Discontent;
- no faith that God will finish what He began – no faith that The Lord would carry them through; and so
- God does another miracle, to once again, provide for their needs, and demonstrate His faithfulness to His people.

And I want you to notice this: After The Lord had made the water good (“sweet” is the word),

Exodus 15:25 (ESV) ..... There YHWH made for them a statute and a rule, and there He tested them, <sup>26</sup> saying, “If (conditional word) you will diligently listen to the voice of YHWH your God, and do that which is right in His eyes, and give ear to His commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am YHWH, your healer.”

<sup>27</sup> Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water.

Alright, so the promise of God is this:

- “Listen to His voice”.

- “Be obedient to His commandments and His statutes; and
- He will bless”.

And they got a little sample of the blessing, because in nearly no time, there they were, in a large, beautiful oasis, with oodles of water...

But there came time for them to leave that oasis, and they set out into the wilderness again. And they ran out of tucker. What did they do? Same old pattern, only this time it got worse. Oh, why did we leave Egypt? If only we could go back to Egypt. It would've been better to die in Egypt, than to die of starvation. At least we had food to eat...

And the Lord heard their cry, and He provided manna (bread from heaven, that would appear overnight, each morning for them to gather), And He also provided quail, in the afternoon.

The manna <sup>Exodus 16:31 (ESV)</sup> ... was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.

Alright, so the People of Israel had just experienced these miracles of provision by God, and yet they grumbled, and so, God would come through for them again... All on the backdrop of the promise of God and His faithfulness (if you hear his voice, keep His commandments).

And this is where we come to two incidents (that are very similar to each other). The first happened at Rephidim (or Horeb) (Exodus 17), and the second happened at Kadesh (Numbers 20).

Once again, the people are out in the wilderness, they've run out of water, and they're tonguing for a drink.... And they grumble. Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us – to die of thirst??? In fact, they're so angry, they're about to stone Moses...

And God told Moses what to do. Take your staff – the staff which you've used for my miracles before, and hit that rock with it, and water's going to come out of that rock. And that's what happened....

A little bit later, this time at Kadesh, it happened again... **BUT...** the second time, Moses didn't listen to God's voice. The second time, God said “**Tell** the rock to yield its water” – He didn't say “strike it”...

But Moses went up to that rock, and he hit it twice, and sure enough, water came out... But Moses hadn't listen to God's voice. He didn't obey God. And God said, “Because you didn't listen to me, you're not going to be the one who leads these people into the promised land.”...

And Moses died, just before Israel eventually entered the promised land.

The two locations where the water came out of the rock, God renamed to Meribah (quarrelling) and Massah (testing)...

And these were massive events, in the history of Israel – A song was written about them (Psalm 95). And that Psalm was quoted in our bible reading today...

The significance of these events, is they revealed a developing pattern of discontent, and faithlessness, and of wanting to return to things of the past. God's people, although they had experienced all these amazing miracles, did not have faith in God.

Which brings us to the third incident, where this developing pattern of faithlessness, came to its logical conclusion. And they did not enter the promise of God.

The People of Israel finally got to the verge of the promised land. And they sent spies in, to get the lay of the land. And when they came back, the dominant voice was "They're big/strong / the cities are well defended / I don't think we can take them...." However, there were two faithful men (Joshua & Caleb), who spoke with faith. **"The Lord is with us; do not fear them."**<sup>i</sup> ...

But of course, the People of Israel, their developing pattern of faithlessness, came to its pinnacle. They were too scared to obey the voice of God. They would not enter the land, because they were scared. And they even decided to elect new leaders, who would take them back to their slavery in Egypt<sup>ii</sup>...

And the song that was written about this:

## Psalm 95: (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> For forty years I loathed that generation  
and said, "They are a people who go astray in their  
heart,  
and they have not known my ways."  
<sup>11</sup> Therefore I swore in my wrath,  
"They shall not enter my rest."

So, let's come back to Hebrews.

Psalm 95 (quoted in Hebrews), is a song about "**today**"...

I am here to tell you, that the most important day, that you will ever have, in your walk with God, is "today"... If you and I meet again tomorrow (Monday), I would say to you tomorrow, "The most important day, in your walk with God, is "today" (Monday)... And if I were to meet with you the next day "Tuesday", I would say to you, "The most important day, in your walk with God, is "today" (Tuesday)... Are you with me???

Being a Christian – being a Disciple of Jesus, is not about a spiritual highlight in the past, or a failure in the past (for that matter) – it's about walking with the Lord, day by day. That's what discipleship is.

**Today**, you may experience the blessing of God; or **today**, your faith may be sorely tested... That's the pattern of Christian life – some days are going to be wonderful blessings; Other days are going to be dreadfully tough... And what matters, is not my attitude toward God yesterday, what matters is my attitude toward God, **today**.... And so, the

People of Israel, had a pattern, that when they were tested, they went down the **faithless** path...

And a key word throughout this passage is “today”...

BTW, here’s a little hint: whenever we read a Bible passage, if we have trouble understanding what it’s about, look for repeated words / phrases / concepts / ideas, within the passage... And I don’t mind telling you, in this passage, I don’t think I have ever come across so many repeated key words, phrases and concepts...

- Today 6;
- Harden (or do not harden) 4;
- Rebellion; rebellious; disobedience; go astray; evil; deceitfulness of sin; provoking God 10;
- Test (or testing) 2;
- Heart 5;
- Rest (or rested; or failing to make it to the rest) 11;
- Faith (or lack of faith/confidence in God) 5
- Hear / heard / speak / message / voice / listen / word of god 14....

Are you getting a picture????

And it’s all held in context of the conditional nature of being God’s house.

Our opening verse today, was our closing verse last week **And we are his house, if** (that pesky conditional word again)



we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

V<sup>7</sup> Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,  
And it quotes Psalm 95...

What's Psalm 95 about? It's about "**Today**"... It's about hearing God's voice, and being faithfully obedient to God, **today**... It doesn't matter, that you failed God yesterday. Today, is a new day. Hear the gracious voice of God today – Repent, receive forgiveness, and move on, being faithful to God today. And let this be the new pattern for you: where you will be faithful to The Lord tomorrow; and the day after; and the day after...

Nor does it matter how **grand** my experience of God was yesterday. What am I going to do when I hear God's voice today? Act in faith? Or is my heart going to be hardened, and be disobedient and faithless???

Now, the reasoning of Hebrews, is all built on the premise/principle/foundation, that God speaks... Christianity isn't merely a religion built on ancient wisdom... It is all built on the premise that God speaks.

*Now, if I was a leader of a "cult", I would tell you, "God speaks through me. Listen to me. If you obey me, you're obeying God..." ... But I'm not a leader of a cult. I am a disciple of Jesus, amongst other disciples of Jesus. And so, I'm going to tell you, "God does not speak through me. I do not have from God, a special "revelation" today" (and beware*

of anyone who claims they do)... The lesson in Hebrews, is that God speaks through His **Son**, and that God speaks by His Holy Spirit, through the Scripture....

Right back, in Chapter 1:1 (this is how the book of Hebrews begins)

**1** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son....

And now, in this section, as he quotes Old Testament Scripture, he introduces it by saying “<sup>7</sup> **Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says**”....

And so, the premise is, “God speaks”. He speaks to us:

- through the words of Jesus and the teachings about Jesus recorded in the New Testament; and
- by His Holy Spirit in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Way too often, we humans crave and go in search of a “special” word from God (a special revelation that nobody else has)...

But, God has already spoken. Therefore:

- Read His word;
- Know His word;
- Live by His word;
- Obey His word.

Righto: So, let's come to the main point that this passage is clearly making.

In fact, to try and make it say anything else would require some clever footwork and slight-of-hand...

And I may upset a few people today. I'm going to ask you, to put aside, your own theology. I must not let "What **I** believe about God", override "what God says". It is critical, that we hear the voice of God, in His word (as it truly is).... And having said that, if you believe in "Once saved, always saved", Hebrews is going to really mess with your theology...

The concern, in this section of Hebrews, is that those who come to faith in Jesus – who come to a **genuine** faith in Jesus – who start out following Jesus – who are "Brothers" in Christ.... ,, The concern is, that they should hold fast to what they believe... Why? Because if they do not, then they will not receive the heavenly reward...

And vv12&13 talk about our responsibility as Brothers and Sisters in Christ (our responsibility to each other): <sup>12</sup> **Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, (remember, he's talking to Christians here)**

<sup>12</sup> **Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day,**

as long as it is called “**today**,” that none of **you** may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Alright, you and I, have a responsibility as brothers and sisters in Christ, to exhort one another (to urge one another on),,, And the danger we are to warn one another against, is the loss of faith...

Sin, has the ability to deceive (even brothers and sisters in Christ)... The deception of sin, can cause us to be enticed by other things – to begin a pattern of discontent with God’s ways, and to even fall away from faith altogether (to want to return to things of the past).

As Brothers and Sisters in Christ, we should exhort one another – we should urge one another on, because V14 says:

**<sup>14</sup> For we have come to share in Christ**

Alright, the word “share” is like having the deeds to a property – to have a share in Christ, is an absolute right,,, but then comes this pesky “conditional word” “if”. **<sup>14</sup> For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.**

(That’s pretty clear.)

There is a common belief among some of our Christian brothers and sisters, “If you ever had genuine faith, you will always have genuine faith”. “And if it looks like a person has lost their faith, it means they never had it in the first place”...

But when we listen to the voice of God (in His Scriptures), what God says, is quite different. <sup>14</sup> For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

This is not a picture of a person who **never** had confidence in Jesus. It is a picture of a person who had an original confidence, and it's a confidence that we must be held onto, through to the end.

And the whole purpose of Hebrews taking us back into the Old Testament, is to confirm, and to back up what he's saying. The people of God, are tested... Being a Christian isn't easy. And testing, reveals the true state of a heart.

And so, the comparison is made.

- The people of Israel, were set free from slavery.

We have been set free from the lifelong slavery of the fear of death.

- The good news came to the people of Israel (The Lord would lead them to the promised land, where they would have rest).

The good news has come to us. (Eternal life in Glory, with Jesus Christ).

- The faith of the people of Israel, was tested (hunger; thirst; fear of their enemies).

Our faith, will be tested. (Persecution; troubles; strife).

- The people of Israel were saved and began the journey with Moses. They had seen and experienced the gracious miracles of God.
- When they came to the promised land, they didn't enter it, because they were not united by faith with those who listened to God.

And the message for the Hebrews, is to listen to God; obey God; exhort one another, to obedience and faith (in other words, be united by faith).

And Hebrews 4:6 pulls all this reasoning together:

<sup>6</sup> Since therefore it remains for some to enter it (the promise), and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, <sup>7</sup> again he appoints a certain day, "Today," .....

"Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts."

The more we study the Scriptures, and the more we come to understand what "grace" really is, the more we realise, that the only part we play in being saved/gaining eternal life, is "faithfulness"... When Hebrews quoted Psalm 95, it was quoting the word of the Holy Spirit of God:

'They always go astray in their heart;  
they have not known my ways.'

How do we know God? How do we truly know God? Well God speaks. How does God speak? Through His Son, Jesus Christ, and through His Holy Spirit in His word.

How can we know God? In brotherhood with the Son, that's how we know God.

The grace of God, means that Salvation/eternal life (forgiveness of sins), is a free gift.

And here in Hebrews, it talks in terms of “rest”. A Sabbath rest actually... When God created the universe, He did His work for 6 days, and then on the 7<sup>th</sup>, He rested. And I'm glad God brought in the law of the Sabbath. That's why we now have weekends...

But the Sabbath, was really looking forward to the coming of Jesus.

To become a Christian, is to experience the grace of God. It is a grace that relieves us from trying to work to be good enough, to somehow earn salvation... Are we agreed on this? I could never be good enough, to atone for my sins. I could never do enough good, to make up for any of the wrong I have done... And neither can you...

And that's why Jesus died. Jesus suffered and died on the cross, to pay the penalty that my sins deserved. – That's grace.

And V<sup>9</sup> So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, <sup>10</sup> for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

But here's the thing: Consider the paradox of "the grace of God". There is nothing inactive about "grace", and there is nothing inactive about "resting" in the grace of God...

We find that paradox in V11:

<sup>11</sup> Let us therefore **strive** to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

Alright, remember he's writing to Christians. They've already come to faith in Jesus. And it is to Christians, He brings us this paradox of resting in the grace of God.... If we do not **strive to enter that rest**, ...we may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

It's a paradox, isn't it – striving to rest. But not really. We cease striving to earn our own salvation, but as God's people (who have been saved) we strive in faith. (Paul used to talk about "running the race that is before us"). As God's people, in faith, we keep on following Jesus; we trust Him in everything; and when we hear God's word, there's no debate to be had – we obey.

And our reading concludes with the power of God's word.



<sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

<sup>13</sup> And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

I said earlier, “God doesn’t bring His revelation through me. God speaks through His word.”

And I don’t know about you, but every time I dig into the Scriptures and read God’s word, if I allow God to speak, instead of inserting my ideas into it, God’s word cuts deep.

- When I hear the word of God, telling me to trust God, it really lays bare, the times I haven’t.
- When I hear the word of God, outlining His design of righteousness & goodness & justice, His word cuts me deep, and exposes my lack of the same.
- When I hear God commanding me, “Love me with all of your being, and love your neighbour”, His word exposes the selfish love I have...

God’s word cuts deep.

But, we rejoice, because God’s word, is **also** a word of grace and mercy and love.

And on that note, here's a little hint of what we're going to study next week:

<sup>14</sup> Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

The message I have for you today, is “the most important day, that you will ever have, in your walk with God, is “today”

Yesterday's failures, move on. Confess them to God, in faith.  
Live in faith today;  
Hold on to the faith you have in Jesus, today;  
Hear God's word to you , today; and  
Obey God's word, today.

Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,  
Your Word is indeed, sharper than a double-edged sword.

And how we respond to Your Word,  
reveals our hearts as we truly are.

Lord Jesus,  
we thank You, that for our sake,  
You were nailed to the cross.  
And we praise You, that You are raised from the dead.

Lord, we confess that we have not always been faithful.  
There have been times when we have rebelled against  
you.  
God forgive us.

And Lord, I thank You for today.  
I thank You for the forgiveness you offer us, today.  
I thank You for Your faithfulness to us, today.  
And Lord, we commit ourselves to You, today.

Lord, by Your Holy Spirit,  
speak to us through Your word,  
and keep us strong,  
to follow You,  
today, tomorrow, and every day,  
through to the end.

in Jesus' Name,  
Amen.

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- <sup>i</sup> Numbers 14:6
- <sup>ii</sup> Numbers 14:4