

**Hardened Hearts**  
**Hebrews 3:12-19**  
**October 13, 2024**

What is the writer to the Hebrews referring to when he talks of evil in the Hebrews? I know he refers to those in the desert, in the wilderness wanderings as we refer to them sometimes. We know the Israelites were in the wilderness for 40 years. We know that prior to those 40 years, there were 12 spies one from each of the 12 tribes sent out to scout out the promised land. We remember that of the 12 only two thought, knew, that the Lord was their God and He, being the creator of all things, the one who saved them some 400 years before by His powerful hand. He had a slave boy, Joseph be installed as second in command of the Pharaoh of Egypt. Later He delivered them through the hand of Moses a murderer, one whose speech was a little off. He delivered them from the great Pharaoh of their day. This true God would be with them to deliver the land, the land promised by Him, into their hands.

Two out of twelve, so the majority won out. Moses reminded them about how it was the Lord. But because of the ten's lack of trust in their great God, God became angry with them and the people who believed them instead of God. As the text from Hebrews points out, those who rebelled, all but two of those who were 20 years and older, those who were considered adults were condemned to die in the wilderness but those younger would get to see it. It was called His rest, as after wandering around the wilderness for those 40 years, they could now rest in the land promised to Abraham so many years before.

What was it that they didn't do that the writer to the Hebrews was bringing it up in the text we have for today? It was unbelief, an unbelieving heart that runs the risk of falling away from the living God.

The writer talks of that unbelieving heart that was hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. What does that sinfulness lead to? Yes, a hardness of heart but what was that hardness against? It was against the Son of God, Christ Jesus.

The writer makes the point that originally those he was writing to, did believe, just as those who crossed the Red Sea believed that it was an almighty God who had delivered them from their captors and opened away, on dry ground for them to cross the Red Sea. They believed but guess who was at work in them? It was the unholy trinity, the devil, the world and their own sinful natures.

This text is a warning to the Hebrews he was writing to. He wanted them to not close their ears, or harden their hearts to what Christ was bringing them through His Word. They were to listen and to pay attention as to not listen, would lead to hearts, hardened to Jesus and what He came to do, what they had heard that had brought them around to trusting in Jesus in the first place.

The writer must have heard or seen things in them that he felt it was showing up as the beginnings of unbelief on their part. He wanted to help them to see the future if they forgot where they were from.

We think of them going off the rails. I remember we had a board fence, when I was growing up, made out of 2X6s. We would like to try to walk that fence as it angled up the hill to the gate. What did it take to fall off? Not a whole lot. Get your eye off the fence, that 1.5" edge of the 2X6, even for a little bit and you would be heading to the ground.

Those many who left Egypt found themselves literally underground as they fell in the desert. It was a great reference for whom the writer to the Hebrews was addressing with His letter. It was great for them but as we put ourselves into this text, is it a good reference for us?

Most of us here were given faith by God, not by crossing the Red Sea on dry ground but by a little water connected to God's Word. We were brought into His family to live out our lives in Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith who came to this earth as a baby to grow up without sin and then to be nailed to a cross to suffer and die so that the promised life, promised to us in our baptisms would be the promise of a new land to come when the Lord comes in judgement and then in the creation of a new heaven and earth.

Yes, it is promised to those who believe a new, promised land, a land even greater than the land promised to the Israelites. We count on that as people of faith but we too can fall into sin, the deceitfulness of sin that seems to tempt us to forget who we are in Him. Is it just a temporary hardening. I pray it is only that and as the Holy Spirit tweaks your consciences, you will listen to Him.

Yes, we have those sins that seem to haunt us. We so easily fall into them and yet He is faithful and just to forgive us those sins too. Yes, those sins can become almost no sin and that is a problem. It is those sins that truly deceive us in to thinking that they aren't that bad, that they aren't hurting anyone and yet who are they hurting?

Not only ourselves but the Lord who wants nothing to cause a hardening of our hearts. He paid too much for them. He has plans for you to have you share what He has given you to give to others.

As you may know I was in Colorado this past week. At the conference there were speakers. We had the speaker for the Lutheran Hour and a professor from Concordia Seminary as well as some pastors from the Rocky Mountain District that had some breakout sessions.

The speaker from the Seminary was the general speaker for the pastors. His name is Dr. Peter Nafzger who is the associate professor of Practical Theology and director of Student Life. He talked a lot about building community especially in the Church.

You might wonder how community and the church have to do with the text for today. We know the people as a group, as a community, turned against God and God was angry with them as they seemed to forget God. You have seen it where it takes one to go off the tracks and before long they will lead another away if not dealt with.

In a community that cares about each other and about God, there should be somewhat of a check against an individual going astray if there are those around them that know them and are willing to express their concern when someone they care about is going on their own way away from the Lord.

If we think about it, a church should be a place as some say where people can go to receive help for life. The world out there is not going to help when it comes to saying anything as the world usually turns a blind eye to those who are getting themselves in trouble with God or in trouble general. No one wants to get involved as it may cause hard feelings especially if you don't know them.

In the church it should be a little different. People come here to hear from the Lord and partake of His supper for us for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of our faith but is that all the church is for?

When we come to the Lord's table, yes we go to receive Christ's body and blood but we don't come as individuals, we come as a group that in its coming together, we are confessing that we believe the same thing and as a group we want to be a part of the person's life we are partaking with.

I know we may not think about it that way but it is the church where we should find those that instead of condemning us for our sins should help us to confess our sins

and receive absolution from God and the encouragement from us who come here as well.

How well do you know others who come here to church? What might happen if you knew them better, knew more about them? Might that help you to see when something is wrong or they might recognize something going on with you? Do you even know all who come here each week? Think about going up to them and find out something more about them. Shouldn't a community such as ours know each other, find out about likes and dislikes and about families and struggles and joys a person is having so that they have more than themselves to count on and share?

Notice how the writer of the text for today uses such words as "exhort one another", and we have come and we hold our and even the "you" should be translated as "all you all ". He is wanting for them to see themselves as a community of believers.

We confess our sins, yes as individuals, recognizing our sins and counting on God to forgive our sins because of Christ but if we just come as individuals and have no encouragement for others we are here with, then what do we have? We are alone and are easier to be swayed by the devil, the world and our own sinful nature.

What happens in a family if they never sit down to eat together? What happens to that closeness that should be there? How many of you found about others over a meal? For one thing you are usually looking at each other. You are enjoying something to eat and it is good to have a conversation between bites and sometimes while trying to get a bite chewed up or swallowed. It is even good for a husband and wife to sit down with over a meal to build that little community.

The writer to the Hebrews wanted the people he was writing to, to check themselves to see if they too might be sliding away from God as like us, there are so many things out there that seek to draw us away from God. Yes, those things look so much like it is what we want but what we want may not be what we need especially things that lead to sin.

We have the church with Word and Sacrament to keep us on the straight and narrow but we also have each other to support us as we go about our days. Get to know those you don't know. You may have some things in common that will help you and even them as you go about life that is challenged by the world that would seek to draw you away from the living God. Look to Jesus to keep you from hardening your hearts to Him.