

Prayer

Save us O Lord, from the perils of giving in to temptation. Keep us from misunderstanding what You have said to us, twisting the truth of Your revelation, gaining satisfaction from leading others astray, or from enjoying the fruits of our own rebellion. Keep our souls and spirits firmly fixed on the example of Christ our Saviour; until all things come to their end: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Appointing Leaders

Give thanks to God today for the wonderful way in which He is working throughout many churches, inspiring some great leaders to guide His people into the deeper things of faith, worship and service. Pray for all such leaders of whom you know, and ask the Lord to bless them, cover them with His love and guide them in all they do in their leadership of service.

Meditation

The politician works to organise and control the world.

But Christ knows the true path of history;
He sees the sin which ruins human plans.

The economist gives advice based on financial projections.

But Christ knows the true value of everything;
He holds the future in His hands for us to see.

The entrepreneur seeks opportunities to generate wealth.

But Christ is the source and the destiny of wealth;
He gives everything away with incomparable love.

The celebrities believe they have conquered the world.

But Christ alone knows how true victory is won;
He is known by the Cross throughout the world.

The impact of 'great' people we read about each day,

Is set against the only real measure of fame;
The millions of lives saved forever by Christ.

Bible Study - Hebrews 3:7-11

⁷ Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, 'If only you would hear His voice today, ⁸ your hearts might not be stubborn as in the Rebellion, the day of testing in the wilderness, ⁹ where your ancestors tested me and saw what I did ¹⁰ for forty years. For this reason I was angry with that generation, and I said, "Their hearts are always wandering because they do not know my ways."¹¹ So I swore in fury, "They will never enter my rest."

Review

The first few verses of Hebrews 3 are a wonderful encouragement to God's people, the Church, to follow and affirm Jesus Christ as the source of all confidence and hope (3:6). What follows in our verses today is a warning not to behave in the same way as the Israelite people of old. It is possible that as with all Christian fellowships, the churches to which the letter to the Hebrews was written had people within them who expressed doubts and uncertainty about what was happening in the church, even in those first few decades after Jesus died. These verses are a staunch warning to such people not to make the same mistakes as the people of Israel when they were in the desert, and rebelled against God (3:8).

Most Jewish people looked back on the Exodus from Egypt as a 'golden' era in the life of the People of Israel. Having endured the hardships of slavery, the people were liberated in power through the miracles performed by Moses on their behalf, enabling them to journey towards the

'Promised Land'. Some of the great religious festivals of Jesus' day celebrated this great salvation and the journey through the wilderness. Indeed, the 'Passover' festival at which Jesus died for our salvation was a Jewish celebration of their own salvation from Egypt at the time of the Exodus! However, the writer of Hebrews wanted to remind God's new people, the church, that the same mistakes made by the People of Israel after they were liberated, should not be repeated by God's people after they had been saved by Christ.

Most of our passage today (apart from the first six words) is a quote from Psalm 95:7b-11. This Psalm was used as an introduction to worship on the Sabbath (Saturday) in most synagogues at the time of Jesus. If you look this up you will find that the Psalm begins wonderfully with words not unlike many of our modern worship songs today 'Come, let us sing to the Lord, let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!' and continues with joyous worship until half way through verse 7. Then suddenly, the tone changes, and God's worshipping people are challenged not to be stubborn, or put God to the test, or go their own ways (Psalm 95:8-11), exactly as in our passage today.

It seems that a stubborn heart, a desire to test out God, and a preference to follow the obvious human way of doing things, are all common forms of spiritual doubt. If we have not experienced these problems ourselves, then we will have been tempted by them and also seen the fruit of such behaviour in others and in our church fellowships. Beware, says the writer to the Hebrews, for Scripture (Psalm 95) says that there are consequences to such behaviour. Although the word 'sin' is not mentioned, the passage states clearly that stubbornness leads to 'rebellion' (a word often translated as 'sin' in the Bible), just as the hard hearted Israelites objected to God as soon as they faced problems in the desert. In verse 7, the 'Rebellion' refers to what happened at Meribah and Massah (Exodus 17:7). The consequence of this and other sins led to a prolonged experience of 40 years 'in the wilderness' for the People of Israel.

Hebrews concludes by warning us that if we dwell in such behaviour, even after receiving the glorious benefits of Christ's salvation, then we may never 'enter his rest' (3:11). For the ancient people of Israel, this meant reaching the Promised Land. For Christians, this means the promise of eternal life in God's new Creation. However, we must bear with the writer of Hebrews, because he has much more to say about all this in the coming verses!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. It is interesting that Hebrews describes a Psalm with the words 'the Holy Spirit says ...' What does it mean to say this about Scripture?
2. Discuss what you remember of the sins of the people of God during their time in the wilderness (see, for example, Exodus 17, 18 and 32).
3. Is there much evidence in the life of the church of the three sins mentioned in this text? If so, how, when and where?

Discipleship

Most of us know what it is to struggle with doubts, and we should not deny that people do. However, part of this struggle is the knowledge that doubt is not faith, and can never be faith. Doubt, whether it shows itself in stubbornness, testing God or going one's own way, is not a place of comfort and nor should it be. It is part of the journey of the soul which we need to leave behind if we are to experience the fullness of our salvation and the glory of peace with God. In some parts of the church, doubt is heralded as a form of spiritual maturity, but it is not. It is a place of ultimate insecurity in which there is no rest.

Final Prayer

Your love, O Lord, draws me onwards, through the fears and doubts, the trials and temptations of life. Your love draws me to the Cross where, inexplicably, I have nothing left to give You from my mind or my heart. I am empty before You, but You fill me up! All praise be to You, O Lord most High! AMEN