

## Harden not your Hearts - Hebrews 3:7-19 - 16 August 2015

Today we continue our series in the book of Hebrews and we arrive at Chapter 3 verses 7 to 19. So if you are new with us, we are sort of a quarter of the way through the book of Hebrews, we're at chapter 3 verses 7 to 19. Now, before we start the sermon proper, I want to introduce it by means of a little video so enjoy and ah... may I have the lights turn down please.....(video plays)

I wonder if this looks like you..... on any Sunday, alright, struggling to keep awake and so embarrassed to discover that you are actually falling asleep. Well, many of us may be physically in church, but mentally we're not ready or worse still, we may be mentally ready, but our hearts are not ready, our hearts are not receptive towards the Word of God, in other words our hearts are hardened against God.

This morning I want us to consider the subject of hardening our hearts, because that's what Hebrews Chapter 3 talks about... "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts"... the idea of hardening is a simple one. You know how it is with ... for all guys who are here, you have to go through NS and in NS you've to do pull-ups before you have your meals right.... and if you do many, many pull-ups, many, many times, there will be calluses that we formed on your hands. It is thickened hardened skin initially is very sensitive, initially, it's painful to do so many pull-ups, but after a while when the calluses develop you're numb to the pain, you're insensitive to pain and so it is that when we come to church and when we hear God's Word, there can be a development of callousness, a development of hardening in our hearts and so the author here in Hebrews Chapter 3 says..."do not harden your hearts".....

Today, I am going to look at this hardening of heart in three different aspects. They are all found in the passage before us in Hebrews 3. Number one.... We're going to look at The Example of Hardened Hearts. Number two..... we are going to look at The Explanation of Hardened Hearts and then finally number three.....we are going to look at The Exhortation against Hardened Hearts, so the example, the explanation and exhortation. If you're taking notes, this is easy for you to follow along, I do that because it's a rather long passage and we need to break it up to make it easier for digestion today.

So let me start first, The Example of Hardened Hearts. Now who in the Bible in biblical history demonstrate hardened hearts the best? Who are the people who are most unresponsive towards God, when they should really be most responsive towards God? Who are they? The author of Hebrews raised this example.... he quotes from Psalm 95..... if...."therefore, as the Holy Spirit says" he's saying this is what the Scriptures were

given in the Old Testament were given.....it's what the spirit tells us, and he refers to a scene many, many years ago, he says "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing or temptation in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for 40 years". The example he is raising here is the example of Israel during Moses' time. Israel was led by Moses out of Egypt to enter the Promised Land. They were having all kinds of wonderful things happening around them, but the Bible says they are the examples of hardened hearts. It's a tragic sad story of hardening. It's a tragic sad story of unbelief... you say why is it tragic? It's tragic because of all people they should be the last to disbelieve God. I mean imagine this....they were a people who've witnessed the "ten plaques". The "ten plaques".were phenomenal demonstration of God's power and might isn't it? ..... supernatural things happened. It is as if God is defeating the most powerful man on earth Pharaoh and defeating the various false gods of Egypt. I mean it was clear as daylight that the God of Israel is indeed powerful, then, God led Israel out of Egypt across the Red Sea. No one has ever crossed the Red Sea that way. No one has ever parted the Red Sea, but there they saw the Red Sea part and they saw how the Red Seas was swallowed up, the Egyptian army that followed after them. For 40 years, they would witness how God will provide for them by raining down food from heaven, raining down manna and how God supplies them with water from the rock that never dries up as they journeyed 40 years, food and water that was provided, their clothes were never torn, their shoes were never worn out, there was a pillar of fire by night, the pillar of cloud by day, I mean Israel is basking in this wonderful demonstration of the reality of God.

Yet these are the people, the Bible says who have hardened their hearts. I mean if you have never seen God, you might not know God, fair enough, maybe.... but they are a people who everyday see God. The pillar in front, the manna from the skies but they lived in rebellion, they tested God, they tempted God, they doubted God, they were always complaining and grumbling food is not nice, water is not enough, these enemies are too difficult for us. They put God to the test. In effect, they say God is a liar, he cannot be trusted. We cannot really believe him and so God is provoked, God is angry, his wrath is stirred up and he said... they always go astray, they have not known my ways. Yes, they followed Moses out of Egypt, but they've not really known my ways, they came out of Egypt, but they are not entering into my rest. They sin, they're disobedient. You say how bad is this? How many times did they really complain and murmur against God? Does God even keep track? I tell you, God keeps track. In Numbers 14:22..."none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs "..... You see God says it's inexcusable.....you saw my glory.... you saw my signs that I did in Egypt and also now in the wilderness, and yet you've put me to the test these 10 times and you've have not obeyed my voice. Over and over and

over and over and over and over and over and over and over again, you disbelieve me, you have always gone astray, say why did Israel go astray? Why externally there're so many signs, they still wouldn't believe? The answer..... It's about their hearts... their hearts are hardened against God. They have an evil unbelieving heart, it's so insensitive, it's so unresponsive, I mean so many stimuli to say yes God is real, trust him but they have hardened their hearts, it cannot penetrate through. So what happened to Israel? ....out of Egypt, but not into Canaan... out of Egypt, but not into rest, because God is provoked and he said in his wrath, he swore in his wrath, this is serious. This is serious.... he swore in his wrath.....they shall not enter my rest. And so Israel because of their hardened hearts are condemned to 40 years of wilderness, wondering, in fact, it is a funeral procession.

For 40 years, 600,000 men will all die, 600,000 men, 20 years and above, they are forbidden to enter Canaan and so every day on an average 40 to 50 men would die because they have not been responding to the Word of God, so the author here gives us this example of hardened hearts ... example means this is not just about them, it is about you, about us that we too can be like Israel, you see that.....someone who has a hardened heart is not someone who is out of church. He may be right here in church. In fact every day, every Sunday he's in church, every Sunday he hears the teaching of God's Word, he sees the signs, the wonders, when he sees peoples' lives change. This guy, that lady, wow! their lives are changed. Wow! There's a reality of answered prayer. Wow! There is beautiful understanding and logic from Scripture. It is helpful for life but you know what, even though that in the midst of all these things, their hearts are hardened against God. You today can be hardened against God, you're not like that animal trying to fall asleep, you're attending.....you're listening ....but your heart is shut out ... there is no blessing to you, to your life, to your heart because your heart is shut out! Can this be you? because you've always assume that because I come to church, because I've been baptized, because I've been to Bible studies, because I go to care groups, I should be okay but you know something, they were all doing these things with Moses, but they never really believe - could this be you?... could you have a hardened heart? They asked, Pastor, what then is a hardened heart really? What is the key characteristic about a hardened heart, that's where we come to the explanation of the hardened heart....

The author here tells us what a hardened heart really is all about. It's very simple. You've actually just read it. It says a hardened heart is "an evil and unbelieving heart".... a hardened heart that does not respond to God is evil, it is unbelieving...you say Pastor, how can this be? I mean, I want to believe in Jesus as God's son who came to die, to save us from our sins... I want to believe that but I don't have enough information, I don't have enough knowledge, I said if that is truly your problem if that is truly your case, fair enough, and we want to help you, we want to help you have the right understanding, answer the

questions as best we can and hopefully you will believe, but there may be many of you today who already have the answers, you are already clear that Jesus is God's Son who came to die for sins, to save us from sins, to lead us to God, and godliness, you've known all that, but still right up till today, you will not believe. Then this is what this hardened heart is all about. It's "an evil, unbelieving heart". You say, what's unbelief? Unbelief is not the inability to understand, but the unwillingness to trust. It's a big difference. If you can't understand, make sure you understand, it could be helped and that's what you come to church, that's why you hear the preaching of God's Word, but if you already understand and you are unwilling to trust, then don't blame it on your inability to understand.

My friends, you can play games before man, but God sees your heart and so Israel had all the opportunities to know about God.... I mean Moses is there, the evidences of God are all around them, but they were unwilling to trust. It was an evil unbelieving heart. Yes sometimes you said oh you know all I need ....I really need some signs, some wonders, I need some miracles to take place before I can really believe. When you look at what the Bible says, Abraham, this is about Abraham speaking to the rich man who has died and gone to a terrible place.... "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead", huh... this man who is dead says "oh, let me go back alive to tell my family, my loved ones, so that they do not end up where I am, let me go back and they will believe... Abraham says no, even if you go back, they will not believe because what they need is not more information, what they need is a heart that is willing to trust. Jesus himself likewise says though he had done so, or John says about Jesus though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe, it's not that inability to understand or the lack of proof is found throughout the Scriptures, but we often grapple with this problem of unwillingness to trust now Spurgeon puts it even more bluntly, pointedly, Spurgeon says, "Hearken, O unbeliever, you have said, I cannot believe, but it would be more honest if you had said, I will not believe your unbelief is your fault and not your misfortune".

Are you in church today, every Sunday, religiously and yet you still would not believe? Are you comforting yourself, by the fact that you are attending, by the fact that you have been baptized, by the fact that you are in care group that you are definitely fine, even though you know in your heart, you have not really entrusted your life to Jesus? You know this is an evil, unbelieving heart and God is provoked in his wrath, and you will not enter into his rest... that's a scary thought ....that's a scary thought that you could spend your whole life doing religious things, being in a religious environment, being in a Christian set up, yet be so far from the cries of Christianity and on the last day you may hear the Lord say, depart from me I never knew you. Why? because all along, you had an evil and unbelieving heart, so that's the explanation... is not a misfortune, it is a rebellion, it is your fault, it's evil....

now in the light of how dangerous this kind of a heart could be, the author now gives some encouragement or exhortation against hardened hearts. He tells us how we can guard against such a spirit and such an attitude.

The three things he says, in particular, number one, he says ... "take care, brethren" .. the word take care means take heed, watch out, be careful, don't presume, don't assume, don't be nonchalant about it, don't be "bo-chap" [ local dialect colloquial which means don't care ] don't take it for granted but beware, because there's always the deceitfulness of sin. There is always the possibility that if you're not watching, sin creeps into your life and sin hardens your heart against believing God. So be very, very careful watch out... someone says "there is no attitude more dangerous for the church than that of unconcern and complacency". I tell you there is nothing more dangerous than we all sit here and say well, the Bible says once saved always saved, I'm definitely saved. Now, once truly saved always saved... that's true, but the true Christian man does not take his salvation for granted. The Bible is full of exhortations for us to work out our salvation for us to make our calling and election sure for us to examine ourselves regularly to see if we are in the faith, there is no place for complacency and unconcern. He pursues, he continues to press on believing in Jesus, he takes care so if you're here today and you "bo-chap" and you feel that argh.... this is nothing to do with me ... I'm concerned about your soul. I believe, a true believer takes these words and he drives him to even a stronger pursuit for God, see Israel were with Moses. I mean who are those who rebelled? Who are those who did not believe? Exactly those who left Egypt and were led by Moses? Who are those who don't believe? In the streets in Orchard Road...yes but right here too, right here too... we may be people who don't believe and so the author says number one, take care ... don't presume don't be complacent, not only does he say take care... he also tells us to exhort one another.

So, knowing the reality that there can be the deceitfulness of sin hardening our hearts, causing us to, in a sense, look like we're departing from the faith, he says all the more we need to exhort one another , I mean keep one another in the faith as it were. The word exhort here is the word "parakaleo" most of you in GLCC long time, would know that this is a word that refers to the Holy Spirit, the comforter, the "parakaleo" the one called alongside us. So the idea here is in this marathon of faith is very difficult, is easy to give up, is easy to be sidetracked but we need one another to come alongside, encourage one another and point one another to Jesus Christ, the finishing line to keep our eyes fixed on the Savior so we need one another....this is the "parakaleo". I need you. You need me. We need one another to fight against the temptation or the tendency to be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

John Piper had a sermon from Hebrews Chapter 3, the same passage and he entitled his sermon "Eternal Security is a Community Project". Eternal security, to know that you are truly safe in Christ, to have this continued faith in Christ is what gives you the eternal security, but this eternal security is something that the whole community needs to be involved, or engaged in. It's a community project, we need one another. So he says "unbelief means failing to rest in Jesus as your greatest treasure". So what do you do in exhorting one another? Well, help each other believe, help each other believe means showing people reasons why Jesus is more to be desired and trusted and loved than anything else. To see the supremacy of Christ, for your soul....that's the theme of Hebrews, and he goes on to say "we speak, then, to others, to each other in ways that cause us to have hearts of faith in the superior value of Christ over all things. We fight to maintain each other's faith, by speaking words that point people to the truth and value of Jesus. That's how you guard against an evil heart of unbelief". No wonder eternal security is a community project put it another way, sin is an extremely dangerous power confronting the believer. It always attacks the individual much as wolves stalk a single sheep. Have you watch those National Geographic and a pack of wolves go for that one sheep... scary thought but you know, sin wants to do that for your life, wants to come into your life, and harden your hearts that you may not lose your walk with the Lord. Chuck Swindoll he says, "Reaching out and touching someone is not just a nostalgic, sentimental advertising slogan - it's a biblical mandate" we need this. We need one another. That's why community in the Bible is not an option. I don't see it as option in the Bible. There's so many reasons, not least eternal security, continued faith in Jesus. If you do not have a spiritual community, you are just like that single sheep, extremely vulnerable to the ravages of sin, exhort one another. This is not just, oh Pastor, I hear you exhort me, every Sunday, no, no, obviously this is not just your Pastor preaching, this is about one another-ing....it's about as often as you can, every day.

My friends, care groups are not to sit around and eat durians, only you can, and we should. But if you all you're doing in care groups is eat durian and chicken wing and "nasi lemak" and fried, fried rice, and.. and...and going to have food tours... you have shortchanged yourself because there's something far more superior, that is Jesus Christ. By all means, have lots of food but let all that channel us and point us to the warmth and the love and the generosity that we see in Jesus. If you do not do that, the deceitfulness of sin ravages your soul. Many of you in this church, I say this pointedly, you come for services, you feel that you're fed in the messages, but I tell you is not enough, no matter who stands in this pulpit, is not enough because the Bible tells us, you need the one "another-s", if you're complacent about your soul, you say, I don't need it..... I'm fine..... I'm strong, I'm healthy.... I'm a good Christian today....my friends, sin is deceitful it creeps

you, into your life and you never know when you're going to fall next. So, take heed, you could be next, you are vulnerable, take heed, be careful, exhort one another, be in such Gospel communities, take it seriously for yourself, if not for anything else. Not only that, thirdly, we are to hold on. Very simple.... take heed, exhort one another, hanging there...hold on tight.. that's what he says "hold our original confidence firm to the end" .....what do you mean "hold our original confidence" ...hold your faith in Jesus, whom you have believed, right to the end, don't ever let go.

See when you presume once saved always saved and you say, ahh.....it's okay... whether I believe or not I'm always saved. I tell you, that's the dangerous part because you may not be saved in the first place that complacent spirit does not belong anywhere in a regenerate heart. Truly born-again person will take heed, and will hold on. And the eternal security is seen in how God helps you persevere in your faith ... so hang on there and that's the consistent theme in the book of Hebrews and Chapter 2, pay closer attention, don't drift, remember that? Chapter 3, verse six hold fast that means...hold tight...Chapter 10, he says don't shrink back, but have faith, preserve your souls. Hang in there!

Some time ago I shared with you the difference between "Professors" and "Possessors". Professors are people who claim they believe in Jesus, but they never really believed. Possessors are those who really believe in Jesus and God lives in them. Now the two of them look so similar, isn't it? Every Sunday they come to church, they, they may say the same things, they may even go for baptisms but how do you tell a professor from a possessor apart? The test in Scripture.... professors eventually drift, possessors ensure unto the end. Jesus spoke about it. Jesus spoke about a kind of soil that is very amazing... he, he knows the soil conditions in Palestine in those days of course there are good soils where the seed is sowed and it brings off lots of fruits for a long time, wonderful, that's what it should be, but then there is another kind of soil that looks very much like that in that when the seed is sown, there is growth in the beginning. In fact, it grows very well....but it dies when the sun rises and scorches it. Why? because it has no roots and the reason why it has no roots is because that soil is very superficial. I mean they were terrains where there are rocks, huge rocks underground and just a thin layer of soil.... and Jesus says these are those who has thin soil, they hear the Word of God, but they never really believe, they receive the word initially with joy, but when persecution comes, they leave the faith, they were never really born again in the first place. Professors have the kind of heart when things are well when things are nice and rosy, you come to church, but when your son gets sick, when your financial situation is in crisis, when your wife leaves you. You say, I don't believe in God anymore but you are the most enthusiastic when you first came to church yes, but there were no roots, you were a professor not a possessor. Jonathan

Edwards has many complex sayings, but this is one of the simplest, I think ... "the sure proof of election is that one perseveres to the end".

How do you know your possessor? How do you know you're one of the elect? Well, the elect will keep believing unto the end. Now this Jonathan Edwards lived two three hundred years ago... so archaic, so not fancy. Let me give you fancy statement. Someone newer, Jack Graham he says "the faith that fizzles at the finish was faulty at the first". How do you like that ... all "f"s.... but very good and very true "the faith that fizzles at the finish was faulty at the first" - it was never real faith to begin with. That's why it stops. That's why you leave the faith. That's why you quit believing in Jesus because you thought it was the right faith but it was not real faith in Jesus Christ.

So, to guard against that evil unbelieving heart, Scripture tells us to hold on, hold on real tight. Spurgeon speaks about a man who was thrown overboard the ship, struggling in the waters, about to drown, when someone threw a rope into the waters for him. He grabbed it, he gripped it with all his might, they pulled him up on to the ship, but it was only after several hours that he could really relax the grip because he held it with such a death grip, that the strands of the rope were enmeshed with his flesh word. He held on for dear life and that's how it is we need to hold on to Christ, to hold on for dear eternal life and not give up. So take care my brothers and sisters, I speak this to you, exhort one another, be sure you have that dynamic in your life and then keep believing, won't you? Even in the persecutions, in afflictions, in the trials of life, in a great tribulation that the Bible speaks of and we have learned of in the book of Daniel, who are those who really belong to God? Those who keep believing to.....there..."Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts". Therefore, why is, therefore there for, because Chapters 1 and 2 tells you about Jesus, the greater one, the supreme one, the creator of all the ages, the sustainer of all things, the Savior of all men, who came and incarnated himself to be man, in order to be the captain of our salvation being the pioneer of our faith, opening the way of life across sin, death and hell. He came so that he can be my brother he came so that he can be a mediator in the light of who Jesus is in the light of what he has accomplished how he has risen from the dead. Therefore, do not harden your hearts. It's so unreasonable to harden your heart knowing Scripture and what God has declared about His Son.

My friends, are you still choosing to live in unbelief you say....when should I believe? The Bible says today, today doesn't necessarily mean 16th of August, today means now, now because you may not have tomorrow, you procrastinate today it may be too late tomorrow....you say why is it too late because you may die tomorrow, you may walk out of this Novotel hotel and get into a car accident, you said "choi, choi, choi" [ local dialect



colloquial which means touch wood ] but it's true, it can happen to anyone of us, you can be having a hemorrhage in the brain and die just like that tonight. You may not have tomorrow, but maybe, what the author is saying is, you may not have tomorrow because sin may come into your life and so harden your heart that you will not have a tomorrow, you just wouldn't listen, it might be too late. George Sweeting is a pastor from ... he's an ex-pastor from Moody Church in Chicago. He gave an illustration whereby he was at the Niagara Falls one spring it was just after winter, and the ice that is on the Niagara Falls are melting and breaking up and large chunks and blocks of ice are floating down and over the Falls and he noticed a strange phenomenon interesting phenomenon when lots of birds are flying to the ice, blocks of ice standing on it and what are they doing? You say....they're pecking the ice, chipping away the ice. George Sweeting looks closer and he realized that actually there are fishes frozen in the ice and so what the birds are doing are chipping away to get to the fish and eat the fish, sashimi at its best.

So when these blocks of ice are near the edge of the Falls they simply stretch their wings and fly away. Go back and start the cycle again wonderful buffet meal. He paid attention to one bird that seems to be delaying the stretching of his wings. I mean, he's been on that ice chipping away, eating, chipping away and right up to the edge never spread its wings until it really was the last moment it began to stretch off his wings to flap and the fly away. It was able to do so for a moment even lifting the ice for a while but eventually it got back ... it couldn't get out of the ice because it has stood on the ice for too long and the claws are frozen down into the ice and over the edge the bird flies or falls to its watery grave. Could it be you ? chipping and eating, chipping and eating and thinking that you can actually be all right tomorrow when it might be too late, today, today, now, my friends, you've been attending church, week after week after week, after week, you know who you are, you know that you are someone who has come out of Egypt being in a church environment, but you know you've not entered into rest, you know that you're not really trusted in Jesus you know there are no fruits of evidence of a Spirit-changed life then don't say it to yourself....tomorrow I will believe today because tomorrow may just be too late for you. It might just be too late for you.

How unreasonable, how inconceivable that when you see the reality of God's Word and what God has done in the lives of people you still resist Him. "They came to the gates of Canaan, but they never entered in, they came to the very threshold, but they perished in their sin, on the morrow they would have entered, but God had shut the gate, they wept, they rashly ventured, but alas, it was too late and so we are ever coming to the place where two ways part, one leads to the Land of Promise, and one to a hardened heart".

Let's bow for a word of prayer. The Scriptures declare today.... the Holy Spirit says...today if you would hear his voice, harden not your heart. I know you have been here your body is here your mind may be here, but my friends.... is your heart open to God? I can think of so many of you who come to church week in and week out and you know you have not been saved because you have not chosen to believe. You're comforted in that you're part of a Christian church. Somehow you feel secure just by that. But our God's eyes see beyond that, he sees your heart... today harden not your hearts .... Jesus the Son of God has come to die for your sins. The Bible says it is finished. He has paid for all our sins successfully on the Cross. On the third day He rose again victorious and He commands that this good news be preached amongst all the nations, to be preached today, this morning, right here for you so that you may be saved. How can we stand on the final day of judgement and say I do not know.... How would... can we.... say... stand at the final day of judgement and say, Lord I just couldn't believe. The holy God will say to you..... It's not that you couldn't, but you wouldn't. How sad because you come to the very threshold, you come a whisker away to escape hell into everlasting bliss in the heavens above and you wouldn't.

Today if you His voice harden not your hearts. My brethren pray for those around you, you know needs this prayer, who needs to make this decision who needs to cross from unbelief to trusting in Jesus. This morning I urge you, I appeal to you, I beg you, for the glory of God and for the sake of your own soul, repent of your unbelief and trust in Jesus. Value Him as the supreme one who gave His life who will grace you and save you and forgive you. Right now right where you are in your heart before God just you and Him, say Dear Lord ... forgive me for my unbelief.....I will repent and believe that's it. Call out to God and he answers you ... it's not about you deserving anything, it's not about you being worthy of it. Christ came to die, because you are absolutely unworthy in the first place. You're absolutely incapable of saving yourself but that's what it is all about. God loves you, He gave His Son for you unconditionally, repent and believe. I say to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ. Don't take your faith for granted, complacency has no place in the Christian's journey. Take care, be alert, watch out because there may be some sins in your life you're tolerating and it may very well harden your hearts. Take care, exhort one another, see that brother beside you see that sister beside you, he needs you she needs you. Your care group needs you...you need a care group, you need that Gospel community.... exhort one another, be one another's cheerleader, "parakaleo" pointing all of us to the supremacy of Jesus.

My friends, this morning, keep on believing. You may be suffering today you may be going through trials, it's tough, it's difficult. God knows it but keep on keeping on hold on to Jesus with a death grip as if were, don't let it go.... this is serious stuff. This is warning from Scripture and yet this is gracious words from Scripture for your soul.

Father, we thank you this morning for Your Word. Bless it now to each and every heart that there will be real faith, real repentance, real life in each and every one seated in his ballroom, oh God help us that we will not harden our hearts, we thank You in Jesus Name, amen.