

## HEADING HOME

**Speaker:** Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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**Scripture:** Hebrews 3:12-14

*Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. You must warn each other every day, while it is still "today," so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ.*

Heavenly Father, speak to us, Lord, through the inspiration and the leading of Your Holy Spirit. We ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

These 2 or 3 verses, in one sense are a standalone for us in terms of a message that we can have, or glean from it and say, "Okay! We need to be careful about unbelief and encouraging one another, and not lose the fact that we are partakers of all that Jesus has done for us." And that can be what we need to look at. Yet, I think that these verses also draw from a larger context that we need to pull in for us to be able to understand it completely for today as I feel the leading of God's Spirit in sharing this Word for you.

We're going to look at it verse by verse and then unpack them; then at the end of it see how we can distill an application that we must then be challenged to put into our own lives.

This message falls into four categories:

1. Unbelief
2. Encourage one another
3. Sin hardens you
4. We all share in that world that belongs to Jesus Christ

### UNBELIEF

*vs. 12: Take care, brothers and sisters, that there will not be in any one of you, an evil unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.*

- An unbelieving heart is evil.
- It leads to a falling away from God.

When we look at unbelief, we see that the bible says that unbelief is equal to evil, and that evil can make us fall away from God. Be careful then!

In other words, he is referencing something that happened before and is warning us. What is he referencing and what is the warning? He is referencing the rebellion that happened with the children of Israel when they came up with the unbelief that God could take them to the Promised Land. In vs. 8 we see this unbelief is referenced to Israel – as Israel did. *"Even though they saw My miracles, their hearts turned away from God, and they refused to listen to Him."* In spite of seeing everything that God had done for them, they turned away from Him and they said, "We don't trust You in spite of all that You've done bringing us out of Egypt, parting the Red Sea." Every miracle that God had done for them, they refused to allow those things to be the foundation for trust in God, that He would take them to the Promised Land.

Moreover, God says, “In My anger, they would not enter into His place of rest.” What happened then? They wandered in the wilderness for 40 years until that unbelieving generation died. Remember that they were still a covenant people, still a people who belonged to God, and yet what they forfeited with their unbelief was the beautiful rest that was assured to them in the Promised Land. Instead that unbelieving generation spent their time in the wilderness.

Therefore, unbelief, and the consequence of unbelief – it is evil, that having seen all that God had done in their lives, they still did not believe and trust God, and it led to them falling away from inheriting the beautiful promise of the Promised Land and rest.

## **WE OUGHT TO ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER**

3:13a *But encourage one another every day, as long as it is still called today.*

Encourage one another every day, not now and then, but every day as long as it is still today. We will see what that means. Different translations try to pull out the essence of this Greek word. *Parakaleo* is the word which has been used variously to mean send for, summon, invite or I beseech you, beg you, or I exhort you, admonish you, or comfort, encourage, console. There’s a wide variety of meanings that have been placed into this word. Yet, as different translations try to bring the essence of that Greek word – the NLY says “warn one another”. The NIV “encourage, the King James “exhort”, the CET “encourage, warn each other every day as long as it is available to you.”

In other words, as long as there is a day in front of you, continue to warn and encourage the brothers and sisters around you, because there will be a time when that day will not be there. As long as it is still called “today”, encourage, warn, exhort one another every day.

## **SIN, OR THE INDULGENCE OF SIN, HARDENS US**

3:13b *So that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”*

Why be so diligent in looking out for each other? Because vs. 13a said, “Encourage one another.” There are two things that we must know about sin: the first that it is deceitful, and the second is that it hardens a person against God. And the consequences of this was devastating for the children of Israel. They missed God’s blessing in their lives. So, be careful about sin.

## **WE LOSE ALL THAT WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN AS PARTAKERS IN CHRIST**

3:14 *For we have become partakers of Christ if we keep the beginning of our commitment firm until the end.*

The writer of Hebrews is particularizing this for us. He says, “In the same way that the heavenly riches have come to us, we have to make sure that we are faithful from beginning to end.” That we need to continue to follow after God. Because, he says, if only we hold firm our newborn confidence, which originally led us to Him, until the end, only then can we be partakers of all that Christ has given to us. “If we continue unshaken in this confident assurance from the beginning until the end,” is another translation. Or, “If we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end,” or “Only if we hold our first confidence firm to the end.” Or as the CEV puts it, “We were sure about Christ when we first became His people; so let’s hold tightly to our faith until the end.”

Hebrews is not a feelgood kind of book; it’s a book that will hit you straight. It tells you exactly what will happen if we don’t follow after the Lord – that there are consequences. In a sense, I think some of the writings of the book of Hebrews, writings of Paul in Romans (chaps. 5 & 6), and then in James as well, reminds us that if we try to settle on grace and think that the whole idea of grace is a condonement of our sin, then we are in for a surprise. Because grace never covers up sin. Grace is

available when we expose that sin and invite the forgiveness and cleansing of God through our confession of that sin. Grace is available in our weaknesses to make God's strength perfect – never to allow us to follow an evil, sinful or wicked lifestyle.

The writer of Hebrews, in many ways, pulls the rug out from under us by the many warnings that we see sprinkled all through this book. As we call ourselves disciples, followers, as ones who call Jesus our Savior, we need to be careful that we walk in like manner. And that there are consequences if we indulge in sin, because sin being deceptive, can cover our eyes and we can be led away from God and so lose the inheritance that Jesus has for us.

I don't want to go there. I just want us to look at these 4 verses and, in a sense say that I just need to be careful. I think the warnings that we see in the bible are meant to be kind of posts along the way that help us to know that we need to be careful. Here, take a good, hard look at our lives and see if there is deception of sin, see if there's hardness of heart. I'd like for us to look at scripture from that perspective in the remaining moments that we have. Let's ask the question: **What do these four verses have for you and me this morning?** Well, here it is.

### **1. Is there unbelief in your heart today?**

Are you doubting God's love, His provision, His care, His grace, His strength or His ability to lead you victoriously through this time? When I think about unbelief, I think that it's like the picture of sin lurking at the door. Satan waiting when we come to a difficult situation to try and drive a wedge between us and God, saying, "Really? Did God really say that?" as he said to Eve. Or "It doesn't have to be that hard. It can be easier – just fall down and worship me. Let's forget all about this cross thing," as he was trying to tell Jesus, "And I'll give you all the kingdoms of the world. Why worry about salvation and all of those lofty things." It's sin lurking at the door just as God told Cain: "Recognize that evil is lurking at your heart's door. But if you refuse to do what is right, watch out. Sin is crouching at the door eager to control you. And the fallout of this is a falling away from God. Beloved, you and I know that that is not the place for us to be.

What enticement is Satan offering you today? What wedge is he trying to drive between you and God? Has he been successful in driving that wedge between you and God? You know that you can't be happy in that place, not if you have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. The bible says, in vs.13, that you will get hardened if you continue in this way. All of us have seen loved ones, Christian brothers and sisters who have got hardened and bitter. Christian by name only, but are far away from walking with God, bitter, cynical, contentious of believers. Their words are dripping with anger, and their expressions are often hard, mirroring the hardness of their hearts. That's what happens when sin is allowed in – there's a hardness that comes into our lives. That's where we will be headed if we don't turn around from there? Can you? Is it possible to do a U-turn? We often think: Will He still accept me? Yes, He will. As the prodigal said, "I will arise and go to my father." It takes an act of your will to say this is wrong.

The second part of that is to be able to confess it and ask for forgiveness. I will arise and go to my father and I will say to him, "I have sinned against heaven and against you." To be able to go to God and say, "I have sinned." Today, when you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as Israel did. In vs.7 and vs.15, twice like bookends, he brings us – "today is the day" "While it is still today", you can do that U-turn and come back to God. But that time will run out at some point. If we have today, then today is the day.

How nice that we are meeting around the table, the table of mercy, table of rest. But we will hear as we come, also about 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." What a wonderful returning to God it would be

beloved, if that's where you are. If you've allowed that sin, allowed yourself to be deceived, and you're hardened, I wonder whether this table today is going to be the one to soften you and set you free.

## **2. We are to be encouragers.**

The scripture wants us to take cognizance of the fact that we are to encourage those who are going through hardships – those who are about to sin, maybe leave the faith, walk away from God's plans. In fact, some of the translations use exhort, which is a stronger word than encourage. Encourage could just mean to want to come alongside and say, "Hey!" But exhort is to do it more ardently, more fervently. Some translations use 'warn' which is to really get into the life of a person and say, "You're headed down the wrong way; you've got to turn." It says we are responsible for our brothers and sisters. And every day we look around and see if there's a brother or a sister in need.

I love that song of yesteryear that used to say:

If you see your brother standing by the road  
With a heavy load from the seeds he sowed.  
And if you see your sister falling by the way,  
Just stop and say, "You're going the wrong way."

You've got to try a little kindness  
Show a little kindness,  
Just shine your light for everyone to see.

Don't walk around the down and out  
Lend a helping hand instead of doubt  
And the kindness that you show every day  
Will help someone along their way.

Don't tiptoe around people who need our help. Be an encourager, an exhorter, a warner, so that we are constantly looking out for one another, brothers and sisters who have been deceived by the evil one. We need to be able to go and say, "Don't give in." Maybe even walk the mile with them. Why is it so important? Because we see at the end, that if they go down that path, they are in danger of losing their inheritance, of being partakers with Christ.

What does it mean to be a partaker with Christ? Scripture tells us what it is that we are partakers of.

2 Peter 1:4 *We are partakers of the divine nature.*

Hebrews 12:10 *We are partakers of His holiness.*

2 Peter 1:4 *We are partakers of the Holy Spirit.*

Hebrews 3:1 *We are partakers of the heavenly calling.*

1 Peter 4:13 *We are partakers of His sufferings.*

Ephesians 3:6 *We are partakers of God's promise in Christ.*

Philippians 1:7 *We are partakers of grace.*

2 Timothy 2:6 *We are partakers of the fruit.*

2 Timothy 1:8 *We are partakers of the afflictions of the gospel.*

1 Peter 5:1 *We are partakers of Christ's glory.*

All of these things are ours as an inheritance if we continue on as we were in the beginning to the end.

## **3. We need to be faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed.**

Let me ask you this as I ask myself: Do we need to recapture that first fervor that we had, that eagerness to read the Word of God, the excitement of conversations with God, the courage to trust Him in every situation? Whatever it was, he said, "I'm just trusting God to take me through." The desire always to do His will, "Nevertheless, not. My will but Thine be done." The joy of being in fellowship with Him, seeing His power manifested through our own moments of weakness, seeing the power of the Holy Spirit in situations and circumstances that we face, experiencing His peace when nothing added up, and yet, we experienced it. That first love that we had, have we lost it? Do we still have it? The writer of Hebrews is saying that we must have the same kind of fervor that we had in the beginning. We need to keep that to the end, to stay firm trusting God.

I wonder whether the prayer for us today should be: Lord, restore unto me the joy of my salvation. Give it back to me Lord. somewhere along the way, I've taken my eyes off You, somewhere along the way I've stopped trusting You, somewhere along the way I slipped back into the driver's seat. It's never been the same Lord. would You restore to me the joy of my salvation, the joy of being Your son, Your daughter, princes, princesses of the Most High God. Restore unto me the joy.

So beloved, three questions for us as we come to the table this morning.

1. Is your heart hardened with sin? Do you need to place it on the anvil and allow the hammer of God to break it and then re-mold you?
2. Are you doing enough as an encourager for the brothers and sisters around you? Do you need to do more in caring for your hurting brothers and sisters who may be deceived by the evil one?
3. Do you still have that passion and fervor of that first love, or is it just a dimly burning wick? Does it need to be recaptured, rekindled, fanned into flame? Or even re-ignited?

Let's go to the foot of the cross and think of Jesus on that cross, bearing my sin, your sin, arms outstretched in love for you and me, taking care of the penalty of death that was due to me and to you. But let's not stop there. Let's move on to the tomb, the empty tomb, the stone to one side, the wrappings folded neatly. But the Lord risen. He is not here. An empty tomb that shows that He had victory over death. Then beloved, let's come together at the table and celebrate in the bread and the juice, the reminder that our sins have been paid for and that He invites us into His presence where we can receive mercy and grace.

Let's pray together.

Father, prepare our hearts as we come to this table of mercy and rest. Lord, show us what we need to take care of before we come, so that when we come and partake, whatever it is that we need, whether it is the hammer against hardened hearts, or to be inspired, convicted about being more faithful in encouraging brothers and sisters, or whether it is to say restore unto me the joy of my salvation. Lord, that we would clear the decks to receive from You today. Prepare our hearts for we pray this in Jesus' precious name. Amen.