

Ben Libby

Sermon

August 16th, the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, and for training in righteousness, AMEN. Our sermon text for this morning comes from Hebrews chapter 3, starting at verse 7:

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness. ⁹ Your fathers tested and tried me, even though they saw my works ¹⁰ for forty years. That is why I was angry with that generation and said, “In their heart they are always going astray, and they did not learn my ways.” ¹¹ So I swore an oath in my wrath, “They will never enter my rest.” ¹² Watch out, brothers, so that there is not an evil, unbelieving heart in any of you that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “today,” so that none of you are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have become people who share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firmly until the end. ¹⁵ As it is said: Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.

This is the Word of The LORD!!! The congregation may be seated...Mercy, Grace, and Peace ARE YOURS from your God and Father and your Savior from sin, Jesus Christ. Dear fellow Redeemed...

How is your heart these days? Even though the heart is simply an organ, we often use imagery to describe it. If you are kind, then you have a big heart. If you aren't kind, then you have a cold heart. Or a black heart. Or a callus heart. Hearts can be stolen, broken, and mended back together. We use all different kinds of language to describe people's hearts, and it usually doesn't describe their blood pumping organ but rather how that person lives.

The Bible also says a great deal about what is in someone's heart. Sometimes, it is good to have a broken heart. David says in Psalm 51, **The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart-- These, O God, You will not despise. (Psa 51:17 NKJ)**, and also pleads, **Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Psa 51:10 NKJ)**.

When it comes to our relationship to our God, the condition of your heart really matters. Look at the man that wrote down those words of Psalm 51... David was “a man after the LORD's own heart, (1Sa 13:14 NKJ)”. When Samuel anointed David, he seemed not only like the least likely man in Israel to be the next king, but also the least likely member of his family. But

what did God remind Samuel? **For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1Sa 16:7 NKJ)**

The problem is that we cannot see as the LORD sees. We can't see into the heart. We can only see the outward appearance. Most of the time this isn't all that important. We should be more concerned about the plank in our own eyes than the speck that is in our brother's. What we do need to be concerned with is our own hearts. Is your heart one that is warm and beats for the Lord? Or is your heart a cold and made of stone? These are conditions that we need to be made aware of, because the LORD looks at them.

Hardness in the cardiovascular system is never good. This is why we concern ourselves with blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood clots. But it should concern us, even more, when it comes to our spiritual hearts. Sin, when ruling in a heart, will turn it to stone. It will try to linger there through deceitfulness. That is why our text this morning is making an appeal to your heart. Don't harden your heart to what the Word says, rather listen! It may break your heart, but it will also save it. It might stop your heart when you realize that

you are deserving of eternal death in hell. But then the Gospel comes in! Now, because our hearts have mercifully been defibrillated by Christ crucified, they can once again confidently beat for Him! - MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDITATIONS OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT O LORD, OUR STRENGTH AND OUR REDEEMER, AMEN!!!!-

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness.

We do not know for certain who the author of Hebrews was. But what is certain is the author's familiarity with the Old Testament. By my count, he quotes the Old Testament over 40 times in this one book! The first 5 verses of our text are in fact a quotation of Psalm 95. And even that Psalm is a call back to Israel, and their rebellion in the wilderness.

When you are talking about the nation of Israel's rebellion, you really have to be more specific because there were so many. This rebellion that is being spoken of is in reference to what is described in Numbers 14. They had finally come to the promised land, and they sent 12 spies to scout it out. 2 of the men came back and said they could take the land, Caleb and Joshua. But the other 10 said the opposite. They were afraid of how large the inhabitants were and how well-fortified the cities were. The people were angry. They decided to stone Caleb and Joshua, choose a new leader instead of following Moses, and return to Egypt. The LORD was so angry over this rebellion that He was going to destroy them all and make a nation out of Moses instead. Moses had to plead with the LORD to not destroy the Israelites, those same people who wanted to kick him out of office. The LORD relented, but all of those people would not enter the promised land.

Your fathers tested and tried me, even though they saw my works 10 for forty years. That is why I was angry with that generation and said, "In their heart they are always going astray, and they did not learn my ways."

Isn't it ridiculous that the people who witnessed the 10 plagues, the parting of the red sea, and giving of the two tablets of the law at Mount Sinai would still not trust the LORD? They saw incredible works that delivered them from slavery into the people with whom God dwelt with... You would think that they would remember to listen to the LORD who saved them.

It just really goes to show you that signs and wonders do not equal faith. It is in our nature to want a sign from God. It would be nice to receive some kind of divine assurance that whatever we were doing was right. But signs and wonders, as powerful as they may be, are not nearly as powerful as faith. We saw it in our Gospel reading this morning. What cities did Jesus condemn there? Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. These were the cities where Jesus lived when He first started His ministry. They saw great signs and wonders from Him, yet they still largely did not believe. When the Pharisees wanted to see a sign from Jesus, what did He say? **"An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." (Matthew 12:39)**

That is why sin is so dangerous. Hearts of stone do not melt over a miracle. Sin deceives the heart... **But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "today," so that none of you are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.**

Have you ever heard the phrase, "Listen to your heart?" It is a romantic saying. "Listen to what your heart tells you and you can't go wrong". Sounds good right? Except that is incredibly wrong. Why? Because our hearts are sinful! Sin lies to you. It tells you that you are in the right when you are in the wrong. If you refuse to hear what God tells you, and instead listen to your own sinful heart, you're going to keep on doing the wrong thing. Listening to our own hearts instead of listening to the Spirit starts the hardening process, which is indeed heartbreaking.

The most prominent example of this is the one whom those 10 plagues were meant to compel. Pharaoh would not let the Israelites go. Whenever one plague was relented from, Pharaoh would again harden his heart and not learn his lesson. After the

sixth plague, the heart of Pharaoh was hardened by the LORD Himself. His fate was sealed. His heart deceived him into not listening to the LORD to the point where God Himself harden his heart.

The Israelites in the wilderness, those cities in Galilee, and Pharaoh are all good examples of how not to act. They all had signs and wonders from God Himself, and they all still rejected Him.

Are we like them? This is a sobering question. Have we had God's assurance that He was with us and instead shrank away and relied on ourselves? Have we heard the words of Jesus and not applied them to our own lives? Have we seen signs and wonders performed in Scripture and forgotten the powerful lessons that they teach? The sad truth is that we are exactly like these people. We, just like the Israelites, have rebelled against the Living God. What is the price to pay for having a heart of stone that does not do what God commands? ¹¹ **So I swore an oath in my wrath, "They will never enter my rest."** It is commendation, plain and simple. As the book of Hebrews goes on to say **It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Heb 10:31 NKJ)**

What is the cure? How do you change a heart of stone? What is the answer to rebelling against the LORD? **Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: Today, if you hear his voice...**

It is as simple as listening here today. It is frustrating when people don't listen to us. As a parent, this is a fact of life that I live with every day. Having to repeat yourself time and time again is exhausting. I can't tell you how many times my wife and I have had to stress "YOU NEED TO LISTEN!!!"

But again, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. In certain environments, my hearing becomes quite poor. If there is a background noise of any kind, it is really difficult for me to hear someone talking to me. If there is a fan blowing, or a washer or dryer going, it is really difficult for me to hear someone who isn't really close to me. Maybe you have a similar experience.

But it is not just in the times when we are hard of hearing that it is hard to hear. People don't like being told that they are sinful. It reminds them of a truth that

they know but don't want to acknowledge. This is not just a problem in others. This is a "me" problem. We all are sinful and hate being comforted with it. Calling a spade a spade can be hard. It can be hard for us to point out someone else's sin. It can also be equally hard for us to be confronted with our own sin. The sentence, "You are sinful and need to repent" is hard to hear.

Yet this is our responsibility. The writer says here, **Watch out, brothers, so that there is not an evil, unbelieving heart in any of you that turns away from the living God.** That means it is our responsibility to make sure that our fellow Christians don't have such a heart. This can be impossible, because like was said before, only God can see into the heart. When they display sinful tendencies, it is our responsibility to bring the law of God to them. But we cannot always feel the pulse of a brother. Yet, this exhortation doesn't just extend to our relationships with our fellow Christians. Do you know whose heart you can see into? Your own! We need to make sure that our hearts are beating properly first and foremost.

When confronted with the hard to hear facts of the law, there are only 2 options. You can refuse to hear these hard words. This will in turn harden your heart. Or, you can listen. You can take those hard words to heart. If you do that, you will see that, yes in fact I am sinful and rebelling against the Living God. You will see that this act of rebellion means an eternity of punishment in hell. If you hear the law, your heart will be filled with sorrow. The Law is a heart breaker.

But it is in the environment of broken hearts where the Gospel comes alive! Yes, we were lost. But Jesus Christ the righteous came to earth! He was both God and Man. He lived a perfect life because He was God. He was tempted to give in to sin as we are, yet He never did. We sin every day. Every single day of His life He fulfilled that law. He always listened. He obeyed where we rebelled.

Dear Christians, the fact of the matter is that His heart was stopped so that ours could be kicked started! When Christ went to the cross to pay for the sins of the world, He performed spiritual open-heart surgery on a universal level. The heart of the sinless

Son of God ceased beating. The result of His sacrifice was that we are justified and received His righteousness. Our hearts of stone were defibrillated, and now they beat with love. Now, to the heart that hears what the Holy Spirit says in the Word, a new heart awaits. Ezekiel prophesied about this: **Ezekiel 36:25-26 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.**

How then should we live? Imagine that your actual heart had a fatal flaw in it... You were on life support and the only hope you had was a transplant. This is not a fictional scenario. There are people all over the world where this is their reality. Imagine what good news it would be to hear that there was another heart out there that was on it's way to you? You wake up, and you have a new flawless heart beating inside of you... How would you conduct your life from there on out?

¹⁴ **For we have become people who share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firmly until the end.** ¹⁵ **As it is said: Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.**

This is our reality spiritually. We all have had the righteousness of Christ transplanted into our lives. We have **become people who share in Christ**. Other translations render this "partakers in Christ". We are now a part of Jesus Christ Himself. We are in Him and He is in us. It makes no sense to live life as if we aren't. If you received a new heart, you wouldn't go back to living life as you did before. You wouldn't go back on life support just for the fun of it. You would most certainly treat that new heart better. You would follow a strick heart-healthy diet and take whatever medications that go along with it, wouldn't you?

This is why we hear His voice. We will do the things that He commands. We will follow the law. Not because we must or else we will die. But because our heart now beats for Him! Our new hearts are no

longer motivated by the law, they are motivated by the gospel! He saved us and rescued us from a certain fate. We, in turn, listen to what He tells us out of love!

The problem is that even though our hearts are now alive, we still live in a body of death. There will be a day when these blood-pumping organs inside all of us will cease to beat. That is why we need to hold on to what we have that is eternal. The end will come for all of us. We need to hold on to that which can never be taken away from us. We can lose it ourselves. We can lose faith. That is why we need to make sure that our hearts keep on beating the beats of love. **For we have become people who share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firmly until the end.**

So, let's do that. Let's do it today! Throughout this text, that theme of "do it today" is repeated. If you were that heart patient on life support, you wouldn't take today for granted. If you finally received a new heart, you also wouldn't take today for granted. We know that our time is limited here. It could end at any moment. These hearts could stop beating like that. That is why we will listen to what He tells us TODAY!!! **This is the day the LORD has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it. (Psa 118:24 NKJ)**

So, how is your heart? The majority of the time this is a question that only you can answer. Have you had it checked recently?

Fitness trackers are all the rage these days. You can wear these devices and see what your heart rate is by simply looking at your wrist. I used to have a FitBit, but I kinda lost interest in it. A lot of the time, I don't really care what my heart rate is.

Today, we all have a spiritual fitness tracker. It is called the BIBLE. Every day, you can look at it and see how you are doing. It will tell you if your heart is beating or if it has some stone-like tendencies. Today, we looked at it. As deceitful as our hearts can be, it can't fake it when presented with the law. The law will truly break your heart. But, as we have seen today, the Gospel kick starts those broken hearts into hearts that beat for Christ. One day, our physical hearts will have a resting heart rate of 0. But, those hearts will rest forever with the one who saved them. The

unbelief of the Israelites was the reason God said **“They will never enter my rest.”** But, we will inherit that promised land of heaven because of what Jesus did for us. Let us, therefore, have our hearts beat for Him here today, for we know that we will rest with Him in eternity. AMEN...