



"Hardening your Heart"

- Hebrews 3

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
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1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus,

2 who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also [was faithful] in all His house. 3 For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. 4 For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things [is] God. 5 And Moses indeed [was] faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken [afterward], 6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. 7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, 8 Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, 9 Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years. 10 Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, 'They always go astray in [their] heart, And they have not known My ways.' 11 So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" 12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, 15 while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." 16 For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, [was it] not all who came out of Egypt, [led] by Moses? 17 Now with whom was He angry forty years? [Was it] not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

The writer of Hebrews has presented Christ as God, Christ as Man, Christ as superior to the angels, and now in chapter 3, we see Christ as superior to even Moses. That may not have great impact for you and me, yet this is now nothing less than "holy" ground for any Jew, who was the first and primary reader of this letter.

The purpose of these comparisons, *especially for the Jew, but for us also*, is ultimately this: If Jesus is the "top of the heap"...if He is indeed the only door to a holy and righteous Creator... then it is crucial that we know where we stand with Him! Are we sure of who He is, and in light of that fact, who *we* are? Are we one of His children? Are we born again? How do we know for sure? *Can* we know for sure? What must I do to make sure of my standing with Him?

In chapter three, the writer breaches the issue of "partaking" in Christ. A sharing in and a participation with Christ. Years ago, Sharon and I had lived in Minneapolis: we had jobs, friends, an apartment. Then we went and bought this cabin in the woods to visit on the weekends, which wasn't such a good idea because that then required all our weekends. Eventually we fell in love with the place and didn't want to go home. Finally, we had to make a decision: *Were we going to be merely visitors or were we going to leave it all behind and move to Wisconsin?*

In that same manner, many of us are faced with that same decision spiritually. Will we continue to be just visitors to His house, or are we going to chuck it all and move in? The fact is, many of us are simply religious “tourists.” We go to a place we do not live, and spiritually snap photos and purchase souvenirs. We are thrilled at the beauty of this wonderful vacationland, but we don’t live there. It’s not our home. We aren’t those guys from Colorado that have the bumper stickers that say “Native”. We’re just visitors. Spiritual tourists in a land not our own. We’re not from here.

Over the subsequent years following that move, my house and land has become not a hotel but a home. And I love it there. I have traveled all over the world and yet, “There’s no place like home.” It’s a sanctuary of peace and quiet in a world of chaos and noise. I love living there with Sharon and experiencing that great sense of rest when I come home, whether it be only after a day working at the church or a month in the mission field. Its “home sweet home” and I feel so good there, so much at peace, so much at rest.

It’s in that place that I share my life...I “participate,” with Sharon my wife. After 44 years, she knows me. Better than anyone else on earth I would think. And she knows every aspect of me, good or bad. She knows the real me, the private me, the intimate and flawed me. Not the pastor Tim, but the guy she shares a life and a home with.

Maybe you know what I’m talking about today. Maybe you have such a place and can immediately relate. It seems from this chapter that God too, has such a house. The author speaks repeatedly concerning this idea. “His house”, “the house”, “every house”...seven times in six verses. A place of intimacy with those who “come over” and comfortable in relationship with those who sit on His couch and put their feet up on his coffee table. I can always tell how a person feels about me, whether they hold me in their heart and mind, by how they act in my house. By whether they are a guest, or a friend, one who knows me and is familiar with my house. Whether they are stiff and cautious, or whether they are personable, relaxed, and comfortable. But some of us have never quite been comfortable in this “house” that belongs to God.

No, I’m not particularly talking about the church building, though our apprehensions can certainly manifest themselves in such a place. I’m talking about the place where God “lives.” That place you phone up or ring the bell or whatever when you are seeking God to converse with Him. It is that place where God is most present, most real. The point is that many of us just have never found any comfort and rest in that place. We have always been a guest, a tourist, just a visitor. We feel clumsy and conspicuous in His presence. Awkward and nervous.

I’m not suggesting a “good-ole-boy” treatment of God. He’s not your “buddy,” nor is He the “big guy in the sky.” He’s **God**. Creator of all things. One who holds life and death in His hands and can end you with merely a word. But so many of us never get past this and we are afraid to spiritually take our shoes off, or help ourselves to His cookies, or to allow ourselves to be truly seen and known by Him. We mind our manners and at the same time keep Him at arm’s length. We can’t imagine why He would want to know us intimately, and it freaks us out to think of hanging out with Him. I mean, what would I say? What would we talk about? What do we have in common?

And that’s the point of this letter, especially these recent chapters. What **do** we have in common? The writer is telling us the answer is “everything” because “God became flesh and dwelt amongst us.” He set down His radiant glory and His supernatural edge to become, *well*, a **man**. He was still God. But He put so much of it on the shelf to be able to sit on the couch with you and to know you personally and intimately. He felt pain and joy, tears and laughter, cold and hot, hunger and fear. He knew what it was to be a man. As the song goes...“What if God was one of us?” He was.

And so many just have difficulty with that premise. They feel that to acknowledge Christ in such a manner is somehow demeaning towards Him. And you know what? It is! But you didn't do that, *He did*.

Maybe we react this way because we are simply afraid to be embarrassed. Or maybe because we are daunted by His position and feel small in his presence. He came so far to be able to have you over to His house and yet how many of us are acting like visiting dignitaries, afraid of a social or political faux pas, fearful of causing some international incident and being so embarrassed that you would want to die.

The writer begins chapter 3 with the word "therefore." It's his way of saying, "Now, in the light of all I have said in the past two chapters..." In response to the fact of who and what Jesus is, let's look at the results. And the results are that we are supposed to be "partakers" of the same heavenly calling as Jesus. We are supposed to have so much in common with Him and be on the same mission as He was. And yet, most of us really have no idea what that is really like!

Chapter 3 is telling us that God has a home too. God has a house, a place of rest, a place where there is this "take-your-shoes-off" kind of peace and comfort. A place where you can come in and be truly known...with all your flaws, scars, and shortcomings and yet still be loved with no pretense and with no condemnation.

A lot of us take issue with all of this because we are still carrying all the religious baggage of our childhoods. When I was growing up, people (especially the pastors and leaders) wore their best clothes in the "house of God" and spoke in hushed tones and never ran or played there and certainly never took their shoes off or let their hair down.

So it was a new journey for me when I started participating in a community that played worship music so loud (live, mind you) that the cops got called and they came and told us to knock it off. A place where you can grab a cup of coffee and sit down with all His other friends and make Him the center of the party. Where you can personally and openly tell Him you how great He is, how much you appreciate the cross and what He did and what He is doing for you.

But for many of us, THIS is the house of God. **This** is where He lives and therefore we come to visit Him once a week, or maybe once a month. And we therefore call ourselves a "friend of God" because we think we have been over to "God's house." But this is a building. Does God live here? Yes, He does. But no more and no less than He does in your bedroom where you have your computer, or in the middle of the woods, or at your work station on Tuesday afternoons. That's not what this passage is talking about...this building.

That's also not why we are called to be a part of this community...to "go to church." Church attendance is to be about everyone else as much, if not more, than it is about me. It's about taking my place in the body and serving others. "Washing feet" so to speak. Blessing and serving others. Then there is corporate worship and the necessity of body life and being part of and accountable to others. It's not about this building. Just because I have been to Lambeau Field doesn't mean I have been to Aaron Rodgers' house. He played ball there. But that's not where He lives. There is no couch there on the field.

The writer of Hebrews is speaking of a frame of mind and a state of being, a place I go to be with the Creator of all things. A place that requires time and giving of myself and sharing of my heart, mind, and soul. The readers, the recipients of this letter, were sliding into this thinking the way many of us have. They went to church and did their Sabbath thing, did all the religious stuff one is supposed to do at church and thought they knew God. They thought they had been to God's house.

Moses, however good intentioned he was, was all about this kind of thinking. It involved reverence and sacrifice. Religious acts and duty and regulations. But all of that, whatever merit it might have held, did not bring the people into that place of relationship. It never caused the people to really know God. Not intimately and personally or a "hanging out on the couch having coffee with God" kind of thing. Moses was a servant. And a good one for sure. But he did not represent that intimacy... that relationship with God that God wants to have with us as a member of the family.

The bottom line is in verse 6, where we are told that essentially *we are* that house. We are that place where God wants to live. Let's face it, however great my house in the woods is, that's not my house. My house, my home, is wherever Sharon is, just as yours is wherever your love is. It's where your wife and kids are...where your love is. I don't know that God has any special fixation concerning this building. His house, His home, is where His love is, and that's in me and in you if you are one of His. My home is wherever Sharon is, and God's home is wherever His people are. And, yes, that can be the church building too, but that is not guaranteed if our hearts and souls are not invested in such.

2 Ch 15:15 "... *they had sworn with all their heart and sought Him with all their soul; and He was found by them, and the LORD gave them rest all around.*"

When my soul, my heart and passion, and the very drive of my life, is not directed toward God, I will never experience that rest, that true peace of kicking back with Jesus in a bond where you really know each other, really understand each other. You will never know what it is like to be with Jesus in the same way as it is to come home at night and settling into your favorite chair. You will never find that peace, that rest that comes within the sights, smells, and sounds of being in the presence of the love of your life.

Many of us are still restless today. Unsettled and jittery. We have the attitude, "If I could do *this*, then I would find rest. If I could get *that*, then I'd have rest. If I could just manage this level, then I'll be rested." But we never get there, and we never know what it really means to be at rest in Christ. This was Martha's issue in the New Testament. She just never spent the time at Jesus' feet. She was too busy with the world. We want to see that passage as an excuse not to serve Jesus and kingdom, but that was not what was going on. Martha's *heart* was not right. It wasn't about her actions! It wasn't just what she was doing or not doing; it was what she was failing to place first.

Verse 7 says, "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: '*Today, if you will hear His voice...*'" Not "*If you will do this thing or that thing.*" He wants us to *hear His voice*. He wants us to come home and spend some time with Him. Israel saw the hand of God for 40 years in the wilderness, but they never came to a point where they actually knew God. They kept looking, kept wandering. Like Martha, "*They always went astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways. So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'*" That peace was, for 40 years, within their reach, and yet they never found what was right before them the whole time. And so they died out there. Just as so many of us will.

Moses came and led them out of slavery, destroyed the Egyptian army and broke them out of their bondage. They moved forward far enough to come *right up to* the Promised Land, that place of promise...that place of rest. Man, it had been a long bondage there in Egypt, just as it was for all of us in the world and in sin! So God says, "I've got this land of milk and honey. I've got this land of wealth, this land of rest, this land of safety. And I'm going to give it to you." And so they got right up to the river's edge and because of fear, because they didn't really believe God despite all He had already done, they respond with, "*Oh, I don't think so...*"

And so God goes, “*Ok, alright, fine. No rest then. Wander.*” And yet even after His people reject His invitation into the rest and they wander around the desert year after year, God still blesses them. The scriptures say that He led them by this cloud during the day and by a fire at night. He provided food every day, and provided shoes that never wore out. *Awesome.*

Year after year, the offer remained: “Come to my house. Know that peace that I created you for.” And yet, as they wandered—by their own doing remember—they actually had the audacity to start complaining. They grew bitter and angry, and pretty soon, they were all up in Moses’ face and each other’s too. Sound familiar? It ought to. It’s happened here in front of you enough times that this should be a familiar story. And what happened to them? What happened to those that we have witnessed? They wandered forever and eventually died out there. They lived their lives and died out there in the wilderness.

God loved them. But they never really knew Him! They never sat on the couch and just chilled out and got to know Jesus. They maybe knew what they were supposed to be doing (that they weren’t) but they never understood the *why or what* was going to be result if they obeyed. They got all angry with what God wanted to do and where he wanted to take them. So they ate the manna and grumbled some more, when God didn’t want them eating manna any more than they wanted to eat it, but it was the result of the decisions they had made and were still making! He wanted them to have big chocolate chip cookies and ice cream at His house, but no, they wanted to wander around in the wilderness instead and then grumble about it.

“Today, if you hear His voice...” Do you? Are you even in a place to hear Him this morning? He’s trying to talk to you, but where are you? Angry? Bitter? Harboring ill feelings toward Him because the fact is you are in the wilderness and you want to insinuate that it is somehow His fault or the fault of the other believers that have made it a second career to try to wave you off and coax you over to God’s house for pie and coffee, or in this case, “milk and honey”?

I’m here today to *“exhort you...while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end...”*

How many of us have dutifully left Egypt (our picture of sin and the world) only to stop halfway home? Now you’re wandering around out there, wandering the streets of life, lost somewhere in the vast wasteland of religious middle ground. And gang, it’s a wilderness out there. Miles and miles of nothing except more folks just like this. Lost and angry, eating manna instead of cookies and pudding and blaming each other and pointing fingers at Moses, or some other pastor, refusing to come home to Jesus. And it all started the moment they told God no. You see, there is no “no” in living the Lordship of Christ. It all began when they didn’t trust Him; they didn’t trust where He was taking them. So they said, “No way. I’m not going to do it. I’m not going to go there.” They justified it a hundred ways, but none of it mattered and none of their justifications released them from call to “participate in the heavenly calling.”

God is still calling you, even if you are like so many out there in the wilderness today. Turn around and come home. Turn around and find that peace, that rest for your soul that God wants to give you. Go back to that place where you told God no and ask for another chance. Step across the river and find rest for your soul.

Pss 116:7 *“Return to your rest, O my soul, For the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.”*