



THE CARPENTER

Hebrews—Chapter 3

Study 4

A Better House

Hebrews 3 introduces us to Christ in the imagery of a homebuilder. He is the Carpenter of our lives, the One who builds the house, and we are the house being built (Hebrews 3:4-6). If you have ever built a home yourself, or had one built, you know a little of what is involved and how challenging it can be. Even if you never have built a home you can at least understand that it takes a great investment of work and money. This equals time, your time, whether directly or indirectly. Time is a major emphasis of these next two chapters in Hebrews, time and focus on the Builder of our home.

Consider Jesus

“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus” (Hebrews 3:1).

You will not find in Hebrews, or any other book of the Bible, an entreaty more emphatic, or vital, than this one phrase, “consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Jesus Christ.”

The basis of power and influence in the world comes from the amount of trust, or value, people place in a particular thing, idea or person. Few people listen to the voice of those whom they do not trust. And even if they are forced to listen, force does not win trust. Paul has sought to build our confidence in God by presenting Him as He really is, loving and self-sacrificing. He is not a God of force, but rather a God of love. Now he encourages us to take time to consider God and open our hearts with the expression of confidence in His love.

“Who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. 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. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, 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” (Hebrews 3:2-6).

Unfinished projects. We all have them. The ongoing task, assignment or job can sometimes be overwhelming. We’re not always finishers, but Jesus is. We are His house and, because Christ is the Builder, we can hold firm unto the end. We can be “confident of this that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6, NIV).

All of us are real unfinished projects in our own way, but Jesus will finish the work He has begun in us. No matter how much of a project we tend to be, we can have confidence that Christ will bring it to completion. There is a real hope here for all of us that should bring assurance and joy to our hearts. Jesus is taking care of us.

Proving the Promises

So far Hebrews has presented what God has done for us without our consent. God has continued to communicate His love to us in spite of our rebellion against Him. He came to this earth in our humanity to take our place and die as one of us and for us. Now, in Hebrews 3, our response to this great love is solicited.

“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you will hear His voice’” (Hebrews 3:7).

Today, right now, as we hear the Word of God speaking love to our hearts,

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“God having provided something better for us.” —Hebrews 11:40

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don't let it slip by. Grab the moment and enjoy it. Now is the time to take it in. "Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years" (Hebrews 3:8-9).

Paul draws our minds back to the history of Israel and a test brought to God's people in the wilderness. He relates this history to us today by saying "do not harden your hearts" like they did then. Just after the Exodus from Egypt, God's people were led to the borders of Canaan by the direct guidance and power of God. Here they faced a test. This land, their new home, was the land of Canaan. It represents to us today heaven itself, the heavenly Canaan. Unfortunately, after forty days of spying out the land, the people refused to believe the minority report of Joshua and Caleb who had returned with a good report. Instead, they followed the faithless report of the other ten spies.

Paul is recounting the history of Israel to encourage us today not to do the same thing with the promises of God concerning our eternal salvation and the heavenly Canaan. We are still inclined to look at the difficulties rather than focus on the promises of God. We are tempted to dwell on the negative and not the positive. Instead of stonewalling optimism as the people stood ready to stone Joshua and Caleb, we are invited to believe God's Word.

"Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways'" (Hebrews 3:10).

In human terms, God is a Man of His word. He says what He means and means what He says and we can trust His Word. It was by the word of the Lord that the heavens were made. God spoke and it was done. God can deliver us from the wilderness of sin, bring down the strongholds of habit, and restore to us the promised land of freedom and blessing. But all of this is impossible if we refuse to believe.

God will not force our will, but He works to encourage our hearts so we can believe His Word. To prove the faithfulness of His word, God gave Israel time, forty years in fact (one year for each day the spies had been given). In this way, even in their rebellion against His promises, God would encourage them to have faith in His word. But as the sentence was announced, the people immediately changed their minds. They didn't like the idea of wandering in the wilderness for forty more years so they quickly decided that they could take the Promised Land after all. The problem with their reasoning was that it was based on them and not on God's word. When God said they could take the Promised Land they refused to believe, and when He said they could not enter in they again refused to believe. The issue here was faith in the Word of God versus what they could do in their own strength. They could either believe in God's word or trust in themselves.

This is the same issue we face today. Will we believe in God's Word? This is why Paul points us to this history in Hebrews 3. Will we trust God's Word to accomplish what He says? For forty years Israel wandered because they needed to learn that God's word could be trusted. And if we fail as they did to believe God's word of salvation to us, God will honor our choice to wander in our own wilderness. Eventually they proved God's word to be true. God said that they would wander for forty years and they did. This was a hard way to learn to trust God, but it is a vital lesson for all generations. Even wilderness wandering proves that we can trust His Word.

God's Wrath

"So I swore in My wrath, 'they shall not enter My rest'" (Hebrews 3:11).

The wrath of God is not arbitrary. His wrath is not like man's wrath (see James 1:20). God's wrath honors free choice, and if we choose to go our own way God will give us up to it in the end (see Romans 1:18, 24, 26). Man's wrath imposes; God's wrath releases. Man's wrath is arbitrary; God's is consequential. Man's wrath inhibits free choice; God's honors free choice, even if that choice is unbelief.

"Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12).

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We may choose to depart from God. However, God is eternally faithful and He will never leave us (see Hebrews 13:5). Please don't leave Me is God's urging. Don't let Me slip out of your life. Don't neglect Me. Don't depart from the living God, the living Word (see 1 John 1:1-3). This is our part, our work, what we are called to do in terms of practical Christian experience. God wants us to respond to His love:

"But exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13).

Exhorting one another is something that is so important that God wants us to do it daily—each and every day of the week—daily. "Today," we are to encourage one another in the Word of God. Share God's love with someone. Tell them His Words to them are, "I love you" (Isaiah 43:4). "I love the world" (John 3:16). There is no greater love in the entire world than God's love for you. It is unconditional and unchanging (see Romans 5:6-8; Malachi 3:6; Jeremiah 31:3). On the other hand, sin will harden our heart. Sin will try to persuade us that God cannot love us. Sin will try to force us to give up all hope in the love of God for our soul. We need to warn others about slipping from God into the darkness of self-condemnation. "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17).

Confidence to the End

"For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.' For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:14-19).

Unbelief—this is the great enemy Paul has directed us to beware of in this chapter. It was unbelief that led the people to die in the wilderness and not go into the Promised Land. At the same time we need to have confidence in God's love and power. Any one of those who died in the wilderness could have turned to the Lord and been forgiven. God is ready to save. This is the message of the Bible. Our Lord is a loving God who delights in mercy and is always ready to forgive:

"Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity, and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:18-19).

Again, there is not a single person who died in that wilderness that God was not ready to forgive and save. In fact, there was one, who did die in the wilderness because of his sin, but never gave up His confidence in God and was eternally saved. His name is Moses. Yes, Moses sinned against God. And his sin was so terrible that God said to Moses, 'You can't go in.' Moses begged God at least three times to let him go into the Promised Land. But God said 'No, you cannot.'

Nevertheless, after Moses was buried, Michael, "who is like God" came to resurrect Moses and take him to heaven. But when Michael was ready to take Moses, guess who else showed up? The very one who is trying to convince you that God is unfair, unjust and unmerciful. It is Satan, not God, who wants to keep us out of heaven. The Bible clearly pictures Satan as the one who contends for us by using our sins to destroy our confidence in God's mercy. Here is the account of Moses' resurrection in the New Testament:

"Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" (Jude 9).

Did you notice what Michael said? The Lord rebuke you, even the Lord. Michael didn't go into a long list of the character defects of Satan. He didn't argue with him. He simply said, "The Lord rebuke you." In other words, Michael is

saying, “Moses is mine.” He is as a brand plucked from the burning. He belongs to God. Michael took Moses to heaven. I like this story because it reveals two important facts about salvation:

Sin is serious and it will keep us out of heaven.

God is merciful and He can save us even though we have sinned.

Why did God take Moses to heaven? Was it because Moses was a good man who deserved to be saved? No, Jesus Himself said there is none good but One, that is, God (see Mark 10:18). The good news is that God did not come to save the good, but the sick (see Mark 2:17). And Paul said, “God came to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15-16). Moses also acknowledged his sin. Even though he made some bad mistakes, he maintained His confidence in God. And this is why Moses was saved. No one will be lost who turns to God, for Jesus said, “The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37).

Summary

Tested and proved—a testimony for us that God does keep His word. The majority in Moses time did not believe and have faith that the Word would deliver them into the Promised Land. They then tested God for forty years and proved that God’s Word will do what it says it will. Our confidence is either in ourselves or in our God. If our confidence is in ourselves, we will refuse to go into the Promised Land when God says we can and attempt to go in when He says we can’t (Revelation 20:9). We will stubbornly follow our way instead of God’s Word. Yet, if our confidence is in Him, we will place our trust in His Word in spite of our most glaring failures and sins. The essence of personal salvation is found when we place our trust in God and not in ourselves. It is then that we find true rest—which is what Paul directs us to in the next chapter.

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