

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

(May 19, 2024)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

### **Sermon Series: Following Jesus...ESPECIALLY** **when life gets tough!**

(Studies in the letter to the Hebrews)

### **Therapy for Hard-Heart Syndrome**

(Hebrews 3:1-15)<sup>1</sup>

Study #4

#### **Introduction: An ounce of prevention...**

A couple of years ago, I had both of my knees replaced (one in July; the other in October). After each surgery I went to PT (physical therapy) for a few weeks to rehab the new knees and learn exercises to get functional again.

PT brought healing to my knees after the trauma of surgery. Recovering from the trauma of a surgery or an accident is one good reason to go to PT.

-----  
**NOTE:** There are footnotes in the printed manuscript which you can find in the Lobby, Welcome Center, and on the website. ([www.nwchurch.org](http://www.nwchurch.org)) These footnotes provide more content than what I can cover in a Sunday morning message. You might find these notes helpful. Please feel free to be in touch with me, though, if you want to discuss. I'm happy to interact with you.

---

<sup>1</sup> F.F. Bruce, William Newell, Zane Hodges, Kenneth Yates (and others) see 3:1--4:16 as a single unit. The beginning (3:1) and end (4:14-16) sandwich the section by considering Jesus as our High Priest.

But physical therapy is also useful for someone who simply wants to maintain general conditioning or for someone who wants to prevent physical decline.

Today, as we take another look at the New Testament letter to the Hebrews, we hear a warning that comes with a prescription for some ST (spiritual therapy) to avoid or to prevent or to reverse a spiritual condition we really don't want to have.

*Quick review...*

To review, this letter was written to a few small congregations of Jewish Christians in the first century. They were suffering persecution. The easiest way for them to have that persecution stop would have been for them to revert to Judaism.

They were tempted to do just that, so the author wrote this letter to give them good reasons to keep following Jesus.

While we aren't suffering persecution, any of us might be tempted to stop following Jesus for any one of a number of reasons. This letter equips us with excellent reasons to keep following Jesus.

As we turn to our passage for today, our (unnamed) author starts off by re-greeting his readers and re-orienting to our Leader.

#### **Comparing Jesus and Moses (3:1-6)**

#### **Two Exemplary Servants (vv. 1-4)**

*Identifying the readership and the Leadership (v. 1)*

#### The readership

***[3:1a] Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, partakers of a heavenly calling...***

By calling them **“holy brothers and sisters”** he is telling us that he considers them members of the family of God. They are Christians.

The word **“holy”** - the Greek word is a form of the word **“sanctified”** (see 2:11) - means that they are set apart for God.

And, as this author used the word *sanctified*, he means to say that they are redeemed, adopted, and justified before God.<sup>2</sup>

By pointing this out, I am not saying that only people who believed in Jesus ever read the letter to the Hebrews. Of course, outsiders read it back then just as people who don't know Jesus read it today, too. And we can be glad whenever anyone reads Hebrews.

What I want to be clear about is that the author's target audience was fellow-believers. The application of the teaching and the exhortations and the warnings in this letter are to believers in Jesus.

What I write when I start a text thread with my three grown children is targeted to them. I write with them in mind.

Any of my kids might forward what I wrote to others so that some people who are not my children will read what I wrote. But what I wrote was for them.

The author of the letter to Hebrews wrote FOR and TO people who believe in Jesus.

These believers are **“partakers<sup>3</sup> of a heavenly calling.”**

Another way to say that is that their **“calling”** is to be a **“partaker”** in Christ's coming kingdom.

---

<sup>2</sup> There is nothing to suggest that the writer considers that his audience is in part composed of people who are not really Christians.

<sup>3</sup> Greek “metoxoi” (*μετοχοι*), meaning partner, companion, partaker.

<sup>4</sup> As is made clear in Hebrews, Christians who are faithful to follow Jesus in this life will attain this **“calling.”**

Their calling is to reign with Him in that kingdom (see Hebrews 1:14; 2:3), to be His **“companions.”** (See Hebrews 1:9)<sup>4</sup>

Those are the readers. Then, he re-introduces us to our Leader.

### The Leadership

**[3:1b]...consider the Apostle<sup>5</sup> and High Priest of our confession: Jesus.<sup>6</sup>**

The word *apostle* means, “one who is sent.” Jesus was sent by the Father to bring eternal life to all who believed in Him and to bring humanity to its destiny of reigning with Him.

And then, building a bridge to what he had just said at the end of chapter 2, Jesus is our **“High Priest.”**

He **“made propitiation for our sins”** (2:17) when He died on the cross AND helps us stand strong for Jesus when we are tempted to not do so.

The author challenges us, the readers, to **“consider Jesus.”<sup>7</sup>**

### Consider Jesus

He is our Leader,<sup>8</sup> so we would do well to think seriously about, meditate on, contemplate who He is and what He's done. We are especially to **“consider”** the example He has set of faithfulness to God.

This is important. Jesus was appointed **“heir of all things”** (1:2) because of His faithfulness to God. Our becoming **“partakers”** (or companions or partners) is conditional upon our own faithfulness to God, just as it was for Him.

<sup>5</sup> This is an example of a word meaning something in one context (in the Gospels, speaking of Jesus' inner circle of twelve disciples, **“apostle”** refers to them) and something else in another context (here, referring to Jesus as the One sent by God).

<sup>6</sup> What follows connects to what precedes by **“Therefore...”** and by the reference to Jesus as our **“High Priest.”**

<sup>7</sup> The main verb - **“consider”** - is an imperative, a command.

<sup>8</sup> See Hebrews 2:10. **“Originator”** It can also be translated **“Leader.”**

The road to follow if you want to fulfill your “*calling*” to be a “*partaker*” with Jesus is the road of considering and then following, Jesus.

To help us see this point, the writer compares and contrasts Jesus and Moses.<sup>9</sup>

*Similarities between Moses and Jesus (v. 2)*

**[3:2] He (Jesus) was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house.**

The faithfulness of Jesus to God

First, what the author says about Jesus is simple and unsurprising. Jesus did all that God told Him to do. He was faithful.

Despite all the difficulties and opposition and the challenges He faced in His life, Jesus never wavered from faithfulness to do what the Father gave Him to do. Perfect submission. Perfect obedience.

The faithfulness of Moses

The verse also speaks of Moses, who was also faithful. But his faithfulness is described a bit differently. Moses was faithful with regard to “*His* (i.e., God’s) *house*.”

We believe that the “*house*” here, refers to the Old Testament tabernacle.<sup>10</sup>

The tabernacle was built and used while the Israelites were in the wilderness after they had been delivered from Egyptian slavery through the Red Sea.

It was a structure (like a tent) that the Jews carried around with them during their forty years of wandering.

At each encampment they would set it up, stay for a while, take it down, and then carry it to another location.

The holiest place in the tabernacle was the place where God’s glory dwelled. The tabernacle was, thus, the centerpiece for the worship of God for the Jews.

The tabernacle was extremely important for the development of the faith and unity and purpose of God’s people. It was always placed right in the middle of their camp.

The construction details for the tabernacle were revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai. God gave this revelation to Moses **[Numbers 12:8] mouth to mouth.**

And Moses was obedient to put the tabernacle together exactly as God told him to.<sup>11</sup>

Read Exodus 39 and 40 and read Leviticus and you will see that when it came to the way the tabernacle was built, how the priestly garments were made, and how the service of the tabernacle was carried out, at least thirty times we read that everything was done “**just as the Lord commanded Moses.**”<sup>12</sup>

Moses did a great job.

But we have to set Moses’ lofty role as a “*servant*” (See Numbers 12:7) in God’s “*house*” against the role Jesus fulfilled in His “*house*.”

<sup>9</sup> This will not be the last time we read of this comparison and contrast in Hebrews.

<sup>10</sup> While there is some disagreement, most scholars I have read (F. F. Bruce; Yates, Hodges) agree. This is also my understanding. Hebrews will have a lot to say about the tabernacle in chapters to come.

<sup>11</sup> The rebuke to Miriam and Aaron after their rebellion against Moses shows that Moses was very special in God’s plan for the construction and use of the tabernacle. (Numbers 12)

<sup>12</sup> Moses’ fuller role in that OT house was future oriented. Everything in that house (the tabernacle) corresponded to future realities.

*Distinctives separating Moses and Jesus (vv. 3-4)*

**[3:3] For He (Jesus) has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. [4] For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.**

**[Jesus] has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses.**  
To that, we say, "Amen!"

And the first-century readers of Hebrews would have said that, too. They would have agreed that Jesus was greater than Moses because **"the builder of the house has more honor than the house."**

Frank Lloyd Wright deserves more honor than the houses he designed.

But the non-Christian Jews of the first century would have said, "No way!" They would have been highly offended. For them, Moses was everything. These were fighting words.

Still, the logic is inescapable: Since the builder of a house is always greater than the house (or the servants in a house), and, since the builder of everything is God - and Jesus is God! (see Hebrews 1:2, 3,8, 10-12) - Jesus is greater than Moses!

Still, not to take anything away from Moses, he was faithful.

### **Moses' Faithfulness (v. 5)**

**[3:5] Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later.**

By the time Hebrews was written, the tabernacle had not been used for well over a thousand years.

It had been replaced by Solomon's temple which had been destroyed by the Babylonians. Then the temple was rebuilt in Ezra's day by Zerubbabel and that temple was enlarged by King Herod, which was standing when Hebrews was written.<sup>13</sup>

But, while it was in use, and while Moses was the servant in the **"house,"** he did a great job of following God's **"some assembly required"** instructions and running it **"according to manufacturer's directions."**

But, again, he was a caretaker of God's house which was way different than Jesus' role in God's **"house."**

### **Jesus, An Exalted Son Over God's House (v. 6)**

**[6] but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house - whose house we are...**

As we have just read (v. 4), Christ, being God, is the builder of all things.

That includes the **"house"** that Moses served (the tabernacle) and the **"house"** over which He Himself was faithful - and these are two different houses.

Again. The tabernacle was the setting where the Jews gathered to worship and to serve God. It was a place of priestly activity.

Here (v. 6), the writer stresses the high priestly role of Jesus.<sup>14</sup>

So, we're talking about a **"house"** that is a place of worship AND a **"house"** in which Jesus Himself has the role of high priest - but NOT the Old Testament tabernacle.

In view is another **"house."** A **"house"** that has a universal scope and a **"house"** over which the Son presides. And, speaking directly to his readers, he writes, **"whose 'house' we are..."**

<sup>13</sup> At the time of the writing of Hebrews (I think in the early- to mid-60's AD), Herod's temple was about to be destroyed by Rome. It was destroyed in AD 70.

<sup>14</sup> See Hebrews 2:17; 3:1.

What is in view in this reference to the **“house”** over which Jesus presides is the visible, worshipping community of Christians.

The **“house”** is not all Christians. It doesn't equal all members of the Body of Christ. The **“house”** consists of those Christians who gather and worship and function as the royal priesthood they were redeemed to be.<sup>15</sup>

Now listen to the entirety of Hebrews 3:6.

*Warning to us...*

**[6] but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house - whose house we are, if we<sup>16</sup> hold firmly to our confidence and the boast of our hope.**

Notice that word, **“if...”**

The presence of **“if”** tells us that a Christian might or might not hold firmly to their confidence and the boast of their hope.

And **“if”** we don't, then we are NOT that **“house.”**

Now, the consistent teaching of the New Testament is that a Christian cannot remove himself or herself from the Body of Christ. That would be the same thing as losing eternal life, which is impossible.

But a believer in Jesus who has withdrawn from fulfilling their priestly function of worship and service with the gathered Christian community - something that would be very tempting in times of persecution, and in hard times, generally - is not a part of this **“house.”**

This **“house”** over which the Son presides as a Great High Priest is the functioning priestly and worshiping **“house”** today.

It is the visible church. And a withdrawal from the visible church is obviously possible.

A Christian can certainly withdraw from community and worship, and for the first of two times in our passage for today, the writer warns us, **“Don't do that!”**

He proceeds to paint a picture of what can happen when God's people don't maintain a close relationship with God's **“house.”**

It's an Old Testament example of a time when the Israelites did not hold fast to their confidence and their hope in God.

### **Israel Did NOT Enter the Rest God Offered Them (3:7-11)**

**[7] Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says,  
“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,  
[8] (Psalm 95:8) DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME,  
AS ON THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS,  
[9] (Psalm 95:9) WHERE YOUR FATHERS PUT ME TO THE TEST,  
AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS.  
[10] (Psalm 95:10) THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION,  
AND SAID, ‘THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART,  
AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS’;  
[11] (Psalm 95:11) AS I SWORE IN MY ANGER,  
‘THEY CERTAINLY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.’”<sup>17</sup>**

This is a quote from Psalm 95, a psalm written by King David. David refers here to the rebelliousness of the Israelites while they were in the wilderness after having been delivered from Egypt.

At many points while they wandered, the Jews were unfaithful to God. And in the back of David's mind may have been any of a number of multiplied disobediences, complaints, and incessant grumblings.

<sup>15</sup> See 1 Peter 2:5 for the same thought.

<sup>16</sup> Notice that the author again includes himself here (**“we”**), indicating that he, a Christian, believes that this warning applies to him, and, obviously, to all other Christians.

<sup>17</sup> These verses (Hebrews 3:7-11) are an extended quote from Psalm 95, written by King David.

But there is no doubt that he has one incident in mind. It was the Jews' rebellion at a place called Kadesh-barnea. (See Numbers 13)

It was at Kadesh-barnea that God told His people to go in and conquer the land of Canaan. He promised them His presence and He promised them victory.

Moses sent twelve spies to check out the land. All twelve returned with glowing reports about the land. It was a beautiful country, with flowing water and green pastures. It was a great place for crops and flocks.

But, while two of those twelve said, "Yes, let's do this thing!" ten said that taking the land was impossible.<sup>18</sup> And the nation, as a whole, sided with the ten.

God's people hardened their hearts. They rejected God's offer to take the land. They **[9] put [God] to the test.**

For their rebellion, God punished them. He sentenced all the adults except the two faithful spies (Caleb and Joshua) to die in the wilderness.

They didn't cease being God's people. But they would not enter the land. Or, as David wrote in his psalm:  
**[11] As I swore in My anger,  
"They certainly shall not enter My rest.**

Entering Canaan, the land of promise, would have been entering into the "rest" God intended them to have.

---

<sup>18</sup> [Numbers 13:31] *But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, because they are too strong for us." [32]... "The land through which we have gone to spy out is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are people of great stature. [33] We also saw the Nephilim there (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."*

<sup>19</sup> One author wrote: These are words of a discerning pastor who has had genuine experience with the weaknesses of a flock of believers, and his own weaknesses.

<sup>20</sup> Again, there is no hint that he suspects some of them are not really Christians.

It was in the Promised Land that they would have the joy of reigning over a kingdom under God's overarching Kingship. God called that "rest."

They forfeited that great privilege by their disobedience and unbelief, by their hard-heartedness.

Now, our author takes that story and applies it to his readers.<sup>19</sup>

### **Conclusion: Warning, we could miss God's rest, too... (3:12-15)**

**[12] Take care, brothers and sisters,<sup>20</sup> that there will not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.<sup>21</sup> [13] But encourage one another every day, as long as it is still called "today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. [14] For we have become partakers<sup>22</sup> of Christ if we keep the beginning of our commitment firm until the end, [15] while it is said,  
"TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,  
DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME."<sup>23</sup>**

*To the first century readers...*

David wrote Psalm 95 about four hundred years after the event at Kadesh-barnea. But he applied it to the Jews of his own day.

Just like the Jews of Moses' day said "No!" to the offer to take the land on their "Today," the Jews of David's day needed to hear God say, "Today" - "Don't harden your hearts against God!" - in their own day.

<sup>21</sup> This is another, more serious, form of the "drift" mentioned in 2:1.

<sup>22</sup> "Partakers" is a translation of the Greek *metaxoi*, the "companions" of 1:9, and may also be rendered "partner." The Christian who is a *metoxos* (singular) faithfully walks with Jesus in this life. The Christian who does not walk faithfully with Jesus in this life does not lose eternal life, but is not a *metoxos*, and thus, does not earn a rich inheritance and does not reign with Christ in His coming kingdom.

<sup>23</sup> Note the two "IF" statements: (v. 6) Christians are members of this house IF (Greek, *ean*) they hold faithfully to their Christian hope; (v. 14) Christians are partakers of Christ, IF they keep their Christian commitment, firm until the end.

In the same way, the writer of Hebrews, writing nine hundred years after David, referenced the same story (Kadesh-barnea) because his first-century readers needed to hear God's "**Today**," too.

He urged his readers to NOT follow the example of the Jews in Moses' day.

Remember that these Christian Jews were facing hard times. They were suffering persecution from fellow Jews for abandoning Moses to follow Jesus.

They were being tempted to throw in the towel, stop following Jesus altogether, and revert to Judaism.

Our author warns them that if they do that, like ancient Israel, they wouldn't be able to enter God's "**rest**." (v. 18)

And what is the "**rest**" that they will not be able to enter?

It isn't the "**rest**" of living in and reigning over the Promised Land. It is the "**rest**" that we've been reading about since we started looking at Hebrews.<sup>24</sup>

It is being Jesus' "**companions**" (1:9), having a rich inheritance in Jesus' future kingdom,<sup>25</sup> and reigning with Him.

That, my friends, is the message that this passage in Hebrews brings to us, today, too.

*To Christians in 2024...*

None of us here today want to slip into the terrible state of having "**an evil, unbelieving heart**" that "**falls away from the living God**." We don't want to "**be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin**."<sup>26</sup>

Let's call these, all taken together, "Hard-Heart Syndrome."

Hard-Heart Syndrome can manifest - and has manifested over the years - in me as a pursuit of comfort and material security or as an unquenchable hunger for acceptance and recognition.

It was manifesting in the first readers of Hebrews as an avoidance of hardship and suffering for Jesus. We don't want that to be true of us.

To pretend that such temptations could never overtake us is to invite a fall into them.

We need some ST (spiritual therapy) to avoid or reverse Hard-Heart Syndrome.

People who get PT (physical therapy) are in for some work. PT may involve regular exposure to mobility exercises, strength training, cardio work, dialing in diet, and even getting the right amount of sleep.

This is good stuff, and all of this we'll do to maintain or attain physical health and function.

The ST (spiritual therapy) the writer prescribes to avoid or to escape Hard-Heart Syndrome is day-by-day encouragement from fellow Jesus-followers.

To fill his prescription, we need to run into the "**house**" over which Jesus presides as our High Priest, worship God for all we're worth, serve Jesus, and experience genuine community.

Here's a quick story to paint a picture of what this could look like...

I mentioned that a few weeks ago I went camping out in West Texas (Big Bend Ranch State Park) with my brother-in-law, Bob. Overall, it was a good trip, but there were challenges.

<sup>24</sup> The teaching of this passage is not unique in the NT. The main idea points to believers having a share in Jesus' reign. See 2 Timothy 2:12; Rev. 2:26, 27; 22:12. Also, the parable of the ten minas, Luke 19:11-27.

<sup>25</sup> See Hebrews 1:14, referred to there as "**salvation**."

<sup>26</sup> The expression here, "**[12] falls away from the living God**" is the opposite of **[6] hold firmly to our confidence and the boast of our hope**."

Now, Bob is a great friend, excellent outdoorsman, and a very strong hiker. We've been on lots of adventures together.

In recent years, on the hiking trips we've taken, he has helped me when I've had to walk slowly because of bad knees. Bob has been very patient with me.

So, I'm not throwing Bob under the bus here, but on this last trip, I did get to help him.

On our three and a half hour hike to the place where we hoped to find water and to camp (we did find water), the temperatures were between 105-115 degrees, as confirmed by the Park rangers when we returned.

We were both pretty beat by the miles and the heat, but Bob felt worse as the afternoon wore on. Getting concerned for Bob, I went searching for water - and found some decent sized pools of water and went back to tell Bob.

He wasn't interested. I urged him to go soak his feet. He didn't want to move. I tried to be annoying. It worked and Bob made his way to the little oasis, got wet, cooled off, and recovered.

I had annoyingly "**encouraged**" him to get up, walk, and go to the water he needed.

That is often what **[13]...encourage one another every day, as long as it is still called "today,"** looks like.

Many times, here at church, brothers and sisters have "**encouraged**" me to walk (take a next step) from my misery to find water.

Some years ago, the entire Care Group Kathy and I were a part of "**encouraged**" me by calling me on the carpet on a matter of how I was investing my time and energy. That was a watershed moment for me.

**"Today"** will you embrace the truth that Jesus wants you to be on the giving and receiving end of "**encouragement**" in your friendships with your brothers and sisters here at church?

To which of your Jesus-following friends will you turn for the truth-telling and encouragement you need? For which of them will you be willing to take a risk and annoy / encourage them with truth?