

SUNDAY, APRIL 24, 2016, 6 P.M.

WFMC

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Over the years I have been asked silly questions. One silly question was: “Why were you born in Africa?” My silly reply was: “Well, I wanted to be close to my mother.”

Whatever the reason, Africa is a long way from Kentucky. It was quite a journey for us – six weeks in all from De Deur, Transvaal, to Lochlin, Ontario -- and then, another 22 years to get to Kentucky.

I can identify with the subjects of our message tonight. The Israelites were nomads and thought in nomadic ways and acted in nomadic ways.

So, it makes sense for me to sing along the way such nomadic songs as:

We’re marching to Zion

I am bound for the Promised Land

Guide me, o Thou, great Jehovah, Pilgrim through this barren land

HEBREWS 3:16

Our text this evening is found in Hebrews 3:16.

The book of Hebrews is addressed primarily to Jewish converts who were familiar with the Old Testament but were being tempted to revert to Judaism.

Hebrews presents Jesus Christ as God’s full and final revelation. Jesus surpasses the limited preliminary revelation given in the OT.

Jesus Christ is shown as superior to the ancient prophets, to angels, to Moses, and to Aaron and to the priestly succession that descended from him.

God’s people must now look only to him, whose atoning death, resurrection, and ascension have opened the way into the true, heavenly sanctuary of God’s presence.

(summarized from *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1857-1858)

Hebrews is a “more than” book. It tells us that Christ is “more than” any other person or any other solution to the problem of sin. Christ is the only solution! Jesus is more than adequate! Jesus work on the cross is sufficient!

Or, as Andraé Crouch sang it: *Jesus is the answer, for the world today,
Above Him there's no other,
Jesus is the way.*

Read Hebrews 3:1 – 4:1

Our text, Hebrews 3:16, comes to us in the form of two questions:

1. Who were they who heard and rebelled?
2. Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt?

In its original context, the answer is reasonably obvious. It was those who because of their rebellion and sin and unbelief did not (perhaps, could not) enter into the rest that God provided in the Promised Land.

Let us take two leaps backwards in scripture.

The writer to the Hebrews is quoting extensively from Psalm 95. The first half of Psalm 95 is a beautiful and quite familiar hymn.

Psalm 95 (NIV)

- 1 Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
- 2 Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.
- 3 For the Lord is the great God,
the great King above all gods.
- 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.

5 The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.

6 Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;
7 for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.

Today, if only you would hear his voice,
8 “Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah (quarreling),
as you did that day at Massah (testing) in the wilderness,
9 where your ancestors tested me;
they tried me, though they had seen what I did.
10 For forty years I was angry with that generation;
I said, ‘They are a people whose hearts go astray,
and they have not known my ways.’
11 So I declared on oath in my anger,
‘They shall never enter my rest.’”

And then we need to leap back further to be reminded of the circumstances that led to the second half of Psalm 95.

First to Exodus 17 summary

The Israelite community was following the Lord’s travel instructions. However there was no water at the place where they camped. They grumbled to Moses -- asking for water. They grumbled that they had left Egypt only to die of thirst in the desert.

Moses told God of his predicament; telling God that the people were ready to stone him.

God told him to take his staff and strike the rock and they would all have water.

The people got their water, but, Moses named the place “Testing” and “Quarreling.”

Second to Numbers 20 summary

The people were again quarreling with Moses and Aaron because they had no water to drink. Egypt seemed like such a good place to return to with its grain, its figs, its grapevines, and its pomegranates. And most of all, its water.

Moses and Aaron went from the assembly of the people to the entrance to the tabernacle and fell down before the Lord. The glory of the Lord appeared to them.

The Lord said to Moses: Take your staff and your brother Aaron and the people. Speak to that rock before them and it will pour out water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so that the people and their livestock can drink.

So Moses took the staff and he and Aaron gathered with the people in front of the rock. Here things change – Moses, in anger, said to the people: “Listen, you rebels, must we bring water out of this rock for you?”

Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the people and their livestock had water to drink.

But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not lead this community into the land I have given them.”

Thus, Moses, the harbinger of the promised rest, does not get to go into Canaan Land himself. Why?

Well, it seems to me that it comes down to the difference between **striking** and **speaking**.

Moses is tired and weary of putting up with these people he is supposed to lead and guide through the desert. So he says: “Listen, you rebels, must we bring water out of this rock for you?” And he strikes the rock twice!

Notice: “You rebels” – “must we” (i.e., Moses and Aaron)

TO STRIKE – provides a picture of human power; of presumption; of pride; it represents the worshipping of power; it is ordinary men trying to be something they are not

Once Moses struck an Egyptian and killed him.

Moses did a lot of striking with his staff. His staff was the tool that he used to bring about the plagues and to get the Israelites out of the land of Egypt. But in those cases, Moses was acting at God's direction and authority.

Here, in contrast, Moses is called not **TO STRIKE** but **TO SPEAK** – this tells us of God's power, of man's need for obedience, and for humility; and to follow God's will and direction.

Thus Hebrews 3, set in its context of these passages from Exodus, Numbers, and Psalms, gives us a message of choice. To follow self and strike or to follow God and speak.

It is a story of death versus rest; of rebellion versus obedience, of pride versus humility, of back to Egypt versus forward to the Promised Land.

Psalms 95 and Hebrews 3 both tell us that God had a bad attitude toward the Israelites for 40 years.

"For forty years I was angry with that generation;"

*So I declared on oath in my anger,
'They shall never enter my rest.'"*

Did God change his mind? Our Hebrews passage seems to say that God is going to allow us into his rest.

God did not change his mind for Moses and the Israelites. He held these nomadic desert Israelites accountable for their unbelief; for their pattern of an unbelieving and sinful hearts; and for their rebellious and hard hearts.

They heard, but sadly they rebelled! And sadly they were punished.

Nevertheless, to the New Testament Christians in our text and to us today he extends great grace. God provides new opportunities of grace and rest.

THREE POINTS TO DRAW FROM THIS PASSAGE

THREE WORDS TO HELP US FOCUS

FIRST WORD: CONSIDER – CONSIDER JESUS in 3:1

Fix your thoughts on, think about, look carefully, focus on, and take a hard look at,

CONSIDER JESUS – He is greater than Moses, he is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. He is greater than the priestly sacrificial system.

Hebrews 10:11 tells us: Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when this priest (namely Jesus) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us four times that Jesus, the great high priest, sat down! In chapters 1, 8, 10, 12! He does want to make that point clear.

Jesus is the “more than”!

As Saint Paul has it in Colossians -- Jesus, the Son, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

SECOND WORD: TODAY

What time is it? It is TODAY, the DAY that you can hear God’s voice!

Or as Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 6:2: “I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.”

It is not the time of the Israelites wandering disobediently in the desert.

It is not the time of the early church Christians in our current text struggling to remain faithful?

It is NOW TODAY.

A student who comes to me with a request for an extension, for more time, for another opportunity, or for so-called extra credit, wants TOMORROW not TODAY.

Some have said, “tomorrow never comes,” we only have today.

Little Orphan Annie sings: “Tomorrow, tomorrow!
I love ya tomorrow.
You’re always a day away!

It is a nice fun song but we can only act TODAY. We cannot act tomorrow.

We can come to Jesus “as long as it is called TODAY.” Today is the day of salvation.

THIRD WORD: REST PICTURES OF REST

We can and need to come to Jesus for REST.

Rest is the place of no rebellion.

In music, a rest is a squiggly line that means “take a rest.”

A rest is a moment of silence in music. The spaces between notes are often as important as the notes themselves. . . . Rests go a long way toward creating satisfying music, with good dynamic balance between musical activity and rest.

(modified from “How music works” website)

Similarly, life needs to be a balance of activity and of rest to add strength, rhythm, and dynamism to life.

College chaplain and pastor, Cleland McAfee , wrote a hymn after two of his nieces died from diphtheria:

*There is a place of quiet rest,
Near to the heart of God.*

Rest is the place of restoration and restoring. (Psalm 51:12) *Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

Rest is the place of quiet support and comfort. Jesus calls us: *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

Rest is also the picture of the Promised Land, of Canaan land, and of the life of holiness lived out in the power of the spirit.

As Charles Wesley writes:

Breathe, oh, Breathe thy loving spirit
Into ev’ry trouble breast!
Let us all in thee inherit,
Let us find that second rest

And as Hebrews 4:9 reminds us: *“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.”*

Accepting God’s rest means giving up my control – and allowing God to be in charge.

It means that when God hears our words of prayer, in the right sense, we should give up our responsibility. That is not necessarily easy.

One of my first chapel talks was on “responsibility.” When I taught algebra, I put the word, responsibility, in big colored letters over the blackboard in my

classroom. Over the years, I have often felt like the young man applying for a job who when asked if he were responsible, blithely replied: “Oh, yes, the last place I worked everything that went wrong, they said I was responsible.

But as good and important as responsibility is, we are talking tonight about rest. I need responsibility and I also need rest.

Charles Tindley has us singing: *Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there;
If you trust and never doubt,
He will surely bring you out.*

We need to find rest, God’s rest, and find it today!

The writer to the Hebrews affirms the call again:

Heb 4:1 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.

Even though God emphatically said to the Israelites:

*So I declared on oath in my anger,
‘They shall never enter my rest.’”*

God has again TODAY extended his great grace to all. If the people he has called will cease from their unbelief and their rebellion and answer his call and accept his grace, they may enter his rest.

WHEN? As long as it is today! AS LONG AS IT IS TODAY!

Hebrews 3:13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.

So, Consider Jesus
Today is the day of opportunity to enter into God’s rest
Rest in the Lord

Fanny Crosby -- 1899

Will you come, will you come, with your poor broken heart,
Burdened and sin oppressed?
Lay it down at the feet of your Savior and Lord,
Jesus will give you rest.

Refrain

O happy rest! Sweet, happy rest!
Jesus will give you rest.
Oh! Why won't you come in simple, trusting faith?
Jesus will give you rest.

Will you come, will you come? There is mercy for you,
Balm for your aching breast;
Only come as you are, and believe on His Name,
Jesus will give you rest.

Will you come, will you come? You have nothing to pay;
Jesus, who loves you best,
By His death on the cross purchased life for your soul,
Jesus will give you rest.

Will you come, will you come? How He pleads with you now!
Fly to His loving breast;
And whatever your sin or your sorrow may be,
Jesus will give you rest.