

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Lessons from History: The sin of unbelief

Recently I visited the Imperial War Museum in London with my family. It was very interesting to see the history of many wars. We saw weapons, tanks, aeroplanes, and ships, all of which were vastly different in size and power over the years. We read of battle plans, great victories, terrible defeats, glorious medals and tragic stories. We also went into the holocaust exhibition which was extremely moving, and so sad, to see what man could do to his fellow man. In fact in every war we read about, there was brutality toward soldiers and innocent men, women and children. Over the years you would think that man would learn from history about the shocking reality of war. You would think governments would try to keep peace at all costs. But no, still we have had wars in the last twenty years that have brought out the evil that is in man's heart. Atrocities have been carried out and men have been tried for the crimes of war. History is very interesting, but do we learn from it?

Over the next four weeks we will be looking at "lessons from history" in the Bible. We will look at different issues that faced God's people, the Children of Israel, as they made their journey from Egypt to Canaan. From a place of bondage and slavery to a land that God had promised them; a land flowing with milk and honey, meaning that everything would be there for their needs and enjoyment. If you would like to read the story of the journey, you will need to read in Deuteronomy, Numbers, Joshua and Hebrews. God called them out of Egypt, and was with them every step of their journey; He showed this in many signs and wonders. But just like us, they were easily discouraged. They disobeyed God; they doubted and failed to lay hold of God's wonderful promises to them. Over the next four weeks we will look at four topics: "The sin of unbelief"; "Ready to obey"; "Dealing with discouragement"; and "Laying hold of God's promises".

My prayer is that as we study these lessons, we will try to learn from history. May we be able to learn from their failings, so we will not make the same mistakes ourselves on our Christian pathway.

Today we will look at; "The sin of unbelief". Please can you turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 3:7-19: "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, 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. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, "They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways." So I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest."' Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, 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, 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 is a book of contrasts, contrasting the good things of Israel with the better things of Christ and Christianity. In the verses which we have read, we are exhorted to learn from the generation that came out of Egypt, but did not enter the Canaan-rest because of unbelief. In Hebrews 4, we read of the better rest for the believer which is found in Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit teaching us of Him. What is rest? The rest that we read here is not retirement from God's work; we should never retire from that. It is not when we take a holiday or put our feet up at the end of the day. It is something that every true believer should be enjoying daily. The believer rests on the perfect work of redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The believer must be diligent in his life by taking heed to the Word of God to enter into the daily joy of these things. What things? The believer is redeemed, he has peace with God (Romans 5:1) and he has the sure hope of Heaven. The Holy Spirit is here to teach us all things (John 14:26). God is with us (Matthew 1:23). The believer has a great High Priest, who has gone into Heaven, Jesus the Son of God, who understands our feelings as we journey through this world (Hebrews 4:14-15). We can come in prayer to Him at any time to obtain mercy, and to find help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). We have put our faith in Christ to save us so why don't we rest or trust in Him to keep us on our journey home to glory?

The reason we don't is because we lack faith, and we allow all sorts of doubts (which is unbelief) to come into our minds. How sad when a saint distrusts God after all the instances of His love and mercy towards them! I would like to state clearly at this point that there is no doubt of any true believer not getting to Heaven because of unbelief in their lives. But if you are hearing this message and you do not believe that God has given His Son to pay the price of your sins and you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, you are in danger of committing the greatest sin of all, which will keep you from Heaven. Look at Revelation 21:8 and you will find that unbelieving is listed with all sort of heinous sins which will result in eternal separation from God in the lake of fire.

I would like to split Hebrews 3:7-19 into two sections:

1. The danger of unbelief (Hebrews 3:7-13)
2. The need of faith (Hebrews 3:14-19)

1. The danger of unbelief (Hebrews 3:7-13)

In the first section God gives a warning to the Jewish Christians to learn from history. He reminds them of how their ancestors rebelled against God in the wilderness, of how they tested and tried God, even although they saw firsthand His mighty works of mercy toward them. God was angry with that generation because their heart always departed from Him and that they had an evil heart of unbelief. God was angry with them. He had every right to be, the way that He had freed them from Egypt, guided them, protected and provided for them in the wilderness. Because of their unbelief God declared that they would not enter into the land of promise. Let us recall some of the instances from their journey.

Let's start in Egypt where the Israelites were suffering badly at the hand of Pharaoh. God heard His people cry and God instructed Moses to go to Pharaoh and ask for His people to be set free (Exodus 4:21). Pharaoh refused, then God brought some terrible plagues in Egypt, and still Pharaoh refused (Exodus 7:14-10:29). The final straw, was as we read in Exodus 12:12, the death of all the firstborn in Egypt. In each house where there was no blood on the lintel and the doorpost, the eldest son died. There was not one house in Egypt where there was not one dead, including Pharaoh's house (Exodus 12:30). Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron during the night to tell them to take the Israelites and all their goods out of the land of Egypt (Exodus 12:31). The LORD opened the Red Sea so His people could cross over on dry land (Exodus 14:1-25). The LORD then closed the Red Sea and engulfed the pursuing Egyptians (Exodus 14:26-29). On the other side, the Israelites saw the Egyptians dead on the sea shore. They saw God's great and mighty work of deliverance. They feared and believed the LORD and His servant Moses (Exodus 14:30-31). This incident in their history was the first of many where the LORD showed clearly His mercy, love, protection and care for His people.

The people recognised this too; they rejoiced in the LORD and praised Him (Exodus 15:1-21). But it wasn't long along the journey when testing and trial came. They came to the wilderness of Shur and went three days without finding water (Exodus 15:22). When they came to Marah they found water but could not drink it because it was bitter (Exodus 15:23). Very quickly they murmured against Moses. Moses cried unto the LORD for mercy on the people and God came in and showed Moses how to make the waters sweet (Exodus 15:24-25). God challenged the people through Moses to be obedient, to be holy and to keep His word. God confirmed to them that He would not bring any of the diseases upon them, as He did to the Egyptians, if they are true to Him (Exodus 15:25-26). They then travelled on further from Elim (Exodus 16:1), where there was twelve wells of water and plenty sustenance, to the wilderness of Sin, between Elim and Sinai. We read in Exodus 16:2 that the whole congregation murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The people were hungry; they even said that they would have been better dying in Egypt where there was plenty food rather than to die hungry in the wilderness (Exodus 16:3). How quickly the Children of Israel stopped trusting in God and turned on Moses.

Moses reminded the people that their murmurings were not against him but against the LORD (Exodus 16:7). Even after all that they had experienced, they did not trust and believe. God again comes in and supplies their every need with the Manna from Heaven (Exodus 16:11-36). We can go through the whole journey of the Children of Israel and see that they never seem to learn, and there was constant disobedience, distrust and unbelief in God, but we don't have time to do this today. I would encourage you to study this journey further.

God was grieved with this generation as we read in Hebrews 3:10. God had every right to be. Think about it; all the examples we have used of God's care and love for His people and they still complained. They always moaned to Moses, who was God's man at that time. They did not believe that the LORD God, the very God of creation would provide for them. God showed His care for them clearly at many times, through great and mighty works, but still they were very easily down heartened; this all came from an evil heart of unbelief as we read in Hebrews 3:12. We too can easily slip into the same conditions. Why? And where does this problem come from? It comes from within; we have the flesh (the old nature) which fights against our new nature. The tendency of the flesh is always to depart from God.

We can be smart and look back and say, "Well, they should have trusted totally in God, God made clear to them that He was with them". It is always easy to look back in hindsight. You and I are faced with the same things in our lives. We actually have a greater responsibility because we have the whole Bible as an example to us. I want you to make a list of the times you have doubted God, even just simple day to day things. Also sit quietly and go through your life and think of when, in some difficult circumstances, you moaned to others about something that came into your life that you found difficult. You never looked to God and asked Him why this circumstance had come upon you, and trusted in Him that it must be for your learning. The different circumstances we face are there to draw us closer to God, to depend on Him, to trust Him. Now go back and list all the happy memorable things that have happened in your life. Ask yourself, Who was taking care of me? God Himself! Give God the glory, the praise and thanksgiving for them. Why should we doubt? He gave His very best for us, His well beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows what is best for us, He made us. We are His; we belong to the Lord Jesus. He sees us in our distress, (the eye of the Lord), that all Seeing Eye watching over you. God will not give you more trials that you can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). He will give you the grace to come through testing times. But God is looking for our trust and belief, which is manifested in our obedience to Him. Hebrews 3:13 says that we have "to exhort yourself daily". Yes, YOURSELF, daily. It is always good to exhort others, but we must never neglect examining ourselves, questioning our trust in God. How sad that a Christian would doubt His Saviour! If you trust Him for your salvation, you must trust Him in your daily circumstances of life. Hebrews 3:13 reminds us that even now, today, God shows His patience towards us as clearly as He showed to His people Israel. We need to recognise His constant and never failing love toward us while walking in obedience and godly fear.

2. The need of faith (Hebrews 3:14-19)

Let us look at our second point: the need of faith, from Hebrews 3:14-19. These verses speak of the consequences of unbelief. This generation of the Children of Israel would not enter into the Promised Land, and the rest, peace and nourishment that would be found there. After all the people went through, you would think that they would take God at His word. In the book of Numbers, we read that God told Moses to send twelve good men to spy out the land of Canaan (Numbers 13:1). They all went; they all saw the same things. Two had faith; Joshua and Caleb. Then there were the ten who doubted God and brought back an evil report (Numbers 13:27-29). Joshua and Caleb brought a report of wonderful things; they told the people that it was "a good land that the Lord had provided" (Deuteronomy 1:25). They had no doubt that the Lord would see to it that they would conquer the Land (Numbers 13:30).

The other ten told the people of the giants in the land, the great cities that were fortified and impregnable (Numbers 13:31-33). The people discussed these things in their tents and they were afraid. They complained that the Lord hated them, that He had brought them from Egypt and had brought them to another enemy so they would be destroyed. God heard His people! (Deuteronomy 1:26-27) How disgraceful that the people, after all they had been through, would think God would do such a thing; God who had guided them by fire at night and by cloud during the day (Exodus 13:21, Deuteronomy 1:33). God was angry with their sin of unbelief and He Himself came down in judgement upon them. He told Moses that only Joshua and Caleb would enter the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 1:34-38). All the people would die in the wilderness, 600,000 of them, but their children would go in, the new generation. God was true to His word. We also see a gracious God allowing the children to enter in (Deuteronomy 1:39). After coming out of Egypt they could have been in the Promised Land very quickly, but after forty years wandering in the wilderness they missed out on the blessings God had in store for them.

Canaan was to be a place of rest, but still in this world. Canaan is not a picture of Heaven to the believer today. It is a picture of the spiritual blessings that we can enjoy today that we find in our blessed Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a place of rest, a place of joy, a place of peace while we are living in this world. How can we enjoy these spiritual blessings? Well, we must have faith.

The Bible is full of promises from God for us that we should grab hold of and make them our own. Here are a few:

1. I will never leave you nor forsake you. (Hebrews 13:5)
2. Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)
3. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. (Psalm 119:105)
4. The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man shall do to me. (Hebrews 13:6)
5. Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, and to day and for ever. (Hebrews 13:8)
6. I will come again. (John 14:3) Behold I come quickly. (Revelation 22:12)

I could go on and on with verses that should encourage us to trust in the Lord. In anything that this life throws at us, we can find a promise from the Lord to encourage us. We need to read the Bible and use it as a remedy and a safeguard. We need to listen to Him who speaks to us as children, who has the knowledge of our need so we can be kept faithful to Him. It is because of our lack of faith, (taking God at His word), that we allow the old nature, the flesh, to doubt God. We need to know God better; we need to know His desires for us. We need to realise the special place that we have been brought into. We can read Ephesians and be amazed about all the spiritual blessings that we can

enjoy now. It has been said that we will receive no new spiritual blessings in Heaven, but we will be in a condition to enjoy them more. When we consider how much we mean to the Lord Jesus, we should then ask ourselves the question, "How can I ever doubt my Saviour and Lord?"

Dear friend, I trust that the Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit, has touched your heart today. May God bless you. Amen.

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