



## **Fighting thru Hardheartedness: Hebrews 3:1-19**

I was watching the 1987 NBA dunk contest yesterday and the winner was Michael Jordan and I became intrigued—so I looked him up on Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia. You know the website that put those door-to-door encyclopedia salespeople out of business. Do you remember those guys, they use to lug those big boxes and try to sell those books for like, 200 bucks apiece. But it wasn't until they left that you realized you only have volume A-D. Show some love for Wikipedia.

Anyhow, so I looked up Michael Jordan and noticed that as great a basketball player as he was, he could not beat the Detroit Pistons in the eastern conference finals for three consecutive years. It wasn't until the fourth time that they finally climbed that hurdle. Later, Jordan, would go on to say that was the defining moment of his professional basketball career up until that point. They finally beat the Pistons! So, what happened the previous three years? When they played Detroit, as the series progressed, they slowly lost confidence! You could see it in their body language. There was this "mental hurdle" that would not allow them to believe they could beat the Pistons. They lacked the confidence.

You know when life is tough and things don't turn out the way you hoped, it's easy to lose confidence, isn't it. I have a family member who has not been able to find work for over five years. He has lost confidence in his ability to find a job. He goes into the process thinking, why should I apply; they aren't going to hire me anyway. He has completely lost confidence in himself.

Have you ever felt like that in your Christian faith? Have you ever been disappointed in the way that life has turned out, and you start to slowly lose confidence in God? Not that you don't believe in him; but rather you lose confidence that he actually cares about you and will bless you.

As we continue our study thru Hebrews, one thing is certain; the author has a high confidence in Jesus as the most unique person that ever existed. Furthermore, he wants his readers to have that same type of confidence, whether life is going well or not.

Life was not going well for these guys, in fact, they were beginning to question if they made the right decision in being a Christian. They were seriously considering going back to their former beliefs, their former way of life.

When we try new ventures in life and things get shaky, we often consider returning to what we know. I know countless people in dating relationships who were miserable, but for some reason—perhaps a lack of confidence that they can find someone better—they went back to that old familiar relationship—which almost ALWAYS turned out not to be a good thing. If they didn't go back, they would find someone who was basically the same type of person.

Maybe you can relate. When things do not go like you want, you are tempted to go back to what you know, even if it never worked in the first place. The Israelites under Moses were in bondage for 400 years. In the end, they were totally mistreated—yet when things got too tough in the wilderness, and it was very difficult, they wanted to return to what they knew, being slaves in Egypt.

Likewise, the original recipients of this letter were strongly considering going back to Judaism, and following the Law of Moses. Not surprisingly, the writer discourages this idea.

**3 Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, (The author is primarily addressing believers) consider Jesus, (Remember they were losing confidence) the apostle (Used in general terms to mean "sent one") and high priest of our confession (A OT priest is a mediator, like Jesus was, between man and God), <sup>2</sup> who was faithful to him (That is, God) who appointed him (Jesus), just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house.**

**<sup>3</sup> For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself <sup>4</sup> For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. <sup>5</sup> Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later (Moses' ministry was not a means to an end, but it pointed to Jesus), <sup>6</sup> but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son (The son is an heir, has more prestige, he has an inheritance). And we are his house (Used in the sense of the people of God) if indeed we hold fast our confidence (Again, the issue of confidence will be important) and our boasting in our hope.**

The author of course, states, that as great as Moses was, and he was great, Jesus is far superior to him in stature, honor, and ministry influence. The theme of this book is *the supremacy of Christ* and the writer does not hold back.

Jesus is described as the exact imprint of God, the radiance of His glory, as one who laid the foundations for creation itself, as one who purified mankind from their sins, as one who is far superior to the angels. Now the writer says Jesus is much more significant than Moses. What this means is that if Jesus was Batman, Moses would not even qualify to be Robin; he would be Alfred, the butler and servant.

So this first section places Jesus above Moses. So if Jesus is by nature God, if he is definitely greater than the angels are, and infinitely times greater than Moses is, why do many still struggle with their faith? One primary reason is because of hardness of heart. We see this in this next section.

**<sup>7</sup> Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,**

**(This verse reveals the divine inspiration of Scripture, since it was a psalm written by David, yet attributed to the Holy Spirit here.)**

**“Today, if you hear his voice,**

**<sup>8</sup> do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,**

**on the day of testing in the wilderness,**

**<sup>9</sup> where your fathers put me to the test**

**and saw my works for forty years.**

**<sup>10</sup> Therefore I was provoked with that generation,**

**and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart;**

**they have not known my ways.’**

**<sup>11</sup> As I swore in my wrath,**

**‘They shall not enter my rest.’ ”**

Did you know the people with the hardest hearts are not staunch atheists like Richard Dawkins, Bill Mahr, or Madalyn Murray O'Hair, who was the key figure in removing prayer from the public school system.

The hardest hearts do not belong to political figures like Mao, or Stalin, who murdered over 60 million people combined because they wanted a god-free society.

The hardest hearts do not belong to family members who reject Jesus and ridicule you every year during the holidays for believing in Christ.

The hardest hearts in the world belong to Christians! I know that is hard to believe, but here is why it is true. Staunch atheists, anti-God political leaders, or that crazy relative who picks on you like a whitehead pimple have not received Christ as their Savior, do not have the Holy Spirit, and do not sit under the Bible's teachings in church on a weekly basis. But we do and often choose not to follow God's ways.

Now we would never expect non-Christians to live by these standards, but it is different for us that proclaim Jesus as Savior. When we blatantly choose to ignore these and other expectations that God has for the way we live our lives, we show the reality of a hardened heart that has grown insensitive to things that are important to God.

Yet, there are several seasons where our hearts do otherwise. For some, this hardness has reached a point where they have drifted away from the faith and cannot see the shore.

The people addressed in this letter are predominantly Christian, who are in danger of becoming hard-hearted like God's people before them, the Israelites Moses led. The author is concerned and encourages them to check their hearts.

**<sup>12</sup> Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. <sup>15</sup> As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."**

**<sup>16</sup> For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? <sup>17</sup> And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? <sup>18</sup> And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? <sup>19</sup> So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.**

### **Signs of a hardened Heart**

It is pretty obvious from the text and from our personal experiences, that nothing good comes from a hardened heart. Your life never becomes better; only more miserable. Ultimately, bitterness sets in and you become a very hard person to be around. You turn into Ebenezer Scrooge. Bah Humbug!

Do you know how Scrooge became a Scrooge? His mother died in his childhood. He was stuck into a boarding school where he was left to stay, even on holidays like Christmas. Ultimately his classmates went home, but he was left there isolated by himself. His father was tight-fisted and too concerned about making money than he was about caring about his son. Then, when he left boarding school, things began to look promising until his fiancée left him because he was more concerned about GAIN than he was about having a wife. The sins of a father come back to haunt the son. Many people today, live there!

People are not just born with hardened hearts, they develop over time when things do not turn out like you had hoped. Hardships! Relationships gone BAD. Loneliness. Failures. Jesus understands your pain and wants you to trust him. So, how do you know if you are in danger of a hardened heart? There are some signs.

1. You no longer have the desire to pray to God or read your Bible
2. You harbor a Secret Sin and justify it in your mind
3. You do not grieve at the reality than people do not know Christ
4. You use your tongue, not to praise God and lift up others, but to be critical, a gossip, or a slanderer

5. You refuse to give a tithe to your church, not even 5 percent, not even 1
6. You hold grudges and have a hard time forgiving others

You might be thinking, “Yeah pastor Kene, I know my heart has grown harder, but I feel trapped—what am I supposed to do?” Here is what the Holy Spirit teaches here through the pen of the writer.

1. **Take inventory of Your Heart (vs. 12)** The Holy Spirit here says you have to take care so you do not develop an unbelieving heart. That means you have to take inventory and pinpoint the areas where you have definitely grown hardhearted. You take care of your heart by confessing those to God, repenting, and committing to improving. The first step is to ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you have fallen away. God will meet you where you are at and help you to do better.
2. **Find people who will exhort you (vs. 13)** I like how God worded this. exhort one another as long as today is today. What that means is don't stop. Honestly, if you are not hanging around people who exhort you in the faith, you are hanging around the wrong people. The Christian life is tough and we need people to root us on, to encourage us to be faithful. To exhort is to encourage with passion. Imagine being in a marathon and you have reached the point where you are exhausted. For me, that would be after I started the race! Anyway, just as you feel like quitting you have people cheering for you. Come on, you can do it! Hang in there. Your almost finished. Those are the kinds of people that help us make it through life no matter how difficult things may be. “Go, go, you can do it, go.” To exhort then, is to cheer someone on to continue the race.
3. **Hold on: Don't lose your confidence (vs. 14)**  
The author says we have come to know Christ if indeed we hold fast to our original confidence in him. What this means is that often times are tough in life, but keep on keeping on. Don't trust in someone or something else, including yourself. God uses these seasons to test us to prove that we are faithful. As hard as it is, imagine that scene in Job where God talks to Satan. He says, have you considered my servant Job. The reason why God allowed that was because he knew that Job would remain faithful. Sure he questioned the justice of it all; but he continues to hold on, even when his wife and friends tell him otherwise. If you have to crawl, make sure that you crawl toward Jesus.
4. **Learn from those who failed (vs. 16-19)**  
The Israelites represent people whose hearts hardened to the point where all they could do was gossip, grumble, slander, and criticize the leadership. They complained and complained and ultimately, God had enough. Over a million people died in the wilderness. One aspect I find completely amazing is that when these folks where at Kadish Barnea, the journey to the promised land was only eleven days. Eleven days, yet these folks wandered in circles for forty years until they all died in the dessert. These folks remind us of something we know to be true. Life without God has no direction or purpose. People just wander aimlessly. We must learn from those who failed.

I wish life were easier and that we would never have to experience the reality of a hardened heart. However, God is infinitely smarter than I am, and recognizes that hardships develop character. He is molding you into the person He wants you to become. I don't know about you, but I am really glad that God does not judge me on my failures, but rather on the work of Christ on the cross. I know my heart. It is up and down. Thank goodness Jesus lived the life before God we could not. I know it is not easy, but as the author said at the beginning, consider Jesus. There is none greater, Not Moses, the angels, or anything else. In the end, Scripture tells us that nothing will ever separate us from the love of God. Ask God to make your heart right so you can worship Him and love people like He wants. It is about God. Lets live the kind of life that shows that to others.