

January 15, 2017

Hebrews 3: 1-19

“How To Hold Fast”

1 – Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, Whom we acknowledge as our Apostle and High Priest. 2 – He was faithful to the One Who appointed Him, just as Moses was faithful in all God’s house. 3 – Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. 4 – For every house is built by someone, but God is the Builder of everything. 5 – “Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house,” bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. 6 – But Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house. And we are His house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory. 7 – So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear His voice, 8 – do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness, 9 – where your ancestors tested and tried Me, though for forty years they saw what I did. 10 – That is why I was angry with that generation; I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known My ways.’ 11 – So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter My rest.’” 12 – See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 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. 14 – We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. 15 – As has just been said: “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.” 16 – Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? 17 – And with whom

was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? 18 – And to whom did God swear that they would never enter His rest if not to those who disobeyed?19 – So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

In my preparation for this message I felt led to do some research on ANCHORS and I discovered there are several different types. This one is called a DANFORTH anchor. It's a type of anchor that is commonly used on small recreational boats because it doesn't weigh much but it still has a lot of holding power. Danforth anchors work best in hard sand or mud because the pointed flukes can easily dig into the bottom. But they don't work well on rocky bottoms because the flukes aren't heavy enough to penetrate. They also don't work on grassy bottoms because the flukes tend to slip off. With that in mind, some boats use the KEDGE or NAVY anchor. You should be familiar with these anchors because Popeye has them tattooed on his arms. This kind of anchor IS good in holding fast to grassy or even rocky bottoms because the weight allows it to penetrate and dig in. And then there are—GRAPNEL anchors—which tend to be used for lighter boats like canoes. They are too small to hold a heavy boat fast—but they do come in handy for retrieving things you accidentally drop overboard kind of like those arcade games. MUSHROOM anchors get their name from their shape—a shape that works best in soft bottoms where the shape can create a powerful suction. Well, I could go on and on because there are TONS of types of anchors—but the one I find most interesting is the SEA ANCHOR. It's kind of a parachute. It's made out of canvas and is used to stabilize a boat in heavy weather. Instead of tethering the boat to the seabed, the sea anchor floats in the water acting as a brake to reduce drift.

I bring all this up as a SEGUE from last week's text where the author of Hebrews talked about the SPIRITUAL drift that was plaguing his first readers. Because of persecution under Claudius and Nero many of those believers were drifting from their faith in Jesus. They were losing their way. And let's face it—we may not have to deal with emperors like Nero—but we all deal with the problem of spiritual drift. We all know what it's like to feel ourselves being pulled toward conforming to this fallen world. Just like a strong ocean current pulling on a ship—we feel drawn all the time. And—when nothing is done to anchor such a person—well before you know it that person has drifted such that they no longer follow Jesus. The same thing can happen to a church. When a body of believers drifts from the faith, eventually it ceases to be a church.

I don't think it's too much of a stretch to say that many churches that originally embraced their mission of saving souls—have drifted and no longer focus on the Great Commission. Some have become gathering places or social ministry organizations with no mention of Jesus. I'm saying spiritual drift is a danger that we all need to pay attention to—which makes today's text important because in it the author of Hebrews cites three ways to stop it—three ways to hold fast.

(1) First he says, consider JESUS. Look at verse 1. *“fix your thoughts on Jesus, Whom we acknowledge as our Apostle and High Priest.”* In other words—the first thing you need to do to stop drift is make sure you have the right ANCHOR—and of course I'm not talking about Danforth anchors or Mushroom anchors. No—the only Anchor that will hold us firm amidst the

currents of this fallen and falling world is Jesus. As it says a few chapters later, our faith in Jesus is *“an ANCHOR for our souls—firm and secure.”* (Hebrews 6:19)

In any case, the author’s point is that to HANG FAST—to keep from drifting—we must consider Jesus. We must always remember Who He is—what He has done—what He promises to do. If we consider Jesus—if we keep our focus on Him—if we anchor our souls to Jesus and his teachings we won’t drift. I love how the old chorus puts it: *“Turn your eyes upon Jesus—look full in His wonderful face—and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.”*

My first church was way out in the country of Southern Indiana. To put it another way it was “in the sticks.” One Sunday night after church I went to a church fellowship being held at the home of one of our members. When I left, I got lost on those “back-in-the-sticks roads.” To make things worse a horrible electrical storm came up. The wind was really blowing. I had my radio on and it said there was a tornado warning. Well as the rain pelted my windshield and the lightning flashed and the thunder roared, I began to worry because I just could not find my way. The more turns I made on those back roads the more unfamiliar they became. I was lost! Then I saw in the distance the lighted cross on the top of my church’s steeple. So I kept my eyes on the cross—always turning on roads that took me closer to it. In this way, eventually I got back to the church—and from there I could find my way home. Well, in the storms of life that pull us—we must keep OUR eyes on the cross. That will help anchor us fast. As Paul says this *“will keep us steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.”* (1st Corinthians 15:58)

The next thing the writers says we should do is guard our HEARTS. This is important because hearts that have become hard—hearts that are no longer responsive to Jesus—they are the MAIN CAUSE of spiritual drift. A hard heart is like a boat that has no anchor—and without that “pumper” working it has no engine either. I mean, it’s BOUND to drift. Look at verses 7 and following: *“So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion—during the time of testing in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested and tried Me, though for forty years they saw what I did.’”*

Please notice the urgency of this warning. Verse 7 says **“TODAY”**—which means **“NOW!”**

Dwight L. Moody referred to something he did in October of 1871 as the greatest blunder of his life. He was preaching in Farwell Hall in Chicago. His text that night was Pilate’s question at Jesus’ trial. *“What then shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ?”* (Matthew 27:22) At the end of his sermon Moody said he would give the people one week to make up their minds about Jesus. He then turned to his minister of music, Ira Sankey, asking him to sing. Ira sang a song entitled, *“Today the Savior Calls”* but by the third verse Sankey’s voice was drowned out by noise outside the hall. The great Chicago Fire had begun and the flames were even then sweeping through the city. The clanging of the fire bells and the noise of the engines made it impossible to continue the service as people ran for the exits. In the years that followed Moody thought of the death toll and said he wished that he had called for an immediate decision for Jesus. He wished he had not put it off for a minute. The fact is, saying **“YES”** to God’s will is always an URGENT thing. We must NOT let our hearts harden.

I'm reminded of the day Robert Fulton tested his steamboat. Historians tell us people actually stood on the shore and chanted, "*It will never start, never start, never start.*" Then, when it started and began to move, they changed the chant to, "*It will never stop, never stop, never stop.*" Often a hard heart shows itself in negativism, a heart that has become unreceptive to God's will.

As a side point I think we should be forewarned here that it is possible to begin well and end horribly—and it doesn't matter how well we begin if we don't finish. You can pass everyone during the race of life—but if you stumble at the finish line you lose. Those of us who are nearing the finish line of life must heed this warning! So—guard your hearts! Just as a diseased physical heart can end our lives and force us to miss out on the blessings of children and grandchildren—the GOLDEN years—a hardened SPIRITUAL heart can ruin our walk. Warren Wiersbe warns, "*The heart of every problem is the problem of the heart.*" So—we must guard ours! And—remember, just like PHYSICAL heart disease, the spiritual version is a gradual thing. I'm reminded of a quote from *Screwtape Letters*: "*Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.*" So—guard your heart. When God commands obey! Don't put it off. Listen: the more we obey God the more we see Him enable us to do so. And the more we do that—the more we see His power—and then the more receptive we are to His commands. To review: Consider Jesus—guard your heart—and then the third thing our text tells us about resisting drift is this:

Third, we must is ENCOURAGE one another. Look at verse 12 and 13, “See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” This is one reason being involved in a church of Biblically-grounded believers is so important. I mean, isolation from the mutual encouragement of the body is a dangerous thing. When we are away from other ANCHORED Christians we more easily succumb to the will of the world. Without that fellowship we are less likely to be transformed into the image of Christ and MORE likely to be conformed to the culture around us. When we are alone and unaccountable it’s tempting to take the easy course instead of the right one. We need to encourage one another to hold fast—not just on Sunday but on every day.

This week I read about a study done in 2009 by a German scientist named Jan Souman. Souman took a group of subjects out to empty parking lots and open fields, blindfolded them, and instructed them to walk in a straight line. Some of them managed to keep to a straight course for ten or twenty paces; a few lasted for 50 or a hundred. But in the end, all of them wound up circling back toward their points of origin. Not many of them. Not most of them. Every last one. Dr. Souman reported, “*And they have no idea. They were thinking that they were walking in a straight line all the time.*” In fact, it isn’t even limited to walking. Ask people to swim blindfolded or drive a car blindfolded and, no matter how determined they may be to go straight—they quickly begin to describe peculiar looping circles in one direction or the other. This study shows we are prone to stray—and not just physically. Without the perspective of

others, we are prone to wander away from the things of God. We need the encouragement of others to stay true to God.

But we must begin and continue. Have you begun? Are you stopped in your growth. Do you have an anchor?