

## Holding Firm in the Family of Christ

20<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 10/10/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Hebrews 3:12-19 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 13-14a, “**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 share in Christ...**”.

### **Introduction**

- ⌘ As we consider this Word from our Lord today, I imagine a few questions might come to mind. Depending upon your age you might ask, “Why did we, or do we, spend all that time in Sunday School learning about the children of Israel? Why learn about them being brought out of Egypt by God’s mighty hand; about the plagues, the Passover, the parting of the Red Sea, the spies’ fear at entering the land God had promised, and their wandering around for 40 years, being sustained by God’s gifts of manna, quail and water from a rock?
  - Why should we care about the fiery serpents and the bronze serpent lifted up on a pole? Why learn of Moses’ death and Joshua’s conquest of the Promised Land?
  - Was it just so we could hear about the great miracles of old and become excited about God’s power? Was it to learn of Israel’s great faith as God’s people? That could hardly be the case.
  - Or was it to point us to Christ; to learn how – after saving His people – He also sustains His people and keeps His promises to the end?
- ⌘ This text, you see, is not a text about how God works in His grace to save His people and bring them into His family, making them His “Chosen People”. That is already assumed and understood here in these verses.
  - This section of Scripture is focused instead upon how God works to sustain His people in the faith until the ultimate fulfillment when He delivers them into His eternal land of promise in heaven.
  - The writer of this letter to the Hebrew Christians knows from the example of Moses and the people of Israel that just becoming a part of God’s family doesn’t guarantee that a person will remain a member of God’s family until the final Day of Judgment. Not that God reneges on His promise, of course, but that the people often get lazy and careless in their faith and remove themselves from salvation through unbelief.
- ⌘ This is the focus of the text before us here this morning. It’s about saying, “Hold firm, for you share in Christ!”
  - Verse 14 says “For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end”. In his Small Catechism meaning to the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed Martin Luther says, “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord ... but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith”. We often forget that last part! We forget that we depend upon our God just as much to sustain us in our deliverance from sin as we depended upon Him to deliver us from sin, death and devil in the first place!
  - And so, we must learn from those people in the past that God tells us about in His Word. They are meant to be examples; to serve as a warning for us. In verses 7-9, before our text, we’re told, “Today, if you hear [God’s] voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put Me to the test”.

### **I. Moses and Joshua point us to Christ.**

- ⊗ God made the people of Israel to be sharers with Moses. He told Moses that He would work through Moses to bring His people out of slavery in Egypt. And so He sent Moses to them; to take His decree and proclaim it to them; so that they would share in His mighty work of deliverance.
  - ➔ God gave Moses the Law to take to the people as a gift; so that they would know how to live in His family. When they sinned, God heard Moses' prayer, and they benefited from God's divine mercy.
  - ➔ But the people grumbled against God's guarantees that Moses brought. In verse five before our text we're told that Moses was "faithful in all God's house as a servant". So to grumble against Moses was to grumble against God. Yet, they refused to listen to God's guarantee of a new land; of His promise of living forever in His presence. And so, ultimately, they died in the wilderness; falling short of the promised rest.
- ⊗ Had they remained faithful, they would have seen God's promise fulfilled; they would have seen God replace Moses with one whose name prefigured the ultimate deliverance from slavery and sin in God's own Son.
  - ➔ "Joshua" was the one whom God raised up to replace Moses and keep His guarantee to His people. "Joshua" – "Yeshua" in Hebrew is the name that we know from the Greek as "Jesus". As Joshua led God's people into the land God guaranteed to His faithful children, so Jesus, the greatest and ultimate fulfillment of it all, is the only "way" to the Father in heaven (Jn. 14:6). He's the one toward whom everything in the Old Testament is pointing.
  - ➔ Jesus fulfills it all, from the sacrificial lamb in the Tabernacle, to the bronze serpent on the pole; from the deliverance of God's people through the waters of the Red Sea to the suffering servant, born of the virgin of whom Isaiah prophesied.
- ⊗ Yes, we learn from it all of Christ the crucified; the greater Joshua, the one who has accomplished the deliverance of the children of Israel in every generation. And we say, "What a wonderful example they were for our hope and our joy!"

## **II. But sin hardens hearts to the guarantee.**

- ⊗ But, as the author of our text reminds us, many of the Israelites did not taste that final joy because, instead of encouraging each other in God's promised guarantee, they inflamed one another in sinful passions, self-gratification, and various sins of wickedness and unbelief that led them to fall away from the only true living God and set their hearts instead upon lifeless idols.
  - ➔ Yes, their rebellion ended when, our text says, their "bodies fell in the wilderness" and "they were unable to enter because of unbelief" (vv. 17, 19).
  - ➔ Paul refers to the sad example they left for us in 1 Corinthians 10:6 when he said, "These things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did".
- ⊗ To be honest, their example ought to cause us to shudder. For the destruction brought about by their rebellion can so easily happen to any of us still today. They show us that it isn't the label that gets a person into the Promised Land. They were part of God's "Chosen People"; they were in His family, but the lesson they left us is invaluable, as tragic as it is.
  - ➔ They show that consistent sin and stubbornness hardens hearts toward God and His guarantee, so that in the end they removed themselves from the family of faith! Sin is so dangerous, not just because it harms our neighbor (which is certainly bad enough!), but because it deceives us regarding the things of God. Greed makes us no longer content with God's provision and turns us to trust in ourselves for survival.

→ This in turn strokes our pride to say, “I’ll do things my own way” so that we begin to worship ourselves and the things we wrongly believe we accomplish without God. And before you know it, God’s guarantee of salvation and eternal life in His land of promise is viewed as an “old fashioned blowing of smoke” and “a waste of time and energy”.

✘ Now remember, God placed us in His family; in relationship with others. So when we deceive ourselves as the Israelites did, we deceive others with us. Instead of encouraging and exhorting our brothers and sisters in the faith “today”, we live for a fantasy land that tomorrow might bring, where we imagine that we make our own rules, follow our own will and foster our own hopes. And we actively seek to drag others along with us in our rebellion.

→ And if that happens, the label of “Christian” that a person may want to claim for himself will do him no good, for he has already rebelled against Christ and removed himself from the guarantee.

### III. Holding Firm in the Family of Christ

✘ This is the very purpose of the Holy Spirit working through our text in Hebrews, chapter 3 today. Verse 15 quotes Psalm 95:7 and says, “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion”.

→ Instead we are encouraged to remember that God has made us a part of His family by His grace; for our salvation and to help sustain us in His Promised Land of eternal Paradise. Verse 12 tells us to “Take care, brothers...”. That connects us to all other believers – brothers and sisters alike – in God’s eternal family. But he warns us not to become lax; not to put our trust in the label, but only in Christ Himself, “lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God”.

✘ This is why most of our hymns and prayers are written in the plural, referring to “we” and “us” and “our” rather than “me” or “my” and “I”. This is God’s gift of mutual love and support; of encouragement and accountability and comfort in our beloved family members.

→ Verse 14, “We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end”. Our confidence is in Christ! That’s the “original confidence” into which you and I were baptized; baptized into His name; into His suffering and death; into the promise to share in His resurrection and inheritance. Because it is all His work, we are then confident that He will sustain us to the end!

✘ And verse 13 shows that we are to “exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin”. The Greek word translated as “exhort” is “parakaleo”, which speaks of one who is “called alongside” the believer for encouragement and support.

→ And it is a present tense verb, indicating that this is supposed to be a constant action. We should never consider ourselves as Christians to be alone in our walk through this earthly life. From baptism until the day we leave this earth, I’ve got you and you’ve got me and we all have the greatest Paraclete – the Holy Spirit to speak of Christ and His Word; to call us to task when we are tempted; to comfort us when we despair or grieve; to strengthen us when we are weak, and to laugh and shout and sing for joy because “today” we are Christ’s redeemed children by His sacrifice in our place!

✘ Jesus set up the Christian walk so that we would never be without someone at our side. He said in John 14:26, “The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you”. Note that the pronouns “you” in that verse are all referring to a plural, like the Southern “y’all”.

→ This is what verse 14 means that “we have come to share in Christ”! You and I and all believers together have Christ as our Savior. He has taken all the sin and bondage that is ours and died with it on the cross in our place. He overcame it and paid for it. And He has now given us all the riches and inheritance that are His, so that we might be sharers (“part-owners”) in Him, according to God’s mercies for our eternal salvation!

✘ You know, the name “Joshua” or “Jesus” in the Greek means “Yahweh saves”. Jesus, as the second person in the Triune God, has saved you from the bonds of sin and hell, and now leads you through this world’s wilderness into the glories of eternal life before His heavenly throne.

## Conclusion

✘ Do not forget, my fellow believers; do not let go of the confidence He has given you and the gift of faith He has placed into your hearts and minds.

→ For then you and I together will have learned the lesson of the Israelites as God has intended for us. You, keep an eye on me, as I will do with you, in the mutual love that we share with each other in Christ.

→ As the author to the Hebrews says in chapter 10:23, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful”. And also in chapter 12:1-2, “...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith...”.

✘ In the perfect name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.