

Do Not Harden Your Hearts

Hebrews 3:1-4:13



Hebrews 4:12-13

¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.



1. This is one of my favorite passages in the New Testament.
2. It has become something of a theme text for my preaching . . . and for my teaching of preaching.
3. Give 'em the WORD . . . let the WORD do the work.
4. After all, the WORD OF GOD is the DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD OF THE SPIRIT . . . it's LIVING and ACTIVE . . . it's EXPOSING and DEMANDING.
5. Now, usually when I use this passage I just sort of lift it out of the chapter and let it stand on its own.
6. What more is there to say, right?
7. And I think you can do that . . . *sometimes* . . . although most of time I caution against it.
8. You see, if you rip a passage out of it's context you run the risk of missing what it really means.
9. You might interpret it to say something good and helpful . . . but what if there's even more to it . . . something significant, even?
10. Like in this text . . . what *is* the LIVING and ACTIVE WORD OF GOD to which the Preacher is referring?
11. Is he talking about the Scriptures *in general*, or does he have something more *specific* in mind?

12. Well, if you read this text in its context you find that he has a *specific* word in mind, and it's an ANCIENT WORD . . . from the Psalms . . .

Hebrews 3:7:11

⁷ Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,
 "Today, if you hear his voice,
⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
 on the day of testing in the wilderness,
⁹ where your fathers put me to the test
 and saw my works for forty years.
¹⁰ Therefore I was provoked with that generation,
and said, 'They always go astray in their heart;
 they have not known my ways.'
¹¹ As I swore in my wrath,
 'They shall not enter my rest.'"



13. The LIVING and ACTIVE WORD that the Preacher uses to encourage his suffering brothers and sisters comes from Psalm 95.
14. It's a word with which they were familiar, because it's a word that was used every week in synagogue services as a call to worship.
15. Sometimes we use Psalm 95 as a call to worship, too . . .

1 - Come Let Us Sing

Come let us sing with joy to the Lord; Let us
shout a - loud to the Rock of our sal - va - tion;

The image shows a musical score for a hymn. It consists of two systems of music. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: 'Come let us sing with joy to the Lord; Let us shout a - loud to the Rock of our sal - va - tion;'. The piano accompaniment features a steady bass line with chords and some melodic movement.

1 - Come Let Us Sing

Let us come be - fore Him with thanks - giv - ing (*and ex -*
tol) And ex - tol Him with mu - sic and song.

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of two systems of music. The first system has a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The second system also has a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 6/4. The piano accompaniment features a steady bass line and chords that support the vocal melody. The vocal line is simple and easy to sing, with lyrics that are clearly printed below the notes.

1 - Come Let Us Sing

For the Lord is the great God, the great King a-bove all gods.

In His hand are the depths of the earth,

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of two systems of vocal melody and piano accompaniment. The first system covers the lyrics 'For the Lord is the great God, the great King a-bove all gods.' The second system covers 'In His hand are the depths of the earth,'. The piano accompaniment features a steady bass line with chords in the right hand.

1 - Come Let Us Sing

And the moun - tain peaks be - long to Him.

The sea is His, He made it *(and His*

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of two systems. The first system has a vocal line in the treble clef and a piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The second system also has a vocal line in the treble clef and a piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "And the moun - tain peaks be - long to Him." and "The sea is His, He made it (and His".

1 - Come Let Us Sing

hands) and His hands formed the dry land, (and His

hands) And His hands formed the dry land.

16. That's verses 1-5, but we also have a song for verses 6-7 . . .

1 – Come, Let Us Worship and Bow Down

Come, let us wor - ship and bow down;

Let us kneel be - fore the Lord our God, our Mak - er.

The image shows a musical score for a hymn. It consists of two systems of music. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: 'Come, let us wor - ship and bow down;' and 'Let us kneel be - fore the Lord our God, our Mak - er.' The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and chords in the right hand.

1 – Come, Let Us Worship and Bow Down

Come, let us wor - ship and bow down;

Let us kneel be - fore the Lord our God, our Mak - er.

The image shows a musical score for a hymn. It consists of two systems of music. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: 'Come, let us wor - ship and bow down;' and 'Let us kneel be - fore the Lord our God, our Mak - er.' The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and chords in the right hand.

1 – Come, Let Us Worship and Bow Down

For He is our God,
And we are the peo - ple of His pas - ture

The image shows a musical score for a hymn. It consists of two systems of music. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 7/8. The lyrics are: 'For He is our God, And we are the peo - ple of His pas - ture'. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and chords in the right hand.

1 – Come, Let Us Worship and Bow Down

And the sheep of His hand,

And the sheep of His hand.

The image shows a musical score for a hymn. It consists of two systems of music. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: 'And the sheep of His hand,' and 'And the sheep of His hand.' The piano accompaniment features a steady bass line and chords that support the vocal melody. The first system ends with a repeat sign, and the second system ends with a double bar line.

17. Now that's the first six and a half verses of Psalm 95 . . . we sing those all the time.
18. But there's four and a half more verses that we don't sing . . .

Hebrews 3:7:11

⁷ Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,
 "Today, if you hear his voice,
⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
 on the day of testing in the wilderness,
⁹ where your fathers put me to the test
 and saw my works for forty years.
¹⁰ Therefore I was provoked with that generation,
and said, 'They always go astray in their heart;
 they have not known my ways.'
¹¹ As I swore in my wrath,
 'They shall not enter my rest.'"



19. Their call to worship was a reminder, not just of GOD'S POWER and of OUR PLACE, but also of the importance of hearing God's voice and responding to it with a soft heart, and of the dire consequences that accompany a failure to do so
20. **Isn't that interesting . . .** that every Sabbath as God's people gathered for worship . . . they began by reminding each other that they were there to LISTEN for God's voice, and to RECEIVE whatever they heard with SOFT and OBEDIENT hearts.
21. **I wonder how much our attitude about or experience of worship would change if we came in with such reminders . . . and such expectations . . . God is speaking . . . you'd better listen.**
22. But there's another reason the Preacher chose this text for this moment.
23. Yes, it was a call to worship with which they were familiar.
24. But it was also a story from their past that bore eerie similarities with their own story.
25. This ANCIENT WORD from Psalms was actually a WARNING based on an even MORE ANCIENT STORY.
26. The poet calls it **"the rebellion . . . in the wilderness."**
27. The Preacher assumed his audience knew it . . . the question is . . . does mine?
28. **"The rebellion . . . in the wilderness"** is a reference to the disaster that is recorded in Numbers 13 and 14.

29. Let me refresh your memory.
30. In the Book of Exodus, we read about God fulfilling his promise to the Patriarchs by brining the Children of Israel out of Egyptian slavery with a mighty hand.
31. But no sooner did the Israelites taste freedom, than they began to gripe and complain to and about the One that freed them.
32. They griped about the Red Sea in front of them and the Egyptians behind them.
33. They complained about their perceived lack of food and water.
34. The moaned about the ministry staff heading up this wilderness trek.
35. Now, for the most part, God was patient with them, because he was TESTING them so that they would learn to TRUST him . . . he says so in Deuteronomy 8.
36. But the Israelites didn't do well on tests, and everything came to a head at Kadesh, just across the river from the land of promise.
37. In Numbers 13, God told Moses to select one man from each tribe to go spy out the land.
38. For forty days they looked it over, and when they returned, they regaled the people with stories of a land flowing with milk and honey and producing grapes the size of bowling balls.
39. But they warned . . .

Numbers 13:28-14:4

However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there.
²⁹ The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan."



³⁰ But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." ³¹ Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are." ³² So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. ³³ And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."



Num. 14:1 Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. ² And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! ³ Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" ⁴ And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt."



40. Ahh . . . there it is!

41. "Let us . . . go back to Egypt"

42. To a people on the verge of going back, the Preacher pulls out an illustration about a people on the verge of going back.

43. At every hint of difficulty, the Israelites were ready to pack up and go back, and the Preacher's audience knows the feeling.

44. Faced with suffering and the possibility of martyrdom, some of them are threatening to go back . . . some to Judaism . . . others to nothing at all.

45. And so the Preacher begs them to remember this story from the *past* as they face their *present* situation.

46. The Preacher begs them to learn a lesson from the past.

47. Isn't that remarkable?

48. The philosopher George Santayana famously wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

49. But the Preacher of Hebrews already knew that.

50. To address a situation in the present, he reaches back in to the past . . . into the OLD TESTAMENT.

51. I thought that stuff was out of date . . . and out of fashion . . . and OLD.

52. But notice how the Preacher puts it . . . "This is what the Spirit SAYS," and "TODAY

- hear his voice,” and “the Word of God is LIVING and ACTIVE.”
53. There is no out of date . . . or out of fashion . . . or old when it comes to the Word of God.
 54. There is only what is profitable for TEACHING . . . REPROVING . . . CORRECTING . . . TRAINING and EQUIPPING (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
 55. Everything that has been written down has been passed down as EXAMPLES for *our* INSTRUCTION . . . *we* on whom the end of the ages has come (1 Cor. 10:11).
 56. Through ANCIENT WORDS and ANCIENT STORIES the LIVING and ACTIVE SPIRIT of GOD continues his slicing, dicing, julienning and exposing ministry.
 57. And he speaks to us TODAY as he spoke to our brothers and sisters YESTERDAY about our brothers and sisters from LONG AGO, and he says . . .
 58. DON'T GIVE UP!
 59. DON'T GO BACK!
 60. DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.
 61. What does it mean to *“harden your [heart]?”*
 - 62. William Lane says . . .**

William Lane, A Call to Commitment, 64.

Hardness of heart signifies treating the Lord with contempt; it is the refusal to believe the Lord; it is choosing to listen to human voices of despair rather than listening to the voice of God.



63. You remember the rest of the story, don't you . . .
64. The LORD was so displeased with the Children of Israel that he threatened to destroy them and start all over with Moses . . . the Children of Moses!
65. But Moses interceded for the people, and God relented.
66. However, because the people would not LISTEN to the voice of God and BELIEVE the promises of God, God decreed that the people would wander in the wilderness one year for every day that the spies were gone . . . for forty years . . . until all of that faithless generation died in the wilderness.
67. But it didn't have to be that way.
68. You'd think that the people who saw the plagues in Egypt . . . and the parting of the Red Sea . . . and the provision of manna in the wilderness would eventually learn to trust and obey . . . but they didn't.
69. And so the Preacher warns his congregation . . .

Hebrews 3:12-15

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. ¹⁵ As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”



70. This is such a dense text . . . there is so much to unpack . . . but, you know, they’re making me preach *short* sermons nowadays.
71. We could talk about the danger of the UNBELIEVING HEART that causes some to fall away.
72. We could talk about how important it is to EXHORT one another so that no one falls away.
73. We could talk about the DECEITFULNESS OF SIN . . .
 - a. The Children of Israel let what they saw with their PHSICAL EYES blind their SPIRITUAL SIGHT.
 - b. They were deceived by the size of the opponents and the severity of the terrain.
 - c. Just like the Preacher’s church was deceived by the propaganda of the Empire and the pressures of their neighbors.
 - d. Just like many of us are being deceived.
74. We could talk about the absolute necessity of holding our CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST firm to the end.
75. We could talk about the PROMISE OF REST that still remains for the people of God.
76. This is the major takeaway from chapter 4 . . .

Hebrews 4:1-3

^{4:1} Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ² For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. ³ For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said,

**“As I swore in my wrath,
‘They shall not enter my rest,’”**



77. God's people didn't get there under Moses . . . and they didn't get there under Joshua.

Hebrews 4:6-7

Heb. 4:6 Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience,⁷ again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted,

"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts."



Hebrews 4:8-11

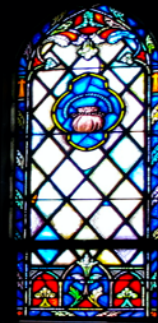
Heb. 4:8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God

Heb. 4:11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.



Hebrews 4:12-13

¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.



78. All of those things deserve more time that we can give them this morning.
79. But I want to end here where we began.
80. The Preacher encourages his audience to LISTEN and to RESPOND with OPEN HEARTS so that they don't FALL like their predecessors did.
- 81. "For the word of God is . . ."**
82. Why this riff on the living and active double-edged sword of the Spirit?
83. Well, I'm glad you asked.
84. In Numbers 14, when the people realized that they were not going to be allowed to enter the Promised Land with God's help, they decided to force his hand and march in anyway.
85. Again, with hard and unbelieving hearts . . .

Numbers 14:39-45

Num. 14:39 **When Moses told these words to all the people of Israel, the people mourned greatly. ⁴⁰ And they rose early in the morning and went up to the heights of the hill country, saying, "Here we are. We will go up to the place that the LORD has promised, for we have sinned." ⁴¹ But Moses said, "Why now are you transgressing the command of the LORD, when that will not succeed?**



Numbers 14:39-45

⁴² Do not go up, for the LORD is not among you, lest you be struck down before your enemies. ⁴³ For there the Amalekites and the Canaanites are facing you, and you shall fall by the sword. Because you have turned back from following the LORD, the LORD will not be with you."



Numbers 14:39-45

⁴⁴ But they presumed to go up to the heights of the hill country, although neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses departed out of the camp. ⁴⁵ Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and defeated them and pursued them, even to Hormah.



86. What you may not know is that the Amalekites and Canaanites were known for the use of a particular weapon . . . a double-edged sword.
87. The army of Israel fell in the wilderness to the double-edged swords of the Amalekites and Canaanites.
88. What confronted the Preacher's church, and what confronts you and me today is a much more effective weapon . . . the LIVING and ACTIVE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD of the SPIRIT.
89. It has penetrating skill like no other weapon, and we will not escape should we choose to do battle with it.
90. You thought the sword of the Amalekites was bad, you ain't seen nothing yet.
91. Learn a lesson from these ANCIENT WORDS and these ANCIENT STORIES.
92. Listen to the voice of God.
93. Believe in the promises of God.
94. Trust him to lead you into his promised rest.
95. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.