

MAKE OBEDIENCE YOUR DAILY CHORE!

Today's Text: Hebrews Chaps. 3

Extracts:

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." [Heb. 3: 12-14]

Pastor R. W. Schambach (1926-2012)¹ was a famous American televangelist and faith healer. In one of his sermons (circulated in those days by video and cassette tapes), he told the story of a wealthy and very hardworking industrialist under whom he had worked as a factory hand. It was in the early stage of his ministry. As the man was beginning to age, Schambach was led in spirit to ask the man to accept Jesus as his Lord and Saviour before it was too late. The man kept dismissing him from his presence. Then, one day, to the surprise of the man of God, the old man sent for him. Schambach thought the moment had arrived. He preached and prompted but all was to no avail. The man asked Schambach, "Are you saying that I will go to hell if I don't accept Jesus today?" The preacher replied emphatically, "Yes." The man got angry and ordered the pastor out of his presence. The following day, Schambach was told the sad news. The man had died the night before without accepting Christ.

We all take a similar risk with our lives, especially with respect to salvation. We behave as if we have all the time in the world without realizing that today could actually be the rest of our lives! In today's Bible verses, the writer of the book of Hebrews is warning his audience that they should learn from their ancestors who blew the grace God gave them in Egypt by squandering it through disobedience in the wilderness. Let us pay serious attention to the story so as to know how to make obedience our daily chore.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R._W._Schambach

1. Background: Your attitude matters!

The way most of us carry ourselves, we give the impression that we have control over our longevity.² Yet, yesterday is a memory and tomorrow is a mirage, that is, something that appears to be real but is merely imagined, an optical illusion. Without the benefit of a prophetic word, tomorrow is so uncertain that you can only talk about it in probabilities. On the subject, James has warned us [**Jam. 4: 13-14**]:

*Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit;" **whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.***

God has endowed humans (as distinct from His other creations) ***with freewill, that is, the ability to know the difference between good and evil and exercise choice*** [**Gen. 2: 16-17**]. It is our choice to worry about growing up (maturation) and building a career and a family (material prosperity). It is our choice to impose time deadlines on ourselves and when they look difficult or impossible, it is also our choice to cut corners through greed or immoral conduct. However, the consequences of our choices are beyond our control. For example, if we turn left when we ought to go right, we cannot blame God if we get lost! In the end, we find that we cannot have peace of mind. That was why, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned His listeners [**Matt. 6: 25**]:

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

Even though we have the privilege of freewill, time does not belong to us but to God. For example, most of us want to live long (70 years and beyond – **Ps. 90: 10**) but nobody has ever convinced me why s(he) wants to live long! Some claim that long life is a blessing from God [**Ps. 91: 16**] and yet Jesus, the Son of God, died on the cross at age 33! Today, history is dated before [BC] and after [AD] Him! The fundamental point is our human reluctance to die and yet, we do not know when, where or how we will die. In the end, we are operating in uncertainty. ***When you are not sure of your future, how can you act with confidence today? Do you then not know that today is the beginning of the rest of your life? That is why today is such a crucial time for all of us.***

Yesterday is behind us and we cannot change anything there. Tomorrow is in the future and we have no idea what it may turn out to be or whether we may see it at all. Of the three time frames, only today is visible; yesterday and tomorrow are invisible. If that is the case, ***why do we not devote the time within our control to fear and obey God instead of using it to regret the past and pushing our***

² http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume_11/Todayisallthatyouhave.pdf

rebellion into an uncertain future? Why can't we make obedience our daily chore?

As a measure of time, today can be defined as the 24-hour period from the last midnight to tonight's midnight. However, we are not awake all through that period. In the words of Jesus, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because ***he sees the light of this world***" [Jn 11: 9]. Jesus adds, "***Walk while you have the light***, lest darkness overtake you... ***While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light***" [Jn 12: 35-36]. That points to the spiritual meaning of today. Jesus is the Light of the world. You need light during your awake-hours of today. ***Therefore, if you walk in the light of Jesus during the awake- hours under your control, you are sons of God, children of obedience!*** In Jesus' words, "He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" [Jn 8: 12]. With such a definition of your today, do you need to worry about the rest of your life?

That is where the third chapter of the book of *Hebrews* becomes very handy to us. The writer used the experience of the children of Israel on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land to demonstrate the meaning and significance of today in our salvation journey. The following issues should be noted:

a) *All left Egypt by grace*

The children of Israel sojourned in Egypt for 430 years. On the day of their departure, God showed them favour as follows [Ex. 12: 35-37]:

Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the LORD had given them favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children.

They had earlier had the privilege to see how God inoculated them against the ten plagues that ravaged Egypt for the sake of the children of Israel. Therefore, ***they owed God obedience for gratitude.***

We are in a similar situation. We had no say in the natural endowments God has poured on us or the family into which we were born. He has given us power to get wealth (material, emotional or spiritual) for His purpose [Deut. 8: 17-18]. Even while we were yet sinners, He demonstrated love for us by sending His only begotten Son to die in our place [Rom. 5: 8]. Everywhere we turn, we know that the "race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill; but time and chance

[i.e., God's grace] happen to them all" [Eccl. 9: 11]. So, what is your excuse for not using your awake-hours of today to honour and obey Him?

b) *Then rebellion set in*

The writer reminded the Hebrews of what their ancestors did in the wilderness despite the grace God had showered on them. He wrote (quoting Psalm 95:7-11), "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness" [Heb. 3: 7-8]. You will recall that after miraculously crossing the Red Sea, the children of Israel began to exhibit ingratitude and rebellion. They complained against manna (food from heaven) and lusted after fish, cucumbers and suchlike foods they used to eat in Egypt [Num. 11: 1-9]. Of the ten spies sent to spy out the Promised Land, only Joshua and Caleb brought back a faith-filled report [Num. 13: 1-33]. As a result, God turned a journey of 40 days into 40 years [Num. 14: 34].

Do you know how we have messed up our salvation journey all because of rebellion? See how many flourishing ministries have floundered in recent times due to inordinate love of money [cf: 1 Tim. 6: 10] or sexual immorality [cf: 1 Cor. 5: 1-13]. See how many leadership tussles have split so many congregations, to the extent that "pastor-worship" is competing with true worship [cf: 1 Cor. 1: 11-13]. Rebellion has set in! Impunity, that is, self-awarded importance or self-exemption from laws, rules and regulations, has become the order of the day in politics, church and other institutions. Rebellion threatens obedience full time!

c) *Only the faithful arrived alive!*

The writer reminded the Hebrews, "Now with whom was [the LORD] 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" [Heb. 3: 17-19].

Only the faithful arrived alive! Only those of us who remain faithful will arrive in heaven on the day the Lord calls us home. ***Only those who make obedience their daily chore will arrive alive!***

From the foregoing, ***we may be taking an undue risk to think that we can control our journey to salvation here on earth. We think we can pick and choose who, when or what to obey. We think we can push true worship to our old age, after retiring from the pursuits of our inordinate ambitions. But do we have such indulgence?*** The rich fool planned to pull down his barn and build a bigger one to store his wealth for many years hence. Thereafter, he planned to relax, "eat, drink, and be merry." But God told him, "Fool! This night, your soul

will be required of you” [Lk 12: 16-20]. He was now bound to relax, eat, drink and be merry in hell, “into the fire that shall never be quenched” [Mk 9:43]! So, what lessons can we learn from the experience of the children of Israel for our own wilderness journey?

2. Lessons for us

The writer of the book of Hebrews warned the children of Israel, “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*” [Heb. 3: 12-13]. So, what lessons can we learn from their experience so we can make obedience our own daily routine? The following should be noted:

a) *God won't do for you what you can do for yourself!*

Salvation is free because it has been bought and paid for with the blood of Jesus. However, that it is free does not make it worthless. That it is free does not give you the licence to behave freely. For example, the air we breathe is free; yet, many people die of lack of oxygen! Therefore, you need to have the basic tools/equipment to be able to benefit from Christ's atoning death on the cross at Calvary. Here is how Jesus put it when He discussed with a ruler of the Jews, Nicodemus, who came to Him by night [Jn 3: 16-18]:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life... He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

God needs your cooperation. He cannot force you to obey; He will not do for you what you can do for yourself! Two examples from Christ's earthly ministry will make this point quite clear. First, we are quite familiar with the story of how Jesus raised Lazarus back to life after he had been dead for four days. Before Jesus got there, it was humans that had dressed up the dead body for burial in a cave and rolled a stone over it. When Jesus got there, He said to the people, “Take away the stone.” The people first put it, so they could remove it! Then He said, “Lazarus, come forth!” The people could not do that to the dead man! As Lazarus came forth, his hands and feet were still bound. Jesus commanded the people, “Loose him, and let him go” [Jn 11: 38-44]. Take another example. The 12-year-old only daughter of Jairus, a ruler of the Jews, was dead. After Jesus had raised her from the dead, He charged her parents to give her something to eat [Lk 8: 40-56]. They could not raise her from the dead but they could feed her!

So, it is your responsibility to obey because you can do it if you choose to so do. In the words of Jesus, “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” [Lk 6: 46]. ***He cannot obey for you! He will not force you to obey Him either!*** For example, on arrival in the Promised Land, Joshua charged his people to “fear the LORD [and] serve Him in sincerity and in truth.” Then, he challenged them to choose whom to serve but, as for him and his house, they would serve the LORD [Josh. 24: 13-15].

b) *Persevere once you are working by faith*

Once you choose to obey, it implies that you have chosen to walk by faith, not by sight [2 Cor. 5: 7]. That will not be easy because those who choose to work godly in Christ shall face persecution [2 Tim. 3: 12]. Therefore, you must ***master the building blocks of faith: tribulation → perseverance → character → hope*** [Rom. 5: 1-5].³ Walking by faith becomes your way of life, a daily chore.

c) *Nevertheless, time is not on your side. You have only today!*

In the words of Jesus Himself, “Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble [Matt. 6: 34]. Each day you wake up, thank God for the privilege to continue to obey Him for another day on earth. It is a very rare privilege which many that died the night before (without knowing or fearing God) never had.

So, today, if you will indeed hear His voice, you can no longer harden your hearts as in the days of rebellion of the children of Israel in the wilderness. Sin will no longer have any hold over you. You will now find that obeying God is as habitual as your daily chores. That is the message for us in today’s study.

3. Conclusion: Jesus is the Light of your today!

Jesus has said, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” [Jn 8: 12]. You have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Saviour- and, therefore, your Light. Can you imagine you radiating that Light today, everyday, ALWAYS, among your family, friends, colleagues, citizens and other publics that you interact with? Can you make obedience to the will of God a daily chore? If your answer is yes, there is joy in heaven for you!

Alleluia!

³ http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume_14/Thebuildingblocksoffaihv0114No33Feb2013.pdf