

# A Greater Calling

JESUS IS GREATER: An Exposition of Hebrews #5 - Pastor Gary Combs - October 22, 2023 - Hebrews 3:7-19

**INTRO:** Good morning church! We're continuing our series, "JESUS IS GREATER: An Exposition of Hebrews." Our theme verse is:

Hebrews 1:4 (NLT) This shows that the Son is far **greater than** the angels, just as the name God gave him is **greater than** their names.

Today, we'll be looking at Hebrews 3:7-19 in a sermon entitled, "A Greater Calling." What is the calling of Jesus? And why is it the greatest of all callings?

## What is His calling?

Matthew 11:28 (NLT) Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

It's not a calling to a religion, but to a relationship! It's not a calling to a philosophy, but to a Person, the Person of Jesus Christ! This personal calling to Jesus in and of itself makes it unique. Makes it great! But notice His promise. "I will give you rest." Rest for our weariness and our heavy burdens. Rest from sin and suffering. Rest from war and division. It's the greatest calling because Christ is the greatest person and He invites us to come to Him, to follow Him and He will give us the greatest rest.

**Need:** And we surely need rest. We need relief. Fighting and terrorism between Israel and Hamas. Riots in our streets. Shootings in Maine. Political fighting and disunity. Concerns about the economy and inflation. Growing anxiety and suicidal ideation among our young people. Where can we turn? Whose voice shall we heed for help? Whose calling? There are so many competing voices and most have already let us down. How do we keep from hardening our hearts to the calling of Jesus? We've heard it, but have we really truly responded to it?

**Trans:** That's what today's message is about. The only voice, the only calling, that can truly help us is the calling of Jesus. How will you respond to Christ's calling?

**BODY:** In the book of Hebrews chapter 3:7-19, the author warned the Hebrews not to harden their hearts against the greater calling of Jesus. We can heed the warning not to harden our hearts and rightly respond to the greater calling of Jesus. How can we rightly respond to the greater calling of Jesus? The text gives **four ways** we can rightly respond to the greater calling of Jesus.

**Read text:** Hebrews 3:7-19 (ESV) 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.'" 12 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." 16 For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? 17 And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

## HOW TO RIGHTLY RESPOND TO THE GREAT CALLING OF JESUS:

### 1. Respond immediately.

**EXP:** (7-11) Circle the word "today" (3x - 7,13,15). Quoting Psa. 95:7-11, the author warned the Jews who heard the call of Christ not to delay their response, nor harden their hearts as their forefathers had when God called them into the Promised Land, but to respond "TODAY!" Respond immediately!

"**Today**" (7, 3x) (σήμερον, *sēmeron*) - this (very) day), what has happened today, now. "The moment we hear God speak, we should respond. To delay is to allow hardness to set in like rigor mortis until our faith and obedience are as lifeless as a corpse ready for burial" (Swindoll, *Insights on Hebrews*, p.56).

"**Hear**" (7, 3x) (ἀκούω, *akouō*) - to hear, to perceive by the ear what is announced in one's presence

"**Do not harden**" (8,13,15 - 3x) (σκληρύνω, *sklērunō*) (PAS) - to harden, metaph. to render obstinate, stubborn. The subjunctive is acting like an imperative because of the if-then clause.

"**Hearts**" (8,10,12 - 4x) (καρδία, *kardia*) - denotes the centre of all physical and spiritual life.

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**“Rebellion” (8)** (παραπικρασμός, *parapikrasmos*) - provocation, irritation. Israel provoked the Lord by their grumbling and complaining about the food and water (Ex. 17) and ultimately about their grumbling against going into the Promised Land saying, “Let us choose another leader and go back to Egypt.” (Num. 14:4).

**“Testing/test” (8,9)** (πειρασμός, *peirasmos*) - to try, make trial of, test; their ancestors put God on trial. “They put my patience to a thorough trial.” (Philip Doddridge) They tested God’s patience and mercy.

**“Saw my works” (9)** - “They saw the wonders at the Red Sea, the descent on Mount Sinai, the supply of manna, etc., and yet while seeing those works they rebelled. Even while sinners look on the doings of God, and are surrounded by the proofs of his power and goodness, they rebel, and provoke him to anger. Men sin when God is filling their houses with plenty; when he opens his hand daily to supply their wants; when they behold the manifestations of his goodness on the sea and on the land; and even in the midst of all the blessings of redemption, they provoke him to wrath.” (Albert Barnes)

**“Provoked” (10)** (προσοχθίζω, *prosochthizō*) - be grieved with, displeased with, to be disgusted with

**“Astray” (10)** (πλανάω, *planaō*) - to go astray, wander, roam, metaph. to lead away from the truth into error.

**“Wrath” (11)** (ὀργή, *orgē*) - anger, wrath, anger exhibited in punishment, hence used for punishment itself

**“Rest” (11)** (κατάπαυσις, *katapausis*) - rest, a resting place, metaph. Heavenly resting place.

**ARG: Don’t harden your heart and delay responding. Today is the day of salvation!**

2 Corinthians 6:2 (NLT) For God says, “At just the right time, I heard you. On the day of salvation, I helped you.” Indeed, the “right time” is now. Today is the day of salvation.

**Jesus call us to respond “now.”** (After a strange excuse for delay)

Matthew 8:21-23 (NLT) <sup>21</sup> Another of his disciples said, “Lord, first let me return home and bury my father. <sup>22</sup> But Jesus told him, “Follow me now. Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead.”

**ILL:** Talk about the 1-year prep of moving the body to the ossuary (Jewish bone box). Or talk about how the Israelites tried to go into the Promised Land on their own the day after their rebellion (Num 14:39-45).

**APP:** Have you hardened your heart against Christ’s call? What hardens the heart? Same as the callous on your hand when doing repetitive work, little by little you lose feeling and sensitivity to spiritual things and to Christ’s call because you keep putting Him off until tomorrow. But today is the day of salvation!

## 2. Respond carefully.

**EXP: (12)** Note the imperative, “take care.” We are to respond with great care to Christ’s great call!

**“Take care” (12)** (βλέπω, *blepō*) (PAM) - to see, discern, of the bodily eye, metaph. to see with the mind’s eye, to have (the power of) understanding, to discern mentally, observe, perceive, discover, understand

**“Unbelieving” (12, 19)** (ἀπιστία, *apistia*) - unfaithfulness, faithless, want of faith, unbelief. Take care, keep a constant eye on your heart. Is it grumbling and complaining or believing. An evil heart and an unbelieving heart are made up of the same stuff.

**“Fall away” (12)** (ἀποστῆναι, *apostēnai*) - to go away, depart from, desert, fall away. “Apostasy.” There are those who attend the church, but are not member of the church. Those who espouse the faith, but their hearts are still unbelieving.

**ARG: Guard and take care of your heart.**

Proverbs 4:23 (NLT) Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.

**How do you take care of your heart? Ask God to give you regular heart checkups.**

Psalms 139:23-24 (NLT) <sup>23</sup> Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. <sup>24</sup> Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

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**ILL:** Your car has several indicators in the dashboard. Speedometer, gas, oil, temperature. If you don't take heed of these you may find yourself on the side of the road with a speeding ticket, out of gas,...

**APP:** Take heed. Take care of what's in your heart! Bring your heart before the Lord in reading His Word and in prayer. Is there any place in your heart that you are disobeying Christ's call on your life or not believing what He has said about Himself, about you?

## 3. Respond continually.

**EXP:** (13-14) Notice the command to "exhort one another every day." Our response to Christ's call includes a calling to "one another." You can't follow Jesus without hanging out with His disciples. But this is more than hanging with one another. We are to strongly urge and encourage one another to continually respond!

"Exhort one another" (13) (παρακαλέω, *parakaleō*) (PAM) - to call to one's side, to admonish, exhort.

"Deceitfulness of sin" (13) (ἀπάτη, *apatē*) - the lusts excited by deceit, deceitful influences seducing to sin

"Share in Christ" (14) (μέτοχος, *metochos*) - sharing in, partaking, a partner

"Original confidence" (14) (ὑπόστασις, *hupostasis*) - foundation, firm, steadfastness of mind, resolution

**ARG:** Sharing in Christ, His Word abides in us and we teach and admonish (exhort) one another always.

Colossians 3:16 (ESV) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

**ILL:** The fire goes out when the embers are separated, but grows hotter when they are gathered.

**APP:** We are a forgetful people. We need continual reminders. We are called to exhort and encourage one another in answering Christ's call to follow Him always.

## 4. Respond obediently.

**EXP:** (15-19) In v.15, the author repeats vv.7-8 from Psa.95 reminding the Hebrews of all that God had done for them, yet they "rebelled" (16) and were "disobedient" (18). And what was the source of their disobedience? "Unbelief" (19). In spite of all the miraculous works of God, they did not respond obediently because of "unbelief."

"Do not harden" (8,13,15 - 3x) - to harden, to become calloused. In Hebrews 2 we saw the first warning, "Pay attention lest you drift!" Here, "the author invites us to slow down and observe a second warning: "Beware of a hard heart!" It's a message too many neglect, but it's one we all need to hear from time to time, or we may end up careening off the path of Christian faith, love, and hope" (Swindoll, 53-54).

"Who/whom?" (16-18 - 8x) - The author asks 5 obvious questions of his Hebrew audience, asking them to answer (1) who "heard yet rebelled?" (16), (2) who "left Egypt led by Moses?" (16), (3) with whom was God "provoked for forty years?" (17), (4) who "sinned" and died in the wilderness? (17), (5) and to whom God "swear that they would not enter His rest?" (18). Answer to the 5 questions? Those who were...

"Disobedient" (18) (ἀπειθέω, *apeitheō*) - not to allow one's self to be persuaded, to refuse or withhold belief, to refuse belief and obedience, not to comply with. And what was the nature of their disobedience?

"Unbelief" (19) (ἀπιστία, *apistia*) - Lit., "no faith, no belief." Lack of faith. Lack of faith leads to lack of obedience. The author equates faith and obedience.

**ARG:** James also asks a rhetorical question: Isn't faith without obedient action dead?

James 2:20 (KJV) But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

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**For Jesus, believing and obeying are connected.**

John 3:36 (ESV) Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

**ILL:** Have you heard of the new trend among many young people who grew up going to church called **“Deconstructing Christianity?”** Or “deconstructing faith?” A recent article mentioned 4 reasons for this trend: **(1) Church hurt** - “It’s easier to throw the baby out with the bathwater when you’ve been hurt.” **(2) Poor teaching** - As a result, they fall prey to the Serpent’s query, “Did God really say?” (Gen. 3:1), **(3) Desire to sin** - Some deconstruct out of a desire to justify their sin. **(4) Street Cred** - Doubt is hip. The desire to fit in with the cultural ethos of our moment is strong. That’s why so many deconversion stories sound like everyone’s reading off the same script—its well-worn clichés signaling conformity to accepted norms. (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/4-causes-deconstruction/>)

**APP:** Unbelief and disobedience are directly linked. Unless faith motivates a person to obedience, it is not true faith but merely an esoteric and useless opinion. Do you believe Jesus? Have you decided to surrender your will to Him completely, obeying Him in all things?

**CONCLUSION:** There are many voices promising rest today, but only One who is able. He’s calling you now. Will you answer?

**ILL:** **Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling - Will L. Thompson (1880)**

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,  
calling for you and for me;  
see, on the portals he's waiting and watching,  
watching for you and for me.

Come home, come home;  
you who are weary come home;  
earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,  
calling, O sinner, come home!

Will you respond to the call of Jesus...

- (1) Immediately... today... now?
- (2) Carefully... taking heed of your heart?
- (3) Continually... fellowshiping and worshiping together?
- (4) Obediently... believing that Jesus is your all in all?

Will you respond to the great call of Jesus today?

Let’s pray.