

Sermon: Moses was Great. Jesus is Better.

Text: Hebrews 3

Introduction:

There is a story (a historical account—not a “fictional story”) in the Old Testament that is repeated over and over again throughout the Bible. It’s the story, described in Exodus through Joshua, of how God led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt...and ultimately settled them in the promised land.

The story begins towards the end of Genesis with one of the sons of Jacob (Joseph), being sold as a slave by his brothers—and carried off to the land of Egypt. When we pick up the story at the beginning of the Book of Exodus, Jacob’s descendants (the Israelites—or the “Jews”) have been made slaves by the Egyptians, and they now number in the millions. We find them crying out to God for deliverance. God does, indeed, rescue them by raising up Moses to be their leader. Following ten terrible plagues that God visits on the Egyptians, Pharaoh finally allows the Israelites to leave Egypt—only to then follow them intent on recapturing them.

This sparks a number of incredible miracles, beginning with the parting of the Red Sea and the destruction of the entire Egyptian army. God then “parks” the Israelites at the base of Mount Sinai for many months in order to give them His laws and commands (God is giving them an ethical code so that they will be a great nation that acts wisely in following the Lord when they settle in their own land). This entire generation of people witnessed first-hand these obvious miracles and unmistakable works of God. They had **ABSOLUTELY NO EXCUSE** to doubt God. And yet...

The Israelites tested God and hardened their hearts. Not just one person—but nearly every one (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb) refused to trust God. They constantly complained about Moses and his leadership. They constantly complained to God that they didn’t have enough food (although God was miraculously providing them ample food and water). Following the scouting report of twelve of their own who had been sent out to explore the promised land (Numbers 13-14), the people voted “as one” to listen to their fears and **REFUSED** to act in faith that God would give them success in occupying the land (and find rest and security).

As I said—this story has far-reaching implications. One of the things that ultimately came from this account was the fact that the Israelites (down through the generations) began worshiping Moses—and the law that Moses received at Mount Sinai—and the angels whom God used to communicate with Moses. One of the reasons that we now have the Book of Hebrews is to address this misplaced worship—and show with great clarity how Jesus is greater than angels, and the Mosaic law, and even Moses himself—and is alone worthy of our worship.

Another “teaching point” of the Exodus account is the **WARNING** that we have due to all of the things that the Israelites did **WRONG**. It was **NO SMALL THING** for this generation of Israelites to doubt God. They all perished in the desert. They failed to inherit all that God had for them.

Examination:

- Read **Psalm 95**
 - Summarize verses 1-7a. What is the Psalmist trying to say in these seven verses?
 - The Psalm takes a drastic turn in the latter part of verse 7. Things shift from words of praise—to a very serious word of warning. What is the warning that we find in verses 7 and 8?
 - Verses 8-10 describe a series of events in the life of the Israelites. What story is being referenced?
 - What sins did the Israelites commit in the wilderness?
 - What was God’s response to their hard hearts and doubt-filled testing? (vv. 10-11)
 - Why do you think this warning begins with the word: “Today”? (v. 7b)

- Read **Hebrews 3:1-6**
 - Why do you think the writer address his readers as “holy brothers and sisters”? (Read Hebrews 2:14-18 for a little more background)
 - What do you think the writer means by the phrase “fix your thoughts on Jesus”? What do you do in your life to make sure you look to Jesus? What are some things that can distract you from considering Jesus?
 - What do you remember about the life of Moses? Why was he so esteemed by the Hebrews?

- Read **Hebrews 3:7-19**
 - What new warning is given here (verses 8, 12)? Compare this with Hebrews 2:1-4 and Hebrews 3:6.
 - To what incident does Psalm 95 refer? How did the Israelites harden their hearts? What was the result of their behavior?
 - What do you associate with “God’s rest”? Think of as many things as you can. What was God’s rest for the Israelites?
 - What is at the root of a hardened heart? (Verse 13)
 - In what ways is sin “deceitful”?
 - What does it mean to “fall away from the living God”? (Verse 12)
 - What role does Christian community play in keeping us connected to God?
 - How important is it to be encouraged in your spiritual life? Why?
 - How important is it to encourage others in their spiritual life? Why?
 - Have you encouraged anyone this week? How?
 - Have you been encouraged this week? How?

Application:

Go back and read **Psalm 95** again. What is the antidote for a hardened heart according to this Psalm? How can you make sure you have this antidote in your life?