

# BaptistWay: Responding in obedience

August 23, 2013

- *The BaptistWay lesson for Sept. 8 focuses on Hebrews 3:7-4:13.*

Much of the book of Hebrews consists of “sermonettes” that reference Old Testament Scripture. Many of these are what preachers refer to as “expository” in nature. In other words, they “expose” or “draw out” the meaning of a single text and apply it to the contemporary audience’s situation. Thus is the case with Hebrews 3:7-4:13.

## **The text**

One of the biggest indictments made about Baptist churches is while they claim to believe the Bible, they fail to use it in worship. Have you ever been to a worship service where the Scripture reading before the sermon felt more like the national anthem before a football game? I attended a church in college where the pastor always read one verse of Scripture from which the sermon was supposed to be based. Following this reading he immediately launched into “10 Steps for Being a Better Christian”—or whatever his chosen topic for that week might have been—and hardly referenced the Scripture throughout the rest of the service.

The opposite is true when the author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 95:7-11. This passage speaks of the account in Numbers 14 where the Israelites “tested and tried” God in the wilderness (3:9). It cites God as being “angry with that generation” (v. 10) and proclaims “they shall never enter his rest” (v. 11).

## **The sermon**

Like all good preachers, the author of Hebrews not only quotes the text, but also explains and applies it to his/her audience's situation. These Hebrews were not trying to enter the "promised land," as were Caleb and Joshua in the midst of others who were fearful and faithless. However, like all Hebrews, they longed to be obedient to God and avoid sin.

The element that makes this possible where their ancestors failed is they "have come to share in Christ" (v. 14). This phrase indicates a change of status should result in faithfulness if/when the conviction that prompted it is authentic and held firm.

Perhaps you've heard the familiar joke suggesting the answer in Sunday school always will be "Jesus." One teacher asked her class of third graders to guess what she had brought for them in a shoebox. She began giving them hints: It is furry; it is small; it has beady eyes; it has a busy tail. As she enumerated each of these, Billy raised his hand and said, "It sure sounds like you are describing a squirrel, but I know the answer has to be Jesus." Jesus is indeed the answer when it comes to being obedient.

Obedience and faith often are thought of as being separate, but the author of Hebrews presents them as being interconnected. In the NIV, disobedience is cited as the reason that people do not enter God's rest (v. 18); yet, verse 19 follows this statement up with the affirmation that "they were not able to enter because of their unbelief."

The verb that concludes verse 18 normally means "disobeyed" but sometimes is used in the New Testament to mean "refusing to believe." To the author, these things are impossible to separate. You cannot have one without the other.

### **The application**

The application part of the author's sermon elaborates on the way "rest" applies to his audience as Christians. From the very beginning of time, God

set resting as a typological example for his creation (Genesis 2:2). In the author's mind, this is when it became something worthy obtaining. The Hebrews recognized their attempts to do this had fallen short. Just as the spies failed to enter the promise land, they failed to receive what was promised to them through their lack of obedience. The good news is this rest still is possible to obtain.

All good preachers save the best for last. This past July, a fireworks show in Waco was spoiled. Someone lost a battery that was supposed to power the main portion of the night's entertainment. This was not discovered until the show already was underway.

After the introductory fireworks, and many failed attempts to solve the problem posed by the missing battery, officials decided to cut the show short by setting off the finale that was powered by a separate battery. Have you ever been to a fireworks show with only an introduction and a finale? Something about it just felt wrong. Sure, there were elements that were entertaining, but the show was not complete.

After making a well-rounded case citing the Hebrews' past struggles with disobedience, and their continued need to observe it, the author is prepared to complete his sermon by pointing to what Jesus makes possible to those who believe and obey over the course of time.

"Anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his" (v. 10). Jesus makes possible what Joshua failed to do. While his rest includes faith and obedience, the only work it is contingent upon is the finished work of Christ. In other words, Jesus makes obedience an involuntary response instead of a forced requirement.

How are you responding in obedience to your faith in Christ every day?