

September 1st – Scheduled To Death...Under the Influence (of Strays and Stupids) – Hebrews 3:6-19

Introduction – In 2015, the NY Times examined the question of America, the New Promised Land? They made a few interesting points designed to demean the American story, but it is true that America is not the Promised Land as described in the Old Testament, but we are a land of Promise as described in the New Testament. Like with the Feast of the Old Testament which shadowed the reality that would be fulfilled in Christ Jesus, the Promise Land (location) of the OT foreshadowed a land of Promise that is fulfilled in Christ Jesus. And just as stubborn as were God's people of the OT in taking advantage of the promised land, so are the stubborn Christians of our day (of any Christian period) who do not take full advantage of the land of Promise in which God's children enjoy his rest! What is worse is we should be setting a good example for others to follow, but we, like the Hebrews in the desert are being led astray and away from God's promised rest.

The principle of the Promised Land was articulated by Joshua, who along with Caleb scouted out the promised land along with 10 others. Joshua and Caleb returned from their reconnaissance excited and reporting a land flowing with milk and honey. But the other 10 said: *"We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are."* But Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes and said; *"If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them."* (Numbers 14:8-9)

The principle of the Land of Promise is fully discussed in the book of Hebrews. It was articulated by our Great High Priest Jesus Christ. It would not be restricted to a location but would be a blessing and promise that whatever land that Christians would settle, God would enrich and protect. The same plea offered by Joshua and Caleb could be echoed for any seeking the new land of Promise, do not rebel against Lord...do not be afraid of the people of the land...This will be our focus in this series of messages entitled "Scheduled to Death". In this series we will study Hebrews 3 and 4, to consider who we are allowing in this world to lead us astray because we are afraid of them and allowing those in this world to lead us away because we are ashamed of Him (God). We will talk frankly about the pressures we feel in today's culture to engage in everything around us because we hope it will bring us blessing and fulfillment. But the reality we must learn from scripture is the only way we find peace and fulfillment is in God's Rest. Using the example of the straying and stupid Israelites who perished in the desert, the Hebrew writer brings the idea of rest home to those who believe in Christ Jesus as our new High Priest and Son over God's house.

But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory. So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested and tried me, though for forty years they saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation; I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.' So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief. (Heb. 3:6-19)

O.K., so here is the deal or agreement God has with modern day believers. If we hold firmly to our confidence and hope in which we glory, which is entering God's rest, He will give us abundance (milk and honey), and He will protect us from our enemies (does any of this sound familiar). For this very reason millions around the world would love to come to America and live because they believe and sometimes even bet their lives on this being the "land of Promise." But none of this means anything if the Christians in America turn their back on God's rest because the land of America is not the focus of God's blessing and protection, it is God's people

who live here that are His focus. This rest God promises is the ability to enjoy all His blessings as we continue to live responsibly for Him. The Hebrew writer makes the case that “Today” is the day to confirm we are entering God’s rest by not falling into the same trap many of the Israelites who were freed from Egypt did. We see here in Hebrews 3 how they were hesitant of heart because they were hardened by deceit, and they were hard of heart because they were hardened by doubt. Many are making this same error in our day so today we must be challenged to consider carefully our situation.

I hate to put any pressure on you, but the future abundance and protection of the old US of A depends on our desire to stay instead of stray and be smart instead of stupid. We must re-examine how we schedule our lives because it reveals if we are straying and choosing to be stupid about God’s provision and protection. It isn’t as if God is asking us to sell all we possess, give it to the poor, and move into a monastery. He is asking us to prioritize how we encourage each other and how we embrace our convictions. This will keep us from straying from Him and His truth and getting stupid succumbing to the world’s doubt. Let’s unpack these ideas.

Did you see or hear about the Bus Driver who was arrested for being “under the influence” just this past week? She hit some things, damaged the bus, and there were kids on the bus! The last report I saw was officials weren’t sure what influence she was under, but it was making her stray and be stupid. I am not sure what influence you are under when it comes to your schedule in life, but is it making you stray from God’s safe path, is it so stupid that you are putting those in your care in danger? Remember, we are talking about making God’s plan our priority, and the idea of rest is associated with taking one day out of week to put our focus on God, come together to share in communion, bring our offerings into the storehouse, and worship His glory because He doesn’t need it, we do in order to enter into God’s rest. Statistics show that fewer people are going to church these days, but not because they are sleeping in on Sundays. Sunday has become one of the most heavily scheduled days of the week, especially for young families. This doesn’t just impact parents, but grandparents too, who want to be there to support their grandkids in their activities. Just last Sunday a grandparent said to me as they were going out the door, off to a ball game. But it isn’t just ball games, or activities for children and teens, there are so many events being held on Sundays that you could attend one every week in this area all year long. You could go eat, go drink, go rock out or get your country on, go for an organized walk and run, see every kind of game, competition, or event. Now, there is nothing immoral or wrong with any of these activities, except maybe the country music thing, but when they are prioritized before our promise to God to meet together on Sundays to celebrate His rest, then anything can become a bus that is going astray driven by someone stupid under the influence.

Maybe it would help if you would always put everything on the schedule through the “Rest Test”. We can use the words of Hebrews 3 to understand the test God desires we put every decision through before going ahead with it. Here are 3 simple questions we must ask:

1. Are we testing God’s patience by ignoring His rest for this scheduled activity?
2. Can we honor God through the scheduled activity?
3. Are we mindlessly following the crowd who has scheduled this event during God’s time?

Again, the problem is not the activity that we schedule it is when we schedule or allow the activity to be scheduled. What would you do if someone started scheduling things at 1 or 2 a.m. because that is when venues and the schedule is open? Would you show disrespect for your body’s need for rest to participate or let your children participate? If other parents told you that is the only time for our team or event and we want your kids or you to be involved, would you ignore your need for rest, or would you mindlessly go along with the crowd? Isn’t it the same with God’s required time of rest, when we gather on the Lord’s Day? Are we saying we don’t need that rest when we just go along with what others have scheduled? God is looking out for us through His required time of rest because for centuries when His people have honored Him and obeyed Him in this, He has opened up the floodgates of blessings on them.

Hebrews 10:38-39 assures; "But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back." But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved." There is much riding on this scheduling thing, but it is much more than just a Sunday thing.

We must ask ourselves what influence are we under and what influence are we putting our kids under? The Little League World Series wrapped up last Sunday. I thought most of the coaches who were caught on camera speaking to their team behaved themselves well. But I also noticed that some of the coaches had to have their words muted by the network because they were offensive and vulgar, but the little leaguers were still exposed to them. We might not think about it, but we will be held accountable for the influence we are under, and more so the influence we put our kids under. Again, back to Hebrews 3:12; "**See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.**" This means that when we are Under the Influence of Strays we can become Hardened by Deceit because it creates in us a sinful, hesitant heart. We must question everything on our schedules and the schedules of those we love because not everybody cares if we hold on to our convictions about Christ. Matter of fact, they probably could care very little as they substitute or are forced to substitute "amoral" training which is so secularized that God is nowhere to be found in it. Can God be found in sports, absolutely! What about cheering and youth organizations, He can be there too, but there is more of an effort to "de-God" all things so that no one is offended. But why aren't we? We must take responsibility for the influences we put our family under, because whoever is driving that bus takes us where they want to go and they might be going to crash!

Not only do we have to consider if we are being led by strays, and God forbid we are leading people astray, but we also have to consider if the influence of others we are under is making us so stupid that we begin to doubt the value of God's rest as compared to the value of the activity. For years I have witnessed Christian parents agonize over this issue, and honestly, I have heard many stupid excuses. I don't mean to be disrespectful but are we so under the influence of others that we question what should take priority in our schedules. If we or our children have the chance to participate in a church activity verses a worldly one, and we doubt the superior value of God's kind of activity, we DUI ourselves. Hebrews 3:15; "**As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.**" God's voice on this matter has been loud and clear for 5000 years, enter into His offered rest or you are Under the Influence of Stupid Hardened people who just make you Doubt the value of His rest. He calls this rebellious because it reveals we "have not known (his) my ways". Outside of extreme examples, what church activity related injuries do you experience or do your children experience? Is there a greater chance that you will make a run to the emergency room or have to seek counseling for you or your kids because they honor God by participating in His rest or because they were involved in some secular activity?

Full disclosure, I have been going to church almost every Sunday of my life. When I was a parent, I taught my kids that church was the most important activity of their week. When conflicts arose, my challenge to them was make a decision that honored God and honored what we as a family believed. Surprisingly, most young people don't even think they have a choice. If it is offered, whether they are gifted or interested, they feel obliged to get involved, and parents will pay whatever the cost to support them. But absent God's rest it is but them wandering around in the wilderness just killing time until God's people receive their full reward. This isn't meant to sound cruel, but that is what we mean by "Scheduled To Death."

It is harder today than it used to be to keep Sunday as a sacred day for the Lord to be honored while He gives us His rest. But every generation must make their choice, and grandmas and grandpas, we might want to speak up more and challenge our own kids who are allowing the world to wear out their kids. It is about the balance, but if we don't balance it all against what God teaches us, we will always be out of balance. Many of our stressed out and tired families wonder why they are so? Now you know how to help them.