

Preparing for Final Judgement

Hebrews 12:18-29

Introduction:

It's a joy to preach to you. Please turn in your bibles now to the book of Hebrews and chapter 12. Hebrews 12. Let's pray.

Father God, we thank you for your kindness in giving us this text of scripture. Thank you for writing it by your Holy Spirit. We pray now that YOUR WORD would do YOUR WORK in your hearts. We pray that you would send your Spirit to give us eyes to see, ears to hear, and soft hearts to receive your living and implanted Word. We ask that you would show us JESUS, THIS MORNING, in all of his fullness. And we pray for this in Jesus' name. Amen.

What is the Holiness of God? That question is perhaps the most IMPORTANT question that you can ask yourself about God's attributes! In the book of Revelation, there are 10s of thousands of angels singing and worshipping God. And then there are 4 select angelic beings who stand before God's throne, and their ONE job is to sing ONE line of a chorus OVER AND OVER AND OVER, day and night without ceasing. And do you know what they sing? The scream out "HOLY HOLY HOLY is the Lord God almighty, who was and who is and who is to come!" These angels are closest in proximity to the Lord, and WHAT IS THE PRIMARY THING that they see about God? It's that GOD IS HOLY! Although God is love, they don't scream out, "LOVE LOVE LOVE". Although God is just, they don't cry out, "JUST JUST JUST." Rather, when they look at God, they exclaim, "Holy Holy Holy", Because beloved, that is the most EVIDENT attribute of God. He is PERFECTLY HOLY.

Throughout the Bible, God declares himself "the Holy One of Israel". The Old Testament, in a nutshell, shows us that it's hard for a SINFUL PEOPLE to dwell with a HOLY GOD! An entire book of the Bible – called Leviticus – is dedicated to teaching us one thing, that GOD IS HOLY! When Isaiah the prophet saw a vision of God, what was

the first thing he noticed about the Lord? THAT HE WAS HOLY, and that Isaiah himself was a man of unclean lips in comparison to that kind of moral purity.

And so what does holiness mean? Well, it especially means that God is MORALLY PURE! He is PERFECTLY GOOD and RIGHTEOUS and everything he does issues from that goodness and righteousness. In Revelation, Jesus clothes himself with the blazing sun, like a man clothes himself with a white robe! You see, God exists in PERFECT BLINDING PURITY! This is a portrait of the Holiness of God. This is what it means that God is LIGHT! It means that he is HOLY.

But Holiness also means MORE than moral purity, doesn't it? It means that EVERY FACET of God's character is SET APART from the rest of the created order. THERE IS NO ONE LIKE GOD. THERE IS NO ONE BESIDE the Lord. There are things that ONLY God IS, and ONLY God DOES. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kingdoms; no one can thwart the working and the willing of God. Why? Because he is HOLY in his SOVEREIGNTY and in every other attribute! He is unlike ANYTHING ELSE and ANYONE ELSE in this world!

And so, that is the most EVIDENT attribute of God. He is PERFECTLY HOLY. And God wants us TO KNOW THIS about Him, for when we see Him. And we ALL will see him one day – face to face. Hebrews says, “It is appointed once for man to die, and then the judgement.” We will all stand before God on the last day – and give an account for the life we have lived in the body – and we will meet him IN HIS HOLINESS.

And in this text, we are going to see that there is only ONE HOPE for us, when we meet God in his Holiness. There is only ONE WAY of Salvation when we stand before our HOLY judge.

That's what this text is about. So let's dive in together.

Hear now the Word of the Lord in Hebrews chapter 12, starting in verse 18

This is God's Holy, Inspired, and Error-Free Word:

Scripture:

¹⁸For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, ¹⁹and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. ²⁰For they could not bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned." ²¹And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling."

²²But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of ²³angels, ²³to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

This is the Word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God).

In this text, we are told what it is LIKE for a SINFUL PEOPLE to meet their HOLY JUDGE. How dreadful and fearful it is to STAND A SINNER in the hands of a HOLY GOD!

And then, we are taught that there are 3 ways to PREPARE to meet that Holy God; 3 ways we are called to READY OURSELVES for final judgement; for when the sky splits, Jesus comes back, and we all stand before the great white throne, and give an account for our lives. I don't know about you, but I want to be ready for that day.

And so God calls us to respond in 3 ways: He calls us to 1) TRUST IN THE MEDIATOR, to 2) BECOME a HEAVENLY CITIZEN, and to 3) be SPRINKLED WITH THE BLOOD. He calls us to: 1) TRUST IN THE MEDIATOR, to 2) BECOME a HEAVENLY CITIZEN, and to 3) be SPRINKLED WITH THE BLOOD.

This is our only hope before a HOLY GOD. And so let's prepare for that day together.

The first way to prepare for God's judgement is to:

1) Trust in the MEDIATOR

In verses 18-21, we are reminded of the story of Moses in Exodus 19, when God showed up in all of his Holiness.

In Exodus 19, the Lord tells Moses that “in 3 days, I will appear to the people of Israel – I will personally descend on the mountain called “Sinai”, and you will all listen from the base of the mountain. And to prepare for this personal meeting with me, consecrate yourselves these 3 days – cleanse yourselves to be ready”. And so that’s what Moses and the people did! They abstained from doing anything unclean – lest they die when they meet their perfect and Holy God.

And so, 3 days passed, and on the morning of the third day, God descended upon Mount Sinai in FIRE, and it was a FEARSOME sight! As God stepped upon the top of the mountain, he came AS a GREAT FIRE (the text says), and the entire mountain was shrouded with the smoke which billowed from that fire on the top. The whole Mount Sinai was swelling with smoke as if from a furnace; this is JET-BLACK smoke! And with this dark cloud, God shrouded himself– so that the sight of God as LIGHT and FIRE would not destroy his people.

Exodus 19 says, that there was peals of thunder and lightning. And then a very loud sound – like a trumpet. And the trumpet blast grew louder and louder until it was overwhelming. And the people were trembling before their Holy Judge! They saw the fire, they heard the trumpet, they felt the earth quake, and maybe even tasted the sulfur in the air. They KNEW the DREAD of their HOLY JUDGE, because they were a SINFUL before him. Beloved, this is what God’s UNMEDIATED HOLINESS looks like before a sinful people; it looks like FIRE. God is a CONSUMING FIRE.

And Exodus says that God started to speak from the fire – in a voice so powerful and terrifying that the people begged that God not speak to them. And instead, the people

pleaded for Moses to speak in their stead, on their behalf. The people said to Moses in Exodus 20,

*“Speak to us **yourself** and we will listen. **But do not have God speak to us or we will die.**”*

And so these people begged MOSES to enter the fire and darkness in their stead; they begged MOSES to MEDIATE between their SINFUL SELVES and their Holy God.

And that’s exactly what he did. Moses was a BLAMELESS MAN that God delighted in! Moses was HOLY as God was Holy! And so, he could ENTER IN, without incurring judgement. And so MOSES APPROACHED the thick darkness, where God dwelt; he ENTERED INTO the sulfuric cloud. And he SPOKE WITH the Lord, on behalf of the PEOPLE of God! As a man speaks to his friend.

Because, beloved, that is the ONLY WAY a SINFUL PEOPLE can MEET their Holy Judge without judgement; they needed a BLAMELESS MEDIATOR.

And so the Author of Hebrews says, “listen, I want you to remember the story of Moses, because MOSES is a parable about a greater mediator to come! MOSES foreshadows a GREATER MOSES – A GREATER GO-BETWEEN, who not only brings you into TEMPORARY relationship– but who brings you into an EVERLASTING relationship with your Holy God!

And who is that GREATER MEDIATOR? Look down at verse 24.

*“But you have come... **to Jesus, the mediator** of a new covenant”*

Beloved, Jesus is the greater Moses! Jesus is the greater go-between who brings us into fellowship with our Holy God! And he does so much more than Moses ever could! Moses could only give us a LONG-DISTANCE relationship with God; but Jesus transports us RIGHT INTO God’s throne room with BOLDNESS! And how does he do that?

He goes to the Father on behalf of his people, and says I HAVE PAID FOR THEIR SINS IN FULL! Don't hold their sins against them; I have washed them white as snow. I am BLAMELESS and they are UNITED TO ME.

Because you see, ONLY THROUGH JESUS, is the Holy God of the universe ACCESSIBLE sinful people like us.

A few years ago my wife's best friend Esther was travelling along a road, when all of a sudden she was pulled over by a police officer. She was confused and asked the officer why she was pulled over, and the officer said, "you are travelling 30 miles per hour above the speed limit; I'm giving you a super-speeder ticket". Apparently, the speed limit changed from 50 to 35 without her noticing, and she was going 65, and that's where she was caught in a speed trap. This was a complete accident – and was unintentional speeding.

Now, normally if this was a one-time offense, you would go to court, pay your fine, and receive a few demerit points on your license – and that would be it. But because Esther was an international student on an international license, the rules were much stricter for her. If she went to court and was found guilty, they would revoke her license. And then she wouldn't be able to drive herself to school!

And so, Bethany rushed with Esther to the courthouse. Esther had the room number, but she couldn't find where the room was, and so she found a man who worked there and asked for directions. The man said to Esther, "how can I help you". She said, "my court hearing is in 10 minutes, and I cant find my room". And the man said, "let me see your ticket". And after taking a look at her ticket he said, "do you have a lawyer? Because this kind of ticket will cause you to lose your license." And she said, "no I don't. I cant afford a lawyer; I'm a student right now". And the man said listen, "I am a lawyer, and I know your court-hearing is in 10 minutes, **but I will represent you in court today.** Just pay me what you can and don't worry. I will get your ticket sorted out with the judge." And so, completely taken aback, Esther walked into court with this man, and

watched as her Lawyer reasoned with the judge, and marvelled as the judge **CLEARED HER OF ALL CHARGES.**

Friends, because of the lawyer's work on her behalf, Esther **MET THE JUDGE WITHOUT JUDGEMENT**– without losing her license. Because Esther had a **MEDIATOR** between her and the judge; there were no charges laid against her – Esther had peace with the law of the US of A.

Beloved, **THAT** is how Jesus deals with us. He is like a lawyer – a go-between – who pleads our case before the Father, he speaks on our behalf, and he says, “Father, I know they have sinned, but I have paid their penalty, on their behalf! I have become their substitute in death, and I have borne all of your wrath against them in my body. So Father, on the basis on my sacrifice on the cross, forgive them! Clear them of all charges against their account. And beloved, let me tell you, Jesus **ALWAYS** wins the case. And more than that, Jesus – the Greater Moses – not only goes to the **FATHER** on our behalf, but he also **BRINGS US WITH HIM**. This greater mediator doesn't just **SUBSTITUTE** us in God's presence, he purifies us like himself, and brings us with him! Because of **JESUS** we find peace with the judge of the universe.

And so, **TRUST IN THE MEDIATOR!** That's how you prepare for final judgment. Confess your sin to him, let him **REPRESENT YOU TO** your **HOLY JUDGE**.

And then once you've done that, **KEEP ON TRUSTING** in the mediator! Run to him when you sin. You don't just need a mediator the day you got saved; you need him **EVERY DAY** to **INTERCEDE** for you and apply his forgiveness to you. So trust in him, and keep on trusting in him. That's the **FIRST WAY** we prepare for final judgement.

And secondly, we prepare for God's judgement by becoming:

2) **CITIZENS** of the Heavenly City

That's what verse 22 says. It says:

²² *But you have come to Mount Zion **and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.***

Now, in the Bible, Mount Zion was a physical place in Israel; it was a mountain, and on top, the city of Jerusalem was built. And at THE CENTER of this city was the Temple of God. This was where GOD dwelt with his people! And all of these images became symbolic for what HEAVEN is like! HEAVEN is where GOD WILL DWELL with his people PERFECTLY! Heaven will be like a HOLY CITY made up of HOLY CITIZENS.

And so that's how you must prepare for the final judgement; you must become a CITIZEN of HEAVEN! You must be granted HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP! Because unless we're one of God's people, we're not safe from God's judgement. Only those who are grafted into God's family tree shall be rescued from the judgement that is coming upon the world – when God arrives in his HOLINESS.

Which means that we must REPENT of our sins, and BELIEVE upon Jesus! We must be MADE into a NEW PEOPLE by the work of Christ. That is how we become a citizen of heaven.

But let's pause there and think on that for a second. We're not in heaven yet, and yet in this text, we are told that we have ALREADY COME to the heavenly city. How can that be so? Well, it means that we are ALREADY made to be CITIZENS of heaven RIGHT NOW, if we have trusted in Jesus! We are a COLONY OF HEAVEN on earth, RIGHT NOW.

And so what does that mean for us RIGHT NOW? How does God call us to live, as HEAVENLY CITIZENS ON EARTH? If you've really met Jesus, then there's going to be A CHANGE in your life. Because meeting Jesus is like getting hit with a transport truck; you cant meet him and NOT be DRASTICALLY TRANSFORMED.

And so, how are HEAVENLY CITIZENS described in this passage? Because that's what we're called to look like here on earth. Well,

First, we are a GENERAL ASSEMBLY. Throughout the bible, the church is never described as the people of God “SCATTERED”; the Church is ALWAYS defined as the people of God “GATHERED”. The word for Church literally means “the assembly” or the “gathering”; we are a congregation of people who ASSEMBLE! We are a FLOCK of sheep; a CLUSTER of the saved. That is what is MEANS to be the church! **That’s what we’ll do in heaven, and that’s what we’re called to do ON EARTH! We are called to GATHER together.**

But obviously, we are living in strange times, during this Ontario lockdown, and this pandemic. And the Church is NOT ABLE to fully gather as she has historically gathered. Under our present circumstances, for a TEMPORARY TIME we are called to SUSPEND our gatherings, in the interest of loving our neighbours and submitting to our governing officials.

And so, what do we do when the ASSEMBLY cannot ASSEMBLE? Well, first, we pray that this would be a SHORT SEASON. And second, we MINIMIZE THE LOSS of the LOCKDOWN! We get busy caring for needs which normally get met when we GATHER TOGETHER. And so, this means: take a few minutes this week to call someone in your church family, and ask them: “how can I pray for you?” Listen to them, and then pray for them over the phone. This means taking a meal to a Church member who is sick and leaving it on their porch for them. This means facetimeing trusted brothers and sisters in Christ for continued accountability – and exhorting each other every day as long as it is called to day, so that none of us will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. This means MEETING ONE ANOTHER’S SPIRITUAL and PHYSICAL needs.

And so, let’s minimize the LOSS of the LOCKDOWN through serving one another! And let’s pray that the Lord would allow us to gather soon. Because that is who we are; we are an ASSEMBLY.

Second, we are the Church of the Firstborn! In the ancient world, there were special rights that the firstborn son was alone entitled to. If you were firstborn Son, you had the exclusive right to inherit all of your parent’s estate upon their passing. **Being the “FIRSTBORN” meant that you were the INHERITOR of everything your Father owned.** And so what does it mean that **God’s people** are called the

“FIRSTBORN”? It means that God’s people are the **HEIRS of the Father’s estate!** It means that we are the inheritors of EVERYTHING that the Heavenly Father Owns. And what does the heavenly father own? EVERYTHING! That will be your experience on the final day when you are welcomed into the heavenly Zion – if you have trusted in Jesus. You will inherit the whole NEW EARTH – you will inherit everything!

That, beloved, is CAUSE for PAUSE and PONDERING. That, should inform where you make your investments on this earth. If you are going to inherit EVERYTHING, then don’t trade your heavenly inheritance for the morsels of sin in this world – it’s NEVER WORTH IT. Esau tried that, and he lost EVERYTHING. Don’t trade you heavenly inheritance for the bowl of soup that this world offers! The eternal inheritance of God is far better than whatever sin is giving you pleasure. And so REMEMBER who you are – you are the Church of the Firstborn; live as if you inheritance REALLY IS in heaven; because it is.

And as proof of that, right now – if you are in Christ – you have already begun to receive the greatest part of your inheritance! You have the inheritance of God’s own presence in your life; not only is God with you, he is IN YOU – indwelling you, by his Holy Spirit.

That’s the second aspect of being a heavenly citizen on earth; we give up the pleasures of living of sin, in order to gain a greater treasure in heaven.

And third, we are those enrolled in heaven! For those of you who have truly been born again, your name is inscribed in heaven! In heaven there is a book called “the book of life”, which is the registry of all of the citizens in the heavenly Jerusalem. And so if you’ve been saved – if you have repented of your sins and trusted in Jesus, then your name has been written in this book, and it CANNOT be blotted out! If God has SAVED you, He has infused persevering grace INTO YOU. He who began a good work in you shall complete it UNTIL the day of Christ Jesus!

And so, let that promise of preservation fuel your perseverance. Since your name has been written in heaven, let that drive you to spend your life LABORING for God! Invest your time, your talent, and your treasure in serving God’s people, and performing your job as unto the Lord. Because if he has written your name in the book, then Jesus has

given you EVERYTHING YOU NEED to be transformed from one degree of glory to the next. He will KEEP YOU through empowering you to do KEEPING THINGS. Because when we know that our salvation is fixed in heaven, we can work not FOR our salvation, but FROM our salvation.

And Lastly, we are described as “the spirits of the righteous made perfect”. Listen, on the last day, when we stand before God – if we are in Christ – we will stand as HOLY and BLAMELESS before him. We will stand, wrapped in the robes of Jesus’ righteousness, and welcomed into the presence of his glory with great joy!

And, so God calls us RIGHT NOW to prepare for that day. **He calls us to live Holy Lives as a dress rehearsal for heaven.** Not perfect lives – that’s impossible – but repentant lives, that own up when we mess up. Lives that grieve sin, love holiness, and become progressively more and more like Jesus – as we behold him in his Word.

And so, BECOME who you ARE! Invest in your HOLINESS; be a quick repentor, get serious about sin in your life; cut it out. Now that God has planted holy ROOT in your heart, let’s start bearing HOLY FRUIT in our lives.

And so citizens of heaven on earth do 4 things: 1) they gather, 2) they treasure Christ over Sin, 3) they persevere, 4) and they live HOLY.

That’s what it means to live as a colony of heaven on earth. And that’s the second way to prepare for final judgement; we must become CITIZENS of heaven.

The final way to prepare for God’s judgement is to:

3) BE SPRINKLED with the BLOOD

Look at verse 24:

*“you have come...**to the sprinkled blood**, which speaks [a] better [word] than the blood of Abel.*

You see, beloved, to prepare for final judgement we must be sprinkled with Jesus' blood! We must be covered by the cleansing flow of his sacrifice for us on the cross!

In Genesis chapter 3, Adam and Eve sinned against God. And then in chapter 4, that sin spread to their children, like a disease. Their kids' names were Cain and Able. And one day, when Cain became jealous of Able; he rose up against his brother and killed him in a field. And the Lord said to Cain,

*“Where is Abel your brother?” And [Cain] said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” ¹⁰ He said, “What have you done? **The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground.** ¹¹ **Now you are cursed** from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.”*

And so when the faithful man Able was murdered, **his blood spoke a word to God!** And that word, resulted in CONDEMNATION for CAIN! The blood of Able spoke a word of JUDGEMENT! The blood of Able brought the retributive justice of God upon Cain for his sins!

But beloved, this passage says that there is a blood which SPEAKS A BETTER WORD than the blood of Able. And that's the blood of Jesus! Even though Jesus was UNJUSTLY MURDERED – like ABLE – JESUS' blood didn't speak CONDEMNATION against those who killed him. No, Jesus' blood speaks FORGIVENESS and PEACE and NEW LIFE towards sinners!

We think of Jesus, when he was shedding his blood on the cross for us, what did Jesus say to the Father about those killing him? He said, *“Father forgive them, for they know not what they are doing!”* You see Jesus' blood prepares us for the final judgement by

granting us forgiveness from the Father! The blood of Jesus is a PAYMENT for our sins and a SATISFACTION for God's wrath against us! By trusting in Jesus' blood, we are sprinkled and made perfect and pure in God's eyes – as if we had never sinned!

Listen, the Bible says that Jesus lived the perfect life that you and I could never live. And he then Jesus willfully died on the cross – not to pay for any sin that HE committed, but to pay for all of OUR sins! He took the judgement; he took the death-blow, that we deserved for our sins! He bore all of God's wrath in his body, on the cross. So that a miracle could happen: That when we believe on Jesus, all of his perfection is credited to our account, and all of infinite debt our sin is credited to Jesus' account. The Bible says

He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21 NASB

Friends, has Jesus become your sin, this morning? Have you laid your sins on Jesus? And then have you been covered by his blood, which speaks a better word than the blood of Able? Because **JESUS BLOOD is your ONLY HOPE FOR CLEANSING before your Holy God.** Hiding ourselves in HIS BLOOD provides us with right-relationship to God.

Listen, have you prepared yourself for the final judgement? Are you ready to meet God in all of his holiness, before his great white throne on the last day? On that last day, NOTHING is going to matter unless you have trusted in the blood of Jesus. Nothing is going to matter except that Jesus is your mediator. Nothing is going to matter except that you have become a citizen of heaven RIGHT NOW. Don't delay – don't gamble with your soul. Prepare yourself for that final day. Today is the day of salvation! You don't know what tomorrow will bring. Come this morning, and trust in Jesus' blood. God has not returned yet in his holiness, and there is still time.

Because, trusting in the blood is how Jesus becomes our mediator. Trusting in the blood how we become citizens of the heavenly city! Trusting in the blood is how we prepare for final judgment! And trusting in the blood is the GOSPEL!

Let's Pray.

Father God, we thank you for sending Jesus. Thank you for his perfect blood which cleanses us right down to our consciences. Thank you for grafting us into your family tree. Thank you for the greater Moses who mediates a better covenant, who represents us, and even brings us with him into your presence. Thank you for providing JESUS, who prepares us for the final judgement.

In Jesus' name we thank you. Amen.

Jesse Stewart