

September 27, 2015
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Hebrews
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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COMING TO THE UNSHAKEABLE KINGDOM

Hebrews 12:18-29

When I was a student in the fifth grade, one of my teachers had a reputation for spanking. His paddle was well known. I cannot think of very many kids in the class who did not feel the sting of the man's paddle. I myself received three wacks because the teacher didn't approve of the way I shaped the letter "o" in writing class. Of course the rehearsal of that incident really raises eyebrows in this modern and much more sophisticated day. People are shocked to hear that the school system actually taught children how to write. Oh, and the fact that a student would be paddled for not writing correctly is also a bit unacceptable in this age.

When I was in the seventh grade, I had a teacher who was even more fearsome. He was a large man with deep-set eyes and a gruff voice. He had a paddle that was over two feet long and over an inch thick that he kept in a locker. The rumors about that paddle held that it was actually five feet long, the handle was big enough for a two-fisted grasp, and the teacher could knock you across the room with one swat. Rumor versus reality didn't matter to me. I toed the line in that class so that I didn't have to have a meeting with the famous monster paddle.

Such stories make modern educators cringe. What a barbaric age that was when I was coming up through school. Today's students might picture our teachers as cavemen who stomped through the cave-like hallways of our dungeon searching for wayward students they could club for their own pleasure. It really wasn't that bad. In fact, those teachers with their paddles established a deep-seated respect for authority in most of us students. When they asked us to stand up, we stood up. When they told us to speak out, we spoke out.

When they gave us homework, we did it. And to this day, I really do not dislike such teachers. I rather respect them, as sick as that sounds to some people.

Aren't you glad that we have progressed in our educational system today so that students don't have to fear their teachers? These are the best of times in school now because the teachers have to fear the students. Now students are not required to do anything they don't feel like doing. No doubt we are rearing a generation of good, dependable citizens who will contribute to a solid and thriving society.

How many religious folks think about God and His rules the same way? There is no shortage of people who rejoice over the fact that the law that was connected with the fearful circumstances of Mount Sinai is done away with, forever gone, never to be resurrected. Sinners will never have to face that law again. Now sinners are invited to come to Jesus who is kind, compassionate, and loving. He will take them just as they are and never expect them to do anything they don't want to do.

The sad fact is that only part of that foregoing explanation is true. The fact is that Jesus Christ came to earth as one of us, lived in perfect obedience to the law God gave on Mount Sinai, and fulfilled all its requirements. He shed His blood to pay for sinners' sins if they will but trust Jesus' finished work. As a result, He deserves all praise and honor.

But, we need to answer one question. Why would a sinner ever come to the conclusion that he or she needed a payment for his or her sins? The reality is that every sinner must stand at the foot of Mount Sinai and quake in fear because they realize that their sin is the breaking of God's law and God is furious about that. Each sinner needs to come face-to-face with God the consuming fire before he is going to see the need for a payment to pay for his sins. The law reveals the need for the Savior. Once we confess our sins and the Savior forgives them, we will be the most grateful people in the universe. That is God's plan.

The law of Mount Sinai is a scary, bad thing. But it is necessary to drive us to Mount Zion where we find incredible blessings from God through Jesus our Savior. How good it is for us to be shaken at

Mount Sinai so that we will flee to the New Jerusalem which will never be shaken.

Mount Sinai Versus Mount Zion (vv.18-24).

The author presents us with a contrast of two significant mountains in Scripture. Each mountain pictures a different aspect of God's work. On the one hand, we fear the God of Mount Sinai (vv.18-21). In that setting long ago, God revealed His majestic character to His people. The author picked up the account from Exodus and recalled, *For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet (vv.18-19a).*

It was the story about the new nation of Israel as God met with them at Mount Sinai. We read about in Exodus 19. God had delivered these people from bondage in Egypt through some amazing deeds. Now God was giving the people His law which was the basis for His covenant with Him. He revealed that He was glad to be their God as long as they kept His law. The problem they discovered was that no one was able to keep God's law perfectly. That was a frightening proposition to people who had this experience of God revealed in blazing fire, on a pitch dark day, with the sound of a trumpet blaring. We also know from the original story that there was lightening and thunder and an earthquake.

According to Moses' account, the people could not even endure God's presence. The writer of our text recalled that God's very voice was overwhelming by penning, *and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them (v.19b).* God's presence came with all that display of power. By the time God spoke, the people were beside themselves with fear. They were afraid to have God to speak to them. The original account reads, *They said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die" (Exodus 20:19).* God's holiness was such an important issue that even a stray dog that approached God's mountain would be stoned. *For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned" (v.20).*

The scene was so frightening that Moses trembled with fear. *Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with*

fear" (v.21). This is the same Moses who had conversations with God several times. He was experienced with things like burning bushes and bloody water, frogs, gnats, darkness, hail, the death angel and such. But this display of God's power and character was truly breath taking and fear inspiring.

Wow! We sure are glad we don't have to deal with a God like that! The God who invites us to come to Him is surely much different. Really? When did He change? Why did He change? How did He change? In spite of all those questions, it is clear that this God gives us the invitation to embrace the God of Mount Zion (vv.22-24). This is a contrasting picture, a different mountain. Mount Zion is a picture of salvation from sin. It is the antithesis of Mount Sinai. Mount Sinai is the picture of the insatiable law of God that reveals sin but cannot forgive sin. Mount Zion, on the other hand, is the picture of salvation in Jesus Christ who paid the price for sin and offers it to all who will trust Him.

Mount Zion pictures the reception of God's grace as opposed to the condemnation by God's law. The law always condemns. It has to condemn so that sinners will know God's standard of righteousness. Because we are altogether unrighteous, we must be condemned by the law. The frightening part is that the law that condemns cannot provide forgiveness because no one can keep its requirements.

That is also why God's grace is so amazing and welcome to us sinners. Mount Zion invites us to eternal, unshakeable salvation through the finished work of Christ. Jesus Christ did what we cannot possibly do by keeping the law. More than that, Jesus paid the price for all our offenses against our Creator by shedding His blood. Now His blood that He shed on Mount Zion is the covering for the offenses of all who trust Him. That will never change. We who are redeemed are eternally secure.

That is wonderful news. It is an encouraging invitation. But we must remember that no one can come to Mount Zion without first being humbled by Mount Sinai. Actually, no sinners see the need to go to Mount Zion, to the cross of Christ until they have run into the condemnation of Mount Sinai. We sinners needed to be scared out of our whits by the law of God that condemns our willful offenses against our Creator. But hanging around the foot of Mount Sinai

while the earth quakes and the fire, smoke, thunder, and lightening from God continues to crash is a bad idea.

When we finally do come to Mount Zion, we find that Mount Zion is the place of seven blessings. First there is the blessing of the heavenly city. We read: *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God the heavenly Jerusalem (v.22a)*. Mount Zion is the name God gave to the city of Jerusalem. It was called the stronghold of Zion. It was the city where God dwelt. David declared in song, *Sing praises to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds (Psalm 9:11)!*

Mount Zion was the city God promised where He would meet with His people and where they would worship Him through sacrifices. God promised through Moses, *Then to the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there, there you shall bring all that I command you . . . (Deuteronomy 12:11)*. But even more important than that special place, the spiritual Mount Zion spoken of here in our text pictures the unchanging, eternal, heavenly city of God. Jesus' promised, *"I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name" (Revelation 3:11-12)*.

Second, when we come to Mount Zion, we come to the blessing of the festal gathering. *And to innumerable angels in festal gathering (v.22b)*. In the eternal city are the thousands of angels who did not fall with Satan. Daniel and John saw this gathering of glory and power in the visions God gave them. Daniel described it: *A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. (Daniel 7:10)*. John, *looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands (Revelation 5:11)*.

The third blessing in the eternal city is the Church. *And to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven (v.23a)*. The first born in Hebrew culture was privileged to receive the inheritance. All born again believers are first born, and we inherit eternal life.

What a gathering of the trophies of God's grace. We should rejoice that our names are written in heaven where we are identified as citizens (Luke 10:20).

The fourth blessing is being in the presence of the Eternal Judge. When we come to the eternal city, we also come *to God, the judge of all (v.23b)*. To the Jew, meeting the Judge of Mount Sinai was a terribly fearful thing because it guaranteed death. But to us whose judgment Jesus took in our behalf, we count it a privilege to meet God the Judge. Through Jesus' sacrifice, He ripped in two the veil that separated us from His presence. He delights that our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life so that He will never condemn us.

Fifth, we will be in the presence of *the spirits of the righteous made perfect (v.23c)*. These are the faithful saints of the Old Testament. They will be like the heroes of faith (Chapter 11) who trusted God's promise about the Seed of the woman, the Prophet like Moses, the perfect Priest. They looked forward to the Savior who perfected us the moment we believed. Their spirits were perfected the moment Christ rose from the dead.

Sixth, we will come to the blessing of the mediator Jesus in the eternal city. He is *the mediator of a new covenant (v.24a)*. That is among the best of the blessings we find at Mount Zion. He is the perfect High Priest who mediates the new covenant through His own blood. He pleads for us as the ones He has purchased for Himself.

If we come to Jesus at Mount Sinai, then it is only fitting that we come to the seventh blessing, the sprinkled blood. We read, *And to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (v.24b)*. Abel offered a sacrifice that was acceptable to God. But the blood of Abel's sacrifice could not pay the price for sin. The blood of Jesus, sprinkled once and for all on the eternal altar in heaven, buys us sinners out of sin for eternity. All these blessings are for the forgiven sinner who comes to Jesus at Mount Zion, the heavenly city.

Membership in the Eternal Kingdom Inspires Right Worship (vv.25-29).

There are important people in our culture who we sometimes refer to as the movers and shakers. They are the ones who determine fads and popular directions of the culture. Our text reveals that God is the Supreme “mover and shaker” (vv.25-27). He has already demonstrated the importance of listening to Him. We don’t need new information. We need to heed the warning God has already given. To that end the author admonished us, *See that you do not refuse him who is speaking (v.25a).*

We do well to realize that *Him who is speaking* refers to the Messenger of God’s message. Primarily that is God the Son. That is how the author began this letter. *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world (Hebrews 1:1-2).*

Secondarily, *Him who is speaking* is the one who speaks the same message of salvation, God’s invitation. He must not be ignored either. People in the past suffered because they did not heed the warning. *For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth (v.25b).* This is a reminder that the Old Testament people heard God’s message thunder from Mount Sinai and walked away and ignored it. They heard God’s prophets repeat message calling for repentance, and they ignore that. All who ignore God’s warning and invitation will be punished.

We modern followers of Christ are not the exception to the rule. Because the people of the old dispensation did not escape God’s wrath when they ignored His message, *much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven (v.25).* This is a call to those people in the local assembly who experienced so much of God’s grace and blessing. They observed the people who repented and found God’s grace at Mount Zion.

The local churches today are full of these people. They are the target of the admonition. They must not reject the message. To hear the invitation but to do nothing about it is to reject it. Better to have never heard than to hear and ignore the warning.

To careless people like that, we warn that they should expect God to act according to His character (vv.26-27). In that time past, God shook the earth. In the future, He will shake the whole creation. *At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens” (v.26).* The reference is to when God shook the earth at Mount Sinai. That was an indication of His authority and power.

God shaking the ground at one mountain was also only a small glimpse of His authority to shake and even destroy His creation. He has promised for a long time that He will do that. He promised through Isaiah, *“Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger” (Isaiah 13:13).* Through the prophet Haggai God promised, *For thus says the LORD of hosts: “Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land” (Haggai 2:6).* John saw in great detail this shaking that is coming and wrote about in the Revelation. *When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place (Revelation 6:12-14).*

At that time in the future, God will purge all things that are not eternal. *This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken – that is, things that have been made – in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain (v.27).* The warning speaks of total destruction of what God allows to be shaken. Peter described it like this, *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed . . . waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn (2 Peter 3:12)!*

Obviously, the event will be catastrophic. But all of God’s purging leads to the eternal city, Zion, the New Jerusalem. Near the end of his vision, after seeing how God will purge all sin from the

creation, John wrote, *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (Revelation 21:1-2).* What an amazingly mighty God we love.

If we really love this great God, then gratefulness for God's kingdom will result in great worship (vv.28-29). The author challenged us to be grateful for God's kingdom. *Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken (v.28).* In light of the passing world, we should be grateful. Everything about life, about our world is in a constant state of flux. Even our most cherished religious, Christian traditions (right or wrong) are likely to change. Because the whole world is infected with the sin principle, it needs to be shaken and ultimately destroyed. But we have no fear!

Be grateful for the kingdom that cannot be shaken. God has graciously given us an eternal kingdom. Nothing in life can change it. Therefore, we must offer awesome worship fitting for the "Consuming Fire." What is this acceptable worship like? Acceptable worship is humble praise and adoration. We get a hint about its character from this challenge: *and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe (v.28b).* The very nature of worship is pictured by the inferior bowing before the superior. We who God has snatched out of a world destined for destruction ought to be the first to bow before Him in humility.

The word worship means to worship through service. The words reverence and awe go a long way to define acceptable worship. That is certainly not awe of ourselves or of performers. It is awe, almost speechlessness of God. Reverence is an attitude of modesty or bashfulness, sometimes translated "shamefaced." Awe is caution, discretion, veneration or even dread. Those traits ought to characterize our worship of God. Why?

Acceptable worship flows from an honest assessment of God's character. Do we realize that *our God is a consuming fire (v.29)*? Nothing about God's character has changed since Sinai. He is the same God who showed up with lightening, earthquakes, fire and such. He still takes His holiness very seriously. But He is the same God who invites those who offend Him with their sin to come to Him and receive forgiveness through faith in Jesus. He is the same God who

offers to us who live in a topsy-turvy world an eternal kingdom that cannot ever change – heaven!