

Hebrews

Hebrews 12:15-29 – Listen Carefully

March 21, 2010

I. The Christian's Wise Response to God's Discipline

A. **Hebrews 12:18-29** . . . For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, [19] and 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. [20] For they could not bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned." [21] And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling." [22] But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, [23] to 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, [24] and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. [25] See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. [26] And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." [27] This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. [28] Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; [29] for our God is a consuming fire.

B. Prayer

C. It is so easy to look at each portion of Hebrews as if it stands alone and is therefore separate it from what we talked about in the weeks previous. As a reminder, this chapter begins with God telling us that His people who have lived by faith are urging us onward in a life of faith. To live this life of faith, God reminds us of what we have to put off and what we need to put on – including fixing our eyes on Jesus. Then God brings us to the matter of discipline – discipline that trains us in this life of faith. From there God advises us to join Him in this process of sanctification by doing our part rather than remaining

passive. Finally, God points out three general areas of sin that we all must guard against lest any of us come short of the grace of God. Which brings us to the verses I just read for our study today – and God's emphasis here is – listen carefully and do what you are told.

II. Listen Carefully – Contrasting the OT with the NT

A. **Hebrews 12:18-21** . . . For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, [19] and 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. [20] For they could not bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned." [21] And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling."

1. *For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, [19] and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words*

a. **Deuteronomy 4:10-12** . . . Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.' [11] You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and **the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens:** darkness, cloud and thick gloom. [12] Then the LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form—only a voice.

b. **Exodus 19:18-20** . . . Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. [19] When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. [20] The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

2. In Old Testament times, a representation of God's presence on the earth was commonly manifested through created "things" and discernable by mostly the human eye and ear, though sometimes that manifestation could be touched – such as the angels of God that visited Abraham and Jacob – who wrestled with the Angel of

God, the burning bush, the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night that stood over the Tabernacle, the Shechinah Glory over the mercy seat which sat on the top of the Ark of the Covenant, the hand writing on the wall, and Jesus Christ – who was Immanuel – God in human form.

- a. In other words, from creation through Christ, the specific presence of God was often physically discernable in and through something created.
 - b. Yet at the same time, these specific manifestations of God were often fearsome – in a dreadful, frightening, or terrifying way – which often led to an overwhelming sense of intimidation and even panic in those who encountered these manifestations.
3. *which sound (the trumpet blasts and God's voice) was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. [20] For they could not bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned." [21] And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling."*
- a. I want us to see that there are two kinds of fear talked about here. First, the fear of the people, and then the fear of Moses.
 - (1) **Deuteronomy 18:15-19** . . . The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. [16] **This is according to all that you asked of the LORD** your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, '**Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.**' [17] The LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well. [18] 'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. [19] 'It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.
 - (2) **Deuteronomy 9:15-21** . . . So I turned and came down from the mountain while the mountain was burning with fire, and the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. [16] And I saw that you had indeed sinned against the LORD your God. You had made for yourselves a molten calf; you had turned aside quickly from the way which the LORD had commanded you. [17] I took hold of

the two tablets and threw them from my hands and smashed them before your eyes. [18] I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you had committed in doing what was evil in the sight of the LORD to provoke Him to anger. [19] **For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was wrathful against you in order to destroy you,** but the LORD listened to me that time also. [20] The LORD was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him; so I also prayed for Aaron at the same time.

- b. The distinction between these two kinds of fear is important for us – for we are to fear God even in this marvelous age of grace. However, our fear is to be the fear of Moses rather than the fear of Israel.
 - (1) Israel feared God’s awesomeness/fearsomeness – thinking it defined His entire character, thoughts, and actions toward them. In other words, they assumed God had no mercy – only harsh judgment – and therefore any misstep on their part could result in great punishment or instant death. This picture of God so intimidated them that they wanted to stay away from God’s presence rather than risk coming into His presence to fellowship with Him.
 - (2) Moses feared God’s holiness because it determined what God could and would do to those who disobeyed and rebelled against Him (i.e., those who were deliberately unholy). Yet at the same time, Moses trusted in God’s mercy – and this is why he didn’t panic or in a frightened way move away from God as one intimidated by the awesomeness of God’s presence. It is also the reason he prayed for Israel and Aaron after they sinned.
- 4. Returning to **Hebrews 12: 18-21**, there are three important points that God wants us to get from these verses so that we can compare what we see here to what God says next:
 - a. **First**, God’s presence was discernable by the physical senses.
 - b. **Second**, God manifested His presence in fearsome forms – thus scaring the living daylights (as we might say) out of those who were close enough to experience His presence.
 - c. **Third**, God allowed only a select few to come into His personal presence, and then only when He invited them. The masses,

though they were allowed to physically discern the presence of God, had to stay at a distance. They could not come near or into the presence of God – lest they die.

5. With this in mind, let's move on to what we have in Christ in relation to seeing and experiencing the presence of God today.

B. **Hebrews 12:22-24** . . . [22] But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, [23] to 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, [24] and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

1. The **first** great truth I want us to see from these verses is that our experiencing the presence and voice of God is different from the Old Testament saints. Where their's was physical, distant, and fearsome, ours is spiritual, intimate, and inviting. This does not mean we no longer are to fear God. But our fear is to be the fear of Moses rather than the fear of Israel.
2. The **second** great truth is found in the words, "*But you have come.*" All who have repented of sin and put their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation from the penalty, power, and practice of sin HAVE ALREADY COME into this spiritual, intimate, and inviting presence of God.
 - a. As we read in **Hebrews 4:14-16** . . . Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. [15] For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. [16] Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
 - b. And again in **Hebrews 10:19-22** . . . Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, [20] by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, [21] and since we have a great priest over the house of God, [22] let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

- c. If we are not living in or at least experiencing a regular time of intimate fellowship with God, it is not because He is distant or the door is closed. It is because we are distant or choosing to divert our attention elsewhere instead of walking through the door into His personal and hallowed presence.
 - 3. The **third** great truth is seen in the entire section, and that truth tells us that God is a god of community. It is not just God and me, it is God and we – the we being thousands and millions of angels and OT saints and NT believers. Think about it, if so many boldly come into His presence, surely we ought to, too.
- C. **Hebrews 12:25** . . . See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.
- 1. The current, popular theology wants us to believe that God is so merciful and full of grace that such a warning as this is archaic, unnecessary, and even a false or misleading representation of God.
 - a. However, it is God, himself, who puts this warning here, not some dour or sour saint who wants to take the joy of Christianity. Now I fully agree that joy is important in the Christian life, but more important than joy is being received by God into His eternal kingdom at the end of life. And if God kept the unbelieving Israelites out of the Promised Land, we can be sure God will judge us for our unbelief?
 - b. Therefore, let us not be so naive as to accept the current, popular, and biblically baseless theology of grace. We see from this verse that it is God, himself, who clearly tells us there is a perpetual tension between fear and grace, and between God's harsh judgment and His tender forgiveness.
 - c. And though we may never be able to perfectly explain this tension, the way of wisdom is to make sure we are on the right side at the end of our life. How? By listening and obeying – or as I have said many times to us – by living up to what we know is right.
 - 2. **Hebrews 2:1-3a** . . . For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. [2] For **if** the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, [3] how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

3. **Deuteronomy 18:17-19** . . . The LORD said to me, 'They have spoken well. [18] 'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. [19] 'It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.
- D. **Hebrews 12:26-27** . . . And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." [27] This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.
1. God's point here is simple – a day is coming when all that is not of God or unto God or for the glory of God or within the boundaries of God's approval or done according to the will of God will be destroyed.
 2. The words from **I John 2:16-17** are very applicable here . . . For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. [17] The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.
 3. Where are you investing what God has given you?
- E. **Hebrews 12:28-29** . . . Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; [29] for our God is a consuming fire.
1. Therefore, since God has given us Himself, His son, and His kingdom, and since all that belongs to God is eternal – we ought to show gratitude (*gratefulness*) – a gratitude that manifests itself in a healthy tension between fear and grace so that we offer to God the kind of obedience and service that is acceptable to Him.
 2. And why would we keep fear and grace mingled together? Because along with all the other things God is, He is a consuming fire. Nothing that can be burned will escape His destroying judgment. (*Aslan the Lion*)

III. Conclusion