

STEADFAST THANKS Sunday School- September 23, 2012

Unifying Topic: FAITH INSPIRES GRATITUDE

Lesson Text

I. Earthly Sinai And Heavenly Zion (Hebrews 12:18-24)

II. Listen To The One Who Speaks (Hebrews 12:25-29)

The Main Thought: Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: (Hebrews 12:28, KJV).

Unifying Principle: People fear many things, especially judgment and death. What can we believe in that will relieve our fears? The writer of Hebrews says that God in Christ Jesus brought us forgiveness and promise of eternal life.

Lesson Aim: To explain the difference between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion in today's text and the implications that each one has for the original and modern-day readers.

Life Aim: To listen to, accept wholeheartedly, and obey the instructions of the One (Jesus Christ) who speaks to us.

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- 12:18 Wherefore For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,
- 12:19 And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more:
- 12:20 (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart:
- 12:21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)
- 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,
- 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,
- 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.
- 12:25 See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven:
- 12:26 Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.
- 12:27 And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.
- 12:28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:
- 12:29 For our God is a consuming fire.

HISTORY:

Hebrews 12:12-17 is still dealing with discipline in a long-distance race. God is not only a disciplining parent, but also a demanding coach who pushes us to our limits and requires of us a disciplined life. The believer is called to...

1. ...lift up his hands and strengthen his buckling knees (v.12). This is the picture of a man discouraged and defeated because of the sufferings of trial or sin.
2. ...make straight paths (a straight course) for one's feet, doing exactly what God's Spirit is saying to do (v.12).
3. ...heal whatever is lame (v.13). In the right way there is healing for them. What is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.
4. Follow after peace with all men (v.14). The believer is never to give up, not as long as there is hope for some degree of peace. However, remember peace is not always possible—not with everyone, but follow after it.
5. ...follow after holiness (v.14). The believer is to be separated from the world and its pleasures and possessions. He is to be set apart unto God.
6. Look diligently after themselves and after others (v.15). Be on the lookout and search diligently lest one fall into one of the dangers that threaten the believer's faith. There are four great dangers that threaten believers:
 1. There is the danger of falling short of the grace of God (v.15). Grace is giving, but it is giving to people who do not deserve the gift. Do Christians need to concern themselves with falling from grace? If there were no possibility for one to "fall short of the grace of God", then there would be no need for us to be "*looking diligently*"
 2. There is the danger of the root of bitterness (v.15). Bitterness can be caused by any thing or any person

who has failed us or brought disappointment and trouble to us in some way. It is a stumbling block in our pursuit of peace; destroying the peace within the person who harbors it.

3. There is the danger of becoming a fornicator (v.16). There are all kinds of sexual vices whether married or un-married. Imagining and lusting within the mind is the very same as committing the act in the eyes of God. And it will keep one out of the kingdom of heaven.
4. There is the danger of becoming a profane (irreverent) person (v.16). One does not have to be overtly wicked; they can displease God by simply devaluing that which is important to Him! Esau lost his birthright, being, he was the primary person whom the great spiritual blessings of God were to come to— the promised seed and the Promised Land. But he cared more for his body and flesh; for the desires and lusts; for the pleasures and possessions of this world than he did for the spiritual things of God. Therefore, he lost what was rightfully his, his birthright by being godless to the promises of God.

He never repented (v17). When he cried before his father, he was crying for the blessing, not crying because he was making a commitment to follow God and to become spiritually minded. How many sell their birthright; their blessing for the satisfaction of their flesh etc.? This is one of the great dangers that the believer must guard against.

LESSON:

Hebrews 12:18-24 Earthly Sinai And Heavenly Zion

12:18 Wherefore For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, — The writer lets us know there is a difference in the earthly Sinai and the heavenly Zion. Mount Sinai was not touchable, where as the heavenly Zion is.

1. **Mount Sinai** was marked by fear and terror. **Mount Zion** is a place of love and forgiveness.
2. **Mount Sinai** is in the desert. **Mount Zion** is the city of the Living God.
3. **Mount Sinai** spoke of earthly things. **Mount Zion** speaks of heavenly things.
4. At **Mount Sinai**, only Moses was allowed to draw near to God. At **Mount Zion**, an innumerable company, a general assembly is invited to draw near.
5. **Mount Sinai** was characterized by guilty men in fear. **Mount Zion** features just men made perfect.
6. At **Mount Sinai**, Moses was the Mediator. At **Mount Zion**, Jesus is the mediator.
7. **Mount Sinai** brings an Old Covenant, which was ratified by the blood of animals. **Mount Zion** brings a New Covenant which is ratified by the blood of God's precious Son.
8. **Mount Sinai** was all about exclusion, keeping people away from the mountain. **Mount Zion** is all about invitation.
9. **Mount Sinai** is all about Law. **Mount Zion** is all about grace.

All that was at Mt. Sinai:

- "*Fire*" symbolized the holiness, righteousness, and purity of God. Man had to be careful how he approached God.
- "*Blackness and darkness*" symbolized the fact that God was hidden from man's sight. He could not be fully known because He could not be seen. Blackness and darkness also symbolized that the Old Covenant of the Law could not give man a clear picture of God; it could only give a shadow of what God was like.
- "*Tempest or raging storm*" symbolized the judgment and fierce wrath and power of God. He was to be feared and revered as the Great and Almighty Judge who could exact judgment upon any who refused to obey His Covenant of Law. The point is this: any person who approached God through the Old Covenant of law faced a holy, distant God of judgment.

This reminded them of what it was like when Israel came to Mount Sinai following their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. God gave the Law at Mount Sinai. All of this symbolized what they have not come to. What a difference Jesus has made! Before Jesus came, God seemed distant and threatening. After He came, God welcomes us through Christ into His presence.

1. The first or old approach to God was through the Old Covenant (vv.18-21).

¹http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=2&contentID=8080&commInfo=31&topic=Hebrews&ar=Hbr_12_20
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

12:19 And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: When God first began to give the Law to Moses, there was the blast of a trumpet and then God Himself apparently began to speak in an audible voice. The voice of God was so strong and forceful that terror struck the hearts of the people. They cried out for God to stop speaking.

12:20 (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: God had been very severe in His restrictions regarding even the slightest touching of Mount Sinai. If even the beast should touch the mountain, they were forbidden to touch the beast, but must rather immediately stone it or shoot it with an arrow. God wanted man to be aware of the separation that sin has caused. It was too much for them, for they could not endure what was commanded.

12:21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) — Could you imagine what the people saw?—the fire, the blackness, darkness, tempest, and heard? — The loud-sounding trumpet, and the voice of words—God speaking. It was so terrible that even Moses said, "*I exceedingly fear and tremble.*" Moses had seen and heard God speak through the burning bush, but not like this! Truly, God presence was awesome to where even Moses feared and trembled. The sight was probably like an erupting volcano. However, it was the power and presence of a mighty, and righteous, and holy God.

12:22 But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, —

2. But the new approach to God is through the New Covenant (v.22-24).

Mt. Sinai was the earthly and physical place the people of Israel used come to; where they received the Old Covenant. They had to be reminded that they didn't have to approach God through the Old Covenant but there is a New Covenant through Christ! They have come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God— where God dwells; the heavenly Jerusalem, and an innumerable company of angels. In coming to the heavenly Jerusalem, you will find it is populated by throngs of festive angels and in coming to Christ gives us the right to a place in that city.

12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, —Now all are addressed—"general assembly, church of the firstborn written in heaven, God the Judge of all, the spirits of just men made perfect." It's still saying that they have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and an innumerable company of angels.

- ²The word rendered "*general assembly*," refers properly to an "assembly, or convocation of the whole people in order to celebrate any public festival or solemnity, as the public games or sacrifices. In "*Vines Expository Dictionary*", the word "*assembly*" is here coupled with the word "*and church*" as applied to all believers who form the body of Christ.
- ³"*The church of the firstborn*"— Messiah is pre-eminently "the First-born," or "First-begotten" (Heb.1:6), and all believers become so by adoption. "*...written in heaven*"— enrolled as citizens there, that is, in the Lamb's book of life (Rev.21:27). We are in one citizenship with the angels.
- "*God the judge of all*"— believers and unbelievers. He is the judge who has judged the believer's sin in Christ. God does not judge sin against the believer; God judges sin against Christ, the Savior of men. This is grace—what grace is all about. And there is judgment of unbelievers.
- "*The spirits of just men made perfect*"— This is the spirit of the righteous who have already departed and gone onto heaven. They stand before God perfected forever.

All are in the Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and innumerable company of angels.

12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. Jesus the mediator of the new covenant and the blood of sprinkling is in the Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and innumerable company of angels.

² <http://bible.cc/hebrews/12-22.htm>

³ http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=7&contentID=3067&commInfo=6&topic=Hebrews&ar=Hbr_12_27
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

- "Jesus the mediator"— Jesus is the mediator between God and man. ...*the new covenant*" is the covenant of grace through belief in Jesus Christ.
- "The blood of sprinkling, that is, better than that of Abel"— The blood of Abel cried out to the Lord. Jesus speaks better things than the blood of animal sacrifice, the blood of Abel. The blood of Jesus speaks of Christ's death to bring redemption and forgiveness.

The sevenfold comparison (v.18-21 and 22-24) should motivate us to remain faithful and thereby realize the superior blessings of the New Covenant.

Mt. Sinai a mountain that may be touched.	Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.
Blazing fire.	Myriads of angels.
Darkness.	The general assembly and church of the firstborn.
Gloom.	God, the Judge of all.
Whirlwind.	The spirits of righteous men made perfect.
The blast of a trumpet.	Jesus, the Mediator of a New Covenant.
The voice of words.	The sprinkled blood that is better than Abel's.

Hebrews 12:25-29 Listen To The One Who Speaks

12:25 See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: — ⁴The writer now contrasts the way that God spoke then with the way that He speaks now. Those who heard God speak at Sinai wanted Him to stop.

The voice of God made them afraid. So they agreed that God should speak to Moses and that he should tell them what God said. They promised to obey all the law of God that He gave to them by Moses. They did not keep that promise. They refused to listen when God warned them. In the end God punished them. Every person bore the guilt and punishment when they broke the Word of God. How much more will He punish those who do not obey what He says by His Son Jesus! The point is: listen to the One who speaks—don't refuse the One speaking—the voice of God. God speaks to us today, not by Moses, but by His Son Jesus. What God says now by Jesus is greater than what He said by Moses. There are three reasons why a person must not refuse Jesus Christ and His message:

1. There shall be no escape whatsoever for the close-minded (v.25).

12:26 Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. When God spoke at Sinai, the whole mountain shook (Exodus 19:18). There was a great fire and darkness. Those who saw it were very afraid. "*Yet once more*", God promises that one day He will again shake the earth, but not only the earth, but the heavens as well.

2. God warns about a great shaking and judgment of heaven and earth in the future (v. 26-27).

This is exactly what the prophet Haggai declared: "*For thus said the Lord of hosts: yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land*" Hag.2:6. Both the prophet and the writer to Hebrews are declaring that a catastrophic judgment is coming upon the heavens and earth. The whole universe, all the stars and planets of the natural world, are to undergo a cataclysmic change. All nature shall be destroyed by fire and remade into a new heaven and earth. There are many shakings going on in our lives today: earthquakes, hurricanes, tornados, Tsunamis, devastating fires, Wall Street, sickness, and even our faith etc., but they are no match for the voice of the endtime coming from heaven.

12:27 And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. "*Yet once more*" meaning, it has happened before, and now this is as the final act of removing those things; sifting out everything without a solid foundation in Christ. Eventually the world will crumble, and only God's kingdom will last. Those who follow Christ are part of this kingdom, and they will withstand the shaking, sifting, and burning. ⁵I believe the shaking has begun. God is shaking the church, so that those who have a form of religion will be shaken out. Those that remain will be those who cannot be shaken. We have an eternal destination which cannot be shaken, remains and stands forever.

⁴ <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/hebrews-lbw.htm>

⁵ <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/hebrews/32.html>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

12:28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God

acceptably with reverence and godly fear: This "kingdom that cannot be shaken" is the true church of Jesus Christ, it is the New Covenant; it is Mount Zion the heavenly Jerusalem. Those receiving, who are of God's kingdom which cannot be shaken are exhorted to have grace. ⁶But to the first century saints, the kingdom had not arrived in its fullness, so, our author exhorts his readers, "...let us have grace"; let us have thankfulness; gratitude. What we all need on the way to receiving this kingdom is grace. That grace, we have learned, is available through our High Priest that's on the throne of grace. Why? Why have this "grace"? Answer: "whereby we may serve God acceptably (offer in such a way as to please Him well) with reverence and godly fear." Remember this is an eternal kingdom and how we serve (*worship*) God is important. Our service, our worship, our thankfulness should be offered in such a way as to please Him, the One we serve, with holy awe and pious care; with godly fear and respect.

3. An unshakeable kingdom can be received (vv. 28-29).

12:29 For our God is a consuming fire. Why should we be thankful and worship God? ⁷He is the God who has all power, who made all that is in heaven and on earth. He is the God who will judge all things. He will punish all who fail to obey what He has said. He is like a fire that burns up all the rubbish. God is a consuming fire. We need to be sure that we really are true Christians.

SUMMARY:

12:18-21 Unlike *the* ancestors, *they* didn't come to Mount Sinai—all that volcanic blaze and earthshaking rumble—to hear God speak. The earsplitting words and soul-shaking message terrified them and they begged Him to stop. When they heard the words—"If an animal touches the Mountain, it's as good as dead"—they were afraid to move. Even Moses was terrified.

12:22-24 No, that's not your experience at all. You've come to Mount Zion, the city where the living God resides. The invisible Jerusalem is populated by throngs of festive angels and Christian citizens. It is the city where God is Judge, with judgments that make us just. You've come to Jesus, who presents us with a new covenant, a fresh charter from God. He is the Mediator of this covenant. The murder of Jesus, unlike Abel's—a homicide that cried out for vengeance—became a proclamation of grace.

12:25-27 So don't turn a deaf ear to these gracious words. If those who ignored earthly warnings didn't get away with it, what will happen to us if we turn our backs on heavenly warnings? His voice that time shook the earth to its foundations; this time—He's told us this quite plainly—He'll also rock the heavens: "*One last shaking, from top to bottom, stem to stern.*" The phrase "*one last shaking*" means a thorough housecleaning, getting rid of all the historical and religious junk so that the unshakable essentials stand clear and uncluttered.

12:28-29 Do you see what we've got? An unshakable kingdom! And do you see how thankful we must be? Not only thankful, but brimming with worship, deeply reverent before God. For God is not an indifferent bystander. He's actively cleaning house, torching all that needs to burn, and He won't quit until it's all cleansed. God Himself is Fire! (*The Message Bible*).

APPLICATION:

When we give thanks, it is not for what we've done but it's for what Christ has done; what He has purchased for us on the cross. Our gratitude is like a magnet in worship, drawing us to His presence and promises by faith. God speaks everyday. We have to be sensitive to His Spirit, fearing with reverence.

⁶ http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/hebrews/12_18-29.htm

⁷ <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/hebrews-lbw.htm>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>