

Jesus Speaks a Better Word From a Better Mountain

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[0 : 00] And so our passage today is Hebrews 12. I'm just going to find it here. That's the last section. Verses 18 to 29 of Hebrews chapter 12.

It says this. You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire, to darkness gloom and storm, to a trumpet blast, or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word could be spoken to them because they could not bear what was commanded.

If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death. The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, I am trembling with fear. But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.

You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?

[1 : 36] At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens.

The words once more indicate the removing of what can be shaken, that has created things, so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

Amen. Awesome. Cheers, David. Hopefully you spotted the word awe there at the end of the sentence.

So, final verse. So it made that question a bit more, not South African, but biblical. Surprise, surprise. Thanks, Darren. Anyway, where are you? Royally stitched you up there.

Great. Let's pray. Well, let's pray, and then we'll begin. Father, we thank you that you are an awesome God, that we have an awesome passage tonight that almost preaches itself, Father.

[2 : 57] Please help me not to hinder that word coming out. Please help our hearts come to you tonight in reverence and awe, and not refuse that word that was spoken to us from a better mountain in Jesus on the cross.

Amen. Amen, amen. So, normally, when you guys sit further back, I try and sneak further forward, but what I've noticed is if I try and sneak forward, I end up getting feedback, and that's from the speakers here, and that's just horrible to everyone.

So that's why I'm up here. I hope that's not too scary. Most awesome mountain experience, best mountain experience, someone on the left here. Shout out. Who's got a good one?

Wixie, you've got a good one? Robbie? Whistler. Brilliant. Skiing? No? Right. Most awesome, best mountain experience, someone on the right here.

Yeah. Right, go on, Lily. Can you remember the name? Oh, no. Well, I have a valley mountain family, which is pretty nice.

[4 : 07] Yes. Yeah. That's the one that's very far with the mountain. Brilliant. That's a great mountain experience, zooming down a mountain. Cool, great. Well, I wonder if you've ever thought about mountains.

They're really surprising, aren't they? I wonder if you've gone up to Ben-Am. It's a tiny little hill. It looks like almost insignificant, but there's a great surprise in it because you climb it, and you do the scramble, and you get to the top, and it's amazing at the top, and it subverts all your expectations.

It's completely the opposite of what you expect. But it's not just earthly mountains that are surprising. Biblical mountains are surprising.

So you think of Mount Ararat after the flood. God has judged the world, and the ark has come to rest on the mountain. And what's the next thing that happens? Noah offers a sacrifice, and we're back in the Garden of Eden.

And we're like, whoa, where did that come from? That subverted all our expectations. It's completely amazing. When I was telling someone about their best mountain experience, the question they asked me was, do you mean like a church, religious experience?

[5 : 22] Because often we associate mountains with a religious experience. So you think of Mount Fuji in Japan, where they worship the mountain. Or I've got a South African accent.

You think of Mount Ekufakomei, which is a religious mountain in South Africa that millions upon millions of worshipers go to every year to worship on this mountain in the Limpopo province.

And so we are thinking about these mountains tonight. And I think the message of tonight's passage is Jesus speaks a better word from a better mountain. Don't be surprised by it.

Don't refuse it. Jesus speaks a better word from a better mountain. Don't refuse it. Don't be surprised by it. Don't refuse it. And in our passage, we've got a number of contrasts or comparisons.

So we've got two mountains that are compared. Then we've got two words spoken that are compared. And then we get two responses that are compared at the end of our passage.

[6 : 30] So if you've managed to find a blue sheet there, a duck blue sheet, you can follow along there. Our points there. Our first one is a better mountain, verse 18 to 23. And then we're going to consider a better word, verse 24 to 26.

And then we're going to look at those two responses under the heading, a better worship, and then selected verses there. And the context of Hebrews is we're in a sermon.

It's very much like Sunday night here at St. Silas, but it was a sermon given to a congregation who were under pressure. They were facing opposition. They were struggling.

Maybe you've had a tough week at work and things haven't gone well and you're under pressure. And the author is trying to tell them to stick with Jesus.

And they were under pressure from the society around them. Christianity was a subset. It was something that was looked down on by everyone.

[7 : 32] There was the big temple beside them that they could see and it looked very impressive. And if you wanted to get ahead in life, then you had to go to the temple. All the people in the temple lived in the lovely areas, maybe Downhill or Jordan Hill or Hindland or something like that.

But the Christians, they all lived in the not-so-nice areas, Carlton or wherever else in Glasgow. I don't know the non-great bits. The people who worshipped at the temple, they'd drive beamers and mercs.

But the Christians, they would drive old beat-up fords. They didn't get preferential jobs. And they're facing under pressure and they're thinking, well, maybe life would be better for me.

I'd be more accepted by my friends. I'd get to more parties if I just gave up on Jesus, if I stopped listening to Him. And I started heading back to the temple.

Started going back to all those things that seem impressive. And the author says to them, don't make that mistake. Don't refuse Jesus.

[8 : 37] Stick with Jesus. But rather, reassess what your object of worship is and come to Him with awe and worship. Come to Jesus and listen to Him.

And so, we're going to look at our first point there, a better mountain. And the reasons that He gives for coming to Jesus are those three points there, a better mountain, a better word, and why we should follow Him.

So, a better mountain. And the contrast there that He gives in our passage is between two mountains, or if you like, two ways of approaching God.

And the first there, Mount Sinai. We didn't look at the reading at Mount Sinai, but when the people came out of Egypt, they came through the Red Sea into the wilderness, into the desert, and God had rescued them out of Egypt, and He had brought them into the desert to Mount Sinai.

And Moses, their spokesman, went up onto the mountain and spoke with God. And God gave Moses the Ten Commandments and the law and all the rules of how they should worship God and how they should approach God.

[9 : 49] And God didn't speak to the people face to face. He spoke through His mediator, through Moses. And the mountain was scary, and it looked impressive, and there was thunder and lightning and trumpet blasts.

But then He turns our eyes to Mount Zion, a second mountain, and it's a mountain that's a picture of who God's people are in Jesus.

And it's not a physical mountain that you can go to and visit. It's an invisible mountain. You can't see it. And the author says, of these two mountains, which one are you going to go to?

Are you going to go to the visible, impressive one? Or are you going to go to the invisible one, Mount Zion, which is better by far? And the first reason that He gives there, better, I wonder if you spotted it, is it is better because it is in heaven.

You see, Mount Sinai, verse 18, you could touch it. You could go to it. You could look at it. And it looked impressive.

[10 : 59] And it looked amazing. But ultimately, it was on earth. It wasn't where God was, in heaven. Mount Sinai is in heaven with God.

And that's where the Christian is going. They're going to be with God in heaven. And the second thing that we notice there, that it's better because it is filled with people.

I wonder if you noticed there, Mount Sinai, it looks impressive, lots of bells, lots of whistles, but there's no people on it. There's lots of rules and it says, don't touch, don't come in.

If you try to come in, you won't meet the standard. You'll be out completely. But Mount Zion, instead, is filled with people. Look how he describes it absolutely beautifully.

The city of the living God, verse 22, a heavenly Jerusalem. It's a city filled with people. You've come to thousands upon thousands of angels, lots of angels. The church of the firstborn filled with people who love Jesus and who want to know Jesus, who've been saved by Jesus.

[12 : 06] And then of the spirits of those who have been made righteous, made perfect by Jesus. It's filled with people. Everyone is welcome so long as they come in and they trust Jesus.

And so Mount Zion is a mountain that's filled with God's people, people who trust and love the Lord Jesus, which is in heaven where God is.

And it's a picture of who God's people are when they come to you and they trust in Jesus. And it's rather surprising, isn't it?

I don't know what day you've had today, but you come to church tonight and it's a bit damp, isn't it? I mean, not, obviously it's been a lovely day in Scotland, it's not damp today, but it's a bit down, isn't it?

We're not a glorious assembly and the preacher might be a bit boring and the music's a bit flat and you think, whoa, this isn't, oh, sorry, this isn't as beautiful as Mount Zion, as the temple or whatever else.

[13 : 13] This is a bit down. Maybe I want to go back and get something else. But the author says, don't be surprised. Don't lose your eyes off that heavenly mountain.

Don't refuse it. It's invisible, but it's not absent. It's something that you'll see in all its fullness in the future and it's perhaps something that you might taste spiritually in a sense as our spirits are in heaven.

with Jesus. And just notice, the second reason that he tells them why they should go to Mount Zion is that there is a better word, verse 24 to 26 there.

So I'll just read verse 24 for us and 25 for us there. So you have come to God, the judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks, what, a better word than the blood of Abel.

See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?

[14 : 31] And the problem for the Hebrews were they had given up on listening to Jesus. What Jesus said, what they read in the scriptures to them wasn't relevant. It's not what the culture was telling them they should follow.

It seemed completely counter-cultural to everything that they were experiencing from Monday through to Friday. Everything about it was completely the opposite of what all the other voices in the world around them were telling them.

And it sounded very unimpressive. Love others as I have loved you. Care for one another. Look after people. It's exactly the opposite of the other words that speak to us.

Look after yourself. Get ahead at all costs. It doesn't sound very impressive. And so they'd given up on listening to Jesus. But the author says Jesus speaks a better word.

A better word comes from mountain. Just notice the three reasons that we've got there. Firstly, the source is better. So, it's from God.

[15 : 40] So, we read there how on Mount Sinai God spoke to the people through Moses. There was an intermediary between them and God. There was a mediator.

But on Mount Zion God speaks to his people directly through his son. At Mount Sinai Moses was a mediator. He was a go-between between God and the people.

But at Mount Sinai we have a greater mediator. A greater go-between between Jesus. God himself. I wonder if you've ever done that broken down telephone thing where you pass the message on down the line and eventually by the time the message gets to the end of the line it's slightly garbled and confused.

And we might think sometimes that when we go to church it's a bit like that. We can't trust what's going on or what's being said. But if we trust in Jesus we can be absolutely certain that we're hearing from Jesus when we read our Bibles.

We can be confident that God speaks to us directly by the Spirit through the Scriptures as we labor at trying to understand it as we unpack it Sunday by Sunday. We can know that God is speaking directly to us.

[16 : 58] Just notice secondly there it's a better word because of its consequence verse 26 27 I was struggling for a better word that consequence but I'll explain it then maybe you can tell me a better word afterwards.

26 At that time his voice shook the earth but now he has promised once more I will not only shake I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens. The words once more indicate the removing of what can be shaken that is created things so that what cannot be shaken will remain.

So at Mount Sinai it was a momentary word it only shook the earth but the heavens those eternal bits remained but at Mount Zion it's an eternal word.

How we respond to it has consequences for our eternity. It shakes the heavens and the earth and the only thing that remains is those things that are eternal that will last forever.

Sometimes when I'm all wistful and I struggle in my Christian life I think it's okay because when I get to heaven I'll be able to strike a deal with God I'll be able to bargain and I think lots of us we think well when I get to heaven if I'm not trusting Jesus it's alright I'm a nice guy I'll be able to strike up a deal with God and He'll let me in.

[18 : 25] But I think that's wrong and what He is saying here is that Jesus' word has eternal consequences. We won't be able to go back and revise the terms when we get there.

It's this word that shakes the heavens and the earth and only what's eternal will remain. It's a word that has consequences for eternity. So in Jesus God has spoken fully and finally and His word lasts forever.

It's eternal. I wonder if you've heard of Andrew Stace. Anyone heard of Andrew Stace there? So at the turn of the century Y2K Sydney Harbour they put up in gold lights eternity on the Harbour Bridge and Andrew Stace was a very humble guy who walked around Sydney graffitiing the pavement with chalk.

So he was a chap who had come to faith in Jesus and he wanted people to understand that Jesus' word has consequences for eternity. So he wanted them to think in eternal terms and so he graffitied the pavement everywhere in chalk with the word eternity.

But just notice there finally it's a it's a word from God it has eternal consequences but its message is so much better.

[19 : 51] Just look at verse 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Now you might be someone here tonight who's thinking what's all this business about sin? Why is God so bothered about sin? What's so special about an apple in a garden?

But you couldn't say that about Abel. Abel he was Adam and Eve's son and he was murdered by his brother in the garden.

It was the very first murder in human existence. And so in Genesis 4.10 we read how his blood cries out from the ground to God about this murder.

and I think we'd all agree that murder is a bad thing that it has consequences that it needs to be set right. Sometimes sin is harder to understand but murder that's a really bad thing.

[20 : 57] But the Bible says if you think about a murder if you think carelessly about a friend if you maybe shake your fist at them in your thoughts in your secret thoughts then that is a murder.

You have murdered them. And at Mount Sinai the answer to this was the old covenant that you'd have to go and try and appease that justice that cry for vengeance through sacrificing stuff through doing stuff through bringing goats and the sign of that was that the elders the Jewish elders went up Mount Sinai and they were sprinkled by Moses with blood as a sealing of this covenant that if they did all these things then they would appease that right for justice that vengeance that first murder and all the subsequent murders caused but here the author says on Mount Sinai we haven't been sprinkled with the blood of a goat that will never put right when things go really bad in your life that will never put right murders and crimes and horrible things like that but you've been sprinkled by the blood of Jesus in a new covenant and that

God on the cross he put right all those things in the world that went completely wrong even the ones that you've done and that a day will come when Jesus will return and he'll put right fully and finally all those things that have gone wrong once and for all and on that day you don't need to fear vindication or vengeance or condemnation but you can rejoice that in Jesus you have forgiveness and grace and peace with God and so the better word there that the blood of Jesus speaks is a word of forgiveness to those who need forgiveness it's a word who when people have got things wrong says peace grace my blood is sufficient it's enough it covers everything you've done wrong there's nothing left you're as good with God as you will ever be

Mount Sinai could never make you cleaner Jesus' blood alone has made you totally clean and absolutely right well I wonder what you make of all that of those two mountains I wonder what you make of those two words as you've thought about them spoken about them considered them tonight and the author of Hebrews he's been building his argument through the whole letter trying to explain to his congregation trying to explain to his audience that Jesus is it there's nothing more he's done everything he's paid for sins absolutely he's brought you into the throne room of God why would you ever say no to Jesus and go back to the temple why would you give to the pressures of your society and so verse 25 he gives one final warning before he says his final notes end of notes in the sermon he says see to it that you don't refuse him who speaks if you give up on Jesus there is nothing left if they did not refuse him when they if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth how much less will we if we turn away from us who warns us from heaven how much more will we lose if we give up on a word that speaks to us directly from God if we give up on a word that has eternal consequences if we turn away from that how much more will we lose and be in danger if we give up on a message that speaks of how

God has died in our place for our sins the greatest gift the greatest death that was ever known about in creation if we turn away from that what left what is there left and so he says to them don't refuse that that's one response you could give but then he says rather a second response let me put it to you a second response is come to God with awe and worship so verse 28 therefore since we are receiving a kingdom you've received everything in God you've received everything in Jesus those guys in Mount Sinai they might have beamers and benzes but you're with God's people in heaven for eternity with Jesus if you've received that how would you respond well be thankful and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe you should be blown away by this in this sermon you should think it's absolutely amazing so thinking on mountains

[26 : 04] I wonder how you think about mountains there's always a surprise in mountains and the greatest surprise on the greatest mountain came on Mount Calvary where it was a hill in Jerusalem and where Jesus died and he turned the worst crime in the world the murder of an innocent man and he turned it in the greatest good dying for people's sins that they might know God it was the greatest defeat it looked like pathetic it looked like defeat utterly and God turned it into victory through his son and he proved it by raising him to life again I wonder how you feel about mountains let's close in a word of prayer so father we thank you that in Jesus we have come to Mount Zion that we have come to Jesus who speaks a better word please help us to listen please help us not to refuse that word please give us strength this week to go to the cross when we get things wrong to ask forgiveness to ask for peace to ask for grace and let us cling to

Jesus at all costs despite all the pressures despite everything we face at work at home in family life let us cling to Jesus in Jesus name Amen