

Hebrews 12:18-29 // Mountain of Fear and Joy

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[0 : 00] To see and to know you. That you teach us more about yourselves. And more about who we are. And so we just commit this time together into your hands. So if this is your first time kind of looking at Hebrews.

I just want to give you a little bit of a steer as to how we navigate where we're at. There is one big theme that comes again and again in this letter. And it's this.

It is that Jesus is better than everything else. That is one thing that comes through all the time. Is that Jesus is better than everything else. He's better than angels.

He's better than Moses. He's the best. He's the better high priest. The new covenant is better than the old. Jesus is better. However.

I think that the question we must ask. That I want us to ask this evening. That in itself is good to know. We need to know that Jesus is better. But there is another question that the writer to the Hebrews wants us to know.

[1 : 22] And he wants us to answer this. Well so what? If Jesus is better than everything else. Which he is. Why do we need to know that? And there is one reason that I want to hone in.

On why the writer would go on and on for 11 chapters. About why Jesus is better than everything else. And this is the reason. It's so that they listen to him.

Listen to Jesus. And it's so that when Jesus speaks. His words do not fall on deaf ears.

To ignore Jesus. There's a huge warning here. It comes again and again and again. Throughout the whole of this letter. And in this passage. We get the reason why ignoring Jesus is a terrible mistake. It's a terrible mistake. Because every single one of us will one day come face to face. Will stand before almighty God. In all his blazing glorious holiness.

[2 : 29] That's the reason it's a terrible mistake. The last few weeks. I don't know what the weather has been like in Glasgow. But in Winchborough it has been a joy.

I'm hoping you had a great weather over the last weekend. In Glasgow when I lived here. It felt like the summer was short. It felt like you had your one little bit of sunshine.

Make the most of it. Because you might not see it again. But there is nothing better is there. Than being able to get outside. Enjoy the sunshine. If you're anything like me.

There is at least one day in the year. When you don't put enough sun cream on. And what happens? Well I'm at a massive disadvantage with this shiny noggin. It's the first thing that gets burnt.

We need the sun don't we? We need the sun to sustain life. And yet get too close. It's dangerous. That is a picture of what it is like.

[3 : 30] To approach the almighty God. We need him. To sustain life. Our lives. But approach him. Get too close.

In the wrong way. It's worse than not just having spiritual sun cream. We need something much more. And we won't survive. Without him.

The reason is. The holiness of God. And the sinfulness of man. Cannot exist together. It's like trying to mix fire and water. Whichever is bigger.

Always wins out. And if there is one thing. I want you to hone in on. To take home from this evening. It would be this. It would be the thing that I said before. When we stand before the living God.

It will directly relate. To how we've listened to Jesus. It will be a terrible mistake. If we've ignored him. But a beautiful moment.

[4 : 27] If we've paid attention. Now. What's great about coming to a. Kind of. As I look out. I don't know where you're all at with Jesus. But there'll be some of us here this evening.

And all of us in many ways. As we'll know. There will be times when we've ignored him. And maybe even. Refused his words. If that is you. There is an opportunity. Presented to you. From this passage. And this is the opportunity. As you hear the word of God. Rather than living life. Where you pick and choose. And ignore Jesus. Depending on how you feel. Rather than living that way. What if this evening. You flip that mindset upside down. What if this evening. You flip that mindset upside down. And started approaching Jesus. With the reverence and awe. That he deserves. What if you did that? I can assure you.
[5 : 25] If you grab that opportunity. With both hands. It's the best decision you'll make. Before we kick off.

Our passage with this. First point. You know. If you're a note taker. First thing we're going to look at. Is the unshakable. Holy voice. Of God. The first half. Of our reading. Verses 18 to 24. We have this contrast. Between two mountains. Now it's been said before. That whenever mountains are mentioned. In the Bible. Take notice. One writer has said. If you take out. All the mentions of mountains. And meals from the Bible. You're practically left with nothing. Mountains are important. Because mountain tops. In the ancient world. Were of strategic significance. They were the ultimate. High ground. It was the military advantage. The untouchable power. The place you ran to. For safety. From opposing enemies. So when God shows up.
[6 : 20] At the top of a mountain. The people are in no doubt. That the living God. Has the advantage. He's the one with untouchable power. But right here.

We have two mountains. We have Mount Sinai. Contrasted with Mount Zion. And the differences between the two. Are spelled out. Verse 18. We see what's at the top. A blazing fire. Darkness and gloom. A storm. And a voice that's when it's heard. Look with me. Verse 19. Those who heard it. Begged. That no further word. Would be spoken to them. Verse 21. The sight of all this. Was so terrifying. That Moses himself. Said I am trembling. With fear. Kind of a mountain. It doesn't sound like. One you'd like to visit. Does it? I don't know if any. If we've got any Monroe. Baggers. Here this evening. But if you heard. That was at the top.
[7 : 15] What do you reckon? Do you go. Are you up for it? You normally go. Mountain climbing. For the view. Well this mountain. If you look at nature. Any animal who touches this one.

Must be stoned to death. I'd recommend. Recommend leaving your SLR camera. At home. Joking aside. This was the reality. Of Mount Sinai. Centuries before. This letter was written. When God redeemed. His people from Egypt. This is the mountain. He brought them to. Mount Sinai. Exodus chapter 19. Moses was terrified. To go up. But he did. He went up. And it was there. That God's people received. The Ten Commandments. And the law. But this mountain. It represents something more. It's more than just a terrifying moment. What it represents. Is the entire way. The Old Covenant. In how God's people. Could relate to God.
[8 : 11] How they would approach him. And essentially. It said this. God is holy. And you are sinful. So keep your distance. God is holy.

And you are sinful. So keep your distance. And your standing before the living God. Rests on your performance. How well you keep the rules. How well you bring the right sacrifices. It was terrifying. Because if you failed. You faced the holiness of God. It's why praise God. There is another mountain. A better way. Mount Zion. Verse 24. We see the difference. Mount Zion. It is the city of the living God. The heavenly Jerusalem. Thousands of thousands of angels. In what they're in joyful assembly. Names written in heaven.
[9 : 09] You've come to God. The judge of all. Who's made. The spirits of the righteous. Made perfect. And to Jesus. The media of a new covenant. And the sprinkled blood.

That speaks a better word. Than the blood of Abel. These two mountains. Could not be any more different. But notice with me. There is a very important part. With how these two mountains start. Notice with the crucial language. Verse 18. How does it start? He's saying to the church. That he's writing to. You've not come to that mountain. You've not come to Mount Sinai. Verse 24. But you have come to Mount Zion. Two different mountains. The God at the top is the same God.

He doesn't change. He's still blazing with glory. Like the sun. He is terrifying to get too close to. And yet providing spiritual life and vitality. Just like the God at the top of Mount Zion.

[10:11] Why? Because he's the same God. His voice still carries the same absolute authority. When God speaks. He always shakes. So the question has to be.

Well. If it's the same God. At the top of these mountains. What's the difference between them? Why does the holy almighty God. Bring you to Mount Zion.

If you come to the judge of all. Well. Well. How do we approach this God? It's the same mountain. But it kind of seems different. Well. Verse 24. Tells us everything we need to know.

Because at the top of Mount Zion. What do we come. Who do we come to? To Jesus. The mediator of a new covenant. And to the sprinkled blood.

That speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Mediator language. It's a theme in Hebrews. Chapter 7 through 9. The best way I think that you can describe a mediator.

[11:13] Is as a middleman. We encounter middlemen all the time in life. I don't. I've. I'm yet to buy a house. But that is the job of an estate agent.

Isn't it? When you're buying a house. The estate agent acts as a middleman. They represent the buyer to the seller. And vice versa. Jesus is the middleman.

Not between buying a house. Houses. But he's the middleman. Between God and humanity. And as the God man. He doesn't just represent. But from the very first verses of the.

This whole letter. That's what we read. He's the exact representation. Of the living God to us. But also he stands representing us. To the living God. He's the middleman.

Who represents both parties. He speaks to God as one who lived a perfect life. He mediates God to us. And stands in our place. Before God. And because of that.

[12:10] Is the middleman he is. Because he's that kind of perfect middleman. That's the reason why his perfect sacrifice. When his blood was spilled.

Speaks the better word than Abel's. Because when he stood before the living God. Representing us. He stood there as a condemned sinner. In our place. And the blazing holiness.

The consuming fire. Consumed the Lord Jesus. Like a fire blanket. That takes the flames. Jesus took the flames of God's anger.

At our sin. But he didn't just stand near the fire. He was consumed by it. So that we wouldn't be. His blood speaks undeniably to us.

And without it speaks a different better word. To that of Abel's. Perhaps you'll remember Abel. Killed by his older brother. And we read in Genesis 4. After Abel is dead.

[13:06] This is what God says to his brother Cain. The Lord said. What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood. Is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground.

Which has opened its mouth. To receive your brother's blood from your hand. Do you see. What Abel's blood speaks of. It speaks of judgment.

And it speaks of punishment. Judgment. Condemnation. And punishment for Cain. Abel's older brother. Yet Jesus' blood.

Even though inflicted on him by us. It doesn't speak of judgment. Condemnation. Or punishment. But of forgiveness. It speaks of freedom. And of reconciliation.

It speaks of acceptance. Rather than condemnation. It speaks of Zion. Rather than of Sinai. A belonging to a kingdom.

[14:06] That cannot be shaken. Now it's at this point. There is a bit of a pivot. It's at this point. Because until verse 25.

It's kind of all good news. You're not going up that mountain. You're going up this wonderful mountain. Where there's Jesus at the top. It's all good news. And then we get to verse 25.

And there's a big. And there's a warning. And it's a warning that comes. Because of what our sinful flesh. Does with God's grace. Wrapped safely.

In Jesus' salvation. Fire blanket. Our sinful flesh. Does something very dangerous. Look with me. We see this one.

In verse 25. See to it. That you do not refuse. Him who speaks. This is what the writer wants to drive home.

[15:06] It is kind of strange. But we know that the human heart is deceitful. It's kind of strange. But true. That having escaped from Sinai to Zion.

The people he's writing to. And we ourselves can respond to grace wrongly. Instead of listening more to Jesus. We can respond by listening to him less. And we're right to ask the question. Well why is that? Why might we ignore. Or even refuse him. Refuse Jesus speaking to us. After knowing that he's the one who stood in our place. It is strange. And yet it's naturally where our sinful disposition turns. And the reason is a presumption on his grace. It is a taking for granted of his loving kindness. That it will cover us no matter what. And I think the right searching question is one to ask ourselves. When you hear the voice of Jesus. [16:11] In the pages of scripture. Because let me just say. That's exactly what the whole Bible is. When you read the Bible.

That is Jesus the living God speaking to you. Every word. So when you hear the voice of Jesus in the Bible. When you do. At what point. Do you ignore what he says? Is it. When he says take up your cross and follow me. That you agree with it on a surface level. But then when the hard moment comes. You just prefer to gain what the world offers. And that's the whole of the Christian walk. Isn't it right? And you could take what Jesus said in this letter. Example. Chapter 10.

What does Jesus say? He says through his word. He says don't neglect meeting together. Do we take that seriously? Or do we come to church when we feel like it? [17:11] What about this one? Make every effort to live in peace with everyone. Are we listening to that? Or do we prefer to gossip and tear people down when we can?

Now I've just chosen to. But you could go throughout the whole Bible or Hebrews. And the list goes on. The real danger. And the reason Jesus is better is woven throughout this letter. Is because of the temptation for Jewish believers to return to Jewish ways. That's the whole point of why it's shown time and time again that Jesus is better. Jesus is better. You're on Mount Zion. Not Mount Zion. Not Sinai. So why would you ignore Jesus and go back to the way of trembling? Perhaps a pertinent question for us this evening is why would we do that?

Why would we do that? I'm going to suggest two reasons why we might. The first, it goes something like this. That we think because of the cross that somehow God has changed in his temperament. [18:24] He used to be a God of blazing fiery holiness. But that's kind of the God of the Old Testament, isn't it, right? Kind of, you know, that's kind of where we read all this kind of stuff. That's the Old Testament and we assume kind of time chronology onto God's existence and think that with age he softened.

Before, yeah, back then, that was ages ago. You know, he was just like a petulant, egotistical, proud young man in his 20s flying off the handle. But now with experience, you know, he sees things a bit differently. He softened. He's grown old. He's a mature guy now. Now he's full of grace. And because of that, because he's learned his ways, he doesn't take sin as seriously as before. And so the commands, the voice of Jesus, when the living God speaks, yes, it's important. But, you know, he still loves us, doesn't he? He's not going to let just that wee bit of sin be such a big deal, is he, really?

Of course not. Maybe that's one reason that we don't listen to him. That's our first reasoning. God has changed for the better and sin doesn't really matter.

[19:33] So don't worry if you refuse Jesus or when he speaks. We simply don't need to tremble anymore. The next reason why we might refuse Jesus and his words is because on the inside, below the waterline, if we always do what Jesus says, we feel losing control of our lives and the discomfort it will bring of having to say no to the simple things we enjoy.

But that way of thinking is exposed, isn't it? It's exposed. Verse 25, look with me. What does he say after he's given this command?

Don't refuse him. What do we say? If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, from Sinai, how much less will we if we turn away from him who wants us from heaven? Then, it's a how much more scenario. You see how this plays out? If you thought Sinai was terrifying, just wait until the warning comes not from the top of a mountain, but from the throne of heaven.

Verse 26, at that time his voice shook the earth. But now he's promised, once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens.

[20 : 59] The words once more indicate in the removing of what can be shaken that is created things, so that what cannot be shaken may remain. You see, when the voice from the throne of heaven shakes, it won't just be the perimeter at the bottom of the mountain that will keep you safe.

When the voice from heaven shakes everything, there will be nowhere to step back to. There is no perimeter. There is only the mediator.

And if you've refused him, the challenging word for us tonight, guys, is that you will be shaken too. This is a hard passage for us to take on board.

And you might be thinking, wow, this all sounds pretty hopeless. And you might well be asking, if everything built on human effort is going to be shaken and destroyed, well, what hope do we have? Verse 28 gives us an answer. 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.

[22 : 16] Can you see the glimmer of hope? We aren't asked to build something that can withstand the shaking. We receive one.

A kingdom that cannot be shaken is gifted to you. You become part of that kingdom. And it's all because of the middleman, the mediator, Jesus' blood that speaks the better word of forgiveness, freedom, hope, peace, and ultimately salvation.

We receive keys to that kingdom from him. And when you realise the kingdom you stand in is the safest place you could possibly be, there simply is no way you can treat his voice casually.

And it sets us free. This is what sets us free to respond, empowered by the Spirit of God, to listen to our Saviour.

And to respond, not to fear him in the way of fearing punishment, but to fear God with awe and reverence and with thankfulness.

[23 : 24] Grace, the evil one in our hearts will tempt us as we've received grace to be casual with it.

But when we actually see the cross of Jesus and what it cost him, and we meditate on that, it produces a deeper reverence. A deeper awe because the cost of sending his own son completely raises the stakes.

And as we're kind of coming towards the close, I just wonder if it's worth landing the plane in our own hearts.

That this changes how we come to God. It changes how we worship him. It changes how we pray to him and how we go about our every day. At the very least, I hope that it makes us more acutely aware that we cannot come into the presence of God flippantly.

Right? Sin does matter. Yes, it's covered. But it took God's own son to die an excruciating death and be separated from his father to make that the case.

[24 : 42] To treat Jesus casually, his words casually, and think that sin isn't that serious is really an insult to what Jesus did. Spiritual fruit comes from taking your sin seriously.

And I'm not here. You know, I'm really not here to make you feel guilty about that. Sometimes we forget that when the Spirit of God is at work in our hearts, sometimes the work is conviction.

And that can feel kind of not nice sometimes. But that doesn't mean it's not good. Godly conviction brought about by the Spirit of God is the path to godliness.

It's the path to awe, reverence, and thankfulness. Not brought about by heavy guilt or worldly remorse, but by the Spirit of God himself. That is a work of grace.

It is a work of grace. And so as we come in for landing, the sun is hot, but it gives life.

[25 : 50] God is holy beyond compare, but he gives life abundantly. We need the sun to be hot. It's heat is what gives life. We need God to be holy because it's out of his absolute holiness that we receive spiritual life.

He is a consuming fire, yet we are not consumed because Jesus was. And because of that, just like we get to enjoy the warmth of the sun on a summer's day, we get to enjoy the smile of a holy God who's become our Father and loves us.

We get to enjoy him. We get to enjoy Jesus. And live every single day belonging to an unshakable kingdom. We've come to Mount Zion.

We've not come to a mountain that can be touched, but we have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. Let me pray.

Almighty God, there's times when we come to your word and it's so challenging and it challenges our lives. It challenges sometimes misconceptions that we've made about you.

[27 : 14] And so I pray that you teach our hearts tonight and remind us of your holiness, remind us of our sinfulness, and remind us that are fresh of the good news of the gospel, that you took the wrath, the flames of fire.

You were consumed so that we wouldn't be. And Lord, I pray that you would teach us to listen to you. I pray that you'd give us ears to hear and listen to the voice of Jesus and that we wouldn't refuse him.

Forgive us where we've ignored you. And so we commit this into your hands. Pray for your blessing and honour upon us, that we might worship you with awe, with reverence and thankfulness.

We ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen. We're going to respond to the word of God by standing to sing.