

Hebrews 12:26-13:6 // Listen to Him

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[0 : 00] Today's reading is from Hebrews chapter 12, beginning at verse 25, which can be found on page 12111 of the church bibles.

! So that's Hebrews chapter 12, beginning at verse 25.

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? 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 is, created things, so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

[1 : 02] 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.

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so, some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

Continue to remember those in prison, as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated, as if you yourselves were suffering.

Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, because God has said, Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.

[2 : 10] So we say with confidence, the Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? Thanks, Kate, for reading, and it's brilliant to see you all.

If you keep your Bibles open at Hebrews 12 and 13, that would be a great help. And let's join together and bow in prayer as we come to God's words. Father, as we sang earlier, speak, O Lord. Speak into our hearts, speak into our minds. Address our fears and anxieties. Address each of our situations, we pray. Remind us of your love and faithfulness.

And help us not only to hear your voice, but to respond in faith and obedience. For Jesus' sake.

Amen. Well, let me put it to you that the way we respond to God day by day depends on how much we value Him.

[3 : 22] The way we respond to God day by day depends on how much we value knowing Him. Now, that tracks, doesn't it? Because it's true in any relationship.

If someone doesn't matter very much to us, we don't pay all that much attention to what they say. We don't rearrange our schedules. We don't particularly care what they think.

But when it really matters, we listen carefully. We want to hear what they have to say. Their words carry real weight. And that's really the question that Hebrews is putting before us tonight.

How much weight does God's voice carry in our lives? Because as we come to the end of this letter, Hebrews has taken us back to two mountains.

We saw that last week. The first is Mount Sinai, the mountain where God rescued His people from slavery, where God rescued His people for relationship with Himself.

[4 : 30] A mountain where God spoke to Moses. And the second mountain is Mount Zion, the heavenly mountain we have come now to through Jesus Christ.

The mountain where God has spoken through His Son. Two mountains, two occasions where God speaks. Two generations of God's people standing before Him.

And on both mountains, the question is exactly the same. How will God's people respond when God speaks?

Will they listen? Will they listen? Or will they refuse Him? Because that is not just the question facing Israel at Sinai.

It's not just the question facing the Hebrews in the first century. It's the question facing each one of us tonight. God has spoken through His Son.

[5 : 27] Will we listen? That's the question. Will we listen? So firstly, listen to the Son who speaks from heaven.

If you just look at verse 25 of chapter 12. See to it that you do not refuse Him who speaks. Now this is the final warning in the letter.

The writer's final warning. And it takes us right back to where the letter began. Now do you remember how Hebrews opened in chapter 1, verse 1?

Hebrews chapter 1, verse 1. In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways.

But in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son. That was the opening declaration. God has spoken and He's spoken now finally and fully through His Son.

[6 : 30] And then came the first warning in chapter 2, verse 1. We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard so that we don't drift away.

So the letter began with a warning about listening. And now it ends with a warning about listening. The whole letter is framed by the same concern.

Will we listen to the Son? Or will we refuse Him? And if you've been with us through this series in Hebrews that we started last autumn, this is perhaps as good a moment as any to stand back and look at the shape of the whole letter.

We began with the Son. We end with the Son. At the very center of the letter stands Jesus, our perfect high priest, seated at the Father's right hand.

And so because of what He's done, we can draw near. So we have Jesus, the Son, as the prophet who speaks, the priest who represents us before God, and the King who is seated and thrown at the right hand of the Father.

[7 : 46] And everything in Hebrews really flows from this. And verse 25 of chapter 12 continues. 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?

And so the comparison you see is with Israel at Mount Sinai. God spoke, He revealed Himself, and yet many refused to listen.

They hardened their hearts. Hebrews says, If rejecting God's Word then meant judgment, how much more serious is it now to ignore God's Son?

God has spoken through His Son. Listen to Him. Do not refuse Him. Do not turn away from Him.

[8 : 45] Because one day every competing voice will fall silent. That's what this language of shaking is all about. Verse 26.

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. And then verse 27 explains the words, Once more indicate the removing of what can be shaken.

That is, created things so that what cannot be shaken may remain. In other words, everything that's temporary will pass away. Everything fragile will collapse.

Everything that resists Christ will be lost. Now careers that can seem secure can crumble.

Governments that look permanent can fall.

Economies that feel solid can disappear. Even whole cultural systems can disappear. Everything that can be shaken will be shaken. And only Christ's kingdom will remain.

[9 : 51] Which means that the only thing, the only thing you're worth building your life upon is Him. Now we live in a world of competing voices.

Voices telling us what to believe, how to live, where hope and meaning and identity can be found. Ideologies that stand in direct opposition to Christ and His gospel.

And the pressure for us to conform can be subtle but constant. But Hebrews pulls back the curtain. One day every rival voice will be silenced. Everything and everyone opposed to Jesus will pass away. Only His kingdom will remain.

So the question for us is not, what does the culture think? Or what does my friends or my employer think? The question is, am I listening to Jesus?

[10:56] I suppose that lands differently for different people. For some of you, this is a warning not to refuse Jesus full stop.

You may be here exploring the Christian faith. You may be here for Tri-Church. You may have heard the gospel many times, but you've never come to Him. Never actually entrusted yourself personally to Jesus.

The Son who speaks from heaven is calling you even now. Do not harden your heart. Do not ignore so great a salvation.

Come to Him. Come to Jesus. Because we do not know when Christ will return. We do not know how long we have on earth. The invitation still stands.

But it's not indefinite. Come to me, says Jesus. Come to me. Now for others of us, the danger is not outright refusal.

[12:02] The danger is gradual drift. Not a sudden rejection of Christ. A slow loosening of our grip. That's been one of the great themes of Hebrews as we've walked through this letter.

A gradual movement away. A thousand tiny compromises. A growing neglect of God's word. A cooling of our love for Jesus. Because I suppose if you or I drifted from Jesus, some things in our life would undoubtedly become easier.

No battle against sin. No pressure to be distinctive. No social awkwardness for identifying with Jesus.

Some things would be easier. But it would not be safer. And it certainly wouldn't be better. Because we would be drifting away from the very salvation that Christ purchased for us.

Walking away from everything that is ours now and will be ours forever. And it rarely feels dramatic. It can happen simply through distraction.

[13:19] That's what makes it so dangerous. Life gets busy. There's deadlines, responsibilities, endless demands on our time and on our minds. Prayer gets squeezed out. Scripture gets sidelined.

And sometimes days pass, perhaps even weeks. And without ever consciously deciding to walk away from Jesus, we gradually stop listening to him.

We stop sitting at his feet and reflecting on what he's saying to us through his word and how it applies to our lives. And so Hebrews asks, are we listening?

Are we listening? Are we making space to hear Jesus' voice? Are we giving his word the weight it deserves? Or have we allowed louder voices to drown him out?

And if Hebrews has shown us anything, it is this. Jesus is our great high priest, our perfect sacrifice, our enthroned king, the heir of all things, the radiance of God's glory.

[14:29] And if that is who he is, there's nothing more important than listening to him. See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks.

So secondly, what is the right response to everything we've seen so far? Look at verse 28. Notice that God hasn't changed.

The God of Mount Zion is no different to the God of Sinai. He's still holy. He is still majestic, still utterly awesome, still, as verse 29 says, a consuming fire.

The difference is not that God has changed. The difference is that Jesus has made a way for sinners like you and I to draw near. Jesus has gone before us.

He's blazed the trail. He's borne our sin. He's opened the way for us to be in God's presence. And so the response Hebrews calls for is wonderfully simple, almost surprisingly simple.

[15:56] What does God want from us in response to all that Jesus has done? What does he want from us? Thankful worship.

That's all. Let us be thankful. Let us worship God acceptably. I love that. After all the soaring theology of Hebrews, after all the warnings, after all the encouragements, after all the teaching about priests and sacrifice and covenants, the application is astonishingly simple.

Be thankful. He just wants us to say thank you and then let that thankfulness flow out into a life of worship.

We'll notice too that he doesn't say since we will receive a kingdom. He says since we are receiving a kingdom, even right now, even as the world around us shakes, even as governments rise and fall, as economies boom and crash, even as our own circumstances change, even now we are receiving the kingdom that cannot be shaken.

And even now we know it's king. And one day we will inherit that kingdom in all its fullness. Meanwhile, everything else will be shaken.

[17 : 23] Every competing voice, every earthly security, the whole created order will one day be shaken. But Christ's kingdom, it will remain.

And if we really believe that, if we really believe that, gratitude becomes the most natural thing in the world.

So let me ask you, when was the last time you stopped simply to say, thank you, Jesus? Thank you, Jesus.

Thank you, Lord, for loving me. Not asking for anything. Not rushing through your Bible time. Not squeezing prayers into the gaps. Just thanking him. Five minutes. Two minutes.

[18 : 24] One minute of unhurried gratitude. Thank you for rescuing me. Thank you for bearing my sins on the cross.

Thank you for reaching down into the pit and dragging me up and putting me into your kingdom. Thank you that when everything else is shaken, I already belong to a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Because true worship begins there with gratitude. Gratitude is not the whole of worship, but it's where worship begins.

It becomes the engine that drives a life that is pleasing to God. A thank you life. A life of acceptable worship. Which is exactly where chapter 13 takes us next.

It's sometimes been said that our generation has muddled priorities. We work at our play. We worship our work.

[19 : 35] And we play at our worship. But Hebrews has a much bigger view of worship than we sometimes do. Look back at chapter 12, 28 just a second.

Let us be thankful. And so worship God acceptably. And then just look ahead to chapter 13, 21. May God work in us what is pleasing to him.

Point simple. Chapter 13 shows us what acceptable worship looks like in our lives. Not primarily what happens here at St. Silas on a Sunday.

But everyday lives that please God throughout the week. Now let's get the order right. Because Hebrews has been crystal clear about this.

We're not accepted by God because we live this way. We live this way because through Christ we've already been accepted.

[20 : 44] So this is not how we earn God's favour. This is how we respond to God's favour. And verses 1 to 6 give us two loves to cultivate and one love to avoid.

Two loves to cultivate one to avoid. First, love people. Verse 1 Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. That's easy to understand.

Harder to do. But remember what Hebrews has already taught us. God is our Father. Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters.

We really are family. Which means church is never meant to be a room full of strangers facing the same direction. You know the kind of church perhaps you've been to that kind of church.

People arrive two minutes before the service starts, sit in the same seat that they've always sat in. Perhaps exchange a polite nod to the person sitting next to them if they've been sitting next to them for the last 30 years and disappear as soon as the last song finishes.

[21 : 53] That isn't family. Hebrews says keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. And then verses 2 and 3 show us what that love looks like.

So verse 2 Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers. Hospitality is simply making others feel at home.

Making space in our diaries. Making space in our homes. Making space in our lives. And that's where the challenge bites. Because I suppose not many of us will have a problem with the idea of hospitality.

hospitality. But for some of us we struggle with the inconvenience of hospitality. Our calendars are full. Our homes are busy.

Our lives already feel stretched. And yet Hebrews says don't neglect it. Don't forget hospitality. Don't slowly let it disappear from your life.

[22 : 53] Part of worshipping God is opening your lives to other people. welcoming people the way that Christ first welcomed us when we were strangers to him.

I love this definition of hospitality from Rosaria Butterfield. She says it's using your Christian home in a daily way that seeks to make strangers' neighbours a neighbour's family of God.

Now someone who embodies that is Simon Atwood. Many of you know Simon of course before moving to St Andrews he was a minister in training here and his ministry every Sunday afternoon was wonderfully simple.

He'd gather a random assortment of students, visitors, friends, complete strangers after church.

He'd march them to Tesco's along the way. Everybody bought something.

Everybody chopped vegetables. Everybody contributed and somewhere between the chopping boards and the pasta sauce strangers became friends. That's hospitality.

[24 : 04] It's everyday life worship because God delights in that kind of love. I heard another story this week. A couple were overwhelmed by the prospect of moving house.

Boxes were everywhere packing to do. Stress levels rising. A Christian sister appeared unexpectedly at the door carrying a meal that she cooked.

She didn't stay. She simply handed it over and said I hear you've been having a time of it. Dinner's on me. That's hospitality too.

Ordinary acts of kindness that remind people they're not carrying life's burdens Alone. And then there's that curious phrase at the end of verse 2.

For by doing so people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Now the reference is to Abraham in Genesis chapter 18.

[25 : 01] Three strangers arrive unexpectedly. Abraham rushes to welcome them and prepares a lavish meal. And only later does he discover that these visitors are no ordinary travelers.

Now the point isn't that we should all expect angels to turn up for lunch tomorrow. The point is that Abraham models radical hospitality to complete strangers.

Hebrews says be like Abraham. Open your life. Open your home. Open your table because God delights in that kind of love. And then verse 3 widens the lens.

Not just strangers suffering believers. Continue to remember those in prison and those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering.

If you know a Christian brother or sister who's going through a hard time because of their faith, don't just stand back and observe their suffering. Enter into it.

[26 : 05] Draw alongside them. Stand by them. Feel something of the weight they carry. Maybe it's a Christian student getting mocked in class.

Maybe it's a colleague being sidelined because of their faith. Maybe it's a believer ostracized by their own family. The temptation is always to keep your head down, to stay quiet, to avoid being associated with them and draw flack like that.

Hebrews says don't do that. Love them. Stand beside them. Remember them. It's one reason it's so important that we regularly pray as we do for persecuted Christians around the world.

We may never meet them but they belong to the same family. So perhaps the question to ask ourselves is this. What does my attitude towards God's people reflect about my attitude towards God?

Second, on our marriage. Verse 4. Marriage should be honored by all and the marriage bed kept pure for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

[27 : 24] Notice those words by all. Married, single, widowed, divorced, young, old, all.

Why? Because marriage is God's idea. Right back in the very beginning God established marriage is one of his good gifts to humanity. The foundational building block of society which means that Christians should honor it, treasure it, guard it, protect it.

We're to honor our own marriages. We're to honor the marriages of other people. We're to refuse to treat lightly what God calls precious.

love. That includes keeping sexual intimacy within the confines of the covenant of marriage. Not because God is trying to deprive us but because God's design is good, because God himself is good.

The world says freedom is found by throwing off boundaries. God says freedom comes from living within his wise and loving and good design.

[28 : 42] So it's worth us reflecting on this. What for you are the particular areas of vulnerability in your own life in this area?

What are your own vulnerabilities? for some of us it means guarding what we watch. For some it means guarding emotional intimacy with those of the opposite sex who are not our spouses. For some it means refusing to feed fantasies that belong only within marriage. For all of us it means learning to honour what God honours.

Learning to love what God loves. Third do not love money. Verse 5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have because God has said never will I leave you never will I forsake you.

Money itself is not a problem. Money buys food it pays the bills it provides for families. Money is a useful servant but money also makes a terrible master.

[30 : 04] And either I trust God or I trust what money can buy. Either my security is in him or my security is in my bank accounts.

And sometimes we tell ourselves if only we had a little bit more in our savings if I just had a little bit more financial security a little bit more of a cushion then I'd be content then I'd feel safe.

But notice the reason Hebrews gives for contentment. Not you already have enough but because God has said never will I leave you never will I forsake you.

Contentment is confidence in the presence of God. The antidote to materialism is not having more it's knowing God is with you.

The antidote to anxiety is not more control it's knowing God is with you. The antidote to fear is not more security it's knowing God is with you. And those words were first spoken to Joshua as he prepared to enter the promised land.

[31 : 16] An uncertain future lay ahead real danger real enemies and God said I will never leave you. And wonderfully that promise belongs to every believer in Christ.

Maybe you're worried about money. Maybe you're anxious about your future. Maybe you don't know how you're going to make ends meet.

Hebrews says you have something greater than financial security. you have the presence of God. Which is why verse 6 says the Lord is my helper.

I will not be afraid. Original readers desperately needed that promise. were afraid that wholehearted allegiance to Jesus would attract the kind of hostility that would affect their bank balances.

In fact it already probably had and they feared it might happen again. Hebrews says you have the Lord what more security could you possibly need?

[32 : 28] So what does acceptable worship look like? When someone asks what's the worship like at St. Silas how would you answer?

I guess we might be tempted to talk about the style of music the bands the singing and it's not that those things don't matter but Hebrews gives us a much bigger answer acceptable worship is not confined to what happens in 90 minutes on a Sunday it spills out into ordinary life it looks like loving God's people it looks like honouring marriage it looks like trusting him more than money finding our security not in what we possess but in the God who provides and why can we live like that?

Because of the promise in verse 5 never will I leave you never will I forsake you that is surely one of the most precious promises in all scripture not I'll make life easy not you'll never suffer not you'll always have plenty but I will be with you and ultimately that's enough and that's perhaps why the words from that old Benny King song resonate so deeply if the sky that we look upon should tumble and fall or the mountains crumble to the sea I won't cry I won't cry

I won't shed a tear just as long as you stand living God stand by me Hebrews says the Christian need not fear why because the Lord is my helper I will not be afraid because God himself has said never will I leave you never will I forsake you God that brings us right back to where we began how much weight does God's voice carry in your life because if this is the God who is with us if this is the kingdom that cannot be shaken if this is the son who speaks from heaven then there is nothing nothing more important than listening to him and nothing more fitting than responding with thankful worship amen let's pray heavenly father we thank you that you are with us we thank you that you are here now by your spirit we thank you for the promise that you will never leave us never forsake us and so please help us by your holy spirit to listen to your son who speaks to us through your words help us to trust you when other voices compete for our attention help us to live lives of thankful worship loving one another honouring what you honour and finding our security in you alone and when life feels uncertain when the things around us feel fragile and unstable help us to remember that we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken for we ask in Jesus name amen well we're going to respond now to God's word by singing the last two songs of praise please