

Hebrews 12C (2014)

- Last week, we began the fifth and final warning that punctuate the letter to the Hebrews
 - For this writer's readers, the message was stark and unavoidable
 - If they sought relief from persecution by returning to Judaism, they were risking something far greater than what they gained
 - They might be cut off from the blessings of eternity that are available for faithful servants of Christ
 - Like Esau, they would suffer loss and experience great regret
 - But that recognition wouldn't be theirs until the time to repent was long past
 - We need to take this "what if" to heart as well
 - Our flesh, the enemy and the world all conspire to tempt us in a myriad of ways to abandon our walk
 - To shrink back, to seek the world's approval, the world's treasure, the world's pleasures is pure folly
 - We set ourselves on a collision course with the Lord
 - And our eternal rewards are on the line
 - So when some among us do stumble, it's urgent that we come alongside them in support, encouragement, prayer, teaching and admonishment, if required
 - Let's ensure no one falls for this deception
 - That was the beginning of the writer's warning last week
 - Today, we look at the heart of the warning
- Before the writer unfolds the main point of his warning, he prefaces it with another contrast between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant
 - In this case, the contrast is between how these two Covenants beckoned their respective participants to enter

[Heb. 12:18](#) For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind,

[Heb. 12:19](#) 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.

[Heb. 12:20](#) For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED."

[Heb. 12:21](#) And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling."

[Heb. 12:22](#) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,

[Heb. 12:23](#) 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,

[Heb. 12:24](#) and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

- Beginning with the moment of inauguration of the Old Covenant in Exodus, the writer recounts the scene at the base of the mountain
 - There was a mountain that God inhabited with great terror for the people
 - It was blazing with fire and smoke
 - It was shaking with thunder and earthquakes
 - When God spoke, it sounded like a trumpet
 - And the sound was so fierce, no one in the crowd could bear to hear it
 - They begged Moses to make it stop
 - Furthermore, God forbade that anyone come near to or touch the mountain
 - Not even animals could approach the base of the mountain, or else they would be destroyed
 - Even Moses was so terrified by what he saw, that he declared that he was full of fear
 - Such was the experience for the people of God as they were beckoned by God to enter into a relationship
- The writer is drawing a comparison between the circumstances under which that Covenant was offered, to the nature of the relationship it established

- The Old Covenant was a covenant that exposed sin and required death, the Bible says
 - In 2 Cor. 3:7, Paul calls the Covenant of Law a “ministry of death” because the Law reveals sin and the necessity of death
 - By the Law, all men stand condemned
 - And as our sin is revealed before a holy and just God, it generates terror, knowing that judgment awaits
 - Therefore, the climate surrounding the inauguration of the Old Covenant mirrored the spiritual impact of that Covenant
 - This was the way the people of Israel knew the Lord under the Old Covenant
- But notice throughout these verses, the writer is careful to point out that the New Testament believer did not enter into the New Covenant under such circumstances
 - We didn’t see God appear on a mountain in terror, shaking and in dread
 - We haven’t known God as a source of condemnation and jeopardy
 - We don’t risk being stoned should we dare to approach the Lord
 - And we aren’t trembling at the thought of Christ’s Second Coming
- By contrast, in vs.22-24, the writer reminds us of how the Lord reveals Himself to His children in the New Covenant
 - The New Covenant believer comes to Mt. Zion, referring to the Heavenly mountain on which stands the Heavenly tabernacle
 - In that place, is the Father with His myriad of angels
 - As well, there stands the great assembly of all Church saints
 - And there is Christ our Judge and all the Old Testament saints made perfect by faith
 - It’s a welcoming, corporate gathering
 - Unlike Mt. Sinai, everyone can approach and dwell with the Lord

- All this harmony and joy and fellowship is made possible by the better blood of Christ
 - Abel's blood was an unwilling sacrifice that cried out for justice and retribution
 - But Christ's spilled blood was a willing sacrifice to reconcile men to God
 - The New Covenant welcomes its participants to approach in peace and without fear of condemnation

[Eph. 2:13](#) But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

[Eph. 2:14](#) For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

[Eph. 2:15](#) by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,

[Eph. 2:16](#) and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

- We can see the writer's point from these examples
 - Before the New Covenant was revealed to men, experience with God necessarily included a sense of condemnation and fear and distance
 - Through the Law, men knew that sin was a barrier to fellowship with God
 - And everything in the Law served to reinforce that truth
 - Men were separated from the glory of God by barriers erected in the form of the tabernacle
 - And every encounter required blood sacrifice
 - And every appeal or approach required a priest to work on their behalf
 - And every appearance of God produced fear and trembling

- But now by Christ's sacrifice, our relationship God has been turned upside down
 - Rather than fear, the Lord speaks peace to us, leading us not to fear Him, but to love Him
 - Rather than enemies, He calls us friends and comes to make His home within us by His Spirit
 - Rather than condemnation, He declares there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus
 - And He invites us to serve Him in joy and without burden
 - Finally, He has assembled a great family of brothers and sisters with us, who share in Christ's eternal inheritance
- Faced with these two alternatives, which one would you prefer?
 - Would you voluntarily leave the New Covenant and take up again the Old?
 - Who would prefer to do such a thing?
 - Notice that the writer says plainly that his audience has already come to the New Covenant
 - And at the same time, he says they have not come to the Lord through the Old Covenant
 - His point is, that if they return to Judaism, they can only do so by turning their backs on a relationship of grace
 - And if they do, they are returning to a relationship marked by condemnation and judgment
 - They are placing themselves back in a state where they have only an expectation of God's wrath
 - And once again, there are consequences for disobedience to the Living God

Heb. 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.

Heb. 12:26 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."

[Heb. 12:27](#) 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.

[Heb. 12:28](#) 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;

[Heb. 12:29](#) for our God is a consuming fire.

- The problem with these believers is neatly summed up at the beginning of v.25
 - God is always speaking to His children
 - He is never silent
 - While He may not be talking about the topics we have on our mind, He is always speaking
 - He speaks first and foremost through His Word
 - No believer can ever say “I haven’t heard from God lately”
 - Or “...the Lord isn’t speaking to me right now.”
 - Not as long as you are spending time in His Word
 - Every time you open the pages of Scripture, you will hear from the Lord
 - The question is, will you hear Him and respond to His counsel?
 - Notice, the writer says they were refusing the Lord
 - “Refuse” implies that they heard
 - The Greek word for “refuse” is the same word translated “begged”, in v.19, speaking of the Jews who couldn’t bear to hear the voice of the Lord on the mountain
 - The writer is saying don’t plug your ears to God’s voice, the way the Israelites did at the mountain
 - The believers in the writer’s day had heard the Lord speaking, in the sense that they had become believers in the New Covenant
 - They knew the truth of the Gospel and the truth of Christ
 - They heard the Lord in His Word and in the Spirit

- But now, they were walking away from living their faith
- They were refusing to listen and follow the Lord
- Why? Because they didn't have an eternal perspective
- Can you imagine refusing the Living God? Standing in His presence with your fingers stuck in your ears like a child?
 - Can any of us conceive of such a situation?
 - I'm sure we cannot
 - And yet, when we refuse the counsel of God's Word
 - Or when we disobey the Spirit's leading
 - Or even when we disregard the wise, godly counsel of church family and leaders
 - We are refusing the Lord
 - So this leads the writer to make one more comparison between the Old and New Covenants
 - He asks his readers to consider what becomes of those who fail to heed the instructions of the Lord
 - Those in Israel who failed to hear and follow the Lord in the desert fell dead, as the stories of Exodus and Numbers show
 - They were in the presence of God's *Shechinah* glory on earth, so when they refused, the Lord's wrath burned against them
 - Knowing this, imagine what happens to those who hear God speaking directly from the Heavenly throne room and then refuse to listen?
 - The writer says in v.26, that the voice of God shook an earthly mountain in the day of Moses
 - But there will be another final "shaking" of both Heavens and earth
 - The writer quotes from Haggai, in speaking about that future day

Hag. 2:5 'As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!'

[Hag. 2:6](#) "For thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land.

[Hag. 2:7](#) 'I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD of hosts.

[Hag. 2:8](#) 'The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,' declares the LORD of hosts.

[Hag. 2:9](#) 'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and in this place I will give peace,' declares the LORD of hosts."

- Notice that the Lord makes a comparison between the moment at Mt. Sinai and His Second Coming
 - In that future moment, the Lord will assemble His people, just as He assembled Israel at Mt. Sinai
 - In that future day, He will assemble all the nations around the holy mountain where He will dwell in the Kingdom
 - And all the wealth of the nations will be present, speaking of the inheritance given to the saints
 - And from that wealth, the people will give to the Lord's house in that Kingdom
 - Leading to a house of even greater glory than any before it
 - And the Lord says that day will be accompanied by a great shaking of all things in earth and Heaven
 - He's speaking of the judgment that comes at the moment the Kingdom is stood up
 - It's a time of accounting, a time of reckoning
 - Notice, the writer says in .27, that this shaking is like a sieve that separates
 - The earth and sea and heavens will be moved and shaken
 - And then what remains will be the works and rewards that enter the Kingdom
 - The writer is referring to the same principle Paul describes in 1 Cor. 3, of a believer passing through fire at the judgment seat of Christ
 - The point is, that God will expose all Creation to His scrutiny

- And even those who have entered into the New Covenant will know His judgment, though without condemnation
- The shaking won't disturb our place in the Kingdom, as the writer says in v.27
- But the Lord's consuming fire is still a reality, as he says in v.29
- Knowing these truths, what should be our only reasonable response?
 - The writer makes that conclusion in v.28
 - Therefore, he says
 - Meaning, because of what we know about the Lord and our Covenant...
 - Because we have received this Kingdom on faith
 - And because it cannot be shaken by anything in this world...
 - Let's live up to that blessing, in gratitude for what we've been given
 - Don't let the world press in and disturb your confidence
 - First and foremost, in our salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone – that's not changing, it's a gift from God
 - But don't let deprivation, peer pressure, discomfort, lusts, desires and ambitions lead you to forget your Heavenly riches
 - Don't let persecution or threats against us lead us to fear those who cannot enter the Kingdom in which we will live forever
 - Don't let illness and relationship disappointments and loneliness drive us to forget that the Lord lives for us and in us, ready to greet us in the near future
 - And don't let the enemy's lies drown out the Lord Who is always speaking to you about these truths
 - Give to God your acceptable service, and do so in gratitude with awe and reverence
 - Live in gratitude for what will be yours in eternity, an experience that is barely around the corner of your life
 - Live in gratitude for the faith you've been given, for what Christ did on the cross, for the things that are certain and eternal

- Take Christ's attitude with you everywhere
 - That though Christ had everything, He gave it up so that He could serve the Father in obedience
 - And because He obeyed, the Father raised Him up, exalted Him and gave Him everything
- That's the Lord we serve, and after He's done everything necessary to reconcile us with God, He only asks that we serve Him to our last breath
 - Nothing illustrates this better than the story of Scottish evangelist John Harper

Harper was born into a Christian family May 29, 1872. He became a Christian 13 years later and had already started preaching by age 17. He received training at the Baptist Pioneer Mission in London, and in 1896 he founded a church, now known as the Harper Memorial Church, which began with 25 worshipers but had grown to 500 members by the time he left 13 years later. When asked about his doctrine, he stated it was simply "the Word of God."

While his spiritual growth followed a fairly direct uphill path, his personal life wasn't so smooth. When he was only two and a half, he fell into a well and almost drowned. At 26, he was nearly swept out to sea, and at 32, he found himself on a leaky ship in the middle of the Mediterranean. Most tragically, his wife died after only a brief marriage, leaving him alone with their daughter, Nana.

In 1912, Harper, the newly called pastor of Moody Church in Chicago, was traveling on the Titanic with his 6-year-old daughter. After the ship struck an iceberg and began to sink, he got Nana into a lifeboat but apparently made no effort to follow her. Instead, he ran through the ship yelling, "Women, children, and unsaved into the lifeboats!" Survivors report that he then began witnessing to anyone who would listen. He continued preaching, even after he had jumped into the water and was clinging to a piece of wreckage (he'd already given his lifejacket to another man).

Harper's final moments were recounted four years later at a meeting in Hamilton, Ontario, by a man who said: "I am a survivor of the Titanic. When I was drifting alone on a spar that awful night, the tide brought Mr. Harper, of Glasgow, also on a piece of wreck, near me. 'Man,' he said, 'are you saved?' 'No,' I said, 'I am not.' He replied, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.'

"The waves bore him away, but, strange to say, brought him back a little later, and he said, 'Are you saved now?' 'No,' I said, 'I cannot honestly say that I am.' He said again, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,' and shortly after he went down; and

there, alone in the night, and with two miles of water under me, I believed. I am John Harper's last convert." He was also one of only six people picked out the water by the lifeboats; the other 1,522, including Harper, were left to die.

- Serve in awe and reverence, serve in gratitude, caring nothing for this world