

## **An Unshakeable Kingdom      Hebrews 12:18-29**

**We shall inherit an unshakeable kingdom if we willingly receive God's grace.**

### **Hebrews 12:18-29      Introduction**

- Let's go back for a moment to the afternoon of Tuesday, August 23, 2011.
- This was the report from ABC News:
  - *"The strongest earthquake to hit the East Coast of the U.S. in seven decades damaged landmark buildings in the Washington, D.C. area, while rattling the nerves of tens of millions, just three weeks ahead of the 10th anniversary of the September 11 attacks ...*  
*"The National Park Service discovered cracking in the stones at the top of the Washington Monument, which will be closed indefinitely, according to the Associated Press. While inspecting it via helicopter the NPS noticed a crack in what they refer to as the paramedian – at the very top of the triangle ...*  
*"At the historic National Cathedral ... damage has been confirmed to three of four pinnacles atop the tower, while reports indicated cracks appeared in the flying buttresses around the east end of the cathedral ... The White House and Capitol building were evacuated following the quake, and the Park Service closed all monuments and memorials on the National Mall."*
- The very real threat of earthquakes reminds us that we live in an unstable kingdom and, for that matter, in an unstable world.
- By way of contrast, today's passage reminds us that God offers us an unshakable kingdom – an eternal home – a place in part defined by its complete stability.
- Let's read the passage through.

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### **Hebrews 12:18-29      Outline**

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|------|---------------------------|----------|
| I.   | The Terror of Mount Sinai | 12:18-21 |
| II.  | The Grace of Mount Zion   | 12:22-24 |
| III. | Let Us Have Grace         | 12:25-29 |

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### **The Terror of Mount Sinai    12:18-21**

- This passage goes back to that awesome day when the Ten Commandments were given on Mt. Sinai.
- The original story is in Exodus.
- Moses summarized it again for the people in Deuteronomy 4:9-14.
- The events at Mt. Sinai emphasized the separation between God and the people.
- They were His people and He was their God, yet they still had to keep a safe distance from this holy and terrifying Deity.
- If God never communicated the reality of this distance to them, then we would never be able to grasp the greatness of His grace today.

- Here are the details:
  - The mountain that cannot be touched
  - Burning with fire
  - Blackness
  - Darkness
  - Tempest
  - The sound of a trumpet
  - A terrifying voice speaking words
  
- 12:20 They were commanded not to come near to even so much as touch the mountain without God's permission.
- If so much as one of their animals were to have wandered up onto the mountain it would have been killed.
- 12:21 Even Moses was terrified by the sheer gravity of all these events.
  
- What was the point of all this drama?
- The lesson to be learned from the terrifying atmosphere at Mt. Sinai is that God is not to be trifled with.
- Pagan deities of Egypt where they had been, or Canaan where they were going, could be manipulated, coerced, bribed or ignored.
- They could happily choose to worship one god over another.
- Not so the living God.
- He is utterly holy.
- He is perfectly righteous.
- He is completely fair and just.
- He will not be mocked by those who refuse to take Him seriously.
- The God of Israel was different in almost every way from the gods of the nations around them – which in fact were no gods at all.
- And Israel needed to learn this.
- They needed to learn to fear the Lord.
- God can only be safely approached when we come near on His terms.
- And we need to learn to fear the Lord as well.
- See all of the following:
  - Job 28:28
  - Psalm 111:10
  - Proverbs 1:7
  - Proverbs 9:10

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#### **The Grace of Mount Zion 12:22-24**

- We have not come to Mt. Sinai.
- Terrible distance is not the main message that God is communicating today.
- The fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of wisdom, but *it is not the last word*.
- While it's true God can only be approached on His own terms, it's also true that He seriously wants us to approach Him.

- We have come to Mt. Zion, to God's own city.
- Instead of an untouchable, terrifying place, we are met by joyful throngs of both people and angels together.
- And the message that we receive at Mt. Zion is one of grace.
  
- Here are the details:
  - The Heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God
  - An innumerable company of angels
  - The church of the firstborn, registered in heaven
  - God is there, the judge of all people
  - The spirits of just men made perfect
  - Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant
  - The blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel
  - Our heroes back in Hebrews 11 were waiting for this heavenly city.
    - See Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16.
  - 12:23 We are citizens of this city, registered there, along with every member of the church.
    - See Luke 10:20
    - See Philippians 3:20
  
- 12:23 We have joined the church of the firstborn – not firstborn chronologically, but firstborn as to rank, privilege and responsibility.
- Earlier in this chapter we discussed Esau despising his birthright and trading it to Jacob.
- Like Jacob, we have come into that place of privilege in our Father's family.
  
- And who do we find there?
  - We find God, of course, the final Judge of all.
  - We find the saints of God who have gone before us.
  - They are called "spirits" because they have not yet experienced a bodily resurrection.
  - They are called "just men made perfect" because they have received that righteousness that is only received by faith.
  - And we find Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant.
    - See Hebrews 8:6 and 9:15.
- The rabbi highlights the fact that Christ's blood speaks better things than that of Abel.
  
- Christ's blood compared with that of Abel:
  - In Genesis 4, Cain killed Abel his brother.
  - So God confronted him. (See Genesis 4:10.)
  - The blood of Abel cried out for vengeance, retribution and justice.
  - The blood of Christ speaks to us of God's forgiveness and His holy gracious love.
  - The blood of Christ speaks better things.
  
- It is Christ's blood that gives us the right to enter heaven; we enter on God's own terms.
- That gracious, sacrificial death secures our place in a glorious eternal home.
- Our Lord has prepared us a city and Christ's blood has secured us a place in it.
- Think about that often and think about it seriously and deeply.
- The Grace of Mount Zion 12:22-24

- *“When the days are difficult and we are having a hard time enduring, that is when we should look up and contemplate the glories of heaven. Moses ‘endured, as seeing Him who is invisible’ (Heb. 11:27). The patriarchs endured as they looked ahead to the city God was preparing for them. One way to lay hold of God’s grace is to look ahead by faith to the wonderful future He has prepared for us.”*
  - Warren Wiersbe, Be Confident

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**Let Us Have Grace 12:25-29**

- 12:25 But grace is not conferred automatically whether we want it or not.
- God gives us the right to refuse it – though doing so is clearly an awful mistake.
- It is the same as rejecting God – turning away from Him who speaks from heaven.
  
- 12:26-27 The rabbi is trying to correct a common mistake we earthlings make.
- We often think of earthly material things as being stable, solid and “more real” than spiritual things.
- In truth it’s exactly the opposite.
- The things of heaven are much more stable, solid and real than the things of earth.
  
- The things of this earth are fleeting and temporary.
- They can be shaken, burned up, destroyed.
- Our monuments crack and someone needs to repair them.
- And we people of this earth are also here only temporarily.
- If our earthly treasure do last, they will eventually outlast us.
  
- But God has better things for us – immovable, unshakeable and eternal.
- They were made to last and they will always endure – even when the final “shaking” eventually takes place.
- Notice that the text does not say “these things will not be shaken” as if it were still possible.
- They cannot be shaken; they are unshakeable.
  
- 12:28 And we are receiving an unshakeable kingdom, prepared for us by our Lord.
- Allow this to be a motivator for us in the day-to-day here and now.
- Receive His grace.
  
- 12:29 The grace of God does not negate the fear of God as if these two qualities of God were contradictory or polar opposites.
- The two exist in tension – or perhaps better – in harmony with one another.
- The same God that is a consuming fire is the God that offers us a river of life if we receive it on His terms.

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## Hebrews 12:18-29      Conclusions

- Four Lessons we can pull out of this passage:
    1. The Fear of God.
    2. The Grace of God.
    3. The Importance of Receiving the Latter.
    4. The Fact That We Are Eternal Beings Intended for an Eternal Kingdom.
1.        The Fear of God.
    - If there is one mistake our generation makes regarding God, it is that we will forget that He is a God to be feared.
    - We have distorted the message of His love.
    - We think we are so smart, yet we've neglected "the beginning of wisdom."
    - God is unchanging; He is still to be feared.
    - In fact, it is this healthy fear that helps us to begin to comprehend the actual grace that God offers.
    - Without the fear of God, God's love and grace simply turn Him into a friendly old man.
    - His love and grace lose all of their value, being reduced to sentimental twaddle.
  2.        The Grace of God.
    - The Israelites began to learn the fear of God at Mt. Sinai when they received the Ten Commandments through Moses.
    - It was a place of holy terror that could not be touched.
    - We have come to the glorious city of God's grace, the heavenly Jerusalem which God offers us as our eternal home.
    - Our place there has been purchased by Christ's blood.
    - Jesus Christ in going to the cross makes it possible for us to receive complete forgiveness.
    - He makes it possible for us to live as citizens of heaven even while we are still very much present here on earth.
  3.        The Importance of Receiving the Latter.
    - The people who originally received this letter were being tested and tried.
    - Their place here on earth would have been made more secure by rejecting Christ's offer of grace.
    - You may feel as if you are in a similar position.
    - Perhaps you feel you have something to lose by becoming a Christian.
    - In reality, you don't.
    - Genuine loss will only be experienced by those who have not received God's grace.
  4.        The Fact That We Are Eternal Beings Intended for an Eternal Kingdom.
    - God did not create us for sin and judgment.
    - He created us in His image to enjoy an eternity with Him.
    - Then came sin and the whole system became corrupted – and we die as a sad result.
    - But God's intentions are still the same.
    - We are still eternal beings intended for an eternal kingdom, though we don't often live with that reality in mind.
    - We should really take one another more seriously in light of the shaking to come.

- Consider these wise words from C.S. Lewis.
  - *“It is a serious thing to ... remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare ...*  
*“All day long we are, in some degree helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all of our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics ...*  
*“There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors ...*  
*“This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously - no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption.”*
  - C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*
- As a closing passage, let's read 2 Peter 3:10-13.

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