

Hebrews 12:18-29

Open:

- I'm not entirely sure who "they" are – but "they" say that when we face danger, we have two instinctive responses:

1) *FIGHT* 2) *FLIGHT*

3500 Years ago in Egypt --

- The Hebrews were slaves to the Pharaoh, but GOD raised up Moses to be their deliverer.

- But Pharaoh refused to let the Hebrews leave.
- Nine plagues . . . Pharaoh's heart was increasingly hardened
- EXODUS 11:4-10 – The TENTH Plague: death of the firstborn male! (ESV)

➤ So Moses said [to Pharaoh], "Thus says the Lord: About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt, ⁵ and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle. ⁶ There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again. ⁷ But not a dog shall growl against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, that you may know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. ⁸ And all these your servants shall come down to me and bow down to me, saying, 'Get out, you and all the people who follow you.' And after that I will go out." And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger. ⁹ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you, that My wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt." ¹⁰ Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh, and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land.

- EXODUS 12:29-30 – (ESV)

➤ At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. ³⁰ And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead.

- That must have been an awful night of mourning! wailing! grief!

Q: On such a dark and terrible night, was there any place in Egypt that was safe?

- ▶ a stone house? ▶ out in the country?
- ▶ a storm shelter? ▶ the basement of a pyramid?

- In fact, the only safe place was the place specified by GOD for His people, the Hebrews.

- Each family was to select a lamb w/o blemish from their flocks. The lamb was slain, and the blood of the lamb was applied to the doorposts and lintel of their house.
- When the angel of GOD passed through the land, bringing death to the firstborns -- he would "pass over" the homes where the blood of the lamb had been applied.

The safest place for any Hebrews was **INSIDE** his/her own home where the blood had been applied!

↳ I don't know if it *felt* safe, but it was safe (because that was what GOD said.)

FAST FORWARD to the First Century --

- The Hebrews of the first century (about 30-35 years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus) are faced with a decision with enormous consequences –
 - ↳ How is GOD to be worshiped? known? served?
 - According to Mosaic Law covenant? . . . OR,
 - Has Moses been superseded by Jesus (Messiah), and has the Law covenant been superseded by the New covenant?
- Among the Jews...
 - A. Some had confessed Jesus as Messiah.
 - B. Some maintained the supremacy and safety of Moses and the Law.
 - C. And some were wavering; they were unsure what to think about Jesus.

The author makes his final appeal by comparing Mt. Sinai (Law) to Mt. Zion (New covenant).

- After an initial introduction, each mountain is represented with exactly 7 designations -- each new detail introduced by the conjunction, "and".

Verses 18-24, (ESV)

¹⁸ For you have not come to what may be touched, [and] a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest

¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. ²⁰ For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." ²¹ ~~Indeed~~ [And], so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear."

²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³ and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Mount Sinai	Mount Zion
<i>Implied: could be touched</i>	<i>Cannot be touched</i>
<i>and a blazing fire</i>	<i>and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem</i>
<i>and darkness</i>	<i>and to innumerable angels in festal gathering</i>
<i>and gloom</i>	<i>and to the assembly [church] of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven</i>
<i>and a tempest</i>	<i>and to God, Judge of all</i>
<i>and the sound of a trumpet</i>	<i>and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect</i>
<i>and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them, for they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned."</i>	<i>and to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant</i>
<i>and so terrifying that Moses trembled with fear</i>	<i>and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel</i>

‣ These two mountains represent two approaches to GOD --

A) **Mt. Sinai -- we discussed last week**

B) **Mt. Zion -- is immeasurably better than Sinai !**

‣ To come to Zion is to come to an entirely different kind of mountain.

- The author would disagree with today's religionists who say that all "faiths" (mountains) are essentially the same, and equally valid.

1) *a mountain that cannot be touched*

2) *and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*

‣ The Hebrews are being called upon to embrace a city which cannot yet be seen or touched.

- *by FAITH!*
- Instead of GOD coming down to where they were (Sinai), they have gone up to where He is!

‣ This is the same city to which Abraham looked forward --

- *"By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."* (11:9-10)

‣ God's heavenly city is NOT acquired according to the terms of Moses' law -- but rather, it is acquired by Messiah's righteousness.

- By embracing Messiah Jesus, they become citizens and ambassadors of this heavenly city and kingdom.
- *"Until the Lord brings the city to the earth, however, we cannot enjoy its full citizenship."*

- John MacArthur

Mount Zion is further described, depicted...

1) and to innumerable angels in festal gathering (in general assembly)

- Angels played a role in the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai -- but here, an innumerable company of angels are assembled in a festive gathering!

2) and to the assembly [church] of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven

- "firstborn" = plural (only use of the plural in the Bible)
 - Firstborns were entitled to special rights and privileges.
 - In the Old Testament God declared that all the firstborn males belonged to Him.
- In the heavenly Jerusalem, all those who are members of God's called-out assembly are equally bestowed with the rights of a firstborn.
 - Galatians 3:26-29 ~ *for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*
- Their names are "enrolled" (written down) in heaven.
 - making their designation already official and certain
 - Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 13:8; 20:15

3) and to God, the judge of all

- They have come to God Himself -- the final Judge of every person
 - Romans 8:33 ~ *Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.*

4) and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect

- ▲ Who are these ? How are they different from "the assembly of the firstborn" ?
 - A. Difference between New Covenant believers (Church) and Old Covenant believers (Israel).
 - probably not -- doesn't fit the context very well
 - the writer has been telling his fellow Jews that if they don't make the transition from Mosaic Judaism to Messianic Judaism they will be devoured by God's judgment.
 - if he now says that the spirits of old covenant believers are righteous and in the heavenly Jerusalem, then his appeal makes no sense.
 - B. Difference between living believers, and saints who have already died and gone to heaven.
 - *possibly*
 - C. Difference between God's "called-out" assembly (beginning with Abraham) and pre-covenant saints.
 - *possibly*

5) *and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant*

- Jesus, of course, as the Mediator stands as the basis upon which God is approached directly, forthrightly.

6) *and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than ~~the blood of Abel~~*

- What is the comparison ?
 - A. It seems to me that most commentators compare Abel's shed blood which cries out for vengeance and justice, and Jesus' shed blood which cries out for mercy and forgiveness.
 - ✓ though brutally crucified!
 - ✓ God is more satisfied with the shed blood of Jesus than He is angered by the shed blood of all persons unjustly killed.
 - B. Better -- Abel's sacrifice of blood foreshadowed the reality and efficacious sacrifice of Jesus.
 - ✓ Abel's sacrifice was acceptable and pleasing to God
 - ✓ *How much more*, is Jesus' sacrifice acceptable and pleasing!
 - ✓ Jesus' blood doesn't produce fear, it is not a reminder of sins -- rather, Jesus' blood results in peace and freedom.

CONCLUSION :

²⁵ *See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.*

For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

➤ **Who or what is speaking ?** (*that should not be refused*)

- verse 24 – Jesus' blood is speaking
- LIT. = "See that you do not refuse the speaking"

➤ **Why is refusal dangerous ?**

- lesser to greater argument . . . *For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.*

➤ **Pronouns!**

- "you" "See that you do not refuse Him who is speaking" the readers; fellow Hebrews
- "they" "For if they did not escape" the Exodites who were at Mt. Sinai
 - Every Hebrew twenty years old and above (save Joshua and Caleb) dies in the wilderness
- "we" "much less will we escape if we reject him" any/all of the first century Hebrews

➤ **What is the contrast between ?**

- A. The contrast is between God speaking on earth (Sinai) and God speaking from heaven (Zion).
- B. The contrast is between Moses who warned on earth and Jesus who warns from heaven.
 - "warns" = "to transact business"; to give advice to inquirers

Verses 26-29, (ESV)

²⁶ *At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."*

²⁷ *This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.*

²⁸ *Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.*

➤ The contrast continues and intensifies –

- ♦ THEN..... God's voice shook the earth at Sinai
- ♦ NOW..... God has promised to once more shake not only the earth but also the heavens

➤ When ?

A. At Jesus' first advent – culminating in His crucifixion and resurrection.

- ▷ In this case, the shaking is not to be taken literally -- but Jesus' coming did revolutionize the world!

B. At Jesus' second advent – when He comes to reign as Messianic King -- "*sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven*" (Matthew 26:64).

➤ The shaking --

- ↳ Which has begun in some sense now, culminates in the destruction of the kingdoms of this age.
- ↳ Think of it – one day, everything in all of God's creation will be shaken and destroyed!
 - ▷ But those belonging to His kingdom will be preserved, unshaken.
 - ▷ Believers haven't "received" the kingdom, but they are "receiving" it -- (*present participle*).

➤ Response –

- ↳ Gratitude
- ↳ Worship (reverence, awe)
 - I'm afraid much of what goes on as worship today has little, if anything, to do with God's character and person -- and more to do with our value set and preferences!
 - e.g. "True North" church: "*All You Need is Love*" and Bon Jovi's, "*Livin' on a Prayer*"