

Hebrews 12:18-29

“Serving God Acceptably”

Proper perspective; that’s the encouragement that the author of Hebrews has been seeking to support, that is reinforce the readers of his letter by. It’s amazing how fast our lives can go sideways when we’re tweaked emotionally, or we’ve been for some reason made subject to depression personally. and These people were down, they were discouraged, they were in the dumps, and the reasons may vary but the point is that they were a lot like you are at times, or like I can be; just dejected and generally downcast.

Though the author has been seeking to bolster them throughout the bulk of this letter, he’s really been pouring it on over these last couple of Ch’s. Because the enemy has this way of isolating us in our pain, or in our depression, making us feel like we’re the only one’s who go through it, that days of difficulty don’t visit other people. and If they do, they don’t like *this*, not like what I’ve gone through *previously* or am perhaps experiencing *presently*. and The author has been sharing *with us* and showing *to us* how that trials and tribulations, toil and trouble are (to various and sundry degrees) part and parcel to the believer’s life. Calamity and catastrophe is no stranger to the life of the believer. Jesus said, “*In the world you will have tribulation;*” John 16:33 It’s not a “might” it’s not a “maybe” it’s a guaranteed certainty, *you will have it*. Of course He followed that up with the hope that He’s overcome the world, so take heart, that’s not the way the story ends for you. Peter said, “*Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;*” 1 Peter 4:12 Yet it seems invariably that when some fiery trial is upon us we’re freaking out, “This is strange, what’ve I done to deserve this?” and We go on this sin sniffing campaign in our lives looking to make sure we’re right with God so that we can get out of the crucible. and I suppose that it’s healthy to evaluate ourselves and make sure things are where they need to be, but why do we freak out when our lives are going through the ringer. Jesus said it would happen, we have countless examples and illustrations, demonstrations and presentations throughout the scriptures of those who’ve endured much worse fates before us and have stayed true to the Lord through it all.

That’s really where Ch 12 begins isn’t it? Here we are surrounded by all these people who’ve witnessed to us the reality of God’s faithfulness to their lives in turbulent times. He’s been faithful to them, He’ll be faithful to us, if they can have our frailty then we can have their faith. “and As long as we’re on the subject of staying true to God and His purpose and plan for your life through painful experiences,” the author says, “let’s consider Jesus who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”

I mean how bad do you really have it, have you shed blood yet striving against sin, and with Christ all that He went through wasn't even for His own benefit, it was for ours. Do you understand that every time you endure some trial, or some tribulation, your own benefit may not be what's in view? You may be suffering for the sake of someone else, so that they can see the reality of Christ *in* you, God's faithfulness *to* you, and they need that to carry *them* through when *they're* in the fire. It's just the tendency of God to use our lives for the benefit of *others*. We get all self consumed, God would have us be *others oriented*.

Don't forget the exhortation that speaks to you as to children, if every now and then you receive some direction, some correction, the "spiritual spanking" so to speak; don't be *discouraged* be *encouraged*. If God *never* corrects your life, then you do well to be concerned for your salvation. But when God chastens you, disciplines me, it testifies of the reality that we're His kids.

Now what you may be going through might be *painful* now, but don't lost heart. It's going to yield fruit in your life that's *peaceable*, we've simply got to give God His way in it, that we might be trained and taught *by* it. So strengthen those hands that are hanging down, and those feeble knees, quit dragging your feet and get back to letting God use your life.

Once you've made things right between you and God, make things right between you and your brothers and sisters. Those whom you've neglected because you've been so self consumed you've just let things go in other arenas of your life. Pursue peace with all people and holiness with out which no one will see the Lord, and be careful that you don't fall short of the grace of God, safeguard yourself against bitterness, its bad news, it'll defile you, like it defiled Esau.

Remember Esau? Sold his birthright to his brother Jacob for a pot of stew, couldn't see past today, wasn't worried about tomorrow, but the day came when he wanted to inherit the blessing, but here's the deal. The blessing is tied to the birthright (I would just encourage you to grab that study if you weren't here a couple weeks ago). So he couldn't inherit the blessing, though he sought it diligently with tears, because he found no place for repentance. Bitterness *seethed* in him toward Jacob, he wanted to murder him, and things were never the same between them, bitterness will work *ruin* in your life.

Now, the basic theme that has been threaded throughout this letter has been *the competency of Christ*. He's the more excellent way, above and beyond angels, above and beyond the prophets, above and beyond the Aaronic priesthood, even over and above Moses and the law. The gospel of John tells us, "*For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*" John 1:17 The idea being that as great as the law was, grace is even better. As awesome as Moses was, he pales (at best) in comparison to Christ. and That's the basic idea being communicated in this final portion of Heb Ch 12.

These guys were thinking of retreating to the law, to the sacrificial system, and the author here is saying, “Hey, the law came through Moses, but grace and truth (the more excellent way) came through Jesus Christ” and He’ll weigh the 2 in the balance and believe me the way of the law comes up wanting. Don’t be beat back by difficulties, don’t slip into the “Well I’ll just do this and do that, and kinda maintain my own standard before God, that’ll be good enough.” Your own standard, my own standard will get me a one way ticket to hell, carry on in Christ, abide in Christ, notice.

Vs18-24

So we have comparison and contrast, a mountain of bondage, and a mountain of blessing, one that is physical, the other that is spiritual. 1 Recognized through tempests, trumpets, terror, death and destruction, the other as the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, an innumerable company of angels, the general assembly and church of the 1st born who are registered in heaven. One covenant mediated through Moses, the other through Christ...Mt Sinai, and Mt Zion.

You remember the story that revolves around the terrifying experience at Sinai (that Mt that burned with fire that may be touched). The children of Israel had been in bondage to Egypt some 400 yrs, and with a strong arm and a mighty hand God set them free and led them through the Red Sea and brought them to the base of Mt. Sinai. and Here they were the upwards of 2 perhaps even 3 million people making camp around the Mt. and Moses went up to God and God told him, *“You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.”* Ex 19:4-5 Moses came down and told the people and they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” and So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord. and God said, “Tell the people to consecrate themselves, wash their clothes and don’t have relations with their wives and on the 3rd day I’m going to come down upon Mt Sinai in the sight of all the people.

God said, “Set boundaries (fence off basically) around the entire MT, and tell the people to take heed not to even approach the Mt and if anything touches the Mt, (man or beast) it’s to be run through with an arrow or stoned, and when the trumpet sounds long they shall come near.” and The basic message was “Stay away, I’m holy, you’re not, and if *anyone* approaches Me with out being requested by name, they’re gonna die.”

On that 3rd day early in the morning a trumpet began to blast long and loud, the longer it blasted the louder it got, it began to thunder, and lightning, the earth was shaking, and this giant pillar of smoke like smoke from a furnace began to descend upon the Mt, the bible says the whole Mt quaked *greatly*. and As you might well imagine the general response was one of terror and extreme fear. As a matter of fact the people told Moses, “Listen, we understand that God speaks to you, but please ask Him to not speak to us anymore lest we die.”

When you come into the presence of holiness, (and you know it) there is a profound sense of unworthiness that will arrest you, and you feel unclean. It happened at Sinai, it happened, to Isaiah, it happened to Daniel, it happened to Peter, it happened to John. The people begged for it to stop! God was issuing forth the 10 commandments, and God was seeking to impress upon the people His holiness to keep them from sin.

Did it work? No, 40 days later all the people were having a massive orgy, and partying around a golden calf at the base of that very Mt saying, “This is the god that delivered us from Egypt.” How many people want a supernatural experience, “God if I could just see you, if I could experience some miraculous happening *by You*, I’d never sin again.” But if anything the bible demonstrates that spiritual experiences and miraculous happenings do *nothing* to bring maturity and spiritual stability into your life. Because it’s never enough, once I’ve seen one thing, I want to see more, the flesh is *never* satisfied. The bible says, “*Hell and Destruction are never full; So the eyes of man are never satisfied.*” Prov 27:20 It’s not the “wow” factor that will mature you; it’s the Word of God. It’s God’s word and the work of the Holy Spirit in your life that will result in your spiritual maturity. The bible is very clear, “*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*” Rom 10:17 It’s not the “wow” factor, it’s not fear that works holiness into a person’s life, it’s not legalism and bondage. Yet those are the qualities that characterize Sinai, you haven’t come to that Mt, why try to go there through your little lists of do’s and don’ts?

You haven’t come to the Mt of bondage, the Mt that speaks of earthly things, the Mt that magnifies the separation that exists between sinful man and a holy God. You’re not about the old covenant. You’re not seeking to hear *from* God or associate *with* God on the basis of Sinai, what’s the covenant you’ve been called to? What’s the Mt whereby you seek to hear *from* God or associate *with God*? Mount *Zion*. and Though *Zion* (or the city of Jerusalem) is a literal place, the author here is speaking of spiritual *Zion*, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels.

At Sinai only Moses was allowed into the presence of God. At *Zion* the general assembly is welcome and invited. Sinai was characterized by guilty men in fear. *Zion* features just men made perfect. At Sinai, Moses was the mediator. At *Zion*, Jesus is the mediator. Again Sinai brings an Old Covenant, which was ratified by the blood of animals. *Zion* brings a New Covenant, which is ratified by the blood of God’s own precious Son. Sinai was all about exclusion, keeping people away from the mountain. Mount *Zion* is all about invitation. Mount Sinai is all about Law. Mount *Zion* is all about grace. and The idea that’s surfacing is one that’s often repeated throughout the book of Hebrews, everything about the work of Christ is greater, don’t turn back *on* it or walk away *from* it.

Now in just a second we’re going to get to the point that a greater covenant bears a greater responsibility and a greater penalty if disregarded. But before we do I want to highlight just a few phrases found here in Vs 23 and 24.

1st of all you might note the phrase, “Church of the 1st born who are *registered* in heaven.” and I like that phrase for 2 reasons, 1st of all there are no 2nd generation Christians, we’re all going to receive the inheritance rights of the 1st born. The bible calls us children of God and joint heir’s with Christ, God has no grandchildren, only children. and As His children we’re the church of the 1st born, we’re all receiving the inheritance of the birthright.

Having been *registered* in heaven. That’s the other reason I like this phrase. Do you understand that God has a record keeping system, it’s mentioned in more than one place in the scriptures, He keeps logs, He keeps records and books. and One of the books that He keeps is called the Lamb’s book of Life, and if you’re in Christ your name (from all that I can tell) is *literally* written in it. and Believe me that’s one book that you want to be registered in. It’s like when you go to a hotel and you get there and they don’t have your registration...it’s a real drag. God’s not like that, if you’re in Christ, you’re in the book, you’re registered. This word, “registered” is a legal term for like a census, it speaks of a record for governmental inventory. and I just love the idea of God taking inventory of His books and having my name right there before Him. “Jeff...Jeff...Jeff... yep! There he is, I got him right there.”

One day the disciples were all topped out because they were able to cast out demons, they were subject to them in Jesus’ name and all that. Jesus said, *“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”* Luke 10:18-20 How important to make sure that your name is written in heaven, that you’ve registered in Christ, you’ve given Him your heart of stone and received from Him a heart of flesh, sensitive and tender toward the things of the Spirit, open to Him moving *in* you, being glorified *through* you.

The next phrase I’d have you take note of is the one directly following, “To God the *Judge* of all.” Both the living and the dead, the day is coming when God will judge the earth in righteousness by the hand of Jesus Christ and You don’t have to like that, but there’s no way around it and you’re going to have to deal with it. People like to avoid the topic of judgment, because it brings with it yucky words like “accountability,” and “responsibility,” yet the bible is clear. *“For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His truth.”* Ps 96:13 Of course Jesus said that the day was coming when the nations would be gathered before Him and He would separate them from one another like a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats, or a farmer the wheat from the tares. and To those on His right hand He’ll say, “Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” and To those on His left He’ll say, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” It’s an inevitable, inescapable fact, God will judge all, if you’re in Christ your sin has already been judged and the penalty paid in full. If not, you’ll bear your own reproach in everlasting separation from God into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

The final phrase here is at the end of Vs 24 with regard to the new covenant, “and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.” Now, there’s a little bit of a debate as to what exactly he means by this. Because as you know Abel was the 1st martyr, killed by his brother Cain. and God told Cain that the blood of Abel cried out to Him from the ground.

So the thought is that some say, “Well, Abel’s blood cried out for justice, for vengeance, for retribution. The blood of Christ cries out for forgiveness, mercy, grace and reconciliation, so the blood of Christ speaks better things than that of Abel.” and Certainly the *application* is there, however I’m not convinced that’s the interpretation. Because Jesus wasn’t a martyr, you’re martyred because of circumstances beyond your control, Jesus willingly laid down His life, He was in full control the whole time.

The context we’re in the midst of is that of acceptable sacrifice. I’m of the persuasion that the blood this is referencing is the blood of Abel’s sacrifice because although it’s both plausible and probable that Adam sacrificed before him, Abel is the 1st man on the biblical record that we have bringing to God an acceptable sacrifice. A sacrifice that God accepted, a lamb of the flock. But there was another *Lamb* that God accepted as a worthy sacrifice, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world whose blood speaks of greater things. It’s like the author here is saying, “Sacrifice has been happening for a long time, even since Abel, and none of it was able to provide a solution to the sin dilemma.” But the blood of Christ, through the new covenant is better, it brings a once for all acceptable solution to the sin dilemma that’s confronted man since the fall. Now...

Vs25-29

What’s the point? A greater covenant brings along with it a greater responsibility and a greater accountability. (Vs 25) “See” that is, ‘Make a concerted/conscientious effort’ that you do not *refuse* Him who speaks.” Now what’s the opposite of *refusing*? “Receiving,” do not refuse Him, or resist Him, but rather *receive* Him who speaks. “For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, (was their a penalty for refusing to obey God’s word, seeking to come near that Mt when you weren’t called for? You bet there was it was the penalty of death) *much more* shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven.” If the penalty of death was imposed upon the one who showed disregard for the old covenant, what do you suppose the penalty will be for the one who disregards the new covenant extended to man in Christ? and So the exhortation comes don’t turn *away* from Him, turn toward Him, give heed *to* Him, Jesus came down from heaven to stand in the gap on behalf *of* us and to show and share the will and the word of God *with* us, see to it that you don’t refuse Him, or turn away from Him, because at Sinai the earth shook, it was terrible, it was terrifying. But now (Vs 26) He has promised saying, “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.”

There is a day coming when God is going to rock this world (literally) the bible speaks of meteor showers, the earth being thrust from its orbit (Isaiah 13) the heavens being shaken,

men's hearts failing them for fear. God is going to shake things up in a way unlike He ever has nor will He ever do again, and those who've refused Him will be removed *from* Him, notice.

Vs27

God is going to make a very definite distinction between that which is temporal, and that which is eternal, and all that's going to matter in the end are those things that you built upon and have been established in that are eternal, because everything else will be shaken loose, torn away and destroyed. Jesus said it like this, "*... whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.*" Matt 7:24-27 It's so important to establish your footing on the solid rock of Jesus Christ being both a hearer and a doer of His word.

Vs28

You see when all the temporal debris is shaken loose (and sometimes God shakes our world so that we'll refocus and rebuild in those areas that are important, we too often cling to the things of this world) then that which is eternal will remain. and That's the kingdom we're receiving, an unshakable, everlasting kingdom. Therefore "Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." What is the means, what is the resource by which we're able to serve God in an acceptable manner? It's grace, what is grace, is it the resource that says, "Hey, sin all you want we'll make more!" "Where sin abounds grace abounds still more, use God's grace as a cloak, or a covering for sin!" God forbid, how can we who've died to sin live any longer in it? Do you know what the finger prints will be in the life of the man, the woman, the individual who is serving God acceptably through the means of His unrelenting supply of grace? 2 Things, #1 "Reverence" and #2 "Godly fear" you show me someone who's out there living fast and loose with the grace of God and I'll show you someone who's not operating in the grace of God at all, but rather they're presuming upon the Lord and are in a dangerous, dangerous position. God's grace *does not* teach us that we can do whatever and God will for some reason *wink* at our sin. We may as well spit upon the work of the cross when we treat God's grace with such contempt. God's grace doesn't teach loose living.

One of my favorite Vs regarding God's grace is found in Titus Ch 2 Vs 11-12, I'm going to read to you just a little more than that. Listen to this, "*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and*

glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” Titus 2:11-14 The grace that saves your soul, will change your life, redeem you from lawless deeds and teach you to live soberly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking forward to the coming again of Jesus Christ Saving grace breeds purity in your life, reverence and godly fear. Therefore, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

Vs29

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. and He will consume anything and everyone who does not come to Him on His terms, His terms are simple, they're reasonable, and they're accessible to all. Unconditional surrender in the person of Jesus Christ You have His unmerited approval in Christ, everything outside that sphere will be consumed, judgment is coming, grace is available. Tap the resource of God's grace in Christ, serve Him acceptably, with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire.

Prayer Points:

God we want to serve You acceptably, may You pour Your grace out upon us lavishly, that we might deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and walk before You in purity, reverence, and godly fear. and Help us to be hearers and doers of Your word, establishing ourselves on a solid and eternal foundation that will last for Your glory, that we might have proper priorities and a proper perspective.

Listen, it's true that our God is a consuming fire, equally true is that Jesus absorbed the full fury, and the heat of God's wrath so that you wouldn't have to. He paid our penalty, He incurred our debt that we might receive His inheritance, it's true that judgment is coming, but God's not willing that any should perish, He would that you would come to repentance, that you would register your name in heaven through the person of His Son, why not do that today?