

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part fifty-four

Sunday, June 3rd, 2018 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2052

Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

DO NOT REFUSE HIM WHO IS SPEAKING

Hebrews 12:25-29 - "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. [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."

It's a great Bible study observation to see the balance placed in the Biblical text by the Spirit of God through these human authors. Immediately after contrasting the fearful approach to God through the law at Sinai (18-21) with the entrance into the grace of God through the "*sprinkled blood*" of the new covenant (24), our writer seems concerned his readers might come to the false conclusion it isn't quite as urgent to *listen* to God since we have been so lavishly embraced through lavishly gifted grace.

What could possibly go wrong now that our worst transgressions have been completely pardoned? Surely God's love isn't in short supply and His mercies are new every morning. We should be fine.

That's what makes the flow of ideas in this text so illuminating. Link up the last verse of last Sunday's text with the first verse of today's - **Hebrews 12:24-25** - "[But you have come...] to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the *sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.* [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.*"

Forgive my repetition on a point here. There is much ink spilled these days telling the church the parts of the Old Testament citing God's wrath and judgment have no place in the New Testament's understanding of God. The fog has finally lifted. The mistakes of past misunderstandings of God have been corrected. Jesus has come and we now know God's true heart. He is always embracing, always loving, never wrathful, never judging.

But this doesn't seem to hold up. Far from cancelling out the revelations of divine wrath and judgment in the Old Testament, our writer *endorses and builds on them*. And he does it *repeatedly* in this New Testament letter:

Hebrews 2:1-3 - "Therefore *we must pay much closer attention* to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. [2] For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, [3] *how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?* It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard...."

Hebrews 10:28-29 - "Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. [29] *How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved* by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?"

Hebrews 12:25 - "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."

Those are just three examples. You can see the "*they/we*" reasoning - "*if this was true for them, how much more so for us!*" Far from *ignoring* or *cancelling out* those Old Testament judgments our writer *builds his whole argument on their ongoing relevance and importance*. The whole *anti-wrath movement* is a house of cards. It is blatantly untrue and inconsistent with even a casual regard to the Bible. This is why most of its proponents deny the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. There is simply no other way to reach their theological conclusions.

1) **NEVER GIVE YOURSELF AN EXCUSE FOR NOT OBEYING A SPEAKING GOD**

Hebrews 12:25 - "*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."

Most of us don't think of the Christian walk as a response to Someone who is *speaking* to us personally. That's what makes that first sentence so striking and a bit strange - "***See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.***"

Notice, not "***was speaking,***" but "***is speaking.***" And then the text will go on to describe the audible voice of God in the Hebrew language on mount Sinai. And the clear impression our writer wants to leave is we have no *less* a speaking voice today.

But is that true? How many of you could honestly say you actually ***heard a voice*** this past week? We tend to distance ourselves from people in the news who talk about doing something because they "***heard voices***" telling them to do so. And we don't want to be in ***that*** crowd.

But this is our Bible. And these are words directed to a New Testament church - to Christians just like we - "***See that you do not refuse him who is speaking...***" And when I read that sentence I immediately ask ***two questions. First, who is speaking and how?*** And second, ***what does it mean to refuse him who is speaking?***

a) ***Who is speaking and how?*** When this text is taken all together it's easy to identify the Speaker on the mountain with Moses. ***God*** is the speaker and not just ***Moses***. That is made clear by the fact it is said of this speaking voice that, "***....At that time his voice shook the earth***" (26).

So this voice is ***God***, not just ***Moses***. The tricky part of the text is the fact it is the writer's clear intention to say that ***same voice*** speaks to you and to me, though not from any ***earthly location***, but from ***heaven*** - ***Hebrews 12:25*** - "***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.***"

So the ***location*** of the voice is different. That much we know and appreciate. But our writer is adamant there is still a ***voice*** and that voice still ***speaks***.

So we know ***who*** speaks. It's the ***how*** part that's tougher to get at. But maybe not really. We have seen the speaking of this voice already mentioned in this letter:

Hebrews 3:7-9 - "***Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today, if you hear his voice, [8] do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, [9] where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.'***"

Everyone reading this letter knew those famous words of ***David*** from their Psalter. Only our writer doesn't attribute the words to ***David***. He attributes them to ***God***. Our writer has the nerve to say those ***words*** - the actual syllables and nouns and verbs - were from ***God***. That's a stunning statement of Scriptural veracity. ***These words aren't just written sentences. They're a speaking voice.***

Hebrews 12:4-6 - "***In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. [5] And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. [6] For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.'***"

These verses cite words quoted from Solomon in ***Proverbs***. Only our writer doesn't treat these words as an ancient quotation. They aren't a ***reading*** in that sense. Our writer says his readers were forgetting these words were actively "***addressing***" them.

Please pause. Our writer is very specific here. There is something he's saying and something he's not saying. He's not saying they've forgotten those words were in the book of Proverbs. He's saying they've forgotten those words are still ***addressing them***. They've forgotten the ***voice behind those words***. They were treating them as an ancient document rather than a currently speaking voice.

Remember where we are. I said there were ***two questions*** that bubbled up out of ***verse 25***. The first related to ***who was speaking and how***. Now on to question number two

- b) ***If God is still speaking to us, how do we refuse Him? What does that refusal look like and how does it happen? How do we forget the voice behind the written words?***

Jesus was concerned people who followed Him years after He ascended into heaven would no longer have the same urgency heeding His words. He addressed this danger very directly - **Luke 10:16** - ***"The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me."***

There it is. That's how church-goers across Canada - religious people like Don Horban - can, if they're not very intentional, ***"...refuse him who is speaking"***(**Hebrews 12:25**). How quickly we turn what we're doing right now into something other than ***heeding the speaking voice of God***.

Terrible things happen when I turn my Christian life into a ***process*** - when I think of it as ***religiously mechanical*** - rather than ***hearing that speaking voice***.

Fight the tendency to ***process*** your faith. There is something I need to hear all over again in the bluntness of those words - **Hebrews 12:25** - ***"See that you do not refuse him who is speaking...."***

I don't mean to be harsh but it's not a small word change when everything that goes wrong in my walk with Jesus becomes a ***failure*** or a ***weakness*** instead of a ***refusal***. ***Failures*** are ***good intentions that didn't quite make it***. ***Weaknesses*** are ***character flaws***. ***Refusals*** are ***relational***. ***Refusals*** are always ***willful*** in nature. ***Refusals imply rebellion***.

I need to do much re-learning here. Surely there are many different issues that crop up in my allegiance to Jesus. But whatever else goes well or poorly - whatever turns out to be easy or hard - I need - O, I need over and over and over again - to make sure I am never ***refusing*** Him who speaks. And I must never re-label that refusal in softer terms.

2) **GOD HAS FUTURE JUDGMENT FOR THOSE WHO REFUSE GOSPEL OBEDIENCE TO JESUS AS LORD**

Hebrews 12:26-27 - ***"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."***

The Biblical record is clear that the mountain actually shook when God's voice spoke - **Exodus 19:18** - ***"Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly."***

Israel never forgot this shaking. She worked it into her songs of worship - **Psalms 68:7-8** - ***"O God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness, Selah [8] the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel."***

But our writer only uses this event as a picture of another terrifying time of divine shaking - **Hebrews 26b-27** - ***"...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."***

That quote at the end of ***verse 26*** comes largely from **Haggai 2:6-7** - ***"For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. [7] And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts."***

The prophet Haggai spoke to ***Zerubbabel*** the governor and ***Joshua*** the high priest at the dedication of the second temple in 516 B.C. God would once again restore the throne of David and re-establish the temple as the center of worship. And nothing would stand in His way.

But that's not what our writer is doing with that same text as he refers to it in **Hebrews 12:26-27**. Our writer takes those words and pushes them even farther into the future. Just as God sovereignly judged the nations opposing Israel He would

yet again shake in judgment all who ***“refused him who is speaking”*** (25).

The rest of the New Testament confirms our writer’s use of this shaking text - **2 Peter 3:10-12** - **“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. [11] Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, [12] waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!”**

How we need this reminder that there is coming a day - ***divinely appointed*** - when all who ***“refused him who is speaking”*** will have that refusal exposed and judged. There will come a day when that ***refusal*** will never pass with another name. All of the things that looked like they had staying power - all the things that distracted our worship and consumed our time - all the things that looked as though they could provide permanent alternatives to allegiance to Christ - they will all be shaken away. They just won’t stand anymore.

3) **BE GRATEFUL - BE DEVOTED - BE CAREFUL**

Hebrews 12:28-29 - **“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.”**

Our writer proves by his example it is the job of New Covenant proclaimers to warn of God’s wrath. It is a New Testament letter to New Testament churches that contains these words - **Hebrews 12:25** - **“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.”**

Judgment and wrath are not the entire message. And they certainly are not the “Good News” part. But if they are left out the good news will never be seen as weighty and relevant as it is. So ***“our God is a consuming fire,”*** is presented as a necessary inclusion in this new covenant text.

And it’s with all that in mind that our writer’s last word in today’s text begins with the connecting word, ***“Therefore....”*** (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....”**

- a) ***The motive of all true godliness is thankfulness.*** We have come into a kingdom - in fact, the ***only*** kingdom - that endures. Only in Christ do we finally find joy that ***lasts.*** We are being led throughout this entire letter to ***treasure Christ*** so we will not lose everything that can keep our lives eternally safe.

Always foster Christ-centered thankfulness. Good deeds not motivated by ***thankfulness to God for Christ the Son*** are human endeavors only and not the deeds that bring glory to God.

- b) ***Worship must be expressed.*** That’s what that word ***“offered”*** means - ***“...let us offer to God acceptable worship.”*** Praise and worship aren’t for emotional fanatics. They are the natural fruit of thankful recipients of God’s unshakable kingdom.

- c) ***Joyful new covenant discipleship remembers the ongoing need to pay serious attention to God.*** Notice the way our writer actually ***includes himself*** in those needing the ongoing warning of God against refusing to heed His voice - **Hebrews 12:25** - **“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.”**

Consider that phrase - ***“warns from heaven.”*** Warnings from heaven are a part of divine grace. Warnings from heaven are a part of the gospel. And they’re often harder to take seriously because you only hear the Spirit’s voice in a gathering like this. You see no fire and smoke like on Sinai. No one else can ***force*** you to hear. Pay attention today. Hear the speaking voice from heaven.