

SERMON: "WHOLE LOTTA SHAKIN..."

SCRIPTURE: HEBREWS 12:18-29

DATE: MAY 3, 2015

Hebrews 12:18-29 (NIV)

18 You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; 19 to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, 20 because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." 21 The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 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 to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?

26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." 27 The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken---that is, created things---so that what cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire."

Jerry Lee Lewis had quite a hit with the song "Whole Lotta Shakin Goin On."

It typified the early rock and roll era. There was shaking on the dance floor and some thought the very foundations of society were being knocked about.

When Elvis Presley first appeared on Ed Sullivan they refused to allow the camera to show what he was doing at the hip level. It was scandalous to be sure.

Others seemed to take it more in stride.

Bob Hope said that he arrived home from a long overseas trip, during this time, to find his family twisting and gyrating and shaking in the living room. He said he thought someone had locked them out of the bathroom.

Whether people thought rock and roll was going to corrupt our society forever or whether they just laughed it away, the shaking it gave our society is nothing compared to what is promised in our Scripture lesson.

The letter to the Hebrews is actually more of a sermon written by a Christian to a Jewish audience. The theme throughout is a comparison between the Old Covenant of the Jews and Christ's New Covenant.

In our lesson the theme is hammered home once more.

It begins with the metaphor of a journey. There is a comparison of journeys---one to Mount Sinai where Moses had received the Ten

Commandments. The other to Mount Zion where the holy city Jerusalem was all decked out as heaven itself.

The journey to Mount Sinai is a journey in the past. It speaks of the Old Covenant between God and Israel. It mentions the shed blood of Abel which was caused by hate and brought about vengeance. It's focused on the law. Moses and the people are left shaking in fear.

The journey to Mount Zion is a journey to come in the future. It speaks of the New Covenant between God and Christians. It mentions the shed blood of Christ which was offered in love and has brought about forgiveness. It's focused on grace. The people respond in hope.

Past and future.

Old and new.

Law and grace.

Fear and hope.

Two journeys---but woven into this passage is another theme that also centres upon past and future, old and new.

It has to do with shaking.

In the past God had shaken the earth. We find this imagery in the book of Judges, in several Psalms and in the prophet Haggai. Most of the times the earth is shaken simply because of the very presence of God. God's presence is so awesome that it has an immediate and very noticeable impact on those around God.

Our lesson promises us further shaking. God shaking, not just the earth, but heaven itself.

In the end times and final judgement, all will be brought to a conclusion. The might and power of God will sift everything and everyone. That which is without a solid foundation will be destroyed. Only that which is based upon unshakeable essentials will remain.

It's a startling and frightening image but it's not meant to cause fear to those who belong to Christ.

Tom Long, in his commentary on this passage, makes this point:

"Under the new covenant, though, God shakes heaven and earth like an antique collector shakes the dust off an old marble statue: to get rid of everything that hides and defaces the beauty that was intended by the sculptor. In Zion, God shakes, not to destroy but to preserve "so", as verse 27 states, "that what cannot be shaken may remain."

While there is warning and judgement alluded to in this whole passage the truth is that this is actually a passage of encouragement.

Encouragement to follow Christ.

Encouragement to look to the future perfect kingdom of God in Heaven.

Encouragement to build life on the unshakeable essentials rather than the superficial gloss that many people focus upon.

Unshakeable essentials like Christ and the Kingdom.

Unshakeable essentials like those referred to in 1 Corinthians 13: faith, hope and love.

But the greatest encouragement is found in verse 28.

Indeed this verse begins with the very important word "therefore" so as to let us know that all that has come before is being brought to a major conclusion here.

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,"

The point all of this leads up to has to do with the proper worship of God---worshipping God with thankfulness, with awe and with reverence.

Our only security in the midst of being shaken are the unshakeable essentials---Christ and the Kingdom, faith, hope, love. Our response to these essentials is worship.

To worship is to focus completely on God.
To offer ourselves mind, body and soul to God.
To seek God in the unshakeable essentials and let those essentials inform us about all our decisions and responsibilities in life.

To worship is not to be done out of duty because we feel it must be done or because we fear God if we don't do it. Worship isn't about coming to receive---not about being entertained or recharged.

Worship is a thankful response to God, recognizing, all the time, just how much in awe and how reverent we need to be as we approach God.

We are approaching the Holiest of Holies, the One who is not shaken but does the shaking---the absolutely sovereign Creator of

everything we can see or imagine. We come to give---and in giving ourselves first to God---we receive!

One of the difficulties ministers have is getting so caught up in leading worship that we don't really grasp the awesomeness of what happens in this hour every week.

Ministers can become so involved with the process of worship---what needs to be done now---what happens next, that they find themselves mechanically completing a task rather than standing in awe of the incredible privilege of leading God's people and proclaiming God's Word.

There is danger every time a minister enters the pulpit that distractions will take away from his or her own worship experience.

So too, there are dangers every time members of the Church enter the Sanctuary.

People, who come to worship, need to be aware of what keeps them from being focused on God who is to be thanked, held in awe and revered more than the most precious possession they own.

It's not just a matter of whatever we might do on Sunday morning to prepare for this hour. Worship on Sunday is something we need to spend the week preparing for.

Sometimes we all fall into the danger of worshipping the dust rather than the statue.

The treasures of Christ are not found in the dust of our bank account or mortgage free home or second car or overseas vacation.

Christ's treasures are stored away for us in the Kingdom of Heaven. They are offered to us in this life as faith, hope and love.

Faith, hope and love point, not to things, but to relationships with God and others.

If we really understand their value it will be easier to come here with an attitude that opens us up to the wonder of the Lord God Almighty.

Thankfulness for the unshakeable essentials.

Awe at how magnificent God truly is.

Reverence toward the God whose sovereign power initiated the sacrifice of God's own Son because God loves us so very much.

William Temple used different words to describe worship but his definition rings with the same truth:

"To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God."

If we could take that definition to heart in our weekly preparation for Sunday worship and our devotional times then thankfulness, awe and reverence would flow like an unceasing, natural spring from our hearts and our lives. Worship that is ongoing!

Think of what that would mean to God!

Think of what that witness would mean to others!

And so, the challenge is placed before us.
We will hold on to the unshakeable essentials.
We will worship God.

To put us in the proper frame of mind to do so let me conclude with a story about the power of worship.

In one of the many art galleries in Europe there is an old Greek statue of Apollo, a beautiful figure of physical perfection. Someone visiting the gallery said he didn't know which was more impressive to look at the statue or watch the crowd as they looked.

Invariably, he said, everyone who stood before it, even for a casual instant, began to straighten up, put back their shoulders, and stand tall!

Our goal is clear:

We will not concentrate on the dust.
We will look to God and stand tall.
We will worship God with thankfulness, awe and reverence.

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