

Do Not Refuse to Listen

The Book of Hebrews

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Well, we are drawing, gradually, to a close in this wonderful epistle. And it's the last portion of chapter 12 that we have before us tonight, verses 25 to 29. And the title, really which borrows on what we see in verse 25, "Do Not Refuse to Listen." Okay. Do not refuse to listen. Last time we saw that our sight is to be set on the right, not the wrong, mountain, Mount Zion, not Mount Sinai. Mount Sinai is full of gloom for the sinner, despair, hopelessness. It says, "Don't come near." It says, "You are unholy. If you should so much as touch this mountain, you will die." And when God came down on Sinai to deliver the Law, the Ten Commandments, well, it was blackness, and fire, and darkness, tempest. And the sound of God's voice, which was so strong, so forbidding, because it required such holiness, that even Moses himself said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling."

But that's not our mountain. Our mountain is Mount Zion. And this is where from God's dwelling place among his people in the church, the city of the living God, and from heaven itself promises us hope. It gives us salvation. It says to us, in the words of the hymn, he has hushed Sinai's loud thunder, the law's loud thunder. That mercy has triumphed over judgment. Here we have the help of angels innumerable. Angels. We are with the saints that have gone before us, the just men made perfect. Like the examples of Hebrews 11. And we found the favor of the judge who came to Sinai and whose shaking of the whole place made it to be a terrifying spectacle.

But now we come to him, and we how will we come because of Jesus the mediator of the New Covenant. The Old Covenant still very much had within it the Covenant of Works. It showed the standards of expected behavior. And then also in store, didn't it, a whole system of sacrifice, because of the failure. We have to live up to those standards. Well, now we have the Lord Jesus by his own blood paying the price. Sufficient. Adequate. More than adequate to obliterate now our sins in the sight of God and to bring us near. That blood of sprinkling speaking better things than that of Abel. Abel's blood demands justice, recompense, vengeance. And that would require, really, God to act against us and to judge us. Really, our acts demand vengeance for all the ill that we have done to our neighbor, let alone to the glory of God. But no, the blood of Christ speaks peace, doesn't it? And it works peace in us. It's sprinkling. It affects us. It cleanses guilty consciences, and it fits us for the service of God.

So, really, all good news. That's what verse 22 is. Good news. There's Sinai, but you have come to Mount Zion. But as we had reason to notice often in this letter, that good news is interspersed with warning. The great encouragement and some of the most elevated doctrine you'll find anywhere in Scripture is then tempered with some of the most, well, warning-filled, alarm-inducing testimony of anywhere in Scripture. That's why this book is often causing people great trouble. Hebrews 6 and Hebrews 10 and part of that cause people to wonder, "Well, am I saved?" The answer is, if you're trembling that it's a good sign that you are. But those warnings, they are given there, and this finishes, doesn't it, with a note of warning. A final warning. Because this concludes the main body of the letter. Chapter 13 is concluding exhortations, teachings, more directives. But the main argument is now done with. And the superiority of Christ has been proved again, and again, and again. And so, now he really has done all he can. He said all that he can say. If they haven't got it now, they'll never get it. And so, he tells them, summing it up, "Well, do not refuse to listen."

So, our first heading is this. God speaks; are we listening? There it is. God speaks, and are we listening. That's who the one who speaks, in verse 25, "do not refuse him who speaks." That is God who speaks. And well, you might say, "Well, it's a pretty obvious thing, isn't it? We wouldn't want to refuse him." Well, the fact is, sinful hearts do refuse him and despite the way he describes himself in the Bible, amply testified to through the works of our Lord Jesus Christ, yet still there is that tendency, a sinful tendency, even in believers to refuse him. We can be stubborn, and we can be willful, as though we say, "We will not. We will not hear him."

Well, what it says here is, is in his speaking that shook the earth, well, that's Mount Sinai. Again, that's the judgment there, the fire, the blackness, the tempest, the darkness, the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words. That shook the earth. Shook that mountain, didn't it, in quite a way and had a remarkable effect upon the people. But what he established was only temporary. What it presented by way of how approach could be made to an offended God by sinful people, tabernacle, a worship, the altars, the different Levitical sacrifices, was only temporary. That was what was not set to remain. It's going to be removed in verse 27. It belonged, in a sense, to a lesser economy. It had lesser implications, lesser effects, and so, although it came with shaking and refusing to have heard what was said then merited death, but compared to what now has come and be established, well, how much the more we should hear what is said then.

This second time when God not only shakes the earth, if you will, but shakes heaven as well. This has opened up something bigger. This is a grander scale of things. And it's not going to be removed. It's not going to be changed. For as the tabernacle is gone, the temple is gone, the sacrifices of bulls and goats, the blood of heifers, has ended. That's gone. The high priest Aaron and his office, following from the family of Levi, that has finished. That has ended. There's a different priesthood now. A priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, one coming from the tribe of Judah, of which nothing is said about the priesthood under the Old Covenant. But everything is said about it, about our Lord Jesus Christ, fulfilling it. And this has shaken up everything. If Sinai was, if you will, shaking

things up, this has shaken things up. And it's like shaking heaven and earth. That the profundity, the effect of it, is that much greater. And so, if it were meant here what was said at Sinai, it barely did, because the history of disobedience that followed on from that, the history of failure of Israel, the history of its not adhering to the terms of the covenant, well, if that was to be punished, how much the more when now this greater revelation, this fulfillment, has come and which has at its very center our Lord Jesus Christ. We're not to refuse him who speaks.

And it takes us back, right, to the beginning to chapter 1 and the opening verses of chapter 1. "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son." And there is a contrast there. Great though the prophets were, none greater than Moses, he's comprised within the prophets. He was given, well, God gave the Ten Commandments in the hearing of them all and tablets of stone to make them stand out in that way, but then the book of the covenant, all the other laws that were to be given, well, were given there by Moses through God giving them to Moses and Moses teaching the people. That's how God spoke. Shook the earth through these prophets, especially Moses. But by comparison something more profound has happened when God in these last times has spoken to us by his Son, made heir of all things and through whom he made the worlds. There is, isn't it, a brightness of God's glory. The exact image of his person. This has moved it up. This is now moved up another level. This was great. What was spoken by the prophets, this shook the earth. And, as we have been saying, this shakes heaven and earth. This is more profound. The implication is greater, and the refusal to listen even greater still. If we won't hear the Son, then there is no hope for us. If we refuse him and what he's shown to be accomplished in him, then there is nowhere to go, no other place. There's no other sacrifice. If we've dismissed the cross, the blood of Christ, there is no other sacrifice. Where else can we go? Back to the blood of bulls and goats? It is preposterous.

And so, here it is very much all the more upon us the responsibility to hear it, isn't it? And the message that really goes with this, the writer has said it already. Hebrews 2:1-3. "Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation." It's a greater salvation. This has taken it on further. And if it was bad enough if you disobeyed under the Old Covenant, how much worse to disobey in what now is spoken from the heaven to us in the New Covenant and which all of it focuses on the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then Hebrews 10:26-29. What a warning! "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?"

Once again, under Moses, well, people died. The words of two or three witnesses. But then it says again, "Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose." Those who had knowledge of what the Son of God has done, and what his blood has achieved, and what the Spirit of God preaching here in Scripture is indicating about the necessity and the value of that blood. Did you just miss that? Then you really have refused to hear the one who has offered you all that you ever could wish for, all that you could ever need to be related to him and to peace in this life and assurance and joy. Oh, if we miss that and refuse that, then we've refused everything.

And that is where Haggai 2, and we read that, and that's actually quoted in Hebrews 12 in these verses here. Let me just read Haggai 2: 6-9. "For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace.'"

And that is a prophecy, isn't it, about the Lord Jesus Christ, the desire of all nations. And though the people then restored somewhat in their rebuilding of the temple back from exile in Babylon, and some of them were remembering what the former temple, the one of Solomon had been like in its glory. And then of course, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it totally. And the new building was of a lesser status. It wasn't so grand. And they were thinking, "What can this accomplish?" The Lord says, "It's actually going to accomplish more, because to this building will come the desire of all nations, the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who will have all the nations shaken." This is of a different order again. This is a shaking up that is far more cosmic. And the Gentiles will come to this light, and the glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former. It's going to be illuminated at the very presence of the Son of God. And what peace we will find when we come to him.

So, it's about him and not refusing him. But of course today, well, we have the Son still speaks to us in the Word of God, in the apostles' teaching, teaching of the writer here to the Hebrews. And we've got to hear it and be ready to hear it and ready to obey it and receive it. When it's preached, to receive it. And so, we have to ask ourselves, "Are we listening?" Because God is always shaking, isn't he? He's always shaking. It's never quiet in the kingdom of God. There is always something happening. And God is never asleep or satisfied with the church that she is all that she needs to be, that she has reached her state of perfection here upon the earth. So, we have to be attentive to it, don't we?

And, well, people are always busy establishing, once again, their all kinds of religion, rules, and regulations, and trying to get God by some obedience, and Islam, the Roman Catholic Church, they've all fallen for that. And what is untrue can sometimes seem more substantial than what is true, and there are representatives of those things can sometimes seem more substantial, more credible, than those who are just preaching the gospel and justification by faith and saying, "The blood of Christ is sufficient. You shouldn't need another sacrifice." So, the pope's every words are heard, the BBC itself will report what the pope says. He's still got something to say. The more so as the man seems more and

more liberal by the day and seems to fit more into the agenda of cultural Marxism than anything else. So, here is him, and if he's dressed in some fine robes and talks in Latin I guess they hear him even more. "This must be good. It's in Latin!" Or the title is in Latin. Perhaps if we were to give our titles in Latin, there we are. That's the answer.

And so, this sort of mystery, this kind of sense of a kind of acquired gravity, impresses the world. And these are the religions, isn't it, that they grab people still. That's why the Reformation was a shaking, wasn't it? That was a shaking and a shaking that still goes on to this day. We are the sort of ones who inherited the things that the Reformation under God brought about. Shook up the Roman Catholic Church and still remains shaken up, never withdrew the anathemas that it spoke against the Lord's servants in those days.

The pandemic can be a shaking, can't it, too. Well, it can be shaking the church. Shaking the nation through that. Seeing what we're made of. Seeing what's within. Revealing the heart in that way. And showing whether there is anything of substance there or not. And revealing in a kind of people where our hopes are, where our faith is. In a sense, it's quite daring this, isn't it, to say it, but sends false ministers and false ministries. Sends them out to see who will be the takers for them to shake the church, to sift the church, the test the church. And the question often comes back to this, is it the Bible that is ruling here or something else? Is it the Word of God or some other set of rules and regulations?

We see the survey in the United States came up to very gloomy conclusions about evangelical people. Well, all kinds. Pentecostal, Charismatic, Protestant, whatever you might want to call them. And it found that actually the majority of those reporting back really the Bible wasn't their main authority. It's their feelings, their experience, and they were okay with same-sex marriage a lot of them, okay with sex before marriage a lot of them. And many of them, in fact the majority of them, said that actually man at the heart was good. And that man actually at heart was good. Well, how then they explain the cross and why we had to have the blood of Christ and why God had to not spare his own Son, giving him up for us all. I don't think they have got an answer to that, because if they think man is good, then what was the problem in the first place. So way off beam.

But we have to be sure that we are thinking biblically, hearing what's here to be heard, grappling with sometimes quite complexing things and quite hard to understand things, but looking to navigate the depths so that we can be well versed, well prepared for whatever comes next. Pandemic today. What's tomorrow? We can't say a quiet life. And perhaps after tomorrow's announcement by the Prime Minister anything but a quiet life. Maybe we get away with it a little bit here, but other places and other Christians may be not so. So, God speaks. Are we listening?

Second heading. Characteristics of listeners. Characteristics of listeners. The right kind of listeners, people who don't refuse to hear the one who speaks from heaven. Well, they are actually people that are taken up with heaven. people like the people of Hebrews 11 who have got this heavenly country in view, a city whose builder and maker is God, the one that is an enduring city, not a temporary, failing place, but this world is, people that they are already receiving a kingdom, eternal kingdom, kingdom that doesn't get shaken. It's

not going to be changed. There is nothing else in God's plan that this is now going to be altered. This is it. The New Covenant. This is it. God has been very pleased. He is very satisfied with this. He's not going to change it. He's going to change people. It's going to shake things up, if you will, but itself is not going to be shaken.

And that's what we are receiving. And we know it's got everything to do with heaven. It's opened up glory to us. It's opened up things to come to us. It's brought future events near. And we're assured of them. That's the substance of faith, isn't it, that we are assured of those things. That they are so, the evidence of things not seen. That we're certain about them. We're certain about the judgments, and that's why it has it here. "Our God is a consuming fire." God is a consuming fire.

Well, that comes in in Deuteronomy 4:23-24. What does Moses say there to the people Well, he says this. "Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." Breaking the covenant. Refusing to hear. Take heed, lest you forget! Not hearing. Well, to those things he says, "You'll find that God is very jealous for his honor. And he won't share that honor with Baal or anybody else. And he is a consuming fire. He will consume those things, and he will consume you."

And in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 God is, we're told here, "And to give you," he says, "who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." Well, that's strong, isn't it? That's the future. And Christians have got the future and to the future. That's real. And it's going to happen one day. And we need a place of refuge. We see then the value of Christ. We need that refuge. Why God himself has given us a refuge. And we flee to him for that safety from wrath to come.

But there is, he's a consuming fire. There is going to be that punishment, that vengeance, in flaming fire on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing worse than rejecting the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is flaming fire. And oh, it's sad, isn't it, when we do open our work, open our preaching, and people just pass by. Well, we shouldn't feel ourselves there in some way affronted or get angry with them. It's sad. It's just so, so sad. Because if they go on doing that, time will come when God will speak to them no more. And what seems folly to them, God will say, "Well, let it stay folly to you. And we will meet you on Judgment Day at the throne, and you will find my fiery indignation. You will discover that I am a consuming fire."

Well, all of this has impressed us if we're Christians. We've heard this. We were made to tremble. That was part of our repentance, wasn't it, to see this and to be stirred into action. And we came to Christ as we saw that there is remedy. There is the relief. That's the answer that we need. Not works. Not religion. Jesus Christ. We cling to him. We find

out more importantly that he has welcomed us, and he embraces us, and we're safe, and we're secure. We look onto that day, and we still tremble. We still say to ourselves this, "That a day of such importance, and I am glad that I can answer on that day that Jesus Christ has answered for me. His blood atones for my sin. But I also want to stand on that day not carrying with me a burden of sin. I don't want to be found on that day with worthless things, empty things, bad things. I want, as far as I am able to understand what my duty is and obligations are, to be doing those very things whenever I am called home, whether suddenly, whether it's a protracted death, whatever it might be, that I am working on my case, and I am busily putting right my house in order." Thinking about that with Hezekiah. Thursday evening getting into a right state prepared to meet with this God.

And so, in the Christian, there is an instinctive stepping back from sin. We look at it and say, "That's dangerous. That is dangerous. If I begin to entertain that, begin to do those things, begin to touch those things, begin to imagine those things, I could be drawn away. And I read in here there is such a thing as a hypocrite. It might prove me to be one. And I could in the end be lost for all of this that I thought I knew and I thought I understand. I could, yet as it were, seemingly lose it all. And that is a dreadful prospect." And a true child of God says, "That is a dreadful prospect. Let that not be me. And indeed, that's not going to be me, because I am going to avoid sin and everything that looks towards apostasy." So those reformulations of what the doctrines are, what Jesus Christ has done on the cross, the things that come as part of justification by faith, which are always being attacked, but we will say, "No, I am stepping back from that. There is danger. That is ruinous to the soul. I don't want my soul ruined. I don't want my testimony brought low. I don't want to carry those ideas before this great God."

So, the true Christian recoils. And all these warnings are given. And the true Christian notes those warnings. It says, "Right. I have heard that. And I am going to make sure I don't fulfill that. Lord, help me. But I am going to make sure that is not going to be me. I'll avoid sin, and avoid apostasy and false teaching, and be on my guard, and be vigilant. I'll be watchful." Because that's the characteristic of a listener, because they've been impressed by the glory of God, his majesty, that you can't play with him. You can't trifle around with him. You can't negotiate something of it different with him. This is who he is. This is what he has decreed. And we nod, and we say, "I've taken note of that. And that is going to be imported into my thinking and my behaving, and I want to follow that as closely as I can."

We notice, don't we, the outcome of it. That we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. Acceptably. That there are things that God does not accept, that are not acceptable to him. That's a big mistake in the church, isn't it, to think that anything that passes for a service, a worship event, whatever on a Sunday, is acceptable to him. Again, you look on what churches are doing. You recoil. You have to really want to be in their shoes justifying what they did, what happened in the pulpit, what was happening on the stage, all the performance and hullabaloo, and aim to justify that to this God. No, no there is reverence and godly fear. And we don't model that as perfectly as we should at all, do we? But nevertheless, we've got a heart to that and a heart against

what passes for worship in so many places. Novelty, and fads, and downright immorality. Shocking tales of where this kind of leads to. Showmanship and all the rest.

So, it says that given that we're taken up with eternity. There's a kingdom that lasts forever. It's been spoken from heaven, shaken the heavens and the earth, because it's so much powerful than what was before, because it's about Jesus Christ, God's last word. Had to be. And it was his Son. Nothing else to say. Nothing to improve upon here. No addition needed. So, we are to hear him. And having grace means that we are to be thankful. That our response is one that is actually a sign of prior grace that God has worked in us. It's asking us by our reaction, our choice, that we're going to be thankful. We're going to be very thankful for what we have, what we are receiving. It's like a present. It's something. It's an ongoing thing that all God has for us he is still giving us.

What the implications of this kingdom are, why, we are still working it out, still on an adventure, if you like. And we're going to be very thankful, very appreciative. Very appreciative. Whatever tomorrow's announcements bring and whether lockdown or whatever we're going to be, we're going to be very thankful still to God. This is his kingdom. This pandemic is not going to shake it. World wars won't shake it. Pestilences worse than this, floods, famines, whatever, won't change this. Even if I'm swept away tomorrow, you're swept away tomorrow, it doesn't change this. And so, we're very thankful, appreciative, and thoughtful.

And that's what contributes towards being reverent and acting in godly fear. This means everything to us, and God means everything to us. It's this God, consuming fire God, but who now towards us in Jesus Christ shows us welcome and friendship. Marvelous! So, we resolve we're not going to refuse to listen. We're not going to step back from that or retire from it. But keep those ears open to whatever God is saying. So that we are not going to be found amongst those who miss it at the end, who lose their way, and who fulfill all the wrong expectations of Hebrews. We'll be those with Mount Zion in view, and who finally find themselves amongst those just men, those spirits of just men, made perfect.

Well, may God help us keep our ears open and to honor God in all his truth.

DO NOT REFUSE TO LISTEN

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: Hebrews 12: 25 – 29.

We have seen that believers are to take their cue from Mount Zion and all it represents and not from Mount Sinai. Mount Sinai does not bring us good news but leads us to despair. Mount Zion leads us to hope as we can see that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The verses we are looking at this evening are actually the conclusion of the main part of the letter. As so often in this letter, there is a mixture of encouragement and warning. Here it finishes on a note of warning.

1. God speaks – are we listening?

It is dangerous to refuse Him who speaks (v25). This is a willful and stubborn refusal to hear though what is said is understandable. It is God who is the speaker. He spoke at Mount Sinai and made the earth shake (v26). This was to establish something which was only temporary and going to be replaced with something better one day. When He speaks again to establish the new covenant, this will be a greater shaking in terms of its effects and will be opening up to us something more permanent which brings us into contact with heavenly and eternal realities.

In Hebrews 1:1-2, we find God speaking in the first place through the prophets, among whom we must include Moses. But when God speaks through His own Son, the effect is more profound and long-lasting. Disobedience to the old covenant led to punishment (Hebrews 2:1-2), but it is worse disobedience to refuse to hear the terms of the new covenant and the things that the Son of God announces in it (Hebrews 10:26-29). If we do not hear the Lord, there is judgment which follows (See Jeremiah 26: 4-6). Verse 26 is actually a quotation from the prophet Haggai 2:6-9. It is speaking about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. His coming removes the old order of things (v27), the things that were made such as the tabernacle, the furniture that was there and the altars where the sacrifices were made.

The Bible is where we find God speaking to us now and we must not refuse to listen. He speaks to us through His Son, which includes all the things which He teaches us through His apostles. Through the Bible He is always shaking the earth and the heavens. He removes heresies and errors if we are listening to what He says. False religion can sometimes seem more substantial than what is real. But the Bible shakes what is false and removes it. It shakes up the church to get rid of bad thinking and bad behaviour.

The Lord can use things, like the pandemic, to shake up His people. He can also use false teachers and ministers to do the same and wake up the true church.

We cannot afford not to listen and to apply the truth carefully. Sloppy and shallow thinking will take us nowhere.

2. Characteristics of listeners

True listeners are taken up with heaven. They are receiving a kingdom (v28). They are already enjoying the benefits of it and know that, in the future, there is more yet for them to experience. They have realized that these things are permanent and that eternal glory has been opened up to them. They have realized that the Lord is a consuming fire (v29) (See Deuteronomy 4: 23-24; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). With this in mind, such people step back from sin and are horrified at the thought of apostasy.

It also deeply affects how we will serve God (v28). We will step back from things, such as in public and private worship, that trivializes the greatness of God. We will not want anything to do with entertainment in the church. We will react against things that are shallow and childish. We will repent of these things in the life of the church or in our personal life. Instead we want to learn how we can serve the Lord acceptably and to show Him true reverence. We will not want to be part of something that is man-centred, and does not have in view the glory of God.

We see in verse 28 that we are to have grace. This is the response of our heart to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. It is a reflection of the fact that the Lord has kindly made us kings and priests in His kingdom. He has given us so much and we respond to Him with gratitude. In view of what He has given us In His Son, the grace we are to have is the truly spiritual response of the saved man or woman.