**The Mount of Fear and the Mount of Joy**

Hebrews 12:14-29
Key Verse: 12:28 “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.”

In chapter 12:1-13 we studied that our life is like running a race with perseverance, fixing our eyes on Jesus. Perseverance is a characteristic that comes from discipline which we need in our daily lives, especially to endure hardship. Paul said that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; then character, hope. (Ro 5:4,5) We also learned that God’s discipline has a good purpose. He disciplines us for our good, so we can share his holiness. Those who accept all present sufferings as God’s divine discipline give thanks to God in all circumstances and use all situations as an opportunity to experience God’s power and his presence.

As I mentioned earlier, the theme of Hebrews is the supremacy of Christ. In order to explain the supremacy of Christ, the author compares and contrasts the old covenant and the new covenant, the priestly system, the tabernacle, priests, and so on. Now, in chapter 12, we see another contrast between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion, between Moses and Jesus, and between the earthly Jerusalem and heavenly Jerusalem.

Part I, warning and encouragement. (14-17) Look at verses 14-17. “***Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy, without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done***.” These verses are a warning against godlessness and an encouragement for holiness. These also teach us our duty toward others and toward God. Our duty toward others is making peace with them. Our duty toward God is being holy. Making peace with others is not easy. Peace does not come naturally. Peace does not come from meditation or mind control. Peace comes from a right relationship with God and with others. If we don’t repent, bitterness and hatred toward others grow like weeds in our hearts. So, we must listen to God and obey his word. Look at verse 14a again. “*Make every effort to live in peace with everyone*.” Jesus said, “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God*.” (Mt 5:9)

Our duty toward God is being holy. Without holiness no one will see the Lord. Jesus said, “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God*.” (Mt 5:8) We have another reason why we should be holy. Peter said, “*As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy*.” (1 Pe 1:14-16) The word holy means ‘set apart’ ‘different’. We are set apart for the Lord and we are different from animals. We are people of God who have the image of the Holy God.

Godlessness equates to sexual immorality according to verse 16. Esau, the brother of Jacob in the OT, sold his inheritance right for a single meal. This story is written in Genesis 25:29-34. Esau was godless because he did not realize the value of his inheritance right. He sold God for food. We see many Esau-like people around us who sell their body and soul for temporary pleasures and benefits. Later, when they want to get it back, they cannot because it is too late. The Bible says, even though Esau sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

Part II, the Mount of Fear and the Mount of Joy (18-29) Here the Mount of Fear is Mount Sinai, and the Mount of Joy is Mount Zion. They are also associated with Judaism and Christianity. By comparing the symbolic two mountains, the author encourages us to come to Jesus with confidence and assurance. First, the Mount of Fear. Look at verses 18-21. “***You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; 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, because they could not bear what was commanded: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death.” The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling with fear.***” Let’s go back to Exodus 19 in order to understand these verses. Just before Moses received the Ten Commandments, he met God who came down to the top of Mount Sinai in fire. In that moment, gloomy darkness surrounded the mountain with the trumpet sound, and the earth was shaken violently. Moses was terrified of the scene of God’s descending in fire. (Ex 19:16-25) If even Moses, who was closest to God, trembled with fear, how much more are we fearful and terrified?

Likewise, in the era of Moses God was the object of fear. Mount Sinai, where Moses received the law of God, was the symbol of fear. God’s presence was terror to his people. Indeed, God limited their approach. God said in Exodus 19:12, “*Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, ‘Be careful that you do not approach the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain is to be put to death*.” So, his people couldn’t approach God or call his name freely. Even today, God is the object of fear to some. They think that God is a harsh and angry God. Their image of God is a terrifying and authoritative father. So, to them God’s image is negative and their attitude toward God is passive. Before Paul was converted, he thought he was pleasing God by persecuting Christians. He thought that he could be righteous by observing the law. But he came to realize that he was wrong after he met Jesus Christ, who came to him with forgiving love. I know one young man who thinks that he is pleasing God by judging others. To him, God is the object of fear and judgment.

Second, the Mount of Joy. Look at verses 22-24. “***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, 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, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.***” Unlike Mount Sinai, Mount Zion is the mountain of joy. Mount Zion is generally known as the holy city Jerusalem. Mount Zion was the emblem of God’s presence because the temple was built on one of the hills in Jerusalem. But in this verse, Mount Zion is the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. In chapter 11:10 Abraham was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Mount Zion is New Jerusalem which is built by Jesus Christ. In a word, Mount Zion, the Mount of Joy, indicates Jesus Christ. As God appeared on Mount Sinai with fire and terror, so Jesus appeared on Mount Zion with grace and truth. As Moses received the law of God on Mount Sinai, so Jesus taught the kingdom of God on Mount Zion. John the Apostle said this in John 1:17, “*For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”* As we studied before, those who are in Christ Jesus come to God with joy and confidence. Those who are washed by the blood of Jesus can approach God with confidence and assurance because Jesus opened the new and living way through his once-for-all sacrifice on the cross. 4:16 says, “*Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”* 10:22 also says, “*Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water*.”

There is a story of a Syrophonecian woman whose daughter was possessed by demons. She was a gentile woman who was not allowed to associate with the Jews. The strict Jewish law forbade her from approaching the Jewish rabbi. But she came to Jesus by faith, believing in Jesus’ mercy and grace. Jesus blessed her faith, saying, *“For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.*” (Mk 7:29) She received the mercy of God. There was a woman who had suffered from bleeding for 12 years. The Jewish law forbade such a sick woman from appearing in public. But she came to Jesus by faith, expecting his mercy and grace of healing. Jesus saw her faith and said, “*Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering*.” (Mk 5:34) Besides of these two women, many sick and weak people came to Jesus by faith. They were paralytics, lepers, blind men, deaf and mute men, tax collectors, prostitutes and all kinds of sinners who were cast out from their society by Moses’ law. When they came to Jesus by faith, all of them were healed, cured, restored, and saved. Jesus is the Mount of joy, the Rock of Salvation, and the Wellspring of Eternal life. Amen!

The important thing we have to remember here is that Jesus never refuses or rejects anyone who comes to him for his mercy and healing. Jesus accepts all of them as his children and blesses their faith. Jesus gives us joy, the joy of salvation, which is the joy of forgiveness of sin, joy of healing, and joy of eternal life. David was known as a man after God’s own heart. Still, he made a big mistake before God and his people by committing the sin of adultery with the wife of Urah, one of his loyal subjects. David repented his sin until his bed was flooded with his tears. He suffered from guilt, shame, and fear. Still, he believed in God’s mercy and his forgiving love. He eagerly desired for the joy of salvation. So, he cried in Psalm 51, “*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgression... Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me*.” (Ps 51:1, 10-12) The Mount of Joy is the fountain of joy. In heaven we all share the joy of salvation with thousands and thousands of angels. As Revelation 5 says, we all sing and praise the chorus, “*Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain!.*..” (Rev 5:12) Amen!

In verses 25-27 the author warns us not to despise the mercy of God. At Mount Sinai the Israelites refused God by worshiping idols. When God warned them, the earth shook. Now we are marching to Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken, because it is in heaven. We are marching to Zion, the beautiful city of God, with songs of joy. In the past when the people of Israel went up to the temple of God, they sang songs of praise. We call these songs ‘*songs of ascents*’ (Ex Ps 120-134). Now we are marching to Zion with songs of joy and spirit of confidence in our salvation. Amen!

Look at verses 28-29. “***Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”*** Here, a kingdom that cannot be shaken which we receive is the Mount of Joy, the heavenly Jerusalem, the kingdom of God. Because we receive it only by God’s grace and through faith in Jesus Christ, we should be thankful. And we should worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. Here, the word ‘acceptably’ means willingly and joyfully. God wants us to worship him with a thankful mind and joyful spirit. Jesus teaches us to worship God in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:24) While Kit West was out of town, David Lee served the praise band in his place for our worship service. David was full of spirit and power. This is the power of the blood of Jesus and power of young blood. What causes you to be fearful? What makes your face downcast? If God is with us, who can be against us? Let us come to Jesus, the Mount of Joy, the Mount of our final victory. Where Jesus is, there is heaven. Where Jesus is, there is the kingdom of God. Let us worship Him acceptably with praise and thanks. Let us read verses 28-29. Amen!