

This Is Your Final Warning

Hebrews 12:25-29

Baxter T. Exum (#1711)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
November 5, 2023



Good morning, and welcome to the Four Lakes congregation! If you are visiting this morning, we are glad to have you with us. We'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card online if you can, or you can use one of the cards from the pew in front of you. Whatever works for you, we would love to hear from you, and we invite you to pass along any questions or prayer concerns.

As we get started today, I'd like to share a few notes that have come in through our Bible correspondence course program, and as I read a few highlights, I'll just leave the information on the wall up here (or on your screen at home), with the encouragement to send us your information if you'd like to enroll. It's completely free, you can stop at any time, and no one will ever harass you over this. We grade and mail out anywhere between 800-1000 lessons every month, and we do this to encourage people to get into the word of God. We also make these available on our website for other churches to use. They can be found under the "Contact Us" tab on the website. In terms of feedback over the past month or two:

- I got a call on Friday from a woman in New Jersey with a question about some dreams she's been having. She's on Lessons 3-4 in *God's Plan for Me*, and she says that the lessons have already helped her tremendously and have helped her learn how to study the Bible.
- We have a note from David in Parkersburg, West Virginia, and he says, "This is just a thank you note for allowing me to be a Bible student and expressing my appreciation. Words cannot express how much these courses have helped me grow spiritually. A special thank you to Patsy for the efforts of putting up with me, as these courses can be time consuming."
- We have a note from Anthony in Jasper, Texas, who says, "I would like to thank you for your love and help and support in blessing me with the opportunity to become a better servant and child of God."
- We have a note from Desiree in Burleson, Texas, who says, "It is good to get your lessons. Thank you for sending the lessons out to me. Thank you for allowing it to be a free course. My mom and dad have signed up for the lessons." She went on to ask us to pray for her and for her dad who recently lost his job. She thanked us again for providing the return envelope.
- We have a note from Billy in Texas who says that he will be "catching chain" to go to prison. I asked my wife (the middle school teacher) what this means, but she was stumped, so I took the risk of looking it up on Urban Dictionary, and it's a reference to being chained to other prisoners to make a transport from one prison to another. But this man was concerned that he didn't want to lose his studies in the

transition and let us know that he'd be sending us his new address. He says, "God bless y'all and y'all's time with these studies. They [are] helping a lot."

- We have a note from Lisa who says that she's in her 50's and heading for a fresh start in life and wanted to study by mail since she's not a "tech guru." She went on to ask for prayers in all areas of her life – physical, mental, financial, emotion, and spiritual," because "they all need improvement."
- We have a note from Bayley Jo who says, "Thank you so much! I learn a lot! I've been applying it to my life and it's been making a huge difference. God be with you."
- We have a note from Amy, an inmate at a prison in Missouri, and she says, "About three years ago I did a few lessons from your church. I found this envelope among my things and have used it to mail this letter. I have renewed my relationship with God and wish to strengthen it through learning more about Him. At this time I am incarcerated and hope you can send me Bible studies. Thank you."
- We have a note from Kimberly in Texas who's asking us to pray for a blessing on her and her family. She says, "Thanks for giving me the opportunity to study the Bible to stay focused in this county jail. This is a blessing and a chance to stay in a positive vibe and mode here. Pray for this jail please."
- We have a note from Ken who thanks us for the lessons and enclosed a \$20 bill. He says, "One learns so much. Thank you for sending me these lessons. Keep up the good work."
- We have a note from Bryan who says, "Thank you for the wonderful Bible studies. You all are such a blessing to me and my family. May God bless you all today."
- And then we have a note from Amanda who is asking that lessons be sent to her and her husband. She's in the Gregg County Jail in Longview, Texas, and her husband is in the Texas State Penitentiary in Tenn Colony, Texas. She says, "I appreciate your ministry and God bless."

I thought you might appreciate an update. It's been a while since I've shared notes from our students, and again, if you would like to enroll, just use the information you see here, or if you are joining us on the phone this morning, give me a call or send me a text at 608-224-0274.

Before we return to our study of Hebrews 12, we want to make sure that we preach the good news! And the good news is that God loves us so much that he sent his only Son to this earth to save us. He lived a perfect life, he died on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up alive on the first day of the week. We respond to this good news through faith, repentance, confession, and baptism (an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins). And we have several examples to share this morning, starting with an update from the Lord's church in Goose Creek, South Carolina. They say, "PRAISE GOD.., we'd like to WELCOME our new Brother-In-CHRIST! Acts 2:47." And that's all they say, we don't have the man's name, but good news from South Carolina this week!

And then we have an update from the Lord's church down in Villa Rica, Georgia. They say that "Last Sunday, David Pattillo was baptized for the remission of his sins. His wife, Donna, confessed sin in her life and was restored to the church. To God be the glory!" So good to see this! And I'm thankful for the reminder that when we sin and drift away from the Lord and his church, God welcomes us back when we confess our sin and go to God in prayer. If we can help with this in some way, let us know.

And then we have one more, this one from Nixon Ocheing, who preaches the gospel somewhere in Kenya. He posted a few days ago and says, "To God Be The Glory, Great Things He Has Done! Brent and Jacob accepting Christ. The best choice they ever made!!!!" And I am amazed at the water situation here. To me, it looks like not much more than a drainage ditch that's been blocked off to have just enough water to immerse someone into Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. But we share this to emphasize the good news, and if you would like to know more, please get in touch.

This morning, we return to our study of Hebrews, and this morning we come to what I believe is the fifth and final WARNING in this message. Some of you have been in my garage, and you know that I have a thing for some unusual signs. Whenever I travel, I'll often stop in at a local thrift shop or maybe a Habitat Restore (which is basically a thrift shop for building materials, benefiting Habitat for Humanity), and I'll keep an eye out for some weird signs. These signs, then, have come from all across the United States, and they are now plastered all over our garage. My only concern is that if our house were to ever catch on fire, firefighters would most likely open our garage and back away slowly.

Well, in Hebrews, the theme is "Jesus is Better," and under this theme we have a series of five major warnings scattered throughout the book, starting with a warning about the danger of drifting (in Chapter 2), continuing with a warning concerning the danger of disobedience (in Chapters 3-4), we have a warning about the danger of spiritual immaturity (in Chapters 5-6), the warning about the danger of willfully continuing in sin (in Chapter 10), and today we come to the fifth and final warning at the end of Hebrews 12. It's a warning about the danger of refusing to listen to God's message, and this is their last warning. There's more instruction to come in Hebrews 13, but this is the last "or else" type passage in this book. And the warning is tied to the privilege they have in being a part of God's eternal kingdom. We're almost reminded of what the Lord said in Luke 12:48 when he explained that *"From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more."* As we sometimes say, *"With great privilege comes great responsibility."* And I think of privilege in terms of being tall. I have "tall privilege," so when I'm out shopping I will often be called upon to reach things for people. It's part of the sacred oath you take as a tall person, and most people over 6-feet tall are aware of this. I am puzzled, though, concerning why stores will put the size 14 shoes on the bottom shelf and the size 8 shoes way up on the top shelf. I will often, therefore, find myself reaching things for people. With the privilege of being tall comes great responsibility. Well, in a slightly similar way, as God's people, we have certainly been given much (we have been made a part of God's eternal kingdom), and so this final warning is especially important.

This morning, then, let's notice the fifth and final warning in Hebrews 12:25-29,

²⁵ See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. ²⁶ And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN." ²⁷ This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

This morning, let's learn what God wants us to learn from this passage...

- I. ...and let's start with the ADMONITION, let's start with the INSTRUCTION (in verse 25), and the COMMAND here is that WE ARE NOT TO REFUSE HIM WHO IS SPEAKING.

And we start with the reminder that the one who is speaking in this passage is God himself. What a blessing! God, who made us, wants to have a relationship with us, and so he took the first step by reaching out to us, by communicating. God, then, is speaking to us through his inspired word. We are not talking about listening to "cleverly devised tales" (as Peter refers to in 2 Peter 1:16), but the gospel message has been written down by eyewitnesses, and the gospel accounts are historically accurate, because the accounts come to us from God

himself; the accounts are inspired, the accounts are miraculously perfect in every way. And so, to refuse the gospel is to refuse God's last and final message.

Thinking back to our warning signs up here: A warning is only as valid as the one who gives the warning. You really can't trust those signs in my garage, but if the Madison Water Utility tells us not to drink the water because they've had a water main break in the area, we would be wise to heed the warning. In a similar way, when God speaks to us in his inspired word, we would be wise to listen. He's not out to make us miserable, but he speaks to us and warns us for our own good.

Unfortunately, though, we don't always heed the warnings. Perhaps we hear the message, but we doubt that what God has said is true. Perhaps we know what we need to do but we put it off, we procrastinate. Perhaps we just stubbornly refuse to listen (we don't like what God has said on some issue). Perhaps we look for a more convenient alternative to what God has told us to do. Perhaps we think we can handle some situation on our own without looking for God's input on it. Perhaps we just find ourselves too busy to slow down and listen to what God is saying in his word (we distract ourselves with movies, and entertainment, and pleasure, and life). But the final warning here in Hebrews 12 is that we are not to refuse him who is speaking. God's warning sign has some weight behind it (unlike those signs in my garage).

And to drive this home, the author cites an example (as he did in the passage we studied last week); he makes a contrast as he argues from lesser to greater. Basically, if those back at Sinai didn't escape when they refused to listen to God's warning on earth, then how much more certain will be the punishment if we refuse to listen to God's warning from heaven? We have a privilege today that those people could only dream of, and if we ignore it, our punishment will be even more certain than theirs. So, ***"See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking."***

II. Well, this leads us to the SOBERING REMINDER (the reason behind the warning), that ONLY GOD'S ETERNAL KINGDOM IS TRULY UNSHAKABLE (we see this in verses 26-27). **PPT******

And this picture is also tied to Mount Sinai and that passage we studied last week, the contrast between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion, ***"And His voice shook the earth then."*** That's a reference to God speaking from Mount Sinai, with the smoke, and fire, and thunder, and flashes of lightning; the mountain itself was shaking. That was then. Now, under the New Covenant, God promises to shake not only the earth, but also the heaven. And this next shaking will shake everything that can be shaken, everything created, and the shaking will be so severe that only those things which cannot be shaken may remain. And we'll get to it in verse 28, but God's kingdom (God's rule) is the only thing that is truly unshakable.

As he gives this sobering reminder, the author actually quotes from the book of Haggai. When was the last time you read the book of Haggai? I can tell you that the kids of this congregation actually studied Haggai just a few weeks ago. As I was standing in the back after the sermon a few weeks ago, I saw a craft, a model of the restored temple made out of paper sitting on the cubbyholes back there, and there was a reference to the book of Haggai written on it. Basically, the prophet Haggai encouraged the people as they rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem after the Babylonian Captivity. But Haggai also looked forward to the New Covenant, to a time when not only would the earth shake, but everything would shake, resulting in a sorting out of what is truly important. It sounds like judgment, but it's really a blessing, because Haggai was looking forward to God's eternal kingdom. And that's the reference here. If we listen to God's voice, we will be among those things that remain. Our obedience to the gospel allows us to come out on the other side of God's judgment. The good deeds we do for the poor and the widows and the fatherless will outlive this world that seems to be shaking to

pieces all around us. Our health can be shaken, our relationships can be shaken, the kingdoms of this world can be shaken, our finances can be shaken, but God's kingdom is unshakable.

The shaking on Mount Sinai, then, was prophetic, looking forward to "the big one," looking forward to a time when the Universe itself would be shaken. And that great shaking is still coming. It's out there. It's coming. I think of how those along the west coast always seem to be prepping for "the big one." My sister and her husband have food and water and supplies stockpiled. They have plans in place, they maintain tsunami evacuation routes, because earthquakes are a constant reality out there. You can drive out toward Cape Flattery (the northwestern-most point in the contiguous United States), and you can see places where earthquakes have split their roads, you can see gashes, and dips as a result of that seismic activity. And if we prepare for this earth to be shaken, then certainly we should also prepare for everything to be shaken, knowing that only God's kingdom will remain.

In this life, we have choices, then, between what is temporary and what is permanent. And we can choose between the passing pleasures of sin or an eternal home with God. We can choose between the praise of this world or the approval of God. We can choose between saving our lives here on this earth or saving our soul. As Jesus puts it in Matthew 16:26, ***"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"*** And, as the Lord says in Matthew 24:35, ***"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away."*** It's important, then, to heed the warning and to realize that God's kingdom is the only thing we can be a part of that will survive the shaking that's coming.

III. **As we come to the end of this passage, let's take a look at WHAT OUR RESPONSE SHOULD BE: KNOWING THAT WE ARE A PART OF GOD'S ETERNAL AND UNSHAKABLE KINGDOM, HOW DO WE REACT?**

He gives the answer in verses 28-29, when he says, ***"Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire."*** Since the great shaking is coming, and since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, we respond to this by showing ***"gratitude."*** So, we are thankful. We are thankful for Jesus. We are thankful for the cross. We are thankful that Jesus took our place. And we thank God for saving us by offering him "an acceptable service with reverence and awe." In other words, we approach God on his terms, not ours, knowing that he fully deserves everything we have to offer. We are not to approach God empty-handed, but we offer ourselves in reverent worship. In all humility, we come to God in "awe." We make ourselves available to serve in whatever way he may be able to use us. Nothing is beneath us. Our lives are his. And when we come together, we pray and we sing together from the heart. We thank God for making us a part of his eternal and unshakable kingdom, remembering all along that ***"our God is a consuming fire."***

Conclusion:

So, the question is: Are we worshiping God, or are we worshiping something that will be shaken someday? Are we focused on God, or are we focused on the things of this world? What are we thinking about during the week? Is God our treasure, or do we treasure the stuff that we see around us? The author of Hebrews is giving one last warning: We are not to refuse Him who is speaking, because a time is coming when everything will be shaken and only God's kingdom will survive; and we respond with gratitude and worship.

Let's go to God in prayer and then Michael will lead us in a song as we think about what we've learned this morning:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the great and awesome God above all others, creator of heaven and earth. We've assembled here today to praise you for making us a part of your eternal kingdom. We ask for your continued forgiveness as we fall short. We ask for wisdom as we navigate through a world that seems to be falling apart all around us.

And Father, this morning we ask a special blessing on those who are studying your word with us through the mail. We ask for blessings on the families of these students. We pray for the jails and prisons where many of these men and women are staying. We pray for peace in their lives. We pray for their safety as well. We pray for all people to come to know you and to someday become a part of your eternal kingdom.

We love you, Father, and we come to you today through Jesus, our Savior and King. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com