

Title: Overwhelmed!
Text: Hebrews 12.18-29
Theme: How gratitude for an unshakeable kingdom fuels acceptable worship (reverence and awe).
Series: Hebrews #52
Prop Stmnt. Already we have come to God in such a glorious reality that demands to be seen in our present lives.
Aim: I aim to help my people see where they are in Christ, right now, so they are encouraged to persevere in the faith, in the fight against sin, and in the call of the gospel to the world.

Title does not reflect the text as much as it does our response to it.

Read Text:

As I read this text over and over I thought of the words of Augustine who said, *“What am I to you that you should command me to love you and, if I do not, you should be angry with me and threaten great miseries?”* (Confessions I, 5)

Have you ever considered the lengths that God has gone to, the efforts that He has put in to communicating Himself to you? It is true that “eye has not seen and ear has not heard what God has prepared for those who love him.” (1 Cor. 2.9) But we don’t grasp it, not because He withholds it from us, but because we cannot grasp the totality of God’s plan for us. We express frustration with God for what appears to us Him leaving us in the dark, when, in reality, our eyes are not fully open. The truth is, He has revealed Himself and His plan for this world and for his people that frankly is overwhelming.

How would you explain the Grand Canyon to those who are blind? How would you describe Tchaikovsky’s 1812 overture to those who are deaf? How do you explain DNA and nuclear physics to a two-year old? If you are God, how do you explain your infinite plan, your unsearchable grace, your unfathomable love, and your indescribable glory to mere creatures? How do you tell them in such a way that reflects its immensity though they cannot grasp it? How can you show yourself as One who is not constrained to those who live bound? Honestly beloved, we have no ground to wonder why God does not tell us all when we do not even have categories in our minds to grasp all that He has already said. And this is part of the frustration that I bring to the pulpit this morning. I desperately want for you to understand this text. I have prayed throughout my study that you would see with your heart what I can only write before you with words. But much of my concern is fueled by the realization that I do not fully grasp all that this text is teaching. There is a promise here for the people of God, a call for the church, a warning, a joy, an offer, a reward, and a reality that is nothing short of awesome in the truest sense of the word. And I bring a sense of weakness, recognizing the limits of my words and my complete inability to make you grasp this. And yet, I long for you to get a vision of God and an understanding of your life in His Universe. Nothing else will make your soul sing. This text is gloriously awesome. It is a summary of the book of Hebrews, and in a sense

the story of the Bible and sits in between two sections of practical exhortations. (12.12-17 and 13.1-18)

I also remind you that this glorious letter of Hebrews was written to a local church (I believe in Rome). God expects and longs for his people to understand what He is doing so he has revealed this for us. This is good food well served for our eternal delight. Let's dig in.

This text is a summary of the book. Hebrews is a rich and detailed explanation of the superiority of Christ over everything in the Old Testament. He is superior to the angels (chap.1), to Moses, to the OT priests who stood between the people and God. He is superior to the Law because he brings a new covenant that cannot be denied. All of these topics are touched upon; Moses (21), angels (22), heaven (22-23), firstborn (23), perfection (23), Jesus, mediator of the New Covenant (24), and sprinkled blood (24). This passage, like much of the book moves to warning and exhortation. It is as if the writer is calling upon all that he has written in order to deeply press upon our souls a critical truth.

But, the real point of the text is revealed in the grammar of it. Verses 18-24 are a comparison and verses 25-29 are a warning and challenge. The comparison, rich in detail and overwhelming to consider is used as the basis for the warning and admonition.

Two groups of people are being contrasted along with two different settings, contrasting two different experiences, responses and results. The readers of this book (New Testament people like us) are being compared to the children of Israel who heard the voice of God at Mt. Sinai. They received the law and it was good and it was needed. We have something even better. We have what the law was pointing to. We have the gospel, the good news of Christ's redemption that is the grounding of the New Covenant. The Old Covenant was good and helpful, but the New Covenant is absolutely glorious and perfect. The Old Covenant revealed ones' need of a Redeemer. The Old Covenant pulled back the veneer of excuses and comparisons that people make amongst themselves and showed the devastating reality of what the human condition looks like compared to God. That is why, when the people heard the voice of God they cried to Moses to have God stop. They were terrified. Not only were they terrified, but Moses, who stood between God and the people, was also terrified. God's righteousness is devastatingly perfect.

We, however, do not have to face that. The one who stands between us and God is not Moses, who himself failed. The one who stands between us and God is none other than Jesus Christ. His death and resurrection has made a way for us to be in the presence of God and to hear the voice of God and not be terrified. In fact, we see that in Christ, we are not surrounded by people who are in terror, but we are surrounded by innumerable angels in festal gathering. Rather than terror, we have joy. This is no shallow, nor fleeting emotion. This is not some cheap, manipulated, formulated, electronically enhanced, predictable "worship experience." This is not dull-spirited, disengaged, arms-crossed, bored with God, unimpressed with the gospel, small-mindedness. This is not what some of you settle for, but it is what you were made for. This is deep-rooted, heart-engaged, gospel-based, full-throttled, life-changing, grace-immersed, eternity-grabbing, heart-

racing, wide-open worship that is not afraid and not holding back because it is based on the One who held nothing back for us.

That is part of the irony of this comparison. Those who could see closed their eyes. Those who could hear stopped their ears. The writer compares where we are now to the nation of Israel.

1. **Do you realize where you are right now?** (18-24)

There are 7 features that describe Israel's encounter with God at Mt. Sinai. (touched, blazing fire, darkness, gloom, tempest, sound of a trumpet and voice) These features are written in dramatic affect to help us feel the weight of terror that the children of Israel experienced at the base of Mt. Sinai. "They could not endure the order that was given. If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned."

How were they expected to be able to live in the presence of this God who is so holy and righteous that even if an animal wandered off and came into contact with the mountain that it had to be executed? What does that have to say about the fate of a person who would deliberately approach the mountain? What does that have to say about the fate of this nation? Here was a nation that was selected by God to be the people with whom God would dwell. But, how could people ever live with such an awesome God? That is what Israel needed to grasp. That is what we need to grasp. On our own, we have no defense and no place to hide from the all seeing, all knowing, ever present and devastatingly righteous justice of God. This scene exposes our attempts to sin in secret as the shams for which they are. These people were undone. These people responded like Isaiah did when he saw the holiness of God and was shaken to his very core, expecting at any moment to be consumed. And yet, these people only heard, felt and saw evidences of God's presence. God himself remained hidden from them. So, again I ask, do you realize where you are right now?

We are not at Mt. Sinai. We, right now, have come to Mt. Zion. Now, do not miss the point. The children of Israel were literally at Mt. Sinai, but did not respond to what God had revealed with faith. They responded with fear and with unbelief. We, the church, have come to a greater place because we have a greater mediator (Christ), and by God's grace we have responded to what God has revealed by faith. We believe Christ so that we can approach God. As a result we, right now, are viewed by God as being with him in the heavenlies. We, right now, are treated as if we are already in the company of the throng that surrounds the eternal throne of God on his high and holy mount.

"But you have come to Mount Zion" (v.22). Already we are there in God's view. Not yet, in time and place do we experience all that we will. Now by faith, then by sight. Now, in position, then in person. Now, we don't see, but we believe because he has said so. Then we will see and realize that while we believed, we had no idea of how overwhelming and glorious it really is. The 7-fold description of Mt. Sinai is overwhelmed by 7 images of Mt. Zion.

Already you have come to:

A. Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.

If, you had no where to go today and someone could take a sack lunch and feed everyone with it, and God granted you the grace to endure, I would love to take you on a journey through the Scriptures and show you all that God says about his mountain. Mt. Zion is where Melchizedek appeared, the priest/king who prefigured Christ. It is the place that David captured that became the home of God since it became the home of the Ark of the Covenant. It was THE place. It is the place that God spoke about in the Psalms as the place that he loved. It is the place that the prophets wrote of. The foundation of Jerusalem was a prophecy of the foundation of the eternal city of God. This text describes Mount Zion as the city of the living God. Our God is eternally alive. His reign will never end, his city will never die, his people will never fade, his empire will never be replaced, and his dominion will never be threatened. The last phrase, “the heavenly Jerusalem” points us to the end of the Bible that speaks of that time when this city, this holy city, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband comes down out of heaven. The scene described in Revelation 21 makes me think that all of creation is standing and in breathless awe, like the congregation standing at a wedding, looking, expectantly for the doors to open and for the bride to appear and upon seeing her are absolutely overwhelmed at her beauty. The wording makes us wonder if this is a city or a people and I believe that it is both. We are dealing with a reality that our vocabulary is not competent to fully describe as our minds are not capable of complete understanding, and yet, God, here in this text is telling us, that he sees us, right now, as already being there. Is it because God sees everything in the eternal present? Is it because your position in Christ is so secure that this reality is already yours? I don’t know. But I know this, we are not alone.

Already we have come to the company of:

B. Innumerable angels in festal gathering.

Festal gathering means joyful assembly. Already, we are participating with angels in the worship of God! Angels were created by God to serve him. Angels do his bidding. There are angels that do nothing but sing at the top of their voices and devote their entire beings to expressing his majesty and worth and glory. We are with them! Our worship of God is done with them! These beings who have never known sin, who have never been distracted, who have never been defeated, who have never been at a distance from God can teach us a thing or two about the worship of God as Creator. They are singularly focused. Their every fiber has one and only one glorious purpose. They extol the glories and majesty of God. They owe their existence to Him and remain dependent upon him for their beings. When we sing, we, along with them are doing what we were made for. Singing, by faith with the angels, and extolling the greatness and majesty of God so that all of creation echoes with our thunderous praise, are both glorious and right. But when we sing of redemption, when we sing the songs of grace, when we declare the mercies of God and lift our voices and declare that our Creator is our Redeemer; that is when we must drown out the angels, for that is a song that they cannot sing. That is a reality that

they have not experienced. We are the rescued ones who have been redeemed to worship Him and declare Him as Redeemer and declare Him, we must!

But there is more. Already we have come to the:

C. Assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.

This phrase describes all those who are redeemed. The picture is that of the completed company of the people of God who are gathered together in the presence of God and who are enjoying God by enjoying each other. Again, phrases like this make us wonder...do the saints in glory somehow see us now? Already, the author says we, somehow are there, though not yet are we fully experiencing it with all of our senses. Believers already are counted as being part of this group, each of whom is enrolled, that is made members by faith. This is the same group that the writer refers to back in chapter 2, where Christ is described as being the One who led them to glory, where He says to the Father that He is not ashamed to call us brothers. Think of that! Here we are standing before the Father who sees all and knows all. There is nothing about us that he does not know, and we, standing there in complete exposure, feeling as completely insecure as any creature has ever experienced at any time and anywhere, has Christ walk over to us and put his arm around us, and look at His Father and then points to us and announces to the universe..."I'm with him! Hebrews 2 says that He then leads us in the glad worship of the Father!

D. Throne of God

We have come to the throne of God. How can this be? How can there be all of this celebration and joyful festivity right here in full view of the throne of God? Do you not realize the searing gaze of God, the penetrating, exposing, unearthing, revealing power of His eyes? This is the One who spoke and Israel begged Him to stop. We learned why in Hebrews 3.12-13. "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account." That, my friend, taken at face value, is a devastating account and frightful depiction. Who can stand before the throne of God? Revelation 20.11 says that not even the earth and sky can stand before his throne. When God the judge takes his throne, even the earth and sky flee away, but then these words, "no place was found for them." There was no place for them to go. There was no escape the all-knowing, righteous-judging presence of God. How can there be....

E. The righteous made perfect

How is it possible, in view of the awesome righteousness of God that sees my every sin, that knows my every selfish motive, my every evil deed, my every desire for worship, my inconsistencies, my failures to speak up for him, my failure to represent him, my failure to love him like I should, and love others, and prefer others, and be considerate of the

needs of others...how is it possible for one like me, one like you, so thoroughly infected by depravity that we are incapable of doing anything from a perfectly pure motive have any chance of standing before him when not even the earth and sky can? How is it that someone can actually be called “righteous, who are made perfect?” The answer to all of that is revealed in the last two descriptions. We are not standing alone. There is One who stands between us and God, and that One is...

F. Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant

Jesus is our mediator! Jesus is our defense! Jesus is our Savior! Jesus is our Justification! Jesus is our Advocate! Jesus is all of these, because His righteousness and only His righteousness covers me. The One on the throne, who, by all rights could and should pour out the fury of his wrath on me, has already poured it out upon his Son. And his Son took it all in my place when he died as my substitute on the cross. There is nothing left for me to pay. His grace has planned it all, tis mine but to believe and recognize his work of love and Christ receive. He is the full, final and perfect mediator because his blood speaks a better word than Abel.

G. Sufficient and Sprinkled blood

Abel, like Christ was killed out of jealousy. But while the death of Abel demanded vengeance, the death of Christ resulted in pardon. This phrase reminds us that this scene before us has been planned by God, all along.

Beloved, if that is where we are, and that is where we are going to be, and that is what God has decreed, and what God is accomplishing, then...

2. Do you realize the accountability that is on you? (25-27)

You are accountable to respond in acceptance and obedience to the Word of God. There are no excuses. We must live now, in view of where we are, right now before Him. His Word created it. His Word accomplishes it. His Word stands. If his word that shook the earth was the occasion for the fear of those whose unbelief was being exposed, what do you think will be the response when the voice of God shakes, not only the earth, but the heavens on the day of judgment. If you reject His Word, you will not stand. You know what I am speaking about. You know the issues in your life, where you, in defiance, and arrogance, place your wants above his truth. We have greater revelation than the children of Israel at Mt. Sinai. But that means that we have greater accountability. You have a greater standing. You have a greater privilege. You have greater knowledge. You have more responsibility and opportunity for more joy and more reason for worship and more motivation for perseverance. Do not treat this lightly.

3. How should you respond? (28-29)

A. **Grateful for grace!** “*grateful for receiving an unshakeable kingdom*”

If your life is not marked by gratitude and humility, if you have never been overwhelmed at the thought of your own sinfulness and have never recognized your desperate poverty that cannot rescue your soul and have never cast yourself completely upon the mercy of God revealed in the all-sufficient death of Christ, then you are not yet part of this kingdom. I plead with you, right now, run to Christ! Confess your sin! Acknowledge your need. Accept his death as your pardon and his righteousness as your defense! Hold nothing back, run to Him and be grateful that he will happily embrace all who come to him! Be overwhelmed with thankfulness that he grants all those who come to him by faith full participation in his kingdom that will never fall. Are you here, angry this morning, uptight and on edge? Is it your mission in life to punish people, or, can you now see why you can let that go? Let it go because of Christ. Let it go because of the gospel. Let it go because of where you are really standing right now. And now...

B. Offer white, hot worship to God.

I know, the text says, “acceptable worship.” What is acceptable worship? Acceptable worship is Christ centered! Acceptable worship is worshipping here in view of worshipping there. It is worshipping now, as a taste of worshipping then. How will we worship God? We will hold nothing back! We will be consumed with God and will forget ourselves (reverential). We will be overwhelmed with God (awe) and will not be distracted, nor disaffected, nor dull, nor dry, but will be fully engaged with all that is within us and with all who are around us and together we will declare His praises, His glory and His redemption. And as we will see next week, white hot worship of God is what drives our love for each other, our hospitality even to strangers, our willingness to sacrifice for each other, for we are, forever, and ever and ever, the people of God, in the kingdom of God, for the glory of God.