

Congregational handout; outline sermon text on following pages

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“Our God Is an Awesome God”

Hebrews 12:12-29

March 1, 2015

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^A John 13:35

^B Romans 14:19; Revelation 21:27

^C 1 Peter 4:10

A. The Way We Should Live

Hebrews 12:12-17

1. This twelfth chapter of the book of Hebrews is packed with tremendous truth
 - a. to try and do any sort of justice in preaching from it on a couple of Sunday morning is a hopeless task – at some future date, perhaps, we shall return and attempt a fuller exposition, but for the present let us simply try to give an overview of this chapter, Hebrews 12
 - b. it is the culmination and summary of the first eleven chapters, of the revelation that Jesus Christ the Son of God, is God's final word to man
 - c. in Hebrews 11 we have the testimony of centuries of the heroes of faith: of men and women who trusted in the Lord, and especially who trusted in the promise of the Lord, the coming Messiah and Redeemer of mankind
 - (A) these were engaged in a struggle, a battle against evil
 - (B) the first 11 verses of Hebrews 12 tells how we are to continue in that struggle and to run the race of life that has be put before us; to engage, as it were, in the Christian Olympics
 - d. verses 12 to 17 continue to highlight some of the ways in which we should live that life – it is a life that is to be ...
2. Helpful and Healing (12-13)
 - a. "12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed."
 - b. God created man as a social being ... sin spoiled that society
 - c. the OT and NT people of God are His first step in renewing society
 - d. this verse gives the practical way to put into effect Christ's words: "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35) – mutual help, mutual strengthening
3. Peaceful and Holy (14)
 - a. "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord."
 - b. this goes hand in hand with the preceding: "So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." (Romans 14:19)
 - (A) that word 'pursue' is used of hunting, but perhaps more often of one army chasing another: with the effort and diligence that you would expend in time of war, do the same in seeking peace
 - (B) and to sanctification – that is, holiness – give the same effort

- (1) it is a work of the Holy Spirit, yes; but clearly believers are also given a responsibility as something to seek, to strive for
- (2) with good cause as a requisite to enter God's holy presence
- (3) Revelation 21:27 has these sombre words about heaven: "and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."
- (4) later we shall see that God's terrifying holiness demands it

4. Showing God's Grace (15-16a)

- a. "15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; 16 that there be no immoral ... person ..."
- b. first, in our appropriation of God's grace
 - (A) it is by grace that we come to salvation, by that same grace we receive gifts which we are to use, according to 1 Peter 4:10, 'as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.'
 - (B) let us not fail or fall short in the matter of this grace
- c. second, live in "Sweetness" rather than bitterness
 - (A) bitterness is the outcome of ongoing ingratitude
 - (B) it is the nurturing in our emotions and thoughts of the feeling that in some fashion, in some way we are not getting what is owed us
 - (C) Satan tempts us with the feeling that being a Christian means we have given up all sorts of things that would have made us happy
 - (D) such an attitude, fed by self-pity, over a period of time can spoil not just ourselves but our fellow Christians – this is trouble!
- d. third, live in Purity
 - (A) many of us are distressed by all the signs of the immoral character of what is being proposed as "sex education" to be foisted upon young, innocent children
 - (B) we had a discussion on this subject at a pastoral meeting this past week, and, while there is value in making our opinions known through petitions, of far greater impact will be concerned parents regularly spending time with their children, hearing what they are being told at school and comparing it with Biblical truth.
 - (C) that God call upon His children to live lives that are pure

5. Spiritually Minded (16b-17)

- a. "16 that there be no ... or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. 17 For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears."
- b. Esau was irreligious – there's a lesson to which we can return
- c. but let us take this lesson from Esau for the moment:
 - (A) he lived with little regard for the spiritual privileges that were his as the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham
 - (B) thinking only of the pleasures and substance of this world
 - (C) and realising only when it was too late what he had lost

B. The Background

1. let us go back to the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy to pick up some background to the next section of this chapter
2. Read Exodus 19:7-25, 20:18-21
 - a. 19:7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him. 8 All the people answered together and said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord.
 - b. 9 The Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever." Then Moses told the words of the people to the Lord. 10 The Lord also said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; 11 and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12 You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. 13 No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain." 14 So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. ...
 - c. 16 So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. 17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke

ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. 19 When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. 20 The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

- d. 21 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, "Go down, warn the people, so that they do not break through to the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish. 22 Also let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, or else the Lord will break out against them." 23 Moses said to the Lord, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us, saying, 'Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.'" 24 Then the Lord said to him, "Go down and come up again, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, or He will break forth upon them." 25 So Moses went down to the people and told them."
- e. Then follow the record of the giving of the 10 commandments
- f. 20:18 All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. 19 Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die." 20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin." 21 So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.

3. Read Deuteronomy 4:11-13, 5:22-28

- a. this is the passage in which some 40 years later, prior to entering Canaan, Moses recounts the giving of the law to the people of Israel
- b. 4:11 "You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom. 12 Then the Lord spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form—only a voice. 13 So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.
- c. Then Moses tells again to these descendants of the people of 40 years ago the ten commandments that were given
- d. 5:22 "These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly at the mountain from the midst of the fire, of the cloud and of the thick gloom, with a great voice, and He added no more. He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.
- e. 23 "And when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders. 24 You said, 'Behold, the Lord our God has

shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire; we have seen today that God speaks with man, yet he lives. 25 Now then why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer, then we will die. 26 For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? 27 Go near and hear all that the Lord our God says; then speak to us all that the Lord our God speaks to you, and we will hear and do it.'

- f. then ... 5:28 "The Lord heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the Lord said to me, 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They have done well in all that they have spoken.'"

4. now, this we have read because it is what lies behind the next seven verses in this twelfth chapter of Hebrews.

C. Mountain Experiences with God

Hebrews 12:18-24

1. Mount Sinai (18-21)

- a. "18 For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, 19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. 20 For they could not bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned." 21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling."

- (A) this is the first of the mountain-top experiences – it is a short 4-verse summary of those passages just read in the books of Moses
- (B) the people of Israel had – and those who have not accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour still have – only a Mount Sinai experience
- b. What marks out a Mount Sinai experience?
 - (A) and even though Mount Sinai is not named here, it is very clear from what we have just read that Mount Sinai is spoken of
 - (B) make no mistake about it: this is a real and fearsome experience of sinful man before the holy God
 - (C) it was of such impact that we are told that Moses – this man who had such a long and close relationship to Israel's Redeemer – was himself full of fear – quaking in his sandals
 - (D) yet it was also only external, material, sensual –
 - (1) there was the blazing fire
 - (2) a darkness and gloom that could almost be felt

- (3) the blare of the trumpets throughout
- (4) the thundering of the words so that 600,000 men could hear
- (E) but above all it was one in which the holiness of God set up a barrier – a barrier of holiness even an animal could not cross
 - (1) and if an innocent animal faced certain death in crossing
 - (2) what hope would there be for sinful man?
 - (3) that describes a Mount Sinai experience of God

2. Mount Zion (22-24)

- a. with the word 'But' we come to a total contrast
- b. "22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel."
- c. a Mount Zion experiences is completely different
 - (A) it is an encounter with the same, the Living God
 - (B) but instead of gloom, darkness, thundering, noise, fear, death
 - (C) we walk, as it were, into the bright light of the Son of God
 - (D) we find in these verses the complete satisfaction of the social aspect which God created in man
- d. this is a picture of fellowship in God's mountain; in God's city; in God's heaven; in God's Presence
 - (A) myriads – technically 10,000 but used of the innumerable; our "zillions" – of angels; with them we assemble in jubilation
 - (B) a general assembly – the calling of God's nation together
 - (C) the firstborn ones – in the OT, the firstborn particularly belonged to God because of the Passover redemption from Egypt – in the NT those who are in Christ are God's first fruits of mankind
 - (1) with all these, we are in immediate fellowship
 - (2) our names have been written down in glory
 - (3) we join together in communion with the saints of all ages
 - (D) and how is this all possible when it wasn't possible at Mt Sinai?
 - (1) because we have a Mediator ... Jesus
 - (2) the human name of our Saviour, the Son of God
 - (3) now exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high

(4) by Him we sinful people are made holy to come unto God

(5) this is the wonder of all wonders that is Mount Zion

e. I had intended to look as well this morning at the closing verses of this chapter, but as our time has gone, it is better to conclude right here: we have read sufficient to bear out the title, "Our God Is an Awesome God"

D. Conclusion

1. there is so much in this chapter to which perhaps one day we shall return, but let us leave here this morning filled with wonder, praise and awe to our great God and Saviour who truly is an awesome God.

2. and close by singing the doxology.

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NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

- Barnes – *Notes on the New Testament, et alia*, by Rev Albert Barnes, Gall & Inglis, Edinburgh
BM – *Biblical Museum*, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
EBC – *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan
Hebrews, by Leon Morris
EGT – *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, Hodder & Stoughton
Hebrews, by Marcus Dods
Gill – *Exposition of the Old Testament, Exposition of the New Testament*, by John Gill, D.D.
Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com.
NICNT – *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*
The Epistle to the Hebrew, by F. F. Bruce
RWP – *Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament*, by Dr. A. T. Robertson
TYN – *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*
Hebrews, by Donald Guthrie