

Our Response

Hebrews 12:18-29

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

One day Esau returned famished from hunting.¹ Whether Esau was truly starving and on the brink of death is hard to determine if one should take his claims literally or as a hyperbole.²



Upon returning to either home or more likely to a camp, Esau finds his brother Jacob cooking some delicious, red stew in and chooses to purchase it at the price of his birthright, which was a double portion of Isaac's estate³ and "more importantly the head of his family and spiritual leader of his people."⁴ In this one act Esau demonstrated not only indifference but utter contempt for all that God had promised to Abraham and his family line!"⁵ Even with the knowledge that a nation would be born from Abraham's offspring that would inherit the land of Canaan and become God's chosen people

(Genesis 17), Esau despised this birthright so much that he was willing to sell these blessings for "the savory but passing pottage of this world."⁶ Later in life Esau came to realize how foolish he was to despise (Genesis 25:34) and selling his birthright but it was too late, for not even his tears could "buy back" that which was so easily "given" away (Hebrews 12:15-17)!

Every time I hear this story, I can't help but look upon Esau and see him as one of the most foolish men in the Bible! Esau did not have to sell off all he had to obtain the "treasure" or "pearl" of God's blessings he only had to accept that which God had already given him. Lest we think too low of Esau and too high of ourselves, I wonder what we as Christians are doing with all the blessings God offers us? The Bible states God has provided us with "every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). These are the kinds of blessings that are of infinite value for they are provided by a sovereign God whose generosity is not limited, not even by our imaginations (4:20)! For those who turn to Him God promises that his/her chains of sin will be

¹ John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 236.

² John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 551.

³ John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 237.

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 738.

⁵ D. A. Carson, ed., *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 68.

⁶ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 739.



broken (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 12:1), and death will lose its sting for while flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:50, 55) a redeemed masterpiece of His grace certainly can and will (John 1:12; 3:16)! Despite all the glorious riches being offered to us can we truly say that the treasures of our hearts reflect a genuine motivation to give up that which we cannot keep, to obtain that which we cannot lose? The following sermon is going to review Hebrews 12:18-29 in order to help remind us not only of the infinite value of our blessings in Christ but also the warning that the

tears of the foolish on that final day will not be able to put out the consuming fire of God!

The Mountain of Fear (18-21)

Before we can truly understand the value of the blessings being offered by God one must first understand how difficult it was for humanity to approach a holy God before the time of



Christ. Those who approached the old covenant of Mount Sinai, a “place charged with the holiness of God,”⁷ all that one could hear was the “trumpet blast and the Voice of terrifying judgement!”⁸ This was the kind of mountain that could not be touched for it burned with fire, darkness, gloom and storm (verse 18). Due to their unworthiness⁹ should either man or beast lay foot on the mountain they were to immediately be put to death (Exodus 19:12-13).¹⁰ God’s voice spoke a warning out of the fire that cut through the darkness¹¹ and penetrated the souls of

those at the base of the mountain so terrifying that Israel begged Him to speak no more (verse

⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 354.

⁸ George Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 417.

⁹ Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 15, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 261.

¹⁰ Paul Ellingworth and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 309.

¹¹ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 480.

19, Exodus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:25-27).¹² “Fear of God’s just condemnation” for anyone who broke His laws was simply too much to bear!¹³ Even Moses whom courageously stood before Pharaoh and cried out God’s demand to “let My people go” (Exodus 8:1) in seeing that the “gap between humanity and God’s divinity”¹⁴ was infinite, freely cried out in the presence of Israel and this all consuming fire, “I am trembling with fear” (Hebrews 12:21)! If Israel was to be God’s people, the mark of holiness would not be negotiated but determined and enforced by the God who is sovereign and firmly in charge of all things seen and unseen (Colossians 1:16)!

Imagine for a moment what it must have been like to live in the Old Testament times! God created humanity in His image (Genesis 1:27) and placed eternity into our hearts so that our soul might seek, and forever be lost without Him (Ecclesiastes 3:11)! To those who witnessed or heard of the Ten Plagues of Egypt (Exodus 7-12), the manna from heaven in the wilderness (Exodus 16), the parting of the Red Sea and Jordan rivers (Exodus 14, Joshua 3:14-17), the fall



of Jericho (Joshua 6:6-25), the sun and moon standing still long enough for Israel to destroy her enemies (Joshua 10:12-14) or Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego being saved from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3); it should not come as a surprise that they came to see God as the rock of their salvation, a mighty fortress in times of need (Psalms 62:6-7)! God’s blessings however did not come without a price, strict obedience to His commands! While God protects His own, He has no issue in disciplining His own! Those who witnessed Nadab and Abihu consumed by fire (Leviticus 10:1-2), being bit by

poisonous snakes for grumbling against God (Numbers 20:1-5), or the execution of the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:30-38), soon realized that the breaking of any of the 613 commands of the Old Testament was an invitation to receive God’s mighty wrath! Even the way to be forgiven was difficult for it had to be done through the sacrifice of animals and only at a specific place and only by God’s chosen priests, the Levites! And if you happen to be a Gentile believer, you were not even permitted into the inner courts of the temple much less near to the Holy of holies!

¹² Leon Morris, “[Hebrews](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 141.

¹³ Ray C. Stedman, [Hebrews](#), The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1992), Heb 12:18.

¹⁴ David L. Allen, [Hebrews](#), The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 590.

The Mountain of Joy (22-24)

Praise be to God “upon conversion we do not come to an earthly”¹⁵ mountain of darkness, gloom and unbearable fear but instead one in which the sprinkled blood of our Mediator has appeased God’s righteous wrath and made us “right” in His sight. Even though God retains His role as Judge under the New Covenant, those who have their names written in



heaven (verse 23)¹⁶ need not fear outright condemnation because their Mediator Jesus has purchased their atonement and their right to be called God’s very own children (John 1:12)!¹⁷ We as born-again believers then are to feel unspeakable joy for we do not have to come to a sacred mountain that cannot be touched but to “the heavenly dwelling-place of God, an eternal mountain, Zion”¹⁸ which is “invisible, all spiritual, and therefore accessible anywhere!”¹⁹ While this mountain points to the eschatological future and home of every believer it also

has present and wonderful ramifications.²⁰ The moment Christ died on the cross the curtain was torn signifying the separation of God and His people was over for under the New Covenant God’s Spirit dwells inside the heart of every believer (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)!²¹ Also, the once and for all atonement of Christ means forgiveness is received through confession and repentance, not animal sacrifice (Hebrews 10:1-18). The blood of the New Covenant then “communicates exultation, warmth, openness, acceptance, and relationship, set off in bold relief against the dismal portrait of the Sinai assembly!”²²

It is at this point in the passage that the author of Hebrews invites us to consider how we are going to respond to the blessings God offers us through His Son Jesus? Will we be like Esau and see our “birthright” purchased through the blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:20) as irrelevant or worst yet despicable? While this seems like a harsh question to ask Christians, do not many still view God’s commands as a burden (1 John 5:3), especially the one that says to “be holy as

¹⁵ John Piper, *Sermons from John Piper (1990–1999)* (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007).

¹⁶ George Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 420–421.

¹⁷ George Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 421–422.

¹⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 355.

¹⁹ John Piper, *Sermons from John Piper (1990–1999)* (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007).

²⁰ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 483.

²¹ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 905.

²² George Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 420.

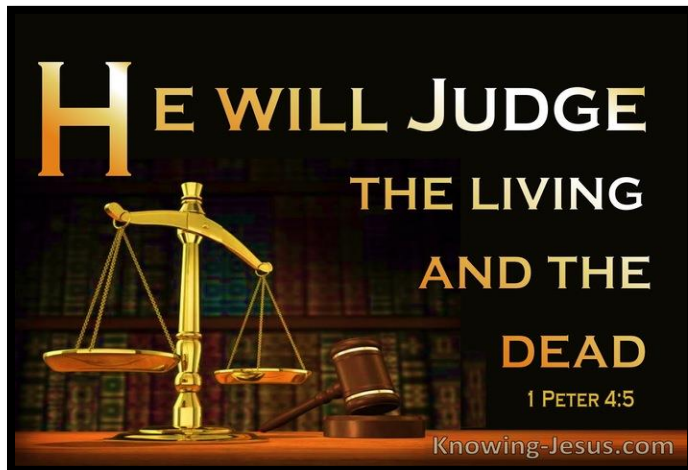


God is holy” (1 Peter 1:16)? Are not many so drunk in satisfying the evil desires of their hearts (James 1:14) that the world sees them not as Christ’s ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) and priests (1 Peter 2:9) but as one hypocritical voice amongst the completing philosophies of our times? Surely God means more to us than our family (Matthew 10:37), possessions (Matthew 6:19-21) or even ourselves (Luke 9:23) and as such commands such a foothold in our hearts that serving Him is not seen as a burden but an honor? Or

are our “itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:3) correct in hearing in this passage that we can live a life of cheap grace,”²³ standing with both feet in Satan’s kingdom and feeling justified to periodically “visit” God’s holy mountain in their fleeting moments of lukewarm “passion”? And even if we sin is not the God of the New Covenant one of love and grace, not discipline so what harm will ever become those who do not fear and obey Him anyway?

God is a Consuming Fire (25-29)

Lest the reader be tempted to stand on the shifting sands of indifference towards God’s blessings or worst yet a mountain of cheap grace, the author of Hebrews warns the reader that God was and still is a “consuming fire” (verse 29). “Even though fear is not a tender, winsome



motive to melt the heart with love, it is very important that we know what a fearful thing it is to spurn those tender, winsome words that the blood of Jesus speaks to the heart.”²⁴ Grace is not a license to sin (Romans 6:1) but an invitation to serve in the power of He who is able (Ephesians 3:20) to transform our hearts of stone into flesh (Ezekiel 36:26)! How much more severe will be the judgment and punishment be upon those whom have the full word of God and Spirit to guide them and yet refuse His gracious gifts of reconciliation?²⁵ For those

who chose to retain their self-seeking hearts of temporal pleasure and their false notion that God

²³ I first heard this phrase in a book by A. W. Tozer.

²⁴ John Piper, *Sermons from John Piper (1990–1999)* (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007).

²⁵ George Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 422.

no longer disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:6), the author of Hebrews warns them that when God's eschatological judgment falls upon this earth its kingdoms will pass away (1 Corinthians 7:31; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 21:1)²⁶ when the judge of the living and the dead returns (1 Peter 4:5). Our proper response then to the blessings of the New Covenant that God offers us is not lukewarmness or contempt but joy and thankfulness that what His kingdom alone is unshakable and irrevocable²⁷ to those who believe in the atoning sacrifice of His Son! We then are to worship God with "reverence and awe" (verse 28) always remembering that while His love and grace knows no limits neither does His judgment.

Like Esau we do not have to buy but merely receive God's gracious gifts of salvation and blessings. Just because we are a redeemed masterpiece of His grace, His ambassadors and royal priests does not mean that we get to remake God into our image so that He might become more palatable to the sensual and temporal desires. And even though Jesus atoned on the cross for



every sin we have or will ever do does not mean we can treat His commands with indifference or worst yet outright rejection! Jesus did not die to give us a license to sin but so that we might have life and have it abundantly, serving out of not only love but reverence and awe of His consuming fire! To this generation whom in their self-centeredness shuns accountability this passage in Hebrews should serve both as a blessing and a warning. To be able to boldly approach God is a privilege that came at the cost of the life of His own Son! Those

whom see this fact as trifle as it bounces off their stone hearts should remember the God of yesterday whom smite those whom indulged in sin is the same God of today and tomorrow! Please examine your life and answer this one final, important question: how have you responded to the "birthright" that you have been offered by your Lord, Savior and King?

²⁶ George Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 423.

²⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 365.