

Sunday morning October 7th 2018 at CBC
Sermon outline: Hebrews 12:18-29

Encouragement comes in various shapes and sizes and moods. The letter which we know as Hebrews was written as a 'word of exhortation' contains some of those shapes and sizes and moods.

This morning the encouragement comes in the form of a contrast. Knowing their familiarity with the Old Testament – something he shared with them - our writer contrasts the experience of the people of God under the old covenant with the experience of the people of God under the new covenant. He wants his readers to be quite sure they are very greatly blessed to live in the Christian era.

[1] THE WAY THINGS WERE

Some of the readers of Hebrews were thinking that they would be better off in if they could return to how things were – before the coming of Jesus. The scenario described in verses 18-21 is based on the description of events leading up to the supernatural giving of the law by the Lord to Moses on mount Sinai – See Exodus 19.16 and following.

In Hebrews 12 it is summarised in terms of an untouchable (on pain of death) mountain, fire, darkness, gloom, storm, a trumpet blast and the very words of God audible. Moses's fear is not described in Exodus, but he himself refers to being frightened later when he realised how disobedient the people had become in such a short time [Deut 9.19].

From the descriptions in Exodus and Hebrews we can truly say that the occasion was truly awesome.

On mount Sinai the Lord was establishing the terms of his agreement with the Israelites whom he had rescued from Egypt. And the basis of the agreement was that there were laws – very precise in various areas – which the people had to keep. They would be ‘justified’ by their keeping of the law. This arrangement, in the great purposes of God, would do two things (at least):

- [i] it would highlight the failure inherent in human nature because people would not keep the law
- [ii] it would set up a contrast, or a backdrop, against which the grace of God in Jesus Christ would shine brightly

That, says our author to the readers, is emphatically not where you are. That is the way things were. That is what you have left behind. A much better day has dawned.

[2] THE WAY THINGS ARE

What has changed? What do Christians have? What are the benefits which Christians may enjoy now?

[i] the venue

It was a mountain. Now, although it is called mount Zion, the real focus is on the city (a city set on a hill, so to speak). It is the city of the living God. Spiritually speaking, this is where Christians live!

[ii] the atmosphere

On mount Sinai, there was fear and terror, for good reasons. The presence of God was almost tangible (touchable) – but that would have been death. But in the heavenly Jerusalem, to which believers belong, there is joy!

[iii] the community

Who is there? We know who was there on mount Sinai. A lot of very frightened people. We know why, God was near. But now, in the city, God is not merely near, he is there, present! He is the judge. And Jesus is there, and angels are there and the spirits of Christian believers from previous ages are there. And it is an entirely safe place to be! It is a happy place, a place of great joy. And this is where Christians are!

[iv] the message

The message on mount Sinai was ‘keep back’ and then ‘keep the commandments for you shall live by them.’

But there is a different message in Zion. It is the message from the sprinkled blood. When Abel was killed by his brother, his blood cried out from the ground, (as it were) for vengeance and the cry was heard by the Lord – Genesis 4.10.

But In Zion, the blood is that of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it cries out not for vengeance but as a message of forgiveness. It is a much better word!

[3] THE WAY THINGS MUST BE

In the light of the way things are, three principles emerge:

[a] We should obey the word of God (the consequences of disobedience are too serious)

The old covenant era may have gone, but what happened in it provides lessons for the new covenant era.. Rejecting God's word was serious then, it is even more serious now.

[b] We should recognise the kingdom of God (it's the only kingdom fit for purpose)

The shaking of mount Sinai was a foreshadowing of something much greater – the shaking of the nations, the end of the world, the last day. The Lord had advertised this in the OT – Haggai 2.6 is quoted – and confirmed it in the NT (various places).

When the nations are shaken, only the kingdom of heaven will survive. We are only safe if we belong to that kingdom. Is that where we are today?

[c] We should engage in the worship of God (it's the natural response of the believer)

If we have rightly appreciated the glories of the new covenant and we have begun to taste the atmosphere of Zion and are looking forward to experiencing the heavenly city in all its fullness, isn't worship our appropriate response?

CONCLUSION

We should worship joyfully and reverently in an attitude of awe. For the great God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has poured down his amazing grace on all who believe, remains the God who is a consuming fire.

To Him be the glory, amen.