

Victoria Ave/Emmanuel Baptist

Sunday, June 14, 2020

Warning from Hebrews #5:

Have I Got Your Attention?

Hebrew 12:25-29

Have you ever been in an earthquake? I believe that I have experienced 3 in my lifetime. Why do I say “believe?” It is because I don’t remember them. The first was when I was very young – 3 or 4 years old – and we were living in Quebec. The second was when I was 16 and participating in a mission trip in England. We were an evangelistic team going from town to town doing presentations for adults and children in town squares and we were travelling by canal. We woke up to the news of an earthquake during the night, but we did not feel it because we were on the water. The last one was about 6 or seven years ago when we were living in southern Ontario on Lake Erie. I don’t remember much of it – but rather a loud booming noise. It many not have even been one – as military planes were practicing for the Detroit airshow and some reported that it was a sonic boom made by the jet.

I have seen videos of earthquakes. In our day and age of video and digital life, the effects of earthquakes have been caught in their glory by tv shows and internet influencers alike. I could only imagine that an earthquake will very quickly get your attention!

You might be surprised to learn that earthquakes show up fairly often in the Bible! God often uses them to get the attention of his people. I did a quick google search and found one site listing 100 references to earthquakes.

In our last warning in Hebrews we have a shake-up as well. Could God be trying to get our attention? Let's read it together...Hebrews 12:25-29:

25 Be careful that you do not refuse to listen to the One who is speaking. For if the people of Israel did not escape when they refused to listen to Moses, the earthly messenger, we will certainly not escape if we reject the One who speaks to us from heaven! 26 When God spoke from Mount Sinai his voice shook the earth, but now he makes another promise: "Once again I will shake not only the earth but the heavens also."^[a] 27 This means that all of creation will be shaken and removed, so that only unshakable things will remain.

28 Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe. 29 For our God is a devouring fire.

We have looked at 4 other warnings in Hebrews:

1. Beware of drifting! (Heb. 2:1-4)
2. Will you choose rest? (Heb. 4:1-13)
3. Falling away from the faith! (Heb. 6:1-12)
4. Avoiding DELIBERATE sin! (Heb. 10:26-35)

Today we have our final warning: "Have I got your attention?"

Whose attention is God after? I can't stress enough that the Bible and the teaching found in it is written for those who call themselves followers of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, we would say it was for the followers of YHWH – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Why do I stress this? Because of the bad habits Christians have of pounding non-believers over the head with the contents... "DON'T YOU KNOW THAT THE BIBLE SAYS..." And often Christians will turn around and ignore it themselves. I am a firm believer that if Christians would be the best "Christ-followers" they could be...then the world would take note and change. If you pray for revival in the world...it needs to begin in the lives of all those who consider themselves Christ-followers! As Mt. 7:3-4 says:

³ "And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? ⁴ How can you think of saying to your friend, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye?"

The Letter to the Hebrews is all about God getting our attention and making sure that we are the best, most effective Christ-followers we can be! It is all about our relationship with Jesus and deciding to put our trust in Jesus who is superior to all!

Now we come to the end of the book. There is one last history lesson and application. Earlier in chapter 12 we have a lesson about two mountains. The reader is supposed to understand the first as Mount Sinai – the mountain where the Law was given to Moses. It was a holy mountain. God's presence was seen in the fire and lightning and felt in the trembling of the earth. It was so holy that you were not allowed to touch the mountain for fear of swift and sudden death. It was something to be feared and to remember.

And yet the people still disobeyed and fell away. Remember the story in Exodus 32? Moses was up on the mountain a bit too long for the people's liking and the people demanded a god that they could see. Aaron obliged and formed the Golden Calf. God knew what was happening and sent Moses back to punish the people. This first mountain was a place of reckoning!

The second mountain is Mount Zion – it is the dwelling place of God. In contrast to the old mountain, Zion is a place of joy and worship. God delivers his people. It is a contrast between the old and the new covenant. Now, with the coming, work, death, and resurrection of Jesus, everything has transformed. Instead of fear and death, we have hope and life... but it is still dependent on response and obedience. In the background is still the warning that you must respond/heed the words of Jesus...or be lost! We are so use

to thinking of Jesus as some sort of buddy walking along the road with us who overlooks our sins and transgressions. We have this picture of Jesus laughing off our sins and saying, “don’t worry!” and we have the audacity to call it GRACE. Grace that we push to its farthest limits and treat it callously and carelessly.

To those so-called followers who are careless with their relationships with God, the warning is given. “YOU MAY BE AT MT. ZION...BUT HOW MUCH MORE SEVERE IS THE JUDGEMENT OF THOSE WHO IGNORE JESUS HIMSELF. REMEMBER THE FATE OF THOSE IN THE WILDERNESS WHO IGNORED THE TEACHINGS OF MOSES!

Isn’t it better to live in the grace of Christ’s work on the cross, growing closer to Him daily as we are obedient to his commands than to live fearful of punishment, knowing that we are ignoring our Lord and Saviour?

God is trying to get our attention!

Have you ever thought about why the pandemic is happening? Outside of the science of viruses and illnesses – what can we learn and how can we apply Romans 8:28 to it...

28 And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love

God and are called according to his purpose for them.

I am not jumping on the bandwagon of “God is punishing all the evil people!” with the pandemic – the reality is that it is effecting the whole world...the good, the bad, and the ugly. We have seen some natural benefits. Nature seems to be healing itself. **BUT WHAT IF GOD IS TRYING TO GET OUR ATTENTION!**

I want to apply this to the Church. To those who claim to be believers and followers. To those say they stand on the side of God. IS GOD TRYING TO GET OUR ATTENTION. Have we been ignoring him?

I know that my life and the lives of many that I know were so incredibly busy that it was too easy to put aside work that God wanted us to do and say...later!

What if God does not want us to return to “normal” worship. In the last decade or so...regular church attendance has been considered 2 times a month as opposed to every week (if we were home). I am not trying to be legalistic. You can attend a church service 10 times a week and still be far away from Jesus. On the flip side...scripture tells us things like:

***¹⁰ A single day in your courts
is better than a thousand anywhere else!***

***I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God
than live the good life in the homes of the wicked.
(Ps. 84).***

Many have complained and stated how they miss going to church weekly. Perhaps God is getting our attention by letting us know what it feels like not to be able to congregate. WILL WE STILL TAKE OUR FREEDOM FOR GRANTED WHEN WE HAVE FORGOTTEN THE GLOBAL LOCKDOWN?

We have an opportunity to “LISTEN” to the voice of Jesus and allow him to use the pandemic for good. That “good” begins in our hearts. May we not treat our gatherings as once-a-week feel-good sessions where we want OUR MUSIC, and OUR TRADITIONS, where we want to feel COMFORTABLE. Mount Zion was not meant to be comfortable...but was meant to inspire and spur us on to the work of Jesus Christ.

It is my prayer that as churches begin to meet again, that a new normal will spring up. A NORMAL that is focused on increasing the kingdom of God through outreach, evangelism, and love. That our buildings will be seen as places of grace...where the questioners and the doubters will be met with love and compassion and will learn about the love of Jesus by believers’ actions and attitudes.

Has God gotten your attention? Have you heeded the warnings and looked within your hearts and minds? Do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God? Have you felt his love and want to love him in return? Decide today that each new day you have is one to love Jesus with all your heart, soul, and mind...all that you have and are...and that you will love your neighbours as you love yourself. What are you willing to do to see your friends, loved ones, co-workers, and neighbours come to faith in Jesus Christ?

Heed the last warning...Listen and respond to Jesus!