

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 24 July 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

How Will You Respond to God's Voice?

Hebrews 12:25-29

It seems that apocalyptic thinking is spreading like wildfire these days. Some kind of “clock” deep in people’s hearts seems to be telling them that time is running out, and that we are living in the end of days. Christians who are reading God’s Word, and who are spiritually awake and discerning, are able to look at the events going on around them, and sense that the time for Christ’s return is drawing near. New Agers and occultists of every shade are *very* aware of coming apocalyptic events, and are even *looking forward* to them, because they mistakenly believe that they, the “enlightened ones,” will survive it all, and emerge on the other side of the cataclysm in a “brave new world,” in which they will be highly “evolved,” like gods. Of course, these people have their own explanations for the coming Rapture of New Testament believers, which have been delivered to them by “extraterrestrial beings” (i.e., “demons”). Not surprisingly, Satan, the master of confusion, has given several conflicting messages to explain away the Rapture; but the most popular explanation is that “aliens” beamed those old-fashioned Bible-believers out of this world, because they weren’t willing to go along with the changes that are necessary in order to bring in the new age. One New Age author named Barbara Marciniak claims that one day, about 20 million souls world-wide will suddenly disappear, and will be taken to another dimension. She says:

“The people who leave the planet during the time of Earth changes do not fit in here any longer, and they are stopping the harmony of the Earth. When the time comes that perhaps 20 million people leave the planet at one time, there will be a tremendous shift of consciousness for those who are remaining.”¹

It is amazing to hear even agnostics and atheists, who have no belief in the Bible, talking as though civilisation as we know it were going to end soon. The prospect of a nuclear war between the U.S. and Russia is making people around the world shudder. The prospect of a global economic meltdown, combined with pandemics, severe famine, and societal breakdown, is striking people’s hearts with fear. Earthquakes and volcanoes are getting much stronger, and are increasing in volume exponentially. Bizarre, unprecedented droughts, wildfires, and insect invasions are hitting every corner of the globe.

What, then, should be our response to these things? Should we be trying to buy up gold and silver as insurance against hard times to come? Should we be stocking up on food and water? Well, stocking up on basic necessities, and starting a garden, are not bad ideas at all. Yet, the Scriptures do not really give mandates concerning material and physical preparations for the Christians who will be living at the end of the church age. The Lord’s instructions are to carry on until He comes; to preach the Gospel to the farthest corners of the earth; and to be always looking and waiting for His return. Material instructions don’t really enter into the picture. The only exception is Jesus’ warning to the Jewish believers who will be living during the Tribulation. In **Matthew 24**, Jesus warned the Jewish believers who will be living at the mid-point of the Tribulation not to run back home to grab any possessions, but rather to flee for their lives, when they see the Abomination of Desolation set up in the Temple by the Antichrist.

¹ Gary Bates, *Alien Intrusion* (United States: Master Books, 2004), p. 323.

Other than this one warning to the Jewish believers who will be living during the Tribulation period, the Lord is silent concerning physical and material instructions for the last days. Rather, all the warnings in the Scripture focus on *spiritual* preparation for the future. The issue that every man and woman must deal with is this: **How will I respond to what God has spoken from Heaven?** This is the only question of any real importance, because in the end, Heaven and earth *will* pass away! When God's plan for this world is consummated, the only things that will last are the **Word of God, and the Kingdom of God.**

That is what this morning's passage of Scripture from **Hebrews** is all about. The title of this message is *How Will You Respond to God's Voice?*

Read Hebrews 12:25-27.

There are two responses that each of us *must* make, in light of what God has spoken. First of all...

I. The unsaved *must* respond to God's call to salvation (vv. 25-27).

In **verses 25-27**, Paul is addressing, for one last time, those in his Hebrew audience who were not genuinely saved--those who had been making a *profession* of Christianity which was not real. His warning to them is: ***"See then that ye refuse not him that speaketh."***

Let's take a close look at this warning. First, who is he ***"that speaketh"***? It is the Lord. With this in mind, please notice that the verb "speaketh" is in the present tense. This means that the action is present, and ongoing. Paul is literally saying, "Refuse not the Lord, who *is speaking* to you from Heaven."

Now, what did Paul mean when he said that God "is speaking" from Heaven? For one thing, he means that the Lord was speaking directly *through him* at that very moment. Fresh new revelation from God was being given as Paul penned these words. Also, more new revelation would be given over the next 30 years, as the New Testament was being completed. The New Testament books were not the Apostles' words, but *God's* words, come down from Heaven.

In **2 Peter 1:21** Peter says, ***"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."*** Peter makes it clear that Scripture is not man's ideas or opinions. Rather, God's prophets spoke as they were "moved" by the Holy Ghost. The Greek word for ***"were moved"*** (*pheromenoi*) means "rushed, moved, or carried along." It has the idea of a piece of driftwood being moved along in a strong current, and going in whatever direction the water goes. The idea is that God controlled—and, in fact, gave—every word of Scripture. Though the authors of Scripture were fully aware of what they were writing, and were not in a "trance," they had no ultimate control over what they were writing, because it came directly from God. In **2 Timothy 3:16-17**, Paul says that ***"All scripture is given by inspiration of God."*** That phrase ***"is given by inspiration of God"*** is translated from a single Greek word (*theopneustos*), which literally means "God-breathed." In other words, God "breathed" the very words of Scripture. *Our* responsibility is to *receive* His words by faith.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

When Paul said that the Lord "is speaking" from Heaven, he meant it in the most profound sense of the word. God was still speaking His words through the Apostles at that present hour.

The people of Thessalonica received Paul's writings not merely as the words of men, but as the Word of God.

Now, this raises an important question. Is God *still* speaking to men *today*, in the 21st century? The answer is "yes!" He isn't giving *new* doctrine or revelation, because the canon of Scripture is closed, and complete. However, God is still speaking to us through the Scriptures, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who reveals the meaning of Scripture to men. That's why Scripture is called "***the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.***"

My friends, the Bible is not outdated. It is just as needed and relevant today as it was at the time it was written. It is God's Word; and it is a *living* Word. God is still speaking to us through His completed Word, the Bible; and He will continue to do so as long as the earth stands! In fact, right here in **Hebrews 12:26**, we see an example of an ancient Scripture that is still speaking to us at the present hour. Let's look again at **verse 26**. (**Read Hebrews 12:26.**)

Is this statement about the "shaking of earth and heaven" something that Paul had just spoken by fresh, new revelation from God? No! Paul was *quoting* an *Old Testament* Scripture—**Haggai 2:6**. Yet, Paul spoke of this prophecy as though it were brand new! He said, "***But now he hath promised.***" Paul wants us to understand that what Haggai wrote centuries ago is relevant to us at this present hour. It is as relevant as if it has just been spoken—as if it were today's front-page headline. And what is this message that God is conveying to us through the prophet Haggai? Well, let's look at that Old Testament Scripture, and find out.

Read Haggai 2:6-7.

In these verses, the LORD is describing what will happen at the end of the Tribulation period, just before the Messiah returns to set up His Kingdom. He says that the *whole earth* will be shaken. *Nothing* will be left *unshaken*! There will be an earthquake the likes of which mankind has never seen before, nor will ever see again. It will be *world-wide* in scope; and it will be unspeakably devastating.

Read Revelation 16:17-21.

What we've just read about is the shaking of the sea and the land, of which Haggai had prophesied 500 years before Christ's birth. Please note, though, that it will not be merely the earth and the seas that will be shaken. God told Haggai that that He will shake the "***heavens,***" as well. The Hebrew word for "the heavens" is *hashamayim*: and the ending of this word (-*ayim*) is dual. This means that there are *two* "heavens" in the physical realm. The first "heaven" is the sky around our earth (where the birds fly); and the second "heaven" is outer space, where God has placed the sun, moon, and stars.

So, then, when the LORD says that He will shake the "heavens and the earth," He is saying that ***all creation will be shaken before He returns!*** The devastation will be cosmic in scale! The whole universe will be in need of restoration and renovation after Christ returns to earth. Jesus Himself said that "***the powers of the heavens shall be shaken***" (**Matthew 24:29**). He also said that "***except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved alive***" (**Matthew 24:22**).

The bottom line is this: for the unsaved who will be living during the time of the Tribulation, there will be no way to escape God's wrath! You cannot run away from a global earthquake that flattens the tallest mountains of the world, and makes every island disappear. You cannot run away from forces that shake the very cosmos! People will run into the dens and rocks of the mountains, and will say, ***“Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”*** Even those unsaved people who survive this unspeakably devastating quake, and who are still living by the time of Christ's return to earth at the end of the Tribulation, will either die at the Battle of Armageddon, or will be judged by Christ Himself after His return, and cast into hell. Jesus foretold this Judgment of the Nations in **Matthew 25**.

Read Matthew 25:31-34 / 41, 46.

Christ made it very clear that when God has finished His terrible judgments at the end of the Tribulation, the only ones who will be permitted to live, and to enter into the Kingdom, are those who have repented and trusted in Him for salvation. Those who rejected Him will be cast into everlasting fire. Jesus also warned us of this coming day in His parable of the dragnet. He said, ***“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”***

This brings us back to Paul's warning to the false professors of salvation. Let's read **Hebrews 12:25** again. (**Read Hebrews 12:25.**) In this verse, Paul is once again harkening back to that day on Mount Sinai, when God descended to the mountain, and spoke to men “on earth.” Remember what happened on that day? The people begged that God would *not* speak to them anymore. As Paul put it in **Hebrews 12:19**, the people ***“intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more.”*** In other words, they didn't want to hear God's Word, because it made them afraid.

What is Paul saying? Well, to the *unsaved*, who had made only an empty profession of salvation, Paul is saying, “Remember how your fathers refused the Word of God that was given to them on Mount Sinai? You'd better not make the same mistake. You'd better not continue to refuse the Word of God that is being spoken to you again from Heaven, through the Scriptures. If your forefathers were not able to escape the *earthly* curses that God exacted on them for disobeying His Law, do you think that *you* will be able to escape the judgments of the Great Tribulation, if Christ should rapture His people out of this world this very day? And beyond that, do you think that you will escape God's *eternal* judgment in the Lake of Fire, if you refuse salvation through Jesus Christ?”

These are strong words of warning. However, that is not all that Paul has to say. Let's read **verses 26 and 27** once again. (**Read Hebrews 12:26-27.**)

Do you see what Paul is pointing out from the verse in **Haggai**? He's saying that when that terrible Day of the LORD comes—the day when God will shake the heavens and the earth—*everything* in the created order will be removed. *Everything* will be disestablished, thrown

down, and replaced. The heavens and earth will be horribly shaken, and in a state of ruin, and will need to be restored. The kingdoms of this world, which have been under the dominion of Satan for millennia, will be utterly thrown down; and a new order—Christ’s glorious Kingdom—will be set up in its place. (It will be the *real* “New World Order”!) Those who have rejected Christ will be violently removed. **Psalm 110:6** says that the Messiah, upon His return, will fill the earth with *dead bodies*.” Simply put, the earth will be trashed! Dead bodies, rubble, and twisted, smouldering ruins will fill the earth; and nothing that exalted itself against God will be allowed to enter into the Kingdom of Christ. **The only thing that will remain will be those things that cannot be shaken.**

So, what *are* the things that “cannot be shaken,” which will remain? Well, one thing that will never be shaken, or pass away, is the Word of God. In **Matthew 24:35** Jesus said, **“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”** The written Word of God will *never* be destroyed. It is eternally preserved and protected. It will outlast heaven and earth! However, there is one more thing that will never pass away. The other thing that will never pass away is the *Kingdom* of God.

Read Daniel 2:44.

The Kingdom of God will never be destroyed or moved. The question is: What *is* the Kingdom of God, exactly? Is it the *earthly government* that Christ will set up when He sets up His Kingdom? Is it the cities and lands over which Christ will rule in His 1,000-year Kingdom? No, it isn’t even these things—for even these things will eventually pass away, and be burned with fire at the very end of the world. **The Kingdom of God is the People of God—the spiritual realm of all who are born again.** Jesus said, **“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”** Those who are born again, and are indwelt by the Spirit of God, are the citizens of God’s Kingdom.

Read Luke 17:20-21.

Read Colossians 1:12-13.

In **Daniel 4:34**, we are told that God’s **“dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation.”** This “Kingdom”—the people of God, who are indwelt by God’s Spirit—will never be removed or shaken, though heaven and earth pass away. Those who are truly saved are in this Kingdom; and they need not fear the future, no matter how bad things may get in this life. Those who are *not* truly saved have good reason to fear the future, because they are not in that unshakeable Kingdom of God. That is why the Apostle Paul goes out of his way to urge those who had never truly entered the Kingdom to stop trusting in their worthless good works, and to place their faith in Christ alone. Paul is urging them to stop refusing the Word of God, which was being spoken to them from Heaven.

This warning still stands today; and it is just as relevant as it ever was before. Christ is coming back, folks! When He comes, the heavens and the earth will be shaken. The only things that will not be removed will be the Word of God, and the people of God, whom He has chosen to call by His name.

Are *you* in the Kingdom? Are you *really* in the Kingdom? You can't be "half in, and half out." If you have not truly placed your trust in Christ alone to save you, *please* do not put it off any longer! ***"Refuse not him that speaketh!"***

Paul has shown us that **the unsaved *must* respond to God's call to salvation.** Secondly...

II. **The saved must cling to God's grace in their daily lives (vv. 28-29).**

The Apostle Paul now turns to those in his audience who are truly saved. What should the response of the saved be, in light of what God has spoken from Heaven? Well, let's read the last couple verses of **Hebrews 12**, and find out.

Read Hebrews 12:28-29.

How should Christians respond to what is being spoken from Heaven? First, we should comfort ourselves with the assurance that we *belong* to God's Kingdom! Paul says, ***"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved."*** "Receiving" is a present tense participle. Paul is emphasising that we who are saved are, at this very moment, "receiving" the Kingdom. It is our present possession. We are citizens of God's Kingdom; and all the possessions that will come with that Kingdom in the future (such as crowns of glory, and cities and dominions that we will rule over during the Millennium) are already our inheritance! (How's *that* for eternal security?)

Secondly, since we know that we *are* members of Christ's Kingdom, we should respond to this wonderful truth by "having grace." This expression ***"let us have grace"*** could also be worded, "let us *hold onto* God's grace." Every Christian needs to *cling* to God's grace. We need God's favour *now* just as much as we needed it on the day we were saved. It is the grace of God that saved us in the first place; it is the grace of God that *keeps* us saved; and it is the grace of God that enables us to ***"serve God acceptably,"*** as Paul says here in **verse 28.**

The grace of God is available to every Christian at any time. God freely provides it to all His children. In **Ephesians 1**, Paul calls it ***"the riches of His grace."*** When you need God's grace, you need only go to the throne of grace and *ask* for it. When you are truly relying upon God's grace in the midst of your trials, you are able to serve God in a way that is truly acceptable to Him. Service to God that is done in reliance upon His grace is the *only* kind of grace that is acceptable to God. There are at least a couple reasons why this is so.

First, any work that is done in your own strength is *never* pleasing to God. Romans 8:8 says, ***"So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."*** God wants our service to manifest not *our own* wisdom and strength, but *His* wisdom and strength.

The Lord demonstrated this truth to me years ago, when I was preparing a sermon about this very subject—the subject of relying on God's grace. I was almost done writing the sermon, and I was pleased with the way my sermon was turning out. However, there was just one problem: I had forgotten to click "save" on the computer. When I came back from lunch, I found that a pair of little hands had been messing with the computer, and that the entire second point of the message, except for the first few words, had been deleted! I managed to recover some of it; but most of it was gone. I really couldn't remember it well enough to reconstruct

it, either. I believe that God was telling me, “All right, Stephen. What you *wrote* about relying on my grace was nice; but now, are you going to put it to practice? First, I want you to put it to practice by not getting in the flesh, and getting upset with the boys, or having a bad attitude; and secondly, I want you to trust me to help you write the rest of the sermon.” During lunch, I had been thinking of all kinds of practical, every-day ways in which we need to rely upon God’s grace; and I was ready to put them in the sermon. However, God said, “No. I want *this* to be your illustration of an every-day situation in which you need my grace.” Perhaps you’re thinking, “Does God really want us to rely upon His grace in even little situations like that?” Yes, He does! He wants to manifest His strength in our weakness.

Secondly, we need God’s grace to serve God acceptably, because **when we are relying on God’s grace, we are able to keep the right balance of confidence in God, and fear of God.** When you are truly relying on God’s grace, you will be mindful of the fact that **“our God is a consuming fire” (v. 29).** God has not “mellowed” since Old Testament times: He is still the same holy God who appeared on Mount Sinai. He is the God who hates sin. Because of our sin, we *deserve* to die, both physically and eternally; and Christians who are relying on God’s grace will always *remember* that fact. Remembering that salvation is a gift of God’s grace gives us **confidence**, on the one hand. (We need not ever fear being condemned to hell again, because our Saviour is ever faithful to us.) Yet, on the other hand, remembering that salvation is a gift of God’s grace instils in us a **healthy, respectful fear of God.** When we are relying on His grace, we recall that God is still a **“consuming fire”**; that He is still holy; that He still hates sin; and that He expects us, in our own lives, to rely on Him to *overcome* sin.

Christian, are clinging to God’s grace in your daily life? You needed His grace in order to be saved; and you need it in order to *serve* Him with your life *now*. In his hymn “Amazing Grace,” John Newton, the once proud, arrogant, self-reliant slave-trader, wrote,

“Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come; ‘Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.”

Conclusion: Are we living in the last days? I believe we are. All the signs seem to be pointing that way. However, those who are in Christ need not fear. In his last-days prophecy, David wrote, **“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof” (Psalm 46:1-3).** David was not speaking figuratively when he wrote of the mountains being moved into the sea; he was speaking *literally*. These unspeakably fearful, awful things will *literally* come to pass in the future (perhaps the not-so-distant future). The Lord *will* shake the heavens, the sea, and the dry land. *Everything* will be removed. Yet, God’s Word, and God’s Kingdom, will never be moved. **Are you in the Kingdom of God?** If there be even the slightest doubt in your mind, you need to get it settled today! The way to get into the Kingdom is not by trying to “do your best.” It is by repenting of your sin and self-righteousness, and casting your entire confidence upon Jesus Christ, who paid the full penalty for your sins. Won’t you trust Him today? “Refuse not Him that speaketh!”

If you are saved already, I would ask, “Are you trusting in God’s grace for your daily life?” You desperately need Him. He wants you to *trust* Him. A human father may fail his child; but God *never* fails. Because Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, you have the sure hope of eternal life; and you have all the riches of His grace that you need every day. Won’t you trust Him more, Christian?

