Worship God with Reverence and Awe

Hebrews 12:18-29
Key Verse: Hebrews 12:28
“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,”

Happy New Year! I bet many of you have heard the phrase, “You are what you eat” or some version of it before, but do you know it’s origin? It was first introduced by a French lawyer/politician (Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin) in 1825. Interestingly he gained fame not as a lawyer or politician but as a philosopher that related food and culture. And his actual quote went something like “Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es.” Which translates to “Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are.” Then in 1863, a Christian German philosopher, Ludwig Feuerbach used a form of it in an essay titled “Concerning Spiritualism and Materialism” saying “man is what he eats,” relating it a spiritual nature. But it didn’t emerge in English until the 1920’s. And oddly enough we still use this phrase even today and we’ve even updated for the computer age into, “garbage in garbage out.” The reason I’m bringing this up is because I thought that it was very similar concept to a book I came across the other day while I was reading a Desiring God blog. “It was written by Greg Beale titled “We Become What We Worship”. His thesis is simple: “What people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or for restoration.” He traces the theme throughout Scripture to show that we are worshippers, and that our worship exposes us and changes us. We either revere the world and are conformed to the sinful patterns of the world, or we revere God and are progressively conformed into his likeness.” And as I was thinking about a key verse for this year the concept of worshipping God came to me. So, I chose Hebrews 12:28 as our key verse this year, it says, “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,”. And the concept of “you are what you eat” or “you are what you worship” resonated with me. It is true in both body and spirit. Before we get into it lets pray.

Let me give you a pop quiz, who remembers last year’s key verse? It was Philippians 1:6 “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” I chose that verse because I hoped to encourage you by reminding you how much God loves you. And that he started something great in you and wants to complete what he’s started in you. Sometimes we’re not motivated to make sacrifices because we’re afraid the outcome won’t be worth our efforts. But through that verse I wanted you to see that we’re not alone, God is our partner in all we do and he is the one who advances the gospel not us. For our part, we need to live lives worthy of the gospel. And through this, we can have confidence that God will complete the work he started. When last year started, we were right in the middle of our Bible house remodeling process, a process that seemed like it took forever. But as we begin this year all the work is done and what a difference it has made. This is only the second time we’ve ever had worship here, so forgive us we’re still trying to get things figured out. I first started coming to Bible study back in 1988/89 and this is the first time in my 29 years of ministry to have a building

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dedicated to serving God. During this time, our fellowship has been like a nomadic tribe, we haven't really had a place that we could settle down. Everything had to be portable because we've always been on the move. We've gotten good at setting things up and taking them down.

In a sense, we're much like the Israelites when they left Egypt. They wandered in the desert for forty years before they entered into the promised land. And this is how I will connect us to our passage this morning. God had mightily rescued his people from the bonds of slavery in Egypt and he set his people free so that they could worship him. "Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what the Lord says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me." (Ex 8:1) And through a series of ten plagues God convinced the Pharaoh to let his people go. And so God led his people out of Egypt and they came to Mt Sinai. This was the place where God was going to meet with his people for the very first time. This was going to be an historic meeting, for they had never met God before. God loved his people so much, he told Moses to let them know, "'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations **you** will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, **you** will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'" (Ex 19:4-6) And as the people prepared to meet their maker the people had to consecrate themselves, that is to set themselves apart and dedicate their life to God. In order to prepare themselves they had to do things like; clean up - wash their clothes, prepare their hearts - abstain from sexual relations.

And this is where we start our passage today. The author of Hebrews, is talking to a group of believers, those who profess to worship God, and he is contrasting God's people before Mt Sinai where God first met his people and established his covenant through Moses and at Mt Zion, the place where that covenant will be ultimately fulfilled. In both situations, God is addressing his people but the imagery is very different between the two places. Verses 18-21 are a description of Mt Sinai and verses 22-24 are of Mt Zion. Take a look at verses 18-21, "**18** You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; **19** to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, **20** because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." **21** The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." The phrases "You have not come …" (12:18) and "But you have come …" (12:22) describe approaching God in worship. It's interesting to note that in the first section here he speaks of "something that can't be touched, like a blazing fire, darkness, gloom, a storm, the sound of a trumpet, and a voice …". The author is not really concerned with the place itself, but with the awesomeness of the presence of God. God of the Old Testament could not be approached for fear of death and the description in verses 18 -21 describes Mt Sinai's terror and climaxes when Moses, the mediator of the old covenant, declares his fear. When God descended upon the mountain it was burning because the Lord descended upon it with thunder, lightning and fire.

I found it interesting that there were seven things that described Mt Sinai or Mt Doom as it may have been known as; fire, darkness, gloom, storm, trumpet, voice & command, and Moses' fear. In

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contrast, there are seven joyful things that describe the new covenant. Take a look at verses 22-24. “But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” The joyous fellowship of God’s people at Mount Zion climaxes in the proclamation of redemption through the blood of Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant. This contrast emphasizes the great privileges God’s people now enjoy through Jesus: cleansing from sin and access to His presence. The author of Hebrews doesn’t give a name for the first mountain, but offers three for this one: Mount Zion, … the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. The name Mount Zion establishes the parallel with the first description of (the unnamed) Mount Sinai. Zion and city of … God were terms that could be used to describe the earthly Jerusalem, especially in reference to its representation of God’s presence among His people. But in this case, these terms are used to describe the heavenly eternal “place” where the living God dwells with His people, Abraham looked forward to “the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (11:10). This is the true “promised land” which the wilderness generation lost and to which the faithful have always journeyed (11:13–16). This is heaven, the true “most holy place” into which Jesus has given His people access (see 9:24).

In the Old Testament, the Promised Land was special because it was the place where God’s people were to live in fellowship with Him. Jerusalem, also called Zion, with its Temple, became the focal point of Israel on earth. The Most Holy Place of the Temple was the center of Jerusalem because it was the particular place where God promised to dwell among them. Thus, the Most Holy Place, Jerusalem/Zion, and the Promised Land were intimately linked within the Old Testament. All three came to symbolize God’s dwelling with His people and their living in harmony and fellowship with Him. In this new place, Jesus is the mediator, not Moses. Moses could only tremble before God. Jesus’ blood is the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (12:24). Jesus brought cleansing from sin and established the new covenant with His sprinkled blood. Cain spilt Abel’s blood on the ground when he murdered him. The blood of Abel “cried out” to God as a witness to Cain’s sin. Abel’s blood proclaimed the verdict, “guilty.” Jesus’ blood, sprinkled on our hearts, proclaims a better word—the verdict, “forgiven,” “cleansed,” “empowered for obedience.” It is through this blood that we and all of God’s people have access into the joyful presence of God on Mount Zion. If we reject this blood (v24), we become subject to the awful separation from God and judgment depicted in 12:18–21.

Take a look at verses 25-27. “See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? 26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” 27 The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.” These verses make it clear why it is so important to obey God’s present invitation. When the author speaks of those who refused him who warned them on earth (12:25),

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he's probably referring to the generation of Israelites that were lost in the desert. They heard God speak on Sinai, but refused to trust Him to take them into Canaan. Even though they heard God (3:7–19), they didn't escape God's judgment (12:25). But now, as we have seen, God speaks from heaven through the blood of Christ, inviting us into His presence. At Sinai, God's voice shook the earth (12:26) but God has promised through Haggai, "Once more, at the Judgment, I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens" (12:26). The author paraphrased this prophesy (see Haggai 2:6) in a way that deepens, but does not pervert, its meaning. Haggai's original words read, "… I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land." In Haggai's mind, "the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land" served as a description of the created order. The earthly Jerusalem is but a picture of the heavenly reality where God dwells. This whole world we see will be overthrown so that the heavenly Jerusalem alone will remain stable.

The conclusion the author gives tells us what to do. Take a look at verses 28-29. "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire." In this verse, we are reminded of the precious gift we are receiving; a kingdom that cannot be shaken. We live in a world that is growing more and more insecure every day. For example, at yesterday's New Year's Eve celebration in New York there was an unprecedented 7,000 police officers patrolling Times Square, with helicopters hovering above, boats in the Hudson and East rivers, and officers on rooftops and the streets lined with sand filled dump trucks. However, in God's kingdom we won't need any of that for we are assured of its security and blessed with such a wonderful community of believers and at its center is God. He is the King. He has established it and he alone sustains it. In response to God's wonderful gift we should have is deep, heartfelt, thanksgiving with undying wonder and gratitude for what God has done for us. We worship through our thanks to God. And that worship is accompanied by reverence and awe (12:28) because it truly acknowledges who God is and how we relate to Him. I read that the Greek word that translates reverence in this verse comes from the same family of words as the word translated "in holy fear," which the author used in 11:7 to describe Noah's obedience. Such offerings of thanksgiving imply our obedience as we worship God. I'm not sure about you, but for me I often take God for granted and I come to him casually or with a caviler attitude. I come to God in a way that is comfortable to me. But we can't come to God in the way that we want, we must come to God according to his preference with awesome reverence for him. Because as verse 29 tells us, "God is a consuming fire." Moses spoke these words to emphasize the gravity of breaking God's covenant. In as much grace that God has shown us, we can NEVER forget that he is still our Almighty Creator. And as such we MUST give him that due respect and adoration that he deserves. We have been so blessed and given such wonderful privileges, we should not become like spoiled children with a sense of entitlement but rather honor our heavenly Father with thanksgiving and worship him acceptably with reverence and awe. Romans 12:1 tells us, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." This verse gives us an idea of how to worship God acceptably. We can choose to use our bodies to do good, or we can choose to use them for bad. So, I pray in this coming new year, each of us may offer our bodies (our time, our abilities, whatever we have) to serve God and love

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one another. Remember, you are what you eat, you become what you worship. The more we worship God, the more we grow to be like him each day. I sincerely pray that God may richly bless you in 2017.

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