

# Hebrews 12:14-29

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning and welcome to the wonderful season where we begin to place our minds on the coming of Christ, Advent, His arrival, just a few weeks away by way of celebration.

And with that, then the advantages of a new year, all those advantages are within reach for young and old alike.

Think of the possibilities. Old patterns can be laid down, new ones, better ones can be picked up in their place.

Christmas is even closer to us than the new year. We're racing toward the birth of a baby, a sign of something new, like the first snow, a fresh start.

What a season. And what a scripture text to match. The text, of course, is dominated by two mountains embedded in the middle.

[ 1 : 22 ] Yet on either side, we have, historically speaking, two different groups of God's people. Looming on the landscape of the text is Mount Sinai, there in 18 through 20 or so.

And then, contrasted with Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. Yet on either end of the two mountains, I will argue, in the mind of the author, are historically two groups of people.

I suppose you could call this sermon, the two mountains. Or by way of listener, applied to two different groups of people.

All of whom were in need of a fresh start. A new beginning. A turning over of the leaf. Well, how might I prove that a season of spiritual renewal is what the writer has in mind and especially for a generation on the front side of the mountains that has yet to live out their lives in newness with God. Take a look. There's a clue hidden in verses 14 through 17 on the front side of the mountains that reveals the writer has a new generation of people in mind.

[ 3 : 13 ] The clue is given in verse 15. In quotation marks. Three simple words.

Root of bitterness. A parenthetical phrase. The quotation marks. The translation committee's way of telling us that these words are borrowed from an Old Testament setting.

In this case, the Old Testament text that the writer is drawing on is embedded in a moment when God's people were in the midst of covenantal renewal.

Take a look. All the way back. Deuteronomy 29. This little phrase. Root of bitterness.

You'll find it in the Hebrew in verse 17 and 18 where we read Beware lest there be any among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of those nations.

[ 4 : 27 ] Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit. root. The author of Hebrews is pulling on the speech of Moses from Deuteronomy 29 and if you look at the heading of Deuteronomy 29 it's the covenant being renewed in Moab.

Let me put it to you this way. There is a new generation standing on one side of the Jordan. Not the generation of their parents who stood on the foothills of Mount Sinai.

Not the generation that heard God thunder forth from the mountains but a new generation the children of those. This is Joshua's generation standing ready to embark and take possession of the promises of God.

So as our text is weighted in the middle by two mountains Sinai and Zion the Mosaic law and the word of the gospel in Christ what is done on earth and what is real in heaven it is embedded in the author's mind recalling an entire generation of young people who get to make their own promise to walk in the ways of the Lord.

Indeed in Exodus 24 God spoke and the people committed their ways to the Torah and they failed and the entire generation died out save two men and now those two men in Deuteronomy 29 are still on their feet those two men mercifully saved by God and a whole new generation that are told

don't let a root of bitterness come to you in fact that entire generation stood on their feet at the Jordan River and pledged that they would give their lives to God and if you go back and read the record in Joshua they did just that they are one of the greatest generations to ever live they stood as a young person collectively a young congregation and they were on their feet and committing their ways to the Lord that historical setting is in the mind of the author as he writes verses 14 through 17 he is recalling the time when a new generation had a new beginning a fresh start a first snow a people that would possess the land the parents had been at Sinai but there at Moab and they stand and say to the

[ 7 : 28 ] Lord I will give you my heart entirely I will put away the foolish idols that have held me captive in the wilderness and I am prepared to walk in and take possession of all your promises they would need strength to do it they would need straight paths that's where we ended last week lift your drooping hands strengthen your weak knees verse 12 make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not put out a joint but may be healed this is the language given to a cadre of people who need to get moving through life so many of you here today stand as it were like young Israel in the plains of Moab in need of a new day and a new way how would you this young generation walk with the

Lord verse 15 or 14 strive for peace with everyone and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord strive for peace namely peace with one another live in community peaceably and in a holy way in other words put down your wilderness wanderings or the wanderings of the generation before you keep the roots of weeds out of your life in Deuteronomy 29 those were the gods of the nations those were the lesser loves that would pull upon the heart strings of a young generation he gives an example by way of contrast an example that every young person here ought to look at read meditate on and take to heart verse 16 that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau who sold his birthright for a single meal for you know that afterward when he desired to inherit the blessing he was rejected but he found no chance to repent though he sought it with tears Esau was a man who did not live peaceably with his brother nor with his parents he is a man who the scriptures claim was unholy and always hasty he was a man who was willful to his own detriment Esau is the red blooded American male before we had America Esau believed that everything must be had now Esau had short term needs only they were the only needs he knew ask Esau you got any long term needs don't have any but I need something now

Esau was ruled by the immediacy of his appetites this is the example that the writer to Hebrews is throwing before the young generation standing on the verge and the call to inherit the promises Esau quickly forfeited a future inheritance for the sake of feeding his flesh in the present moment when it came to women he preferred them Hittite and more than one he wanted two took them in the same year the scriptures say that it made his parents suffer a bitterness that's our word again in the text a bitterness of spirit so disheartened were they so there it is two mountains rising in the middle of the text and on one side a previous generation that was to give a renewal of covenant to stand on their feet and say as they would have said under the voice of Moses as for me and my house we will serve the

Lord this is a rejection of all things in the world that they had known between Mount Sinai and that river and I say to you as your pastor as your friend as your brother as your fellow laborer as the one who's walking to inherit the promises that this congregation in all of its youthfulness should represent that congregation and run with earnestness and infidelity the text indicates that Esau went another direction look at verse 17 you know that afterward when he desired to inherit the blessing he was rejected for he found no chance to repent though he sought it with tears in other words if we are likened to Israel in their youthful generation moment we are not to despise all the promises that await us in heaven we are not to despise heaven we are not to live for the present we are not to be hasty later he was tricked and left without the blessing and the scriptures will tell us that

[ 13 : 12 ] Esau lifted up his voice and wept the only blessing given Esau was that after many decades he would finally throw off the yoke of his brother how can I get you to see this as a young man Esau who knew the ways of the Lord decided he would go his own way and it cost him decades but there was merciful hope that after decades perhaps you'll be back in fellowship the point is proven the writer in setting down these words is looking for covenantal renewal let me put it to you this way he's looking for your promise your promise looking for your promise today to stand on the plains of

Moab with Christ before you and the world behind you that's what the mountains illustrate these old ways of life and the new ways there are two mountains in verses 18 to 24 and they are designed to let you know that there are two different covenants there are two ways forward in the world you can go forward across the Jordan with Christ or you can go back to Mount Sinai where it still stands you can go moving in toward heaven and empowered by Christ's blood or you can look for something here but know this whatever is here will be shaken forever seven fold aspects of the old way the sound of the trumpet the beast touching the stoning that would occur the terrifying nature of the sight the trembling of the fear all of

Sinai and its gloom and its darkness and its weightiness which was unable to deliver the people all standing on one end and in contrast verse 22 with Mount Zion and again a seven fold characteristic of that place the city of the living God the heavenly Jerusalem the innumerable angels he is trying to paint for you two diametrically different pictures one of life here that is leading to judgment and one of life there wherein there is salvation and there is an assembly and to God and to the spirits of the! and then he leaves Christ for the very end of his list as if it's to say and we're finally arriving at what I want to say and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant and to the blood that speaks better than anything even concerning the blood of Abel there there is a proving of his point in play he is recalling a generation that needs to covenant with God by throwing their eyes on heaven and in contrast to what's going on on the earth and notice then he follows the backside of the mountain speaking to another generation and in doing so I speak to another group of people here he speaks to an older generation who through life experience set out with God but lost him along the way the clue just as it was in the first part by way of italics and a drawing upon an

Old Testament historical record is put forth behind the mountains in verse 26 with a second quotation yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens and he is not only grabbing those words he is grabbing that historical setting and context so where is it take a look at Haggai if I could find Haggai Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi Zephaniah Haggai there it is let's find our verse you'll see it in chapter two you'll see it right there I will shake in verse six yet once more in a little while

[18:21] I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land I will shake all the nations you'll see it again later in chapter two verse twenty one speak to Zerubbabel governor of Judah saying I am about to shake the heavens and the earth but the thing I want you to see is the historical setting of Haggai itself it is placed to a group of people who were set about to rebuild the temple God had wondered why have you not yet finished what you set out to do that's a whole generation they'd been in the land about forty years and hadn't accomplished what God wanted for their short term needs or their long term needs and so he says to them why are you considering your ways and your homes and your things rather than the things of God in other words he's saying to an entire people you need to be shaken you need to be shaken to realize that you once decades ago set out to walk with

God you made a covenant did you not did you not say in your youthfulness that you would seek him with all your heart do you not know or remember the place where it began and you gave your life to Christ and yet like me you know that life wears on and often our faith wears out and this word on the back side of the two mountains!

that are! reading our text recalls a generation that needed to recommit a new covenant and indeed they began to do it and so I say to you today as part of that generation have we let things go on for too long have we been too concerned with our own world and not the house of the Lord have we lived our lives to the point where for some they are in complete disarray the time Haggai has in mind was fulfilled and set in motion at Christ's first coming in other words when he says in our text that God was going to shake the heavens and the earth that is a promise that the Hebrew writer reflects on and indicates that we have now come to

Christ for in Christ the earth and the heavens have already been shaken what does it mean then for us simply this morning by way of response in the book of Hebrews you can see it clearly what it will call for you if you have wandered and lost your way if you are in need of standing today walking the aisle looking for the sawdust trail there's hope for you yet I know there's hope for you because you're still breathing he didn't lay you out in the wilderness and take your breath first of all verse 25 see that you do not refuse!

him who is speaking now that's not me that's God God was speaking to this early generation to whom this letter was written God had spoken in these last days through his son!

[ 22 : 06 ] God was speaking to them how can you restart with God today how can you get a fresh start how can you throw off maybe what are decades of disintegration in life first don't refuse him who is speaking God is now giving you another offer today this day under the hearing of my voice and if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven think of it God is speaking to you today from heaven through my words that are attached to his inscripturated call that you are to grab hold like that generation in Haggai's day and pick up the standard once again the righteous though he falls seven times will get up do not refuse Him who is speaking to be grateful for what you have received in

Christ verse 28 therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken may gratitude be the mark of any older man or woman here who knows through their own life that the mess they live is in large part their own undoing but be grateful that God has given you something that will not be shaken though all hell may have broken loose in an effort to take you from God you sit here today and you can stand and say I am recommittting my life to his ways just as the people of Haggai's day did be grateful gratitude ought to be the mark of everyone following Christ number three offer acceptable worship!

there it is the end of our text let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe that's your way back you might be sitting here today and go wow it's nice to know that there's a word on Sunday for the young generation who's setting out but what about the ones of us who have gotten lost along the way and the word for you is clear don't refuse him today be grateful for what he's given you today and now offer him acceptable worship and you know what acceptable worship looks like in your life in our text from the back end or the front end earlier we know what it's looking like it's listening to the word of God it's living in peace with the family of God it's restoring relationships within your own home for God things that Esau never did until decades later it's pursuing holiness again with the vigor of your youth and you do it all in reverence and awe in the sight of God imagine imagine you walk to church and the snow is falling and you say this is a good day it's the first snow that's the only reason it's good but the first snow is good it's going to lay down on the land and it's going to make all things look new or at least it's going to put a cover on the things that look old imagine coming into church young or old and being able to walk out with a fresh start

I can't really think of anything better it's there in the little song we sang rejoice rejoice Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel imagine rejoice Emmanuel will come to you and walk with you again Emmanuel will come to you and walk with you and your entire generation it is time for covenant making with God it is time for covenant renewal before God who's ready who wants in who wants to go home under a new page perhaps the better question is who wouldn't want in who wouldn't walk that road again who wouldn't want to taste and see and be strengthened in the grace that is found in Christ that we might live in gratitude and in glory to him

I cannot think of a more appropriate Christian message and Christmas message as we prepare for Advent or Christ's arrival that you would come to him that you would come to him again that you would come to him again that you would recommit your ways to him again and you can do that through participation in this table for this is where the covenant was cut that gets you home before dark taste and see that the Lord is good don't you love his last line it's kind of like English understatement for our God is a consuming fire talk about a way to drop the hammer he drops the hammer younger generation who stands on the plains of Moab

[ 28 : 19 ] Holy Trinity Church and all of its youthfulness with a lifetime and decades of service before you be not unholy or sexually immoral be not hasty let not a root of bitterness grow up among you but pledge yourself to the Lord that we might see in you what we saw in Joshua's day a whole generation that served God with all their lives believe me there are plenty of us older folks around who feel like the fortunate few that God still speaks to the days of Haggai where we too can come and reclaim the years the locusts have eaten our heavenly father we ask that we would embrace the writer to the

Hebrews call to recommit our vows to you I pray for this generation in its youthfulness that there would be a collective affirmation to Christ and his ways and I pray for those of us who are of an aging generation that we would return to working on the house in ways that restore even our own homes before you do that for us through the blood of Christ and empower us through his death and resurrection in Jesus name amen to