

BEHOLD YOUR GOD! **(Hebrews 12:25-29)**

Charlie Brown and Lucy were outside on a clear night. The stars were shining brightly, and they began to talk about the vastness of the universe. They decided to count the stars. After a few minutes of counting, Lucy announced, “I’m going back inside. I’m beginning to feel insignificant.”

If you struggle with pride or an overdeveloped sense of your own significance, I suggest that you go outside on a clear night and look up. Or go to your computer and google the pictures that are being sent to us by the James Webb deep space telescope. That might serve to put you in your place, so to speak.

I am, however, convinced the primary purpose of the universe is not to make you and me feel insignificant. Its real job is to help us see the grandeur and the majesty and the power and the glory of our God. David tells us in Psalm 19:1, “The heavens declare the glory of God.”

I am also convinced that our great need is to see God for how marvelous and magnificent He truly is.

In the 9:23 of the book that bears his name, the prophet Jeremiah wrote, “Thus says YHWH, ‘Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches.’”

People who are given to bragging about themselves often boast in those very areas—their wisdom (how smart they are), their might (how strong or skilled they are), and their riches (how wealthy they are or the things they own). *“Look at where I live; Look at what I drive; Look at what I wear.”*

Instead of boasting in those things, God offers us an alternative in the very next verse: “But let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me.” God is saying, “If you just have to boast about something, tell others that you are well-acquainted with who I am.”

Then at the end of that 24th verse, God says something about Himself that we need to learn and know, “that I am YHWH who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares YHWH.”

I have come to believe that the strength and vitality of a person’s spiritual life is in direct proportion to how big his or her God is. If your God is small and limited, your spiritual life will be weak and fragile, but if your God is big and strong, you will be durable and resilient.

A puny Christian has a puny God, but an overcoming, victorious Christian has an all-powerful, almighty God. My friend, how big is your God?

As we look at today’s passage, I want you to “Behold Your God.” We are going to examine three truths about who God is, and I am going to follow up each of those truths with a single question that I want you to answer for yourself. You can’t answer that question for your kids or grandkids or spouse or your friends. Answer for yourself.

Let’s begin by reading our text—Hebrews 12:25-29. Now, let’s go to statement and question #1:

Our God Is the One Who Speaks: Will You Obey Him?

The author of Hebrews has already given a good deal of attention to the fact that our God is a God who speaks. In fact, that is how he began his letter. Go back to 1:1-2.

God is not silent. God is not mute. Rather, God loves to communicate, and He does so in a variety of ways. God speaks to us through nature. He speaks to us through our conscience. God speaks to us through circumstances. God speaks to us through other people, people who are Spirit-filled and Spirit-led. God speaks to us unerringly through Scripture. This Book does not contain the Word of God. This Book is the Word of God. Best of all, God has and continues to speak to us through His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the best and final revelation of God to us.

- What is God saying to you through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus?
- What is God saying to you through the example of Jesus?
- What is God saying to you through the teachings of Jesus?

The author Hebrews quotes again and again from the OT Scriptures. Each time he does so, He is giving us what God has said. Notice 3:7. Before he quotes from Psalm 95, he tells his reader, “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says . . .” He doesn’t say, “As David said” or “As the psalmist said.” He wants us to know that when we read Scripture, we are reading what the Spirit said. The author of Hebrews is in agreement with Paul who claimed in Ephesians 6:17 that the word of God is the sword of the Spirit.

When I preach from the Bible, I am not attempting to use the Bible as my sword. I do not use the Bible as a weapon. Some preachers do, and each Sunday they leave their hearers wounded and bloody and they leave feeling confident they have done the Lord’s work.

My goal is to preach God’s word as accurately and clearly as I can. As I do so, I trust that the Holy Spirit will wield His own sword to do His own work. Instead of leaving you wounded and bloody, the Spirit of God will use the blade of His sword to do some needed surgery so that you will be healed and made whole. There may be some pain, but it will be a necessary pain indicating healing is taking place.

Look at how the author of Hebrews phrases v. 25. He puts it in the negative. He tells us what we must not do.

A few months ago, I came across a comedian named Mike Goodwin. He talked about his Mama and how she would correct him. She would look at him sternly and say to him, “What you’re not gonna do is stand there with the screen door open. That’s what you’re not gonna do.” She would say, “What you’re not gonna do is talk back to me. That’s what you’re not gonna do.”

The writer of Hebrews is saying to us, “What you’re not gonna do is refuse the One who is speaking. That’s what you’re not gonna do.” The One who is speaking is God. In other words, “You are going to obey God. That is what you are going to do.

In addition to giving us a negative command, he seeks to motivate us by giving us a negative example. Moses was God’s spokesman to the people of Israel. He told them

what to do, and they didn't do it. After they didn't do what they had been commanded, they didn't escape judgment. Now, we are being told what to do from heaven, and if we don't do it, how much less are the chances that we will escape the consequences of disobedience.

We need to keep in mind that the gospel-call to trust Jesus is not merely an invitation that we can accept or not accept based on our druthers. It is not like me or you inviting someone else to a church function. They can choose to come or not come. It is up to them. If they choose not to come, we are not going to insult them or judge them or get back at them in any particular way. It was an invitation. That's all.

The call of the gospel to trust Christ is not an invitation. It is a command. Al Mohler wrote:

The gospel is never presented solely as an offer to be considered. It is presented as an ultimatum, as something to be either received or rejected. Presenting the gospel always produces a response. One either hears the gospel and believes it unto salvation or hears the gospel and rejects it unto eternal judgment.

That means, if you present the good news of Christ to someone and they get mad at you or insult you or ignore you, they haven't rejected you; they have rejected God. Those who refuse God to the end will not escape His judgment.

God has spoken and He is speaking to you. I repeat my question, "Will you obey Him?"

The first semester of my freshman year in college, I had been struggling with whether or not God was calling me into ministry. At least that was what I thought or told myself. More precisely, I was really struggling with whether or not I would say "yes" to the God who was calling me into ministry. Late one night I was in my dorm room sitting at my desk. I flipped open the Bible. I was going to look for a verse in Romans, but it opened to the OT Book of Job. There was some color that caught my eye. It was a verse I had highlighted some weeks before. It was Job 22:21. I re-read those words I had read back in the summer. That verse says, "Submit to God and be at peace with him."

At that moment, I knew I needed to submit to God. He was calling me to preach. The next Sunday I went to home church and walked down the aisle during the invitation. I shook the hand of my pastor and told him God was calling me to preach." I submitted, to God and His peace came.

What is God calling you to do? Will you obey Him?

Our God Is the Judge Who Shakes: Can You Give Him Thanks?

Just a couple of verses prior to this week's text, God is said to be "the judge of all." That word stands without qualification. God is the judge of all, everyone, you, me, and all others without exception.

At times, this Judge has chosen to shake this world. I had considered entitling this message, "There's a Whole Lotta of Shakin' Goin' On," but then, I thought better of it.

What did God use to shake the earth? According to v. 26, God used His voice. The

author is referencing what he spoke of in the preceding verses, the occasion when God met Moses on Mount Sinai. If you care to read about it from the OT, you will find it in Exodus 19 & 20. In chapter 19 we are told the mountain trembled. In chapter 20 we learn that the people trembled.

Today's text tells that there is coming a time when God isn't going to shake the earth alone. He will also shake the heavens. When God commences to shake, there are going to be things that shake loose. Much of what shakes will come unhinged and unglued. They will become disconnected to whatever had formerly held them.

The last part of v. 27 tells us the purpose for this shaking: "In order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain." Then, in v. 28 he tells us what it is that cannot be shaken. It is the Kingdom. His kingdom cannot be shaken. It, and it only, will remain. If you are a member of His kingdom, you have reason to be grateful.

I may be going beyond the text, but I believe God has a way of shaking us to pry us loose from those things to which we ought not be attached. Have you allowed yourself to be tied emotionally to things, habits, even people that you ought not to be connected to or associated with. God can shake you loose from those connections. That shaking may not be a pleasant experience, but it is a necessary one.

If, however, you are connected to the Kingdom—to Kingdom priorities, to Kingdom practices, to Kingdom people, when He starts shaking, those attachments will hold strong. If you are not being anchored by the Kingdom, you, my friend, are in trouble.

God can shake in every area and in every arena. He can shake in economics, in politics, in education, in science, in military conflict, in weather disturbances, in the culture wars, and in everything you could possibly imagine.

I am reminded of Habakkuk 1:5 where we read, "Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told." That was true in Habakkuk's day. It is true in ours. God is still working, and so, we should still be watching. And as you watch, be prepared to be amazed at what He does.

God is starting to shake, and the world is starting to tremble. Are you anchored by His Kingdom? Can you give Him thanks?

As I was preparing this message, a chorus came to mind that I haven't sung in decades. I couldn't tell you the last time I sang it. Do you ever sing this chorus:

Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul
Thank you, Lord, for making me whole
Thank you, Lord, for giving to me
Thy great salvation so rich and free

As the shaking intensifies, can you give Him thanks? That is both our job and our privilege. Paul instructs us in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." Let's do God's will for us by giving Him thanks.

Our God Is the Fire Who Consumes: Do You Worship Him?

Look at the last two verses of chapter 12, vv. 28-29. Verse 28 tells us what to do, and v. 29 tells us why we are to do it. We are to worship God because He is a consuming fire. I want to make sure that we read this verse correctly. Notice that the verb is in present tense not in past tense. The verse does not say that God was a consuming fire. It says that He is a consuming fire.

We need to worship the God of the Bible, the God who is, not the God of popular culture, not the God who never was. Let me read to you something that portrays God as He never was but is often viewed as the God who is.

The following was written by the late journalist/columnist Nicholas Van Hoffman:

The Mush God has been known to appear to millionaires on golf courses. He appears to politicians at ribbon-cutting ceremonies and to clergymen speaking the invocation on national TV at either Democratic or Republican conventions. The Mush God's presence is felt during Brotherhood Week and when Rotarians come together.

The Mush God has no theology to speak of, being a Cream of Wheat divinity. The Mush God has no particular credo, no tenets of faith, nothing that would make it difficult for believer and non-believer alike to lower one's head when the temporary chairman tells us the Reverend, Rabbi, Father, Mufti, or So-and-So will lead us in an innocuous, harmless prayer, for this god of public occasions is not a jealous god. You can even invoke him to start a hooker convention and he/she or it won't be offended.

God of the Rotary, God of the Optimists' Club, Protector of the Buddy System, the Mush God is the Lord of secular ritual, of the necessary but hypocritical forms and formalities that hush the divisive and the derisive. The Mush God is a serviceable god whose laws are not chiseled on tablets but written on sand, open to amendment, qualification, and erasure. This is a god that will compromise with you, make allowances and declare all wars holy, all peaces hallowed.

That is the mush god, but that is not the God of the Bible. The true God is a consuming fire. He either consumes the sinner who remains unrepentant or He consumes the sin of the one who turns to Him and receives His son as Savior and Lord. When Jesus went to the cross, God poured His wrath out on His Son because Jesus took upon Himself the sin of all who would turn to Him in saving faith. All those who reject Jesus will have to face God's wrath on their own.

We are so accustomed to thinking and talking about God's goodness, His mercy, His patience, His kindness, and His grace, that it seems more than odd to focus on His holiness and His wrath. It is not only odd, it is uncomfortable, and we would rather avoid that subject altogether, but that would be a mistake.

The most common form of heresy is not saying something that is clearly false. Rather, it is to focus on something that is true to the exclusion of complementary truth that just happens to be uncomfortable.

Theologian N.T. Wright who I was blessed this summer to go hear in Waco observed that God's wrath is necessitated by His love. Listen to what he said:

The biblical doctrine of God's wrath is rooted in the doctrine of God as the good, wise, and loving Creator, who hates—yes, hates, and hates implacably—anything that spoils, defaces, distorts, or damages His beautiful creation, and in particular anything that does that to His image-bearing creatures. If God does not hate racial prejudice, He is neither good nor loving. If God is not wrathful at child abuse, He is neither good nor loving. If God is not utterly determined to root out from his creation, in an act of proper wrath and judgment, the arrogance that allows people to exploit, bomb, bully, and enslave one another, He is neither loving, nor good, nor wise.

We can worship God for His wrath because His wrath is an outgrowth of His love as well as His holiness and justice.

Jesus taught us to worship God in Spirit and in truth. I am afraid that all too often our worship falls short of both of those guidelines. Instead of worshiping Him under the guidance and leadership of His Spirit, we routinely worship Him out of habit, out of tradition, out of social expectation. And instead of worshiping Him in truth, which is to worship the true God as He truly is, we worship God as we imagine Him to be or wish that He was.

Almost 35 years ago, Annie Dillard penned these words of caution:

On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning.

It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.

Worship is holy business. It is to be done by a holy people for we worship a holy God. I ask you, "Do you worship Him?" Do you worship the true God as He truly is?

The greatest need of God's people in our day is to behold our God. He is the One who speaks, the Judge who shakes, and the fire who consumes.