

Things That Last

Hebrews 12:25-29

If I say the names Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in that order, what do you think of?

I'm guessing most believers are going to think about the gospels, the first four books of the New Testament that tell us about the earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

It is through these books that we learn about who Jesus is.

Don't listen to someone who tells you to go into a closet or take a walk in the forest and listen for the voice of Jesus.

Open your bible and read first hand eye witness accounts of Who Jesus is, that is how you get to know Him.

For the record, I'm not against praying privately or walking in nature to spend time with the LORD, just bring your Bible with you!

If you read through the gospels one of the things you will discover about Jesus is that He often taught people in something called parables.

A parable is a story with a meaning.

Sometimes when the LORD tells people a parable the meaning is not so obvious and He has to explain it further to His disciples.

Sometimes though the meaning is completely obvious and those who hear have no need to ask about what He is getting at.

That is the case in Luke 12 when a man comes to Jesus asking Him to intervene in an inheritance dispute.

Instead of doing what the man asks, Jesus instead warns him and everyone listening about the danger of greed and the accumulation of possessions.

He then proceeds to tell them this parable "**Luke 12:16-21.**

I have no doubt that we could draw and number of applications from this parable.

We could talk about the dangers of being rich. Something very important for us who live in a culture of enormous wealth to consider.

We could talk about the problem of greed.

We could talk about the foolishness of presuming what the future is going to be like.

The rich man in the story displays all of these problems, but these are merely the symptoms of the disease and not the real illness this man is suffering from.

The real problem for this man is that he cares a great deal about material things and he cares very little for the things of God.

He cares a great deal about temporary things and has given little consideration to things that last forever.

[That is an ever present danger for us as well. It is very easy to get wrapped up in the temporary and neglect the eternal. As we return this morning to the book of Hebrews we are confronted with the importance of eternity. Eternity is forever. Think about that! The perceived goodness or badness of our lives over the course of less than 100 years will quickly be irrelevant as the ages of forever continue on. It is no wonder then that God in His word emphasizes the importance of eternity. Here in **Hebrews 12:25-29** there are three lessons for us in regards to eternity. Here is the first...]

Point #1 – Our eternity depends on listening to God. (Verse 25)

The LORD has made Himself known to everyone to varying degrees and if we continually stop up our ears and refuse to hear what He says, we will certainly end up under His eternal and terrifying judgement.

Verse 25 begins with a command.

From the context of verses 18-24 we know that the “him who speaks” is God.

Notice also that this is in the present tense. Why is that? Because while it is right to say that God has spoken, that is an action happening in the past, it is also right to say that He is speaking.

Now it is very important that we understand that rightly and we will get into that, but right here first and foremost we need to have this command sink into our hearts and minds.

When God speaks we are to listen! He is speaking to us right now!
Are we listening?

Immediately the writer shows us why this is so important because he shows us what is at stake here.

Again the context is really important. In the previous few verses he has been comparing the experience of the people of Israel at Mount Sinai, with the experience of Christian believers at Mount Zion (the “heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.)

In verse 25 he carries on the comparison of earthly Sinai and heavenly Zion (**Verse 25**).

If you are familiar with the Bible you will remember what happened at Sinai.

God says for all to hear, “Don’t make idols!” What do they do?
They make a golden calf.

A short while later God says, “Go into the Promised Land!” What do they do? They chicken out!

Then God says, “Don’t go into the Land!” What do they do? They try and go in and get beaten badly on the battlefield.

It is not hard to see the theme is it? God speaks and they refuse to listen and they pay the price of God's judgement.

If that happened to them, if they did not escape, he says, "How much less will we?"

His point here is not to say that God's speaking at Sinai is a small thing. His point is to say that His speaking to us "from heaven" is even greater.

To get what he means by this we have to go all the way back to the beginning of **Hebrews 1:1-3**.

Setting a mountain ablaze with glory and having almighty God audibly speak is a big deal, but greater by far is the second person of the Trinity taking on true humanity and living upon the earth teaching people about the kingdom of heaven.

He is still speaking. The Bible is the completed written word of God that declares the glories of Christ from beginning to end and every time we open it we are hearing from heaven.

Are we listening?

[I could not help but think of high voltage power stations as I was thinking about the command to listen here. There is one near my house and it has a fence around it and on that fence there is more than one sign saying something to the effect of "Danger Keep Out". I think most people know the importance of listening to that command, because most people realize that if you refuse to listen and climb the fence there is a good chance you are going to die.]

The command here is even more serious.

If it was just a matter of dying and then ceasing to exist, then all of these warnings would be no big deal.

But that is not what happens. We don't cease to exist when we die we either end up with God forever or we end up in hell forever.

The Bible's description of hell is one of anguish and torment and Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:10 make it crystal clear that it never ends.

The only reason people end up there is because they refuse to listen.

People often want to blame God for not saying enough, not making Himself clear enough, but that is not the problem.

The problem is people stop up their ears and their hearts to God even though He has sent His Son into the world.

[We need to "see to it" that is not us! Where we spend forever depends on it. Now some of us may be tempted to ignore this warning. We may be tempted to live like most other people do

who are mainly concerned with material things or the span of their own life. These next couple of verses remind us of an important truth that ought to steer us away from setting our hope and affection on the things of this world. Here is the important reminder...]

Point #2 – Created things cannot give us an eternal hope. (Verses 26-27)

All that we know and experience in this current creation has an expiry date. It will not last forever and therefore it can do nothing for us beyond this life.

In the parable that Jesus told about the foolish rich man, his foolishness is highlighted by the fact that he dies.

He does all that work, acquires all that stuff and wealth, and then before he gets to enjoy it he's dead and it all goes to someone else.

That has happened to a number of people in history. Our own mortality is a very important reason to consider eternity, but it is not just the limit of our own lifespan that we should consider it is also the limited existence of everything else (**Verse 26-27**).

On top of the scene of a mountain set on fire by the glory of God, on top of thunder, and a loud trumpet blast, it says that when God spoke the earth shook at Sinai.

To say that this is an incredible display is an understatement to say the least, but it is nothing compared to what is coming.

It says here that according to the promise of God the whole of creation will “once more” be shaken.

I suppose the words “once more” could be taken in a couple of different ways, but immediately the meaning is explained to us removing all other possibilities.

The entirety of the universe will be shaken “once more” because at that time it will cease to exist. It will be removed.

You know the end of the world is a topic of regular conversation these days.

Mainly the conversation revolves around how humanity has the ability to destroy itself.

People worry about nuclear war, about an asteroid hitting the planet, about food shortages, and the list goes on.

Now I don't want to make light of that stuff. It is serious business, but I think it is very telling what is almost always absent from the list of concerns.

Very few people are concerned about God bringing an end to the universe, but that is what the Bible says.

He spoke it into existence and we can expect Him to speak it out of existence.

Everything we can observe in the universe and everything that exists but we cannot observe has an expiry date on it.

Not because of a mathematical formula that can calculate how much energy is left and when it will run out, but because Almighty God will say that is enough.

Because that is true, no created thing can help us in eternity.
It's not going to be there.

Things that don't last will ultimately disappoint us.

[Most of you have probably experienced this on a small scale. I have. When I first started as an electrician I had to buy a battery drill. Being on a tight budget in those days I bought a cheap one. You can probably guess what happened. It didn't last. A couple of falls and few months of charging it every day and using it and it didn't work. Guess what I did? I bought another cheap one. Guess what happened? The same thing. I eventually learned my lesson and bought a better quality drill. I dropped that thing from 25 feet twice and it still works. Things that last are better than things that don't.]

Now even the best made things in this world don't last forever. They can't help us, but we are told here at the end of verse 27 that when this current creation passes away there will be something that remains.

What is it that remains? It is the "heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God."

You can read about this at the end of the book of Revelation.

After this current creation passes away and God creates a 'new heaven' and a 'new earth' the heavenly city of Jerusalem descends to the new earth and there God dwells with His people forever.

That is the place where Jesus says to store your treasure because that treasure lasts forever.

It is important to point out that these eternal things are not eternal in and of themselves.

Only God has that characteristic.

What it means here when it is talking about created things that cannot be shaken or things that last forever, are things that are sustained by the irrevocable promises of God.

God says, that on account of faith in His Son He will grant to all who believe eternal life and will give us an eternal home.

We will live forever brothers and sisters because God wills it for all eternity.

[Nothing in this world or this universe can do that for you. There is no hope here only disappointment and pain. Let us, then, set our affections on the things that last rather than things that don't. Now, if we do that and we should there is something else that will happen. If we are listening to God and if we understand that created things cannot give us an eternal hope, and so we are rightly looking to the LORD for that hope then we are ready to hear this third lesson from our text. Here is the lesson...]

Point #3 – Having an eternal hope demands a response. (Verses 28-29)

If indeed we have set our sights on the never ending kingdom of Jesus Christ, then we must be affected by it.

Having effectively turned our minds towards eternity, the writer begins verse 28 by saying this, (verse 28a).

Having given us a most serious warning against refusing to listen to the LORD and then showing us the futility of temporary things, he speaks to those who belong to the kingdom of God.

Notice the present tense here. It says, “We are receiving...”

From what has been said so far we know without a doubt that the full realization of our eternity is in the future.

At the same time it is happening now.

God is at work in the world right now, He is speaking to us through His word right now, and the Holy Spirit is at work in the Christian right now, working for the glorification of the Lord Jesus in us right now.

It is true that there is a great deal of trouble in the world generally and also in our lives specifically.

Jesus never sugar coated that one bit. He said, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Do we really believe that? Sometimes it is hard because the things that are staring us right in the face seem absolutely impossible, it can seem like the misery will never end, and that can leave us in despair.

If that is you this morning, put in the forefront of your mind that the things of this world are not going to last.

If you are in Christ then through His precious blood shed on the cross you have been made right with God, you are His son or daughter.

Be reminded that Jesus has conquered the grave, and the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in you, shaping you into the image of Christ right now as you are being prepared for eternal joy.

Therefore, verse 28 goes on, “Let us be thankful.”

If we are indeed “receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken” we always have something to be thankful for.

This isn’t telling us to gloss over pain. It isn’t telling us to put on a fake smile and pretend like everything is fine.

Listen, fake Christians don’t do themselves let alone anyone else any good.

If you are all smiles in public and at church and a nightmare to live with at home, stop doing that.

That said, even if your breaking to pieces this command to be thankful applies to you, it applies to every Christian.

If you don't know what to be thankful for, start with the gospel.

Start with being forgiven for your sin. Start with the knowledge that this present world is temporary.

A new heaven and a new earth are on the horizon.

Start giving thanks for those things and see where the Lord takes you.

Verse 28 adds another command. It says, "Let us be thankful AND..."

This is the whole reason why we are "receiving" an eternal kingdom, so that we will worship God.

Notice the kind of worship that we are to have. It is to be "acceptable".

I wonder if we could remember every Sunday that we've been in church and we could remember what we were thinking about when it was over, I wonder how often we would be thinking about whether or not we were pleased with church as opposed to whether or not God was pleased with our worship.

Is there reverence and awe in our hearts before the LORD?

There ought to be **Verse 29**.

This is what makes truly understanding and believing the gospel so amazing.

It is not that the gospel brings God down to our level so we can feel all warm and fuzzy about the wretchedness of our sinful condition.

It is that the gospel makes us right with God despite our wretchedness so we can enjoy the greatness of Who He is to the praise of Christ Jesus forever.

I will close this morning with three questions.

First, are you listening to the LORD?

Second, are you putting your hope in things that last (eternal things)?

Third, is an eternal hope making a difference in your life?

Let us ask ourselves these things, let us be really honest with the answers, and let us plead with God to set our hearts on things that last.