

9/27/2015

Lord's Day Service Message

The City of the Living God

Hebrews 12:18-29

¹⁸You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; ¹⁹to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, ²⁰because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." ²¹The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

²²But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, ²⁴to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

²⁵See 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? ²⁶At 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." ²⁷The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

²⁸Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹for our "God is a consuming fire."

There are many religions in this world. All religions claim that they have the right way to know god, to approach god or to be blessed by god. But this text in the book of Hebrews shows us that Christians have a better way than all other religions to approach God of the universe and to be blessed by him. Christians are the citizens of the city of the living God. They can gather as a joyful assembly. They are the church of the firstborn. They are living in the unshakable kingdom.

The Joyful Assembly

It was very difficult for the people in the days of the Old Testament to approach God's presence. God gave them two things through which they should approach God. One is the law (Mt. Sini). Another is the tabernacle (the temple). They approached God by keeping the law. And they approached God through physical ceremonies of the temple. But no matter how hard they tried to keep the law and to be good through temple worship, when they came close to God they were trembled with fear. Because they were still imperfect and sinful. And their sinfulness was exposed before God's holiness. ¹⁸... *a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; ...they could not bear what was commanded: ...*²¹*The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."*

But through Christ, God has opened a new way for us to approach him. It is to approach him not through physical ceremonies or by observing the law but by faith in his grace. Verse 22 says, "*But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly.*"

Through Christ, God has opened a new way for us to approach him without fear. In the Jewish temple, there was a curtain which divided the most holy place from the rest of the temple. Nobody but the high priest could enter that place and only on particular occasions. But through the death of Christ, God opened the curtain to all. At the moment Christ died on the cross, the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom

(Matthew 27: 51, Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). In God's grace in Christ, we can approach God joyfully together.

“Joyful assembly” in Greek is one word “Paneguris.” In ancient Greek this word denotes gathering of many people for some public festival or celebration, such as the Olympic Games.

People spend lots of time and money to go to sporting events. When their team wins they joyfully celebrate. When the Chicago Blackhawks won the Stanley Cup championship last season, thousands of people came out into the downtown streets to share in the joyful celebration of their team's victory. But such a victory does not happen every day. It happens, at most just a few times in their life time.

However, we believers can have victory every day. Not because we are perfect, not because we fight and win physically. But because we have victory of Christ. The victory of Christ is a victory over sin, death and the devil. Until Jesus died on the cross, no other angelic being and no other high priest could achieve victory over sin, death and the devil. This victory is the greatest victory of all. This victory of Jesus happens every day. Every day in the name of Jesus the power of sin, death and the devil is conquered. In the name of Jesus, every day people are set free from sin and the devil. That is why we can joyfully celebrate the victory of Jesus.

This joy reaches to heaven. The angels are engaging in a joyful celebration of this victory. The angels are sinless beings, servants of God, messengers of God who are helping and serving the believers according to God's instruction. They are spiritual beings invisible to human eyes. But through the help of the Spirit of God, our spiritual eyes can be open and we can sense them. What a joy we can have when we sense and even see those angels among us, and worship awesome God with them. Even today here in this place, while we are worshipping God in Christ, angles are with us. They are worshipping the Lord with us now.

Do you want to live with joy every day? Come to God's presence by faith in Jesus' grace. Claim the victory of Jesus. Come and join in the believers gathering, a joyful assembly.

The Church of the Firstborn

Believers of Christ are called the church of "the firstborn." Here "the first born" is plural and it means believers who have been redeemed. The singular form of the firstborn refers to Christ. The reason why the Bible calls Christ "the first born" is that

- 1). God has given Christ the right to lead men to him, as his children (Romans 8:29).
- 2). God has given Christ the supreme right to govern all things in the universe (Colossians 1:15). By him all things were created, and they were created for him as well. With respect to the rest of creation he is the firstborn, thus heir of all things.
- 3). Christ is the first man and only man to rise from the dead (Revelation 1:5). And through him all believers can receive the power of the resurrection (Romans 6:4).

So the plural form of "the first born" means believers who have been redeemed by Christ to be God's children and who have a privileged position as heirs together with Christ, the supreme firstborn and heir of all things (Heb 12:1).

Their eternal life is guaranteed. It means that they have eternal security. If you are a believer of Christ, you are guaranteed to enter into heaven whenever and in whatever condition you die.

How does it happen? It happens through the mediator of the new covenant. In the old covenant, there were so many laws which people had to obey and follow to be God's chosen people. But through Jesus, God has given us a new covenant. The new covenant is the covenant made through the blood. The new covenant is that if anybody believes

and accepts that the blood of Jesus can cleanse all sins of man and make man righteous before God, God will accept that person as a righteous person and as his child. The blood of Christ is better than any other blood even the blood of Abel.

So if you believe in the blood of the mediator, you can belong to the church and you are entitled to receive the fulfillment of all God's promises. Your status as a citizen in the kingdom of God is guaranteed. Nothing and nobody can take away this status from you.

Your mistakes and sins can't take away your citizenship as a firstborn. There is no trial that can take away your privilege as a firstborn. There is no power that can take away your eternal security. If anything or any power attacks you with fear and doubt about your status of a firstborn, claim God's assurance in the blood of Christ. Whenever the devil attacks you by saying "You are a bad person. You have no right to receive God's blessing," resist the devil with faith in the blood. "You devil get away from me. You are a liar. I have the blood of Jesus. In the blood I have God's eternal guarantee of heavenly citizenship."

The Unshakable Kingdom

The city of God to where believers belong is an unshakable kingdom. Every year there are some 500,000 detectable earthquakes that occur around the world. Of these, 100,000 can be felt and some 1,000 cause some kind of destruction in either lives or property.

There are not only earthquakes but also lots of other events which shake and destroy things in this world—storms, economic collapse, wars, sickness or death. God uses them to shake the world.

Divine shaking separates the shakable from the unshakable. When God shakes the world, people will know what things will last, what will not. *"Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is,*

created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain” (verses 26-27).

God allows all believers to go through these shaking events. Why does God do that? Why does God not prevent believers from being shaken? God wants to test our faith. By getting rid of all shakable things from our lives God helps us stand on the unshakable.

There are two things in this world and universe which are unshakable. First, it is the word of God. The Lord says, “*Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away*” (Luke 21:33).

Satan has been trying to destroy the Word of God since the Garden of Eden, twisting and turning God’s Word. But the Word of God still stands as is.

The people who hold on to the word of God can stand firm. The final ground we can stand on is the word of God, the solid rock which does not change and can’t be shaken. Nothing can shake and destroy us as long as we hold on to the word of God.

Second, it is the church of Christ. Jesus says, “*On this rock I will build my church and the gates of hades will not overcome it*” (Matthew 16:18). The church of Christ is not a building or an institution. It is the assembly of people who confess that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior. There are those who have tried to eliminate the church, but all have failed:

- communism
- secular humanism
- false cults and religions
- Satan

If we make this confession and belong to the assembly of believers, nothing and no power in this world can shake us.

Then what is the conclusion? The conclusion is this: *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so*

worship God acceptably with reverence and awe for our "God is a consuming fire" (verses 28-29).

If we have all these privileges as the people of the city of the living God, we must be thankful always.

There is an old legend of a man who found the barn where Satan kept his seeds ready to be sown in the human heart. On finding the seeds of discouragement more numerous than others, he learned that those seeds could be made to grow almost anywhere. When questioned, Satan reluctantly admitted that there was one place in which he could never get them to thrive. "And where is that?" asked the man. He replied sadly, "In the heart of a grateful person."

When trials hit our lives, we can be thankful "Lord I thank you because through trials you shake and get rid of all dirt and filth from my life and make me strong and pure. Lord I thank you for helping me remain on solid ground, your unshakable word and church."

We also must worship God with reverence and awe. The fact that we believers have gracious access to God's presence does not give us the right to approach God in any way we choose. God is still the holy God. God is still the judge. God is still the consuming fire. Although we don't need to fear God as the people in the Old Testament days, we still need to fear him as the holy God.