

June 5, 2011 by Steve Brandon



# One Last Warning

## Hebrews 12:25-29

### 1. Do Not Refuse Him (verses 25-27)

### 2. Show Gratitude (verses 28-29)

Two weeks ago from today, a tornado touched down in Joplin, Missouri, wiping out much of the city. Angie Williams is but one of many of the tornado survivors in that city. She has written of her experience, ...

After we got home from church and had eaten lunch the girls and I took an afternoon nap while daddy had to go to work. After we woke up I started to do dishes and was going to get dinner ready. Adley was watching a movie so we didn't have the local news station playing, completely unaware of the weather. Treay [my husband] called, which is unusual, to tell us to watch the weather. I turned the tv on to the news station and he and I decided together we were safe that the storm was heading north of us. So we hung up and I started back to what I was doing.

Then my mom called and said "do you know you are under a tornado warning?" I said "really? No" and then the sirens started going off. I hung up and took the girls to the bathtub and sat down. The sirens quit going off so we got out of the bathroom and started to resume our evening. I put Averie in a stand up bouncer seat in the living room and Adley was sitting on the couch. My mom called again to check on us. While on the phone I continued to look through the windows keeping an eye on the extremely dark sky. When looking out my front window the sky to the left was a pretty light blue while the sky to the right was black. I kept hearing the weatherman saying the storm is "over the heart of Joplin" I thought, "Is that me?"

Then I noticed hail sporadically falling out the front window. I told my mom who is still on the phone that it is hailing. She said "get in the hallway this is not a good sign."

So I told Adley to get in the hallway and I picked Averie up still in the bouncer seat and placed her in the hallway. I went to Adley's room and grabbed her bed pillows and her special puppy dog and blankies then shut her bedroom door. I went to my bedroom and grabbed just a few more bed pillows and shut our bedroom door along with Averie's bedroom door and the hall bathroom door. These things I don't always do.

Then something told me to remove Averie from the bouncer seat and hold her in my lap, so I took her out and put the seat back in the living room. Then I realized the tv was too loud and it wasn't telling me anything worth hearing, it was playing the tv show Seinfeld so I got up to turn it down so I could hear more of what might be happening outside. It felt like seconds after I sat in the hallway the hail and extreme winds began banging on the front of the house. Still on the phone with my mom I was giving her a play by play of what was happening. I said its hitting the front of the house and its really strong, then the power flickered and I let out a shriek then it flickered back on then off.

Then I heard the sound of a train...I told my mom and she said, "That's it!!! Cover your heads and get as low as you can! Get low!" The force pushing on the house got stronger until it ripped through the house taking everything in its path. The noise was unbelievable, it was so loud! The wind was so strong and the skies were dark!. All I could do was cover my babies and yell, "God PLEASE keep us safe! PLEASE put your Angels all around us!" I begged and pleaded God to keep us safe.

The tornado seemed to go on and on, the thought of what it would be like to wake up in Heaven passed through my mind. The pillow that was on my head flew immediately off and I thought man its me against the tornado now, so I got lower down on my girls. I begged God to "PLEASE let it end! PLEASE let it end!"

When it finally came to an end and I sat there checking on the girls and I hear a voice that I know very well yelling "Ang? Ang? Ang?" It was my mom! She had been on the phone the entire time the tornado ripped through my house! I couldn't believe it.

I had to search a little through debris and I finally found my phone. First words out of my mouth were "Everything's gone!" It was so surreal.

I covered the girls with their daddy's coat that landed nearby us. It had started to rain huge rain drops. I sat there thinking "what do I do? Where do I go? Should I stay here or go for help?" I decided I needed to get the girls to safety.

The lightening was striking extremely close and the rain was really coming down. So I had Adley stand up and then I stood up with Averie (we did not have to crawl or dig out, just stood up from where we were sitting, everything was gone around us, not a single wall was standing), then picked Adley up and carried both girls in my arms along with Adley's favorite blanket and stuffed puppy dog and carried them barefoot to a nearby church.

I can't believe I carried them that far not to mention barefoot. I didn't look around much, I was too afraid of what I would see. The girls and I just held each other close and walked to where we knew we would be seen. I walked to 20th and Wisconsin.

I heard screams and cries. It broke my heart knowing there were injured or even trapped people out there but I had to keep walking to keep my girls safe. My mom still on the phone tried to figure out a place for me to go, but communication was hit and miss.

Once I reached the church we were all cold and tired and scared. We sat down on the church parking lot. Everywhere we looked had been destroyed.

A nice Christian couple drove by and saw the girls and I sitting all alone in the middle of a deserted parking lot and told us to get in their truck. I am so blessed by this family. They gave us towels and blankets to warm up. They drove to the grandparents house and got the girls new t-shirts to wear, Averie was beginning to turn blue because she was so cold. Both girls were so brave and barely cried. Adley was worried about daddy and so was I but we couldn't reach him by phone. I knew in my heart he was ok. Adley and I said a prayer for daddy trusting that God had took care of him too. Treay's work was not hit. Praise the Lord!

The sweet family took us to the home depot parking lot where I saw a Highway Patrolman. My mom had told me that a trooper would be looking for me so I knew I had to talk to them. I finally got to talk to a trooper and he helped get word to my dad where I was. This nice trooper drove my girls and I down 20th street to my mother-in-law's house, which thankfully was not hurt by the tornado. Not much long after I arrived a familiar vehicle sped into the driveway and it was my mom and dad! I have never been so relieved to see them in my life!! I gave my mommy a huge hug and started to cry. I had stayed so strong until that moment.

Thinking back over that night I can see how God had a hand in keeping us safe.

1. Treay called and told me to watch weather. He normally does not call me while at work.
2. My sister-in-law accidently texted my mom that there is a tornado warning in Joplin.
3. My mom called and told me about tornado warning just seconds before sirens went off.
4. I got out of the bathtub and stayed in the hallway.
5. We just stood up and walked out of tornado basically untouched. (I had a few cuts and bruises but no big deal)
6. The houses surrounding my house (which there are 5 of them) all had at least one wall still standing in their home and I had none. Not a single one.
7. Adley's dresser was knocked over at a 45 degree angle holding the outer brick wall up to act as a ramp at the exact spot where we were sitting across the "hall" which we believe helped things go over our heads.
8. I believe God put us in the exact spot we needed to be during the tornado. IF we were further back we would have been crushed. If we were further forward we probably would have been blown away.
9. We can't find our major appliances, but Treay's grandma's glass candy dish we got after she died was untouched.
10. Two cars flew into my house on either side of us...they could have easily landed on us!

What a great story of survival. It is very gripping, and very appropriate for our text this morning.

I invite you to open your Bibles to the book of Hebrews. Our text this morning is Hebrews 12:25-29. Like last week, it is another windy, shaking, terrifying text, much like what took place in Joplin, Missouri two weeks ago (May 22, 2011).

Hebrews 12:25-29

See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.

I trust that you can see the shaking in this text. Verse 26 says, "His voice shook the earth then." This is a reference to the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. When God gave the law, "the whole mountain quaked violently" (Ex. 20:18). The sound was like a trumpet that grew louder and louder and louder. And God answered Moses with thunder.

It was a fearful scene, every bit as much as the Joplin tornado. When the people of Israel "perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, ... they trembled and stood at a distance" (Ex. 20:18). They said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die" (Ex. 20:19).

Just as the shaking took place then on Sinai, it will come again. Look at verse 26, "Now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.'" This future shaking is as sure as sure can be, for God has promised that this will take place (verse 26). This promise came in the book of Haggai, chapter 2, verse 6, about 1,000 years after Sinai. It was a prophecy of the coming of Jesus -- when He turned the world upside down through His church (Acts 17:6). It was also a prophecy of the end of the world -- when God will shake everything on this earth and replace it with the New Heavens and the New Earth (Revelation 21). The whole creation will be affected on that day.

The shaking at the giving of the law was just a taste of what will take place on that day. That day will be so terrible and so violent that it will make the tornado in Joplin, Missouri seem like a soft gentle breeze. A cursory reading of Revelation will show you how terrible it will be. There will be plagues, famine, hail, fire, stars falling from the sky. Some will escape, safe in the protecting arms of God. Others will perish in their rebellion. But, all of creation will experience the tornado. That's the point of verse 27, ...

Hebrews 12:27

This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

In other words, all created things will be shaken! The earth (and the heavens) will be devastated on that day. The only thing that will survive this shaking is the souls of people. How important it is that your soul is right before the Lord. How important it is that your soul is right today.

I trust that you can tell the seriousness of this text. I trust that you can see the severity of this text. I love to preach joy and happiness, but that's not here in our text today.

We aren't playing around here. We are talking serious consequences to failing to follow Jesus Christ. When you follow Jesus, you are like Angie Williams in the storm - destruction all around, but safe in your pocket of protection. Our text this morning is a warning to seek refuge in Him.

Actually, this is the 5th warning section in the book of Hebrews. It would do us well to look back to the other ones. The first warning comes in chapter 2, ...

Hebrews 2:1-3

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

The warning here is simple: Don't drift. Don't drift from the gospel. Remember, the Christian life is not a lake, where you can simply float in the middle. No, the Christian life is like a river. If you do not pay attention to Christ, you will drift away, and the consequences are devastating. They didn't escape in the Old Covenant. You won't escape in the New Covenant. How shall we escape? We won't!

The second warning comes in chapter 3, ...

Hebrews 3:7-13

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, and saw My works for forty years. Therefore I was angry with this generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they did not know My ways'; as I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'" Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

The warning here is simple: Don't harden your hearts. Hardening of the arteries prevents blood from flowing well throughout your body. It can lead to death. Hardening of the heart can prove fatal to your soul. So, don't ignore the warning signs that God has given you. Don't let your heart resist God's word. Don't be like the Israelites, who refused to believe, though they saw great signs and wonders. God's wrath was against them. His wrath will be against you if you don't repent.

The third warning passage comes in chapter 6. We see an introduction to it in chapter 5, ...

Hebrews 5:11

... You have become dull of hearing.

And then, chapter 6, ...

Hebrews 6:4-6

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

The warning here is this: Listen to His voice. Be ready to hear. Don't fall away. If you have come into the assembly, if you have tasted and touched of the work of Christ -- and then, refused him! -- there is no hope for you. So, don't fall away.

The fourth warning passage comes in chapter 10.

Hebrews 10:26-31

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The LORD will judge His people." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The warning here is to stop sinning willfully. That is, to stop doing those things which show that you don't believe in Christ. Stop offering sacrifices. Stop going to the priests. Stop thinking that your good works are going to save you. Stop trusting in other things, rather than Jesus. And again, the consequences are dreadful. God will take out His vengeance upon you. If you think that it was bad for those who rejected Moses, just think what it's going to be like to reject Jesus.

All of the warnings call us to press on in our faith. This is why the book of Hebrews was written. It was written to warn those Jews who had come into the church, heard of Jesus, but were turning their back upon Him. And here we come this morning to "One Last Warning." This is the title of my message this morning, "One Last Warning."

In chapter 13, we find no warnings, only encouragements to follow the Lord. The chapter is packed with many practical applications of how we ought to follow the Lord in obedience to Him. It is so practical that we find a command in almost every verse at the beginning of the chapter -- verses 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 9.

My outline has two points this morning. They are formed from the commands in the passage. I trust that you can see the first one there in verse 25, ...

1. Do Not Refuse Him (verses 25-27)

Verse 25 says, "See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking." Obviously, that's talking about the Lord. It's talking about Jesus. Jesus is speaking.

The very first verses of this book tells us this. "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2a). And here in verse 25, we see that Jesus is still speaking. The verb used here is in the present tense. You say, "What's He (Jesus) saying?" We get a clue in verse 24, ...

Hebrews 12:24

You have come ... to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel

Here, we see the sprinkled blood of Jesus speaking. Jesus is speaking the gospel -- the good news that the blood of Jesus is sufficient to cleanse you from your sins. You don't need to stand before God condemned. Rather, in Jesus, you are cleansed!

Chapter 9, verse 22 says, "According to the law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (9:22). In chapter 10:4, we read that "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (10:4). And yet, through the sacrifice of Jesus, we are cleansed from our sins. "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (10:14). Jesus is our storm shelter. Jesus is our "safe room". Jesus is our hallway in Joplin, Missouri.

That's what Jesus is saying. He's saying, "Don't look to the ways of the Old Covenant to forgive your sins. Don't look to yourself to earn your salvation. Look to Me! My blood is sufficient for you. Turn to Me! Trust in My blood. Trust in My sacrifice!" And the issue of the book of Hebrews is that some were not listening to His voice. In fact, the issue is all of the warning sections of this great book is that people aren't listening to his voice.

"For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard. ... it was at the first spoken through the Lord, [and] it was confirmed to us by those who heard. .... so do not drift away from it" (Heb. 2:1-3). Jesus spoke it, so don't drift away.

"Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (3:7-8, 15; 4:7). Three times is this verse quoted! Jesus is speaking. It is as though He is telling us, "I am shaking the Earth; find refuge in Me." Do you hear His voice? Don't harden your hearts.

"You have become dull of hearing" (Heb. 5:11). Oh, you have heard alright, but your hearing has become dull. So, listen up! Pay attention. Or, as we see here in verse 25, "Do not refuse Him who is speaking."

So, don't refuse Jesus. He is your only hope. All of Hebrews tells you this. He is better than the angels or Moses or Joshua or Aaron or any of the high priests. He offers a better covenant, which is founded upon a better sacrifice. He enters a better tabernacle and offers to bring you there if you but believe in Him.

So, "do not refuse Him who is speaking." The audacity to refuse Jesus is amazing. He says, "This storm is coming. I'm going to shake the heavens and the Earth. But, there's a pocket in the hallway where you will be safe. God there. Get low. Cover yourself!" But to refuse Jesus is to say, "No thank you. No, I'll stand in the living room. Thanks for the advice."

Now, you may refuse Him in the little things. You may refuse Him in the big things. But, it's the little things that lead to the big things. No child grows up and leaves the home at 18 to live a sinful, rebellious life, without first rebelling in the little things. It began with the temper tantrum at age 2. It continued with the refusal to hold hands across the street at age 3. Pretty soon, there were the swear words at age 7, and the influential friends at age 12. The first experiments with drugs and alcohol come at 13. With 16 came the driver's license and the late nights

out. And 18 comes as no shocker to anyone. And so likewise, people who forsake Christ don't do so in a moment. No, there are lots of little things that lead up to it.

Remember Judas? Long before he betrayed Jesus, he was pilfering the money jar (John 12:6). Remember Solomon? (1 Kings 11:3). Before he had 700 wives, he had two wives. Before he had 300 concubines, he had one concubine. Remember the Prodigal Son? (Luke 15). There were seeds in his rebellion long before he left home.

That's how it works in life; little things lead to big things. Those who fall into adultery begin with pornography. Those who embezzle millions of dollars began by embezzling a few. Those who commit perjury on the witness stand have told many lies before ever taking the stand. So, don't refuse him on the little things, so that the big things never come to be a temptation.

I remember hearing the testimony of a pastor who had an affair with the church secretary. He said that it all started with a simple hug in his office. One thing led to another, which led to another, which led to another. Eventually, he was removed from the church, he divorced his wife, he married the secretary, and fled the state.

So, church family, do not refuse Him who is speaking. This is one last warning! Listen to Jesus! Listen to everything that He says. Believe Him, trust Him, and follow Him. And for those who forsake Jesus -- it all starts with the little things. So, break off from every known sin. Do Not Refuse Him (verses 25-27).

Let's continue in verse 25 to see why we shouldn't refuse him. And again, a similar argument comes up again. He compares the days of the Old Covenant with the days of the New Covenant. The Old Covenant was the old way. The New Covenant is a new way. You have no excuse for following in the ways of the Old Covenant.

In fact, this is the argument of much of Hebrews. Do you want to follow Moses? He's the servant, but Jesus is the Son! (3:1-6). Do you want a priest like Aaron? He's a weak man, but Jesus is the Son made perfect forever (7:28) Do you want to follow the Old Covenant? The mere mention of the New Covenant has made the Old Covenant obsolete (8:13). The priests? They made many sacrifices; Jesus makes one sacrifice!

So, here we come again to verse 25, ...

Hebrews 12:25

For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.

Do you remember the days when the law was given? The people of Israel received the law. In so doing, they pledged obedience to the law, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!" (Ex. 24:3, 7).

And how did that fair? Not too well. They failed to hear His voice. They failed to trust Him. They failed to believe that they could conquer the land. They hardened their heart.

And what did it get them? They died in the wilderness. Listen to God's word on the matter: "Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers" (Numbers 14:22-23). All who were 20 years and upwards failed to enter the land. Every single one of them (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb).

And if they didn't escape, how much less will we escape? We won't. With fewer privileges, God did not let them escape. With greater privileges, God will certainly not let us escape. Will you learn from this?

As verses 26 and 27 say, the Earth will be shaken! So, let's turn to my second point. It comes in verses 28 and 29.

2. Show Gratitude (verses 28-29)

Show gratitude because, in Jesus, we will not be shaken. Verses 28 and 29 say, ...

Hebrews 12:28-29

Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.

In Jesus Christ, we have an unshakable kingdom. Jesus has promised, "I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matt. 16:18). Jesus said,

John 10:27-29

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father who has given them to Me is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

Psalm 110 is often quoted in Hebrews to show how unshakable the kingdom is. Hebrews 1:3 tells us, "Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." In Hebrews 1:13, the Father said to Jesus, "Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."

Hebrews 11:12-13 describes, "[Jesus] having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet" And Hebrews 12:2 says, "Jesus, for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

The fact is that Jesus has overcome and is currently seated at the right hand of God. And His kingdom is coming at the appropriate time.

Now, many have tried to shake the kingdom. When the apostles began preaching, the Jewish authorities "commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18). Yet, this couldn't shake the kingdom. Paul told those early believers, "Through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Rather than snuffing out the kingdom, these tribulations only caused the kingdom to progress (Acts 16:5).

When the Romans attempted to snuff out the church through the persecution of Christians, the church flourished! When the former Soviet Union attempted to enforce their atheism, the church again flourished -- the kingdom stood strong. But, we have "a kingdom which cannot be shaken."

We all love being on the side of the winner. I have news for you. God's kingdom will win! He will prevail in the end. So, I encourage you.

The consequence is this: "Let us show gratitude" (Heb 12:28). Literally, this says, "Let us have grace" (which is how the King James and the New King James translate it). In other words, let grace be in us and saturate us. Let us realize that this kingdom is a gift to us.

There's no reason why we ought be permitted to escape the shaking of the earth, but by His grace. And those who are filled with grace will put forth gratitude. Gratitude for all that God has done for us: He died for us; He provided a better way for us; He will bring us safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen (2 Tim. 4:18). Such things are what ought to drive us in our service to him.

Look again at verse 28, ...

Hebrews 12:28

let us show gratitude by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe.

Look at how we serve the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is "by gratitude." In other words, the grace that fills us is the strength that empowers us to serve. Don't miss sight of this. It's how the church works. It's how you are motivated to love and good deeds. It's not by guilt. It's not by high-pressure tactics. It is an amazement at God's grace in our lives that carries us along.

Deep within us, we know what God has done for our souls. So overflowing are we with grace and thankfulness, that we live for Him. Such is the basis for the many exhortations in chapter 13. They all flow from this overwhelming grace of God that is within us.

Many can get this wrong -- doing things because they think God will be happy with them if they do, doing things because they have a pressure applied to them from others, doing things because of duty. But, God says, "Serve me from delight."

This is the premise of John Piper's book, "Desiring God". It's a great book. It's where glorifying God and our pursuit of joy intersect. We are so overwhelmed by God's grace to us that we respond in loving obedience to Him. So, let God's grace so fill you that you Show Gratitude (verses 28-29).

Finally, there is a spirit of how we ought to go about doing this: "Let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:28-29). Again, we are drawn back into the Old Testament. Just before entering the land, Moses warned the people, ...

Deuteronomy 4:23-24

"Watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything against which the LORD your God has commanded you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."

It's our delight and it's our joy to follow the Lord. This is our One Last Warning -- Do Not Refuse Him (verses 25-26) and Show Gratitude (verses 28-29).

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 5, 2011 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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