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“Shaken, not Stirred!” – Hebrews 12:14-29 Steve Christian

○ The role of a coach can be an important one; they may need to be an instructor, assessor, strategist, mentor, demonstrator, adviser, supporter, motivator, counsellor. Most times, the role of the coach is to create the right conditions for learning to occur; and then find ways of motivating others so that they may reach their optimum potential. The writer of Hebrews comes across as the ideal coach; to a people floundering between Judaism and Christianity.

○ I wonder do you feel like you are floundering at the moment? Perhaps your world is a little shaky at present. Mark Hitchcock recently wrote, “Our planet is groaning and heaving. War, social and racial unrest, shattered families, surging suicide, runaway debt, inflation, deadly new viruses, drug and alcohol abuse, rising lawlessness, and political polarization are coalescing to drive civilization to its knees. In today’s environment, good news can be difficult to find. Hope is in short supply. Our world is increasingly weary, worried, and worn.” Although we may be shaken, let us not be stirred in our faith in the Lord.

○ Last week’s passage spoke of the Christian life as a race, and how we are meant to encourage one another to make sure that we all get across the finish line safely. But what must we do to run the race with efficiency and success? And still today, many a Christian will try to run their race carrying extra baggage thus making their journey more demanding and difficult. It may be trivial anxieties and concerns – the worries of the world; it could be resentment toward another person; secret greed for bodily appetites; it could be pride, ambition and self-advancement; it could be tolerating sin; or even allowing the philosophies of the world to permeate our thinking and therefore our understanding of God.

And due to some of these things that weigh us down, the track may then become less obvious to us; where are we going now? And so, **“Let us throw off everything that hinders; let us run with perseverance. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, and let us accept His discipline as a gift, sent to produce a harvest of righteousness.”** The coach then gives further pointers as to how to make the journey less demanding for ourselves and more supportive for the other team members to ensure that we all make it to our eternal reward – the great city of God. ○

You see, your world might be shaken, but don’t let your heart be stirred. Your world may be shaken by godlessness, sexual immorality or bitterness, but don’t let that stir your heart of compassion and unity with one another. ○ We need to help each other to finish the race. V.14-17, **“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.”**

The writer has just been calling us to run the race of life with endurance and here we are called to help one another along in that race. ○ But what's easier to focus on here, the do's or the don'ts? "See to it that no one is sexually immoral or godless, and that no bitter root grows up within you." That's pretty easy to centre on. We often look out for the bitter, godless and immoral person and then reprimand them. But, we're not meant to come at this with a big stick and wipe one another out; you're bitter, you're godless; you're immoral. Rather, holiness and grace are the key in these verses. For it is holiness and grace that allow us to live in peace with each other.

○ First, holiness. **"Make every effort to live in peace with one another, and to be holy."** Make every effort to be holy. It takes effort from us. Holiness doesn't just happen; it takes effort to keep oneself from sin; seek to please God; to offer him your best because He is number 1 in your life. In its simplest form, holiness means "belonging to God." Make every effort to belong to God. Make every effort to throw off all that hinders. Remind yourself that you belong to God, and remember too that your brothers and sisters belong to God, and so make every effort to live in peace with them.

You see, holiness doesn't guarantee righteousness, if we become proud of our holiness like the Pharisees, then its self-righteousness. So, don't let your holiness elevate you such that you think poorly of your brothers or sisters; looking down upon them and judging them. Don't allow your pride; or your theological "correctness" to get in the way of your peace with one another. Don't allow other positions such as Covid or vaccinations; or drug or alcohol use; or what you might determine to be their failure in sin such as sexual immorality, to destroy the peace and unity that we should experience together. And the way that we do that is by focussing in, on the grace of God.

○ Holiness is kept in balance by grace. He says, **"See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God."** Make sure that both you, and your brothers and sisters don't miss the grace of God. Keep coming back to fix your eyes on Jesus; think about Him and what He has done; consider what He endured for you, and keep reminding one another of this; God's grace in Jesus. We have all received what we don't deserve in Christ. For we are all sinners, but praise God, we are saved by grace.

You see, it's easy to become sexually immoral; or godless like Esau who sought short term relief and received long term misery. It's easy to let a bitter root grow within as we see the sexually immoral or the godless. And then allow that bitter root to become that unpleasant, sour, resentful, harsh, cold, festering sore that causes further trouble and defiles many within the team.

And it's easy to become an individual within the team; to think more highly of ourselves than we ought; or on the other hand, to become a passenger within the team and expect that as we watch all the others do the work of support and encouragement, that we can coast along. There is no room for spiritual laziness, or spiritual pride. ○ **"Make every effort to live in peace, and see to it that no one misses the grace of God."** Live in peace and remind one another of the unmerited grace of God.

You see, under the law of Moses; under Judaism, the people tried to attain the impossible; for a holiness that was always out of their reach. And the writer seeks to remind them of this, but at the same time encourage them to appreciate their newfound position, and he does so by way of comparison; comparing Mt Sinai to the New city in glory, Mt Zion. ○ He calls them to holiness and reminds them of the old system to attain holiness. He says, (v18-22)

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

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.”

Mt Sinai is here described as a place of fear. It was a physical place burning with fire, darkness, gloom and storm. It was a place to be avoided – “Do not enter! Or enter at your own risk.” Although Moses was allowed to enter, he trembled in fear. But the coach says, “do not be afraid for you have come to Mt Zion.” And notice the contrast. ○ (v.22-24)

“You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”

What a contrast! These words bring such encouragement! This is no place of burning fire, darkness, gloom and storm, but there’s a multitude of joyful angels assembled. Remember chapter 1? The angels were the ministering spirits sent to serve those who would inherit salvation and they were sent to bring the law. But now, they celebrate in heaven that the Son of God has accomplished what the law was not able to.

This is, to the place of **“the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven.”** Remember too, the last plague to hit Egypt that struck down the firstborn, unless the blood of the lamb was painted over the doorpost. The firstborn of Israel were saved, and now we are the firstborn through Jesus blood; applied over our lives granting us forgiveness and eternal life, and we are told that our names are written in heaven – so we are certain of our salvation.

We have come to God, who as the judge of all, has made perfect the spirits of the righteous. God is in the process of making us perfect as He disciplines us; He not only forgives us our sin, but purifies us from all unrighteousness. His discipline is less of a punishment than that which is needed to train, empower and strengthen; to provide the catalyst for making us more like Jesus; just like the disciplines that the coach brings have perfection in mind.

And, this passage says, we have already come to this new city! We’re already citizens of it, and therefore under this extraordinary blessing that bring such joy and peace, comfort and security. This is not a place to be feared, but welcomed, under the new covenant that Jesus has delivered. And so, v25-27, ○

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

At Mt Sinai the thunderous voice of the Lord shook the earth. Now, I’ve never lived through an earthquake, but it must be quite terrifying as the foundations of your world are no longer as stable and secure as you thought they were. But there will come a day, when God will take both heaven and earth by the scruff of the neck and make it what He intended it to be. Do not refuse Him who speaks, for everything will be shaken; everything transient, temporary and second rate, including Satan and the realm of darkness will be removed from what will be the glorious new Heaven and new earth. And that Kingdom cannot be shaken. Praise God!

○ (V.28-29) **“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.”** Your world may be shaken, but again, don’t let that stir your heart of trust in the Lord. Maybe your world is looking a little shaky at the moment. The international world around us may also look a little shaky, even so, don’t let your heart of faith in the Lord be stirred into worry, anxiousness nor depression.

For this breathtaking promise from the Lord, that he “will shake the heavens and the earth” comes not only as a promise but also as a warning. These things will happen, but **see to it that you do not refuse him who speaks, for our God is a consuming fire.** Do not refuse Him who speaks as you sense His prompting; whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says; and let us not quench the Spirit. He is not a tame God to be treated light heartedly, flippantly, or in a shallow or thoughtless manner. He is a Holy God, and reminding ourselves of who He is, should lead us to appreciate all the more, the grace of God, what Jesus has done for us, by opening the way up for us to come into the very presence of our Almighty and Powerful, yet gracious Father.

Therefore, **“since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; and see to it that no one falls short of the grace of God. Let us draw near to God; let us fix our eyes on Jesus, and let us hold tenaciously to the hope that we profess. And so, let us be thankful, and worship our God!**