

It's all too easy to take things for granted. We humans have a remarkable ability to forget what's most important in our lives. We don't always pay attention to the things that are the most significant.

We say, "Familiarity breeds contempt." Or perhaps it should be familiarity breeds indifference. We forget how important the people we are closest to are.

We also say, "You can't see the forest for the trees." We often get caught up in minutiae and trivia. We miss the big picture. We get sidetracked.

That's a bad combination. Missing what's most important, and taking things for granted.

But, realizing that, we humans have also developed some strategies to help with this problem. We've developed some coping mechanisms. We have holidays and festivals to remind us of the important things in life.

We take the blessings of liberty for granted. So we have a celebration every July 4 to remind us of how important our political freedoms are.

We take our parents for granted, so we set aside a Mother's Day and a Father's Day.

We take the blessings of life for granted, so we have a national day of Thanksgiving.

We take God for granted, so people pour back into church on Christmas and Easter.

The problem is, however, when it comes to God, is that really enough? God is the most important thing, the most important being in the universe. God is the central giver and sustainer of our lives. A couple of days a year doesn't begin to help us keep that in perspective. The remembrance of God's place in our lives requires far more than that.

In fact, for Christians, our worship of God is job #1. Nothing is more important. The classical and biblical pattern is weekly public worship, along with daily prayers or devotions. These practices help us to remember who God is, and who we are in relationship to God.

The writer of Hebrews knows how important worship is. Much of the book centers on worship. And in ch12, Hebrews reminds us not to take God for granted.

In our Epistle lesson today, Hebrews comes at worship from what is, for us, a strange angle. It contrasts 2 mountains: the earthly Mt. Sinai, and the heavenly Mt. Zion.

First, we get reminders of the earthly Mt. Sinai, the mountain where God appeared to Moses and the Hebrew people. This is the mountain from the movie, *The Ten Commandments*. Hebrews uses these words for Mt. Sinai: "blazing fire, darkness, gloom, tempest, the sound of a trumpet."<sup>1</sup> These are all manifestations of God's appearance to his people in the Exodus.

---

<sup>1</sup> Heb 12:18

And there is also something we forget about, something that's not in our mental picture of Mt. Sinai. I blame Cecil B. DeMille for it. He shows Moses going up the mountain alone to meet with God. But the book of Exodus contains an earlier scene that is not shown in the movie.

And in that earlier scene, God speaks to his people directly, while they are camped out at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

In that scene, all the people heard God speak, they were overwhelmed and terrified, and so they told Moses to go and talk to God for them. They couldn't do it themselves.<sup>2</sup>

That's what Hebrews is referring to when it says that on Mt. Sinai, God spoke to his people in "a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them."<sup>3</sup>

And even Moses was afraid. Hebrews says, "Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I tremble with fear.'"<sup>4</sup>

God's appearance on Mt. Sinai was distant, scary, full of pyrotechnics. And the people were afraid to approach God.

But notice what Hebrews says back at the beginning of our lesson. It says, 'You have NOT come to Mt. Sinai. You have NOT come to such a manifestation of God in fire and smoke and thunder.'

And by the way, the word, translated "come" has a very narrow and technical meaning. It doesn't mean approach in general. It means approach in worship. To come before God for the purpose of worship.

The message is clear. You're not approaching God in fire and thunder. You're not approaching a God who is terrifying and frightening. You're not coming to God insulated through one spokesman who is speaking to God so you don't have to.

Instead, Hebrews says, you're approaching God to worship in a different way. Listen to the different tone when Hebrews mentions the other mountain: "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to innumerable angels in festal gathering."<sup>5</sup>

In other words, you're not approaching a place of fear and terror. You've got access to heaven itself, the heavenly Mt. Zion, God's dwelling place. You've got an inside track to go where only angels used to tread. And it's a 'festal gathering.' It's a party. It's a celebration.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ex 20:18-21

<sup>3</sup> Heb 12:19

<sup>4</sup> Heb 12:21

<sup>5</sup> Heb 12:22

And Hebrews calls this party, "the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven."<sup>6</sup> In other words, you're coming to worship God, you're coming to God's feast with the rights and privileges of one of God's own children.

Don't take this for granted.

After all, it's hard to see the President of the United States. Not just anyone can have an appointment. It's even harder to visit him in the Oval Office. And it's almost impossible to see him in the family quarters of the White House. Impossible, unless you're part of the family. The president's family has unique access to the president.

And what Hebrews is saying is, that in heaven, you have the status of family. More specifically, you have the status of God's firstborn child. You have a full access backstage pass.

And you get that access through Jesus, through the New Covenant he has brokered.<sup>7</sup> You get that access through Jesus' blood, which brings forgiveness.

This kind of total access in worship is unprecedented. It's an amazing gift. Because of that, you can worship God directly, joining with Angels and Archangels, through Jesus Christ. Such a gift is of enormous value and worth.

And because of that, it is not a gift to be taken for granted. Hebrews is telling us that worship is serious business. We've been given a huge gift of being able to approach God.

As Spiderman said, "With great power comes great responsibility." Or as Jesus originally said it, "Of those to whom much is given, much is expected."<sup>8</sup>

"Therefore," Hebrews says. And the therefore is always the most important part of the argument. "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire."<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, Hebrews is saying, since we're being given an eternal gift, we need to respond in a certain way. We've been given the status of firstborn child. We've been given access to God through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, Hebrews says, let us give thanks. Let us offer worship. And let us do it with reverence and awe. Not haphazardly. Not taking God for granted. But in thanksgiving for all that we have and all that we are.

Our mission statement reminds us of what job #1 for us is: "Worshipping God in beauty of holiness." That's the most important thing we can do this week and every week.

---

<sup>6</sup> Heb 12:23

<sup>7</sup> Heb 12:24

<sup>8</sup> Luke 12:48

<sup>9</sup> Heb 12:28-29

In a few moments we will offer bread and wine to God at this altar. But you will be asked to offer more. I will say,

"Lift up your hearts." And you'll say that you will.

And I will say, "Let us give thanks." And you'll say that that's the right thing to do.

And it is the right thing. And it is the most important thing. We offer thanks to God, in a service called Eucharist, which means giving thanks.

And God will take the thanks we offer. Our heavenly Father, the Lord and creator of the universe will take the thanks we offer.

And God will take the bread and wine we offer. And God will use it to give us a tangible sign of his presence: Jesus Christ, spiritually present, in his body and blood.

There's nothing more important that we can do this week... There's nothing more important that we can do any week than to offer thanks and worship to God.

And there's no more important place we can be, than in a place where we can bask in God's presence.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give him thanks and praise.