

Riverview Baptist Church
Sunday School Teaching Plan
June 22, 2014
“God’s Voice”

Memory Verse

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.” Hebrews 12:28, NIV

The Big Idea:

Sermon Scripture: Hebrews 12:18-28
Sermon Title: Receiving God’s Unshakable Kingdom: Part 1 - Listening

Sunday School Scripture: Hebrews 12:18-28
Sunday School Title: “God’s Voice”
Big Idea: God’s powerful and majestic voice demands that we listen and respond.

REVIEW: Last week, we discussed the discipline of God. Did anyone experience something this week that might have been God disciplining you? Did you see God intervene in your life somehow to teach you something?

This week, as we continue our study in Hebrews, we will begin a five part series called God’s Unshakable Kingdom. This title comes from Hebrews 12:28, which is our memory verse. How would you define God’s kingdom? In what ways is His kingdom different from this earth? How is God’s kingdom unshakable? How should this impact the way we live here and now? This week, we will discuss the importance of listening to God’s voice as we pursue His unshakable kingdom.

READ Hebrews 12:18-28

INTRODUCTION

Remember that the original readers of Hebrews were Jewish Christians. They were struggling in several ways. Not only were they having trouble melding their Jewish past with their new Christian identity, but they were also enduring persecution for their faith and difficult trials of life. In response, the writer of Hebrews encourages them to take heart, and he provides several different reasons for this. First, he compares the Christian life to a race (Heb 12:1-3). The author points out that obstacles are to be expected, but can also be overcome through the power of Jesus, who ran the race ahead of us. Second, the author teaches the readers that tough situations can actually be God’s way of disciplining His people, whom He loves and instructs like children. Third, the author encourages the readers to remember that they are now under grace, not the law. And because of the grace of Jesus, they can know God intimately and hear His voice confidently. This third encouragement is what we will study today.

In Hebrews 12:18-28, the author compares Mount Sinai to Mount Zion to illustrate the difference between the law and grace. Pastor and author David Guzik explains it well: “Exodus 19:10-25 explains what it was like when Israel came to Mount Sinai. The mountain was fenced off; there was no trespassing, on pain of death. They were commanded to wash their clothes and abstain from sexual relations. There was thunder, lightning and a thick cloud. There was the sound of a trumpet, calling forth the nation to meet with God. There was more smoke, like a furnace, and earthquakes; then the trumpet sounded long - until Moses spoke, and God Himself answered. God spoke to Israel from Sinai, but warned them in every way possible to *stay away*. The reaction of Israel was understandable: they were terrified (Exodus 20:18-21). They wanted the experience to *stop*, not to continue. But we are in a different place. Our relationship with God is not modeled after Israel’s experience on Mount Sinai. We come to God’s other mountain: Zion, the name of the hill upon which Jerusalem sits.”

The author of Hebrews contrasts the two mountains to make a point. Mount Sinai was about God’s earthly kingdom. It established the law and required animal sacrifices to cover man’s sins. In contrast, Mount Zion is about God’s heavenly kingdom. It centers on the grace and forgiveness offered through Jesus. From both mountains, God speaks to His people. And in both instances, God’s people must listen to His voice in order to escape condemnation and enter God’s kingdom. Our focus today will be the instruction that comes in verse 25 of Hebrews chapter 12: “*See to it that you do not refuse Him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them from on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?*”

The voice of God is incredibly important because it comes from... well,... GOD! Think about this. When you were younger and you heard your parent's voice give you a command or warning, you knew it meant business! When you heard your parent's voice, you listened and obeyed because it was your parent speaking! On the other hand, if some stranger spoke to you, you'd likely give his words less thought. You might even completely ignore the stranger's words because he had no relationship with you and had no authority over you. We listen to the voices of people we respect. If we truly worship God in awe and reverence, we will recognize and listen to His voice.

THE VOICE OF GOD:

1. THUNDERS WITH AUTHORITY

How do you feel about thunder? Was there ever a time when you feared it? How would you describe thunder to a deaf person? Why does thunder deserve respect?

There are several places in Scripture where God's voice is likened to thunder. One of my personal favorites is found in the book of Job.

READ Job 37:1-5.

Scripture says the roar and rumbling from God's mouth resounds and holds nothing back. His mighty voice thunders with majesty. What an impressive image of God's voice. Thunder is nothing to take lightly. In fact, thunder has a sort of authority to it. Thunder warns of the flooding rains and crashing lightning to come. Thunder rolls in without invitation. No one can predict where it will come from, when it will rumble, or how long it will last. And whether it comes with a low rumble or an ear-splitting crash, thunder gets our attention. We may not like thunder, but it's hard to ignore. I believe God's voice is compared to thunder in Scripture because His voice, like thunder, carries authority that cannot be questioned or ignored. God's voice can come in a quiet whisper or a violent earthquake. No one can quench the voice of God. It goes forth majestically to accomplish God's own will. And like thunder, it's impossible to ignore God's voice. We can choose not to respond to His voice, but we do not have power enough to ignore it. God, the Creator of everything, speaks to His creation with thunderous authority. How will His people respond?

2. DESTROYS THE DROSS

Have you ever had to clean up destruction from a storm? If not, imagine some of your property was hit by flooding. What type of things would not survive if your home was flooded? What things would survive?

READ Psalm 29.

Psalm 29 is a beautiful hymn about God's majestic voice. Like the Scripture we read in Job, this Psalm likens God's voice to thunder. Notice the verbs associated with God's voice as it thunders: *it breaks the cedars, shakes the wilderness, flashes forth in flame, twists the oaks, and strips the forest bare.* Just as an intense lightning storm can wreak havoc and cause wide-spread destruction, so too can the voice of God. The voice of God is powerful, authoritative, and strong. It's strength cannot be matched or duplicated, and is therefore to be feared. In Psalm 29, God's voice progresses through the wilderness, destroying everything in its path. Picture an intense storm with flashes of sky-to-ground lightning, which produce fire in the forest. The flames of the fire lick up everything in its path, burning all the vegetation on the ground and even the bark on the trees. After the storm, everything is destroyed. Devastation is all the eye can see for miles. The air is still and quiet; trees lay twisted on the earth; the ground is soft with rain and black with ash. It may seem like a total loss. But it is also a blank slate – a great opportunity for a new start. Within a matter of weeks, new plant growth will poke through the black soil. Creatures will once again return to the forest, and eventually new trees will grow.

Sometimes, the voice of God comes through our lives like this storm. And the power and authority of God's voice thunders through us, bringing lightning and flames. The fire burns up all the dross in our lives – the excess, the trash, the sin. The mighty voice of God cuts through us to reveal that which is temporary and useless and that which is eternal and significant. And after His voice has spoken and all is quiet, it initially looks like devastation. But on closer examination, we find that some things survived the storm. While the dross – the extra stuff in our lives that was holding us back – was destroyed, the things of eternal value weathered the storm beautifully. And we realize that, whether we like it or not, the

thunder of God's voice cleaned out our lives. By simply speaking into our lives, He destroyed the dross and highlighted the eternally significant.

When was the last time you cleaned out your closet or one room of your house? How did you decide what to keep and what to get rid of? Why is it important to clean out periodically? If God were to clean our life, what would he keep? What might he throw out?

3. GUIDES HIS CHILDREN

Describe something you built or made. What actions did you have to take to create it?

READ Genesis 1:3

The terrible strength and authority in God's voice has the power not only to destroy, but also to create life. One of the very first references we have about the voice of God is in the creation story. Genesis 1:3 "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." Did you catch that? How did God create light? He spoke. All he did was give a command. God said, "Let there be light," and shazam!!! Light happened. It was created out of nothing. God's voice has creative power. Throughout the first chapter of Genesis, God speaks the name of things, and those things are instantly crafted into existence through the power of God's spoken word. God's voice has the power to create life. And not only do we see Him create life through speaking, but we also see Him guide His creation with His spoken words.

READ Genesis 1:27-30.

In these verses, God creates man. But he doesn't stop there. God's mighty voice blesses Adam and gives him instructions: be fruitful, multiply, subdue and rule the earth and its animals. God again speaks to Adam and gives him life-sustaining guidance: use the plants and animals of the earth for food. So in this first chapter of the Bible, we see God's voice creating, sustaining, and guiding his creation. And God's desire to guide His creation didn't stop in the garden. Still today, God desires to speak to His children to provide guidance.

READ Psalm 32:8

In His Word, God promises to guide us – to show us the way we should go. He promises to teach, instruct, and counsel us. If we are His children and we pursue righteousness and flee from sin, we can be confident that God will speak to us and guide us. God will speak, and His voice will be heard by those who love Him.

4. REQUIRES A RESPONSE

What are some ways God speaks to us? (Through the life of His son, through the Scriptures, through the Holy Spirit, etc) When was the last time you felt God speaking to you?

READ Psalm 32:9

In Psalm 32:8, God promises to "instruct you and teach you in the way should go." But continue reading. In verse 9, God warns us to "not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle." So while God promises to speak to us and guide us, we must recognize that God's voice requires a response from us. When God speaks, He desires obedience. Consider this: when you train a child (or even an animal) to recognize and respond to your voice, you expect him/her to obey. It stinks when you have to drag that child (or animal) kicking and screaming towards obedience. In the same way, we choose how we respond to God's voice. We can obey or disobey. While we recognize the choice is indeed ours, we also need to know that God much prefers willing obedience to stubborn disobedience. Hebrews 12:25 serves as our warning: "See to it that you do not refuse Him who speaks." God will speak. And His mighty voice will be heard. The question is, how will we respond?

CLOSING: God's powerful and majestic voice demands that we listen and respond.

APPLY IT!

- When was the last time you felt God speak to you?
- Do you believe God desires to speak to you today?
- When God does speak, are you prepared to respond in obedience?

Take some time this week to quietly read God's Word and seek Him in prayer. Ask Him to speak to you, even if His voice results in a major "clean out" in your life.

STUDY NOTES:

(These are for your own study. This is NOT the lesson. Commentary written by David Guzik and available online: http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/guzik_david/)

For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire: Exodus 19:10-25 explains what it was like when Israel came to Mount Sinai. The mountain was fenced off; there was no trespassing, on pain of death. They were commanded to wash their clothes and abstain from sexual relations. There was thunder, lightning and a thick cloud. There was the sound of a trumpet, calling forth the nation to meet with God. There was more smoke, like a furnace, and earthquakes; then the trumpet sounded long - until Moses spoke, and God Himself answered. God spoke to Israel from Sinai, but warned them in every way possible to *stay away*.

So that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore: The reaction of Israel was understandable: they were terrified (Exodus 20:18-21). They wanted the experience to *stop*, not to continue. Did this fear work in promoting holiness among the people of Israel? Did it change the heart of Israel? 40 days later, they worshipped a gold calf, saying it was the god that brought them out of Egypt!

But we are in a different place. **For you have not come to the mountain:** Our relationship with God is not modeled after Israel's experience on Mount Sinai. We come to God's other mountain: Zion, the name of the hill upon which Jerusalem sits.

Contrasts between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion.

Mount Sinai was marked by fear and terror. Mount Zion is a place of love and forgiveness.

Mount Sinai is in the desert. Mount Zion is the city of the Living God.

Mount Sinai spoke of earthly things. Mount Zion speaks of heavenly things.

At Mount Sinai, only Moses was allowed to draw near to God. At Mount Zion, an **innumerable company**, a **general assembly** is invited to draw near.

Mount Sinai was characterized by guilty men in fear. Mount Zion features **just men made perfect**.

At Mount Sinai, Moses was the mediator. At Mount Zion, Jesus is the mediator.

Mount Sinai brings an Old Covenant, which was ratified by the blood of animals. Mount Zion brings a New Covenant, which is ratified by the blood of God's precious Son.

Mount Sinai was all about exclusion, keeping people away from the mountain. Mount Zion is all about invitation.

Mount Sinai is all about Law. Mount Zion is all about grace.

But you have come to Mount Zion: The lesson is plain. We shouldn't come to Mount Zion as if we were coming to Mount Sinai. So put away your hesitation and get bold in coming to God! Of course, the idea of the superiority of the New Covenant is also repeated. How could these Jewish Christians even consider going back and preferring the religion of Mount Sinai over the relationship of Mount Zion?

The blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel: The **blood of Abel** does not mean the blood he shed in his martyrdom. Rather, it was the blood of the sacrifice he made - the first recorded sacrifice from man to God in

the Bible. The blood of Jesus **speaks better things** than the blood of animal sacrifice, the blood of Abel.

See that you do not refuse Him who speaks: If we refuse to get strong, get right, and get bold, we should not remain ignorant of the consequences.

They did not escape: There were consequences for rebelling at Mount Sinai. How much more should there be consequences for resisting God's greater work at Zion?

Whose voice then shook the earth ... Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven ... things which cannot be shaken: God is shaking the present order, and these beleaguered Jewish Christians felt it. But the things of God and the people of God will remain.

Since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace: The kingdom itself will never be shaken. So it behooves us to seize God's unmerited approval in Jesus, helping us to **serve God acceptably**. Many wrongly argue that "too much" grace gives license and breeds disrespect towards God. Actually, grace gives us **reverence and godly fear**. Perhaps those who think grace gives them license to sin aren't walking in grace at all!