

Hebrews - Part 6

by Richard Owen Roberts

Richard Owen Roberts emphasizes the urgency of heeding God's warnings in Hebrews and the importance of true belief manifested through obedience.

Duration: 1:01:55

Scripture: Hebrews 3:15

Topics: "Salvation Warning", "Christian Obedience"

Description

This sermon delves into the warning passages in Hebrews, emphasizing the importance of not neglecting salvation, avoiding hardening of the heart, being vigilant against dullness of hearing, and refraining from willful sin. It stresses the need for obedience to God's warnings, highlighting that belief is not just passive agreement but active obedience. The sermon concludes with a powerful reminder of the impending shaking of all things by God, urging gratitude for the unshakeable kingdom and a call to offer acceptable service with reverence and awe, as our God is a consuming fire.

Transcript

Thanks for this wonderful opportunity for me to share with you over the days of this week. I leave in the morning for Arkansas, where I'm scheduled to be preaching on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in the evening at the Church of Stark City, and then at the same time on Tuesday and Wednesday in the morning and Thursday in the evening in the prison there in Arkansas. I will appreciate especially your prayer support for this ministry in the prison.

And Lord willing, I return home on the Friday, and I'll be in my own church next Sunday. My church, where I have been preaching for the last 14 months, all those Sundays and Wednesdays when I have not been elsewhere in the country, is hearing a candidate next Sunday. And I need to be there for that purpose.

Now we've been looking at the warning passages in Hebrews, and as I have mapped them out for you, they are six in number. On Sunday morning last, we looked at the first warning about drifting and neglecting so great salvation. And Sunday evening, we were focusing upon the incredibly great danger of hardening our hearts.

Monday night, we were looking at the third warning about dullness of hearing and becoming sluggish in our souls. And on Tuesday, the fourth warning, sinning willfully and shrinking back. On Wednesday, we were dealing with that incredibly helpful and urgent passage.

On the issue of resisting the discipline that is mandatory for the believer, self-discipline and the discipline of the Lord himself. Now, will a person be saved by observing these warnings? Well, of course not. We're not saved by keeping the law.

We're not saved by observing the warning. We keep the warning because we believe Christ. We're saved by faith.

Now, the tragedy of the multitudes is they have understood belief to be passive acquiescence. So, they hear matters about Christ, that he is the virgin-born Son of God. They say, I believe it.

They hear accounts of the miracles that he performed. They say, I believe. They learn about his teachings.

And they say, those are good teachings. I believe in his teaching. They learn about his suffering and his death.

They say, I believe. They hear about his resurrection. And they say, I believe, and his ascension.

I believe. But the devil believes all of those things as well. But he has a grace that many professed Christians do not have.

He believes and he trembles. But we know perfectly well that no matter how much he trembles over the things he knows to be fact and belief, there is one thing he will not do, and that's to bow to Christ. So the New Testament makes it crystal clear that belief is not mental assent or passive acquiescence in truth, but obedience.

So if the Lord says, stand up, we stand up. If he says, sit down, we sit down. If he says, shut up, we shut up.

Whatever the Lord says, we do. When he gives a warning, as he has six times in Hebrews, we heed that warning. If we do not heed what the Lord says, we are not believers.

You see, some believe in him, but they do not believe in him. And what is mandatory, what every one of us must do, is to believe in him. Whatever he says, whatever he commands, we do.

So it certainly can be said, if one does not heed the warnings of Hebrews, they will be lost. But they will not be saved because they keep the warnings, but because they believe in Jesus Christ and they believe Jesus Christ. I suppose it's been about 50 years ago, when I was in Edinburgh, Scotland.

And I learned that one of the great preachers of Scotland was speaking in one of the Edinburgh churches of a Sunday evening. And I was able to go. A few of you at least will know his name, James Stewart.

And he was preaching on that passage in the Revelation. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. In a very kindly and gentlemanly way, he laid out the basic issues of the text in a very inviting fashion, in a way that was truly appealing.

He made it clear how important it is to open the door of your life for Christ. But as he was reaching the climax of the sermon, he began to speak about those persons for whom the door of their heart had been long closed against Christ. Closed so long and distorted so badly, that when they heard him knocking and knew it was Christ coming to claim them for his own, they laid hold of the doorknob and tried to open the door, but found it stuck tight.

And then he proclaimed, Christ, when you cannot open the door of your own heart, has the capacity to back it down and enter. And he said it in such a way that there was an incredible hope that anyone who merely called out, come in, would indeed find the Savior. Maybe some here this morning have had the door of your heart so long closed to Christ, that you don't even know how to get it open.

And all you have to do is to call out to him and let it be known that you long for him in your life. Paying attention to these warning passages is like saying, Lord, I welcome you. I want you above all else.

Nothing else begins to matter like your presence, your power in my life. Now this sixth warning is very different from the others. For one thing, it's couched in preferred words.

It's more like the first warning than the others that are much lengthier. It focuses upon the issue of not refusing him who is speaking. And as I've sought to point it out already, it is giving heed to what the Lord says that demonstrates that we truly believe.

So the warning is simply, do not refuse him who is speaking. Our focus is upon chapter 12, verses 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29. Now there's a very significant way in which the body of this epistle, this epistle of the Romans, is essentially completed with verse 29 of chapter 12.

Our God is a consuming fire. What follows are matters of a personal note from the author to the reader, sort of like an appendix that is added. The epistle to the Hebrews begins with the words of tremendous consequence.

God, after he has spoken long ago in the Father, or to the Father, in the prophets, in many ways, in these last days, has spoken to us by his Son. That's how the epistle began. The message that is of great consequence is not the message of the prophets, as urgent and consequential as they are.

What the prophets said is of minor consequence in comparison with what the Son of God says. And this twelfth chapter ends the main body of the epistle by calling upon us to not refuse him who is speaking, namely the very one described in chapter 1 as the Son of God himself. Now throughout the epistle, and it's quite clear in each of the warnings, that anyone who did not obey Moses was in incredible trouble.

And in fact, all who disobeyed Moses as God spoke through him were destroyed in the wilderness. And the thrust of these warnings has been, it's much more dangerous, vastly more dangerous to fail to heed him who speaks from heaven than to fail to heed Moses. And we have noticed in the various warnings, various ways in which Israel did not heed Moses in various descriptive language about how God dealt with them for their failure.

So now let's take these five verses and weigh them with as much care as we're capable. Some of you know what a syllogism is, a simple form of logic where you have a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. What we have initially in this warning is a syllogism, the major premise, see to it that you do not refuse him who is speaking.

The minor premise, for those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on the birth, and the obvious conclusion. Much less shall we escape who turn away from him who warrants from heaven. Now that is such an urgent issue.

I must label the matter and press hard in the hopes that everyone is absolutely clear on this. Each person who failed to listen to Moses and to the message of God that was delivered at the hands of angels was

destroyed. And every person in this room, and every person in this community, and every person on this earth who refuses to hear the one who speaks from heaven will be destroyed.

Now many don't believe that, but unbelief does not alter fact. It is a fact to be weighed with great seriousness. It is a fact to be believed.

If you have never opened the door of your heart to Christ, if indeed it is stuck, shut, and you have never called out, come in! You can be absolutely assured that you are headed for destruction and there will be no escaping yet. Now of course there are younger folk who say, well I don't intend to be destroyed. I really don't.

I do intend to become a Christian. But not now. I have certain things I want to do first.

In time, when I'm ready, I will open the door to Christ. Don't crowd me. Don't push on me.

I'll do it, but eventually, not now. And the tragedy for multitudes who have refused to open the door is that their life was suddenly terminated long before they had opportunity to reach that point when they intended to open the door. Or if their life was not terminated earlier than anticipated by their refusal to open the door.

They wandered into some area of sin that got a hold of them and they never then found the way out of the wilderness of sin. Or they hardened their heart against Christ. And when repeated call after call after call to repentance was sounded in their ears, the hardness of their heart made it impossible for them to hear and to heed.

So these warnings are warnings of God's consequence. And none of us could with any wisdom whatsoever delay even for a day or two in responding to the call of God. The first verse of this warning, as is quite clear to you now, I trust, focuses upon the past.

Listen to this quotation from Exodus chapter 19, beginning with verse 5. Now then, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own possession among all the peoples. For all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom, a priest, and a holy nation. And God said to Moses, these are the words that you are to speak to the sons of Israel.

So in verse 25, the reference to him who warned them on earth, those words I just read, constitute a portion of the warning. Then we have the record immediately thereafter of the way the people of Israel responded to that warning. Exodus 19, verses 7 and 8. So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and he sat before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him.

And the people answered together, and they said, all that the Lord has spoken, we will do. So Moses carried their message back to the Lord. The tragedy is they lied.

When God gave them a warning, they were momentarily affected by that warning. But they didn't follow through. Being affected by a warning, being stirred, being moved, even shedding tears, is not the same as heeding the warning.

Over the years, I have observed many, many people deeply stirred by the warnings of God's word. I have seen their tears in multitudes of haste. I have heard their pronouncements of response and obedience.

But so many of them did not follow through. And that is the heart of the warning. Israel said, yes, Lord, everything you say, we will do.

But they didn't do it. They didn't really take the warnings to heart. Or maybe a few of them were so silly as to think, God won't really know whether I obey or not.

So I'll say that I'll obey, and I won't, and the wool would be pulled over his eyes. How could he possibly know? But whatever is in the heart, whatever lies behind the disobedience, the result is still the same. There's a further quotation from Exodus 19.

So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. And they stood at the foot of the mountain.

Now, Mount Sinai was all in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire. And the smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him with thunder.

And the Lord came down on Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up himself, quaking. And the Lord spoke to Moses, Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the Lord today.

And many of them perished. Now, on that occasion, they did not break through the boundary that God had set. The experience of the whole mountain quaking, and the fire erupting from it, and the smoke pouring toward the heaven, and the sound of the trumpet, and the voice of God, set them in such fear that they dared not violate.

But a little later, when the smoke was gone, and the fire was not visible, and the quaking had ceased, and the trumpet was not sounding, then they violated everything the Lord had set. It does not matter, I repeat, that a person makes a temporary response when the situation is dreadfully frightening. It is the long-term response that matters.

So the warning is crystal clear, isn't it? If those who heard on earth that which I have just read and described, then proceeded to refuse to listen to him who spoke, how much more grievous, how much more threatening and dangerous is it to refuse to hear him who speaks from heaven. I hope that that is clear to all. There is no thunder taking place here this morning.

The building is not shaking. Fire is not shooting out. Smoke is not ascending.

A mere old man stands in front of you and recites scripture. But it is God himself who is speaking. You can hear my voice in your ear.

But deep in your hearts is the voice of God that is warning you, don't fail to hear what I am saying to you. You can disregard my words. You can write them off as inconsequential.

But you cannot disregard the voice of God. Israel sought to do so. And they are still suffering and will suffer forever the consequence of their refusal to obey the voice of the Lord.

Look at verse 26. His voice shook the earth then, and it most certainly did. But now he has promised saying, Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens.

Now the picture I trust was clear to my eyes. That that mountain of Sinai was shaking. But now, pay attention to what we are being told.

That happened way back then. It was very real. But there is another shaking coming.

It will not be the shaking of a mountain. It will not be the shaking of a community like New Albany. It will be the shaking of all of the heavens and all of the earth.

Now we've had some little experience in recent months with winds that shake huge areas. We've not only seen the trees bent over as a result of the wind. We've seen them by the thousands snapped off by the power of the wind.

We've seen huge buildings lifted off their foundations, carried some distance and dropped, and they are smashed to smithereens. We've seen automobiles raised up by the wind and placed in trees. We have a fairly good notion these days of the power of the wind.

And we've had information provided to us about the power of waves. And we've seen pictures of the huge areas devastated completely by the wind. These huge tidal waves.

But the picture in front of us is not the picture of the destruction of the wind or of the waves, but the picture of God himself taking the whole earth in his hands. As a boy, I thought it quite clever that I could sneak up behind a fly and suddenly grasp that fly in my hand. Then I would shake it real good so that it got whatever flies get dizzy or who knows what.

Then I would throw it on the floor and stomp on it. But the ability to shake a fly until it's dizzy is hardly consequential. But the ability of God to take the entire earth in his hand and shake it is something so consequential that we would be terribly foolish not to consider what is said in this passage.

Have you got the picture? The day is coming when God is going to take the whole earth and shake it. And everything that can be shaken will be shaken and destroyed. And the only things that will remain are the things that cannot be destroyed by shaking.

Now put your mind to work on that subject. Let me spell it out just in case someone's on the dumb side and doesn't quite get the picture. God is going to lay hold of the whole earth and he's going to shake it and shake it and shake it and shake it until everything that can be shaken and destroyed by shaking is gone.

And all that's going to be remaining is that which is not going to suffer damage by the almighty God shaking it for all he's worth. Then you have to ask this sober question. The things that attract me, the things that I hold dear, the things to which I devote my time and my energy, the things that consume me, are they things that can be shaken and destroyed? Or are they things that no amount of shaking is going to affect? You're not very smart if you fail to enter now into serious consideration.

We're not talking about some crazy notion that some silly apostle had and wrote down. We're talking about the very Word of God. The Word of the God who made you.

There isn't a person here in this room but what is the subject of the God who made them? Not one of you made yourself. Not one of you has control of your life. Not one of us has any ability to set the length of our

days.

Not one of us can stand against even simple things like sickness. When we are struck with sickness back here, we're sick. God has made it clear.

He's going to shake everything. Your entire world is going to be shaken. And if you have any wisdom at all, you'll examine what is said here and act with wisdom in accordance with what is said.

Let's just think now about what can be shaken and what cannot be destroyed by shaking. If you're well familiar with Hebrews, you will remember these words that I now read from chapter 1 of Hebrews, verses 10-12. Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands.

They will perish, but thou remainest. They will all become old as a garment, and as a mantle thou wilt roll them up. As a garment they will all be changed, but thou art the stand.

And thou years do not come to an end, even if this shaking is some distance off. We are not told when the shaking is going to occur. Suppose you're 26 now, and you live for another 50 years from this date, and the shaking occurs in the 57th year.

You're going to be destroyed, even if not by the shaking. Not one of us, in and of ourselves, is eternal. We all have a limited lifespan.

We don't know what that lifespan is. Only God is eternal. His years do not fade.

His life does not end. Our physical lives on this earth do. So, whether everything dear to you is destroyed at the time when God takes the whole earth in his hand and shakes it to the point that everything destructible is destroyed, or whether you live out a natural lifetime, everything that you hold dear is going to be destroyed.

Did you ever hear of anyone who loved a garden, who died and took the garden to heaven with them? Did you ever learn of anyone who loved their automobile, and the automobile accompanied them into eternity? Everything that we hold dear is going to be destroyed if it is destructible. And as I said, we don't know when this great shaking is coming, we just know it is indeed coming. So, let's think now systematically.

Everything that is of a physical nature will be destroyed. Houses. And how hard is it for God to destroy houses? Well, we've seen enough on the news lately to know that thousands of houses can just simply disappear in a moment of time.

And it causes God no severe exercise at all. You don't hear God panting up in heaven because he just sent a tidal wave or a hurricane force wind. So, all houses are going to be destroyed.

Your house. My house. All vehicles will be destroyed.

All farms will be destroyed. All schools will be destroyed. All libraries, now for Pastor John that's a bit of a dream.

But his library is just a bit of a library. I've got a monstrous library. 60,000 books in it.

It's all going to be destroyed. Not even my most favorite volume is going to survive. Everything physical will be destroyed.

Your computer. And the internet. And everything like that will be included in destruction.

Even the hospitals will be destroyed. All the things that man has built, bridges and highways. Vast commercial enterprises.

Everything will be destroyed. Like plants, flowers, the earth itself. Everything physical taken in the hand of God and shaken.

And everything that by shaking can be shaken to pieces and destroyed will truly be destroyed. Have you given the kind of consideration that a truth like that deserves? Or are you playing the fool and focusing your life on stuff that is going to be destroyed? Everything personal will be destroyed. Your health, your wealth, your bank account, your stocks, your bonds.

The gold that you've accumulated. Friends will be destroyed. Families will be destroyed.

Enemies will be destroyed. Power will be destroyed. Prestige destroyed.

Employment destroyed. Everything, even the cosmetics on your counter. Everything shakable will be shaken by God and destroyed.

Everything in the realm of religion will be destroyed. All church buildings. All theological systems.

All parachurch organizations. All the colleges, all the bible institutes, all the theological seminaries. All the denominations.

All the religious experiences throughout the world. All the false professions of faith. All the dead works to which you've given yourself.

All of it destroyed. The only things that are going to remain are the things that cannot be shaken. God himself will not be destroyed.

He is the destroyer. The kingdom of God will not be destroyed. The kingdom of Satan will.

There will not be one vestige of the kingdom of darkness, of the kingdom of evil that remains. Totally gone. But the kingdom of God stands firm.

The word of God will not be shaken. Not one single word of God will be lost. The person of faith will not be shaken.

Every true Christian will endure the shaking. All the deeds of righteousness done in Christ's name will endure the shaking. And in the light of the truth of this passage, every sober-minded person needs to ask, Am I devoting my life, my time, my energy to that which will be destroyed in the shaking? Or to that which cannot be destroyed? That's the warning.

Don't be the idiot. Don't be silly. Don't act like the fool.

Don't invest your time, your strength, your energy, your opportunity in things that are bound to be destroyed. Give everything you've got to that which cannot be shaken. There must be a reality check.

What portion of your time is being given currently to that which shall be shaken by God? What portion of your time is given to that which cannot be shaken? No, this passage does not suggest that in the light of the destruction that's coming, we all leave our houses and our jobs and we sit in the field waiting for the destruction to come. There's nothing observed in this passage. Nothing that suggests some silly kind of.

But it is a very heartfelt cry to not waste your life on things that are non-essential and that will be destroyed. So let me simply ask now. Have you been playing the fool? Are you giving inordinate time and energy and interest to that which is certain to be destroyed? Or have you focused on that which cannot be shaken? Then notice what follows.

This expression, verse 27, yet once more denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken as of created things in order that the things that may not 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 with awe. Earlier in the week, I pointed out that a person who is lacking in gratitude is a person who sets themselves up for drifting.

That a person who is lacking in gratitude sets themselves up for the hardening of their own heart. The person lacking in gratitude is the person who is most likely to become dull of hearing and sluggish. The people who sin willfully are those who are lacking in gratitude to God.

The people who fight against discipline, who do not discipline themselves, and who despise the chasing of the Lord are the people lacking in gratitude. The call of this final warning is to show gratitude since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken. Let us show gratitude.

I want to ask, is the level of gratitude in your life adequately reflective of the immensity of what you have received as a citizen of the kingdom of God? One of the most painful issues of my life is going from place to place preaching about the kingdom of God and watching the shoddy way in which people who call themselves Christians are acting toward God himself. If you truly are a citizen of the kingdom of God, it's time to stop fooling around. It's time to get earnest about showing gratitude to God.

When you remember that everything in your life that is shakable will be shaken and destroyed, what is there left but that which cannot be shaken? And anyone who is facing the reality of true Christianity has profound reason for gratitude. Yes, I do enjoy my home. I love my family.

I'm grateful for the privilege of ministry that's been mine for so many decades. I appreciate and am truly thankful for my wonderful library. But all of that is ending.

But the kingdom of God is remaining. And I want to be sure that I am demonstrating every hour of my life the gratitude to the God of the kingdom that is appropriate. And I am urging you on the basis of this warning to be certain that indeed there is appropriate gratitude to God for the things that cannot be shaken.

Now, it is perfectly plain in verse 28 that if I show gratitude for the kingdom which cannot be shaken, then I am in a position to offer to God acceptable servants with reverence and offense. Because a lot of people today are in church across the nation who are hoping that they are offering to God acceptable worship and servants. But they aren't.

Because they have not that level of gratitude which is appropriate for that which cannot be shaken. And the call of this warning is to be done with lesser things. And to get serious about both expressing gratitude

to God and total commitment to service that is pleasing to God out of a heart of deep gratitude.

Because by God's grace you are part of the eternal kingdom. And the passage ends appropriately with a very, very consequential word. Our God is a consuming fire.

When our gratitude is appropriate, when our service for God is prompted by a right understanding of these things, the consuming fire has beneficial effects upon our lives. All the drugs, all the stuff in our lives that's impure, that has no consequence, the consuming fire of God devours. So that we become more and more like our wonderful Savior.

But for those who have fastened on the destructible, the consuming fire does not quicken their passion and increase their holiness. It just burns up all the religious chap of their life and leaves them with nothing. So brothers and sisters, here's a wonderful opportunity for all of us to take a real step forward in refusing to give any more time and energy to things that don't matter.

Focusing upon our Lord Jesus Christ and his eternal kingdom. Remember, these warnings will not save us. But the failure to heed them will demonstrate that we've been deceiving ourselves when we call ourselves Christians.

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