

Hear the tale of 2 dogs. One dog was named Bev; the other, Ted.

Bev was my sheep dog (Black & Tan Kelpie, crossed with Black Barb). And Ted was her pup. And as Ted grew, he was nothing like his mother.

*Ted was Mum & Dad's dog, and he had **zero** use as a sheep/pig dog, and not much good for anything really, because although he was a dog, he was a scaredy-cat – he was terrified of everything.*

If you were to call him over (even with a smile and friendly voice), he would reluctantly come; tail tucked between his legs; and when he got near, he would roll on his back and piddle on himself in terror... It was bazaar. And so he couldn't be taught to do anything, because he was terrified; and when you gave him a command, he assumed he was in trouble...

*But Bev, she was the best dog I ever had. Good sheep dog. And out on the farm, she would go with me everywhere. She'd hate to be left at home. And if you know dogs, you know they smile... And Bev, would usually be smiling... And the only time she ever showed any fear, was when **she** knew she'd done something very, very bad, and she would look guilty, even before **I** knew what she had done anything wrong...*

And there were times when I would have to discipline her, but I know she loved me.

She had a habit that when I was laying under a machine, repairing it, she'd come in and lay down beside me, and then

reach out the soft part of her paw (just above the pads), and stroke my forehead with the soft furry part of her paw...

After all these years, I still remember the way she enjoyed my company, and I loved having her around... And she was a good sheep dog too.

Now, this might seem strange, but that is what I thought of when I read today's Bible reading. It's a tale of 2 peoples and 2 covenants. One involved much fear and trembling. The other involves a lot of love, respect, and honour.

And yet, it's the same loving God.

In the 2nd Century, there was a bloke by the name of Marcion. And he taught that the god of the Old Testament was different to the god of the New Testament. He viewed the God of the Old Testament as evil – the creator of evil – a horrible god – a god of wrath and bondage, but the God of the New Testament is a god of love and freedom.

And some people today, as they hear certain stories from the Old Testament, and compare that to a few select passages from the life of Jesus, come to that same conclusion – the god of the Old Testament **must** be different to the god of the New Testament.

But 1800 years ago, the early church heard what Marcion had to say, and then the early church read the Scriptures as a whole, and they came to the conclusion, that Marcion was absolutely wrong.

*The conclusion was (**and is**), that The God of the New Testament is the same loving, searching, forgiving God as the God Whom we read about in the Old Testament. And so the early church made a tough decision – “Marcion, you’re not allowed to teach that rubbish any longer.” And so his teachings were pronounced heretical... And with good reason: They were simply not true.*

You see, to come to the conclusion that the God of the New Testament is different to the God of the Old Testament, means to ignore the love of God and the Forgiveness of God, and the way that God pursues His people throughout the Old Testament (and there’s a lot of it),

And you would also have to turn a blind eye in the **New** Testament, to how Jesus is very clear about how He will come again to judge the living and the dead...

You see, as we read the **whole** Bible, in both the Old Testament and the New, we discover that there is **one God**, through **all** time, and it’s the story of the journey of God’s love for His people:

- disciplining us at times;
- giving of Himself for us at times

but always a God of:

- justice;
- love;
- mercy; and
- ready to forgive.....

And always a God Whom we should:

- admire;

- respect;
- honour;
- worship; and
- hold in awe.

Sometimes we forget this. Sometimes we **forget** that God is our Heavenly **Father**, and we want to treat Him as if He's just a mate. Or maybe we might think of Him as a doting Grandfather – someone who hands out lollies; turns up for a few happy times; and never has a harsh word to say...

Sometimes we come to worship and we treat worship as if it's a place for **us** to let our hair down and do our own thing, and we forget the reverence; and the respect; and the awe; and the fear of God that should form our worship, as we come before Him in all of His Holiness.

So,,,,
There's a lot for us to learn from today's reading, because it speaks to us on so many different levels. And we're going to consider 3 different levels today. And the 3rd level (which is the main point), will carry over into next week, as we get into Chapter 13.

1.
So, let's begin. Level 1:
The temporary physical status vs the eternal state.

When the Lord led the People of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, they didn't yet really know, this God Who had saved

them. And so, the Lord led them to Mt Sinai, which is where He gave Moses the 10 Commandments...

And there at Mt Sinai, the People of Israel were struck with the fear of God.

- There was darkness;
- the mountain was like it was on fire;
- with billows of smoke;
- a loud voice booming down from heaven;
- a trumpet blast sounded; and
- The ground shook.....

The people cowered in fear. And rightly so. They were told, “If you set foot on that mountain, you will die”...

And so, Moses went up on their behalf...

So, when the Old Covenant was given, it was a very physical experience. The presence of God was something they could see/hear/feel. There was no doubt about the presence of God. And it scared the living daylights out of them... They couldn't bear for God to speak to them, and so, Moses became the intermediary. *Like Ted, cringing;.....*

But, our experience of salvation, and coming to know God, is very different to that.

For us, it's about faith.

There is no:

- shaking;
- smoking mountain;
- loud voice of God reverberating in the air...

For us, it is about faith. We believe. We **believe** that Jesus has been raised from the dead. And on this belief, we **know** that He is Lord. We know, that He is the all-powerful Lord God Almighty. And we believe in Him. We turn our hearts toward Him, and surrender ourselves to Him, for His glory...

The one thing we need, is faith. And yet, that is the barrier for many. For some, the one thing that they need, is the very thing that prevents them from becoming a Disciple of Jesus.

You may have heard it said, “Yeah, all God has to do, is to show Himself to me; or do this/that; or do this sign/wonder, and then I’ll believe...”

And some people become signs & wonders junkies, and as soon as the signs and wonders stop, they become less enthusiastic about God... But the thing is, the presence of physical signs and wonders is **not** the key to faith, and they are **definitely** not, the keys to faithfulness.

You see, the People of Israel, they experienced all this. They:

- felt the shaking;
- saw the smoke billowing;
- heard the loud voice,,,
- They were the same ones who had been led through the waters of the sea when they parted...

and yet, they were faithless.

Moses had been up on the mountain for 40 days. That’s all it took – 40 days, before they took matters into their own hands

– “God seems to have gone. Where’s this Moses bloke? He’s missing in action...” And so they all donated gold from their jewellery; and they made for themselves, a golden calf; and they poured out their worship to the abomination they had made – “**This** is the god who saved us from Egypt.”...

“Signs and wonders”, are not the keys to faith.

I think of something Jesus once said:

He began to denounce the cities where most of His mighty works had been done, and He said:

Matthew 11: (ESV)

²¹ “**Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.**

And the same went for Capernaum. The cities, where most of His mighty works had been done, failed to repent...

Yes, of course they believed Jesus could do miracles – they saw them being done... But that level of belief did not translate into a life-changing faith.... And that’s what we’re on about here – a life-changing faith.

So, the Old Covenant was characterised by physical signs and wonders – signs that generated a fear of God... And even the New Covenant has some elements of physical signs and wonders, but that is not what we come to.

You see, all of this physical stuff, is only temporary. But, the call to faith in Jesus, isn’t a call to something temporary. It is a call, to that which is eternal. And we don’t find our

blessings in physical things. The **blessing** we have, is in things that we cannot yet see.

V18 says: ... you have not come to what may be touched...

We haven't come to Mt Sinai... We've come V²² ... to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...

“Zionists” and “Zionism”, is well and truly in the news at the moment. For the “woke”, and for those who are angry, looking for a cause to be angry about, it’s currently very fashionable to embrace the long-term Islamic hatred of Jews and of their wanting to live in their homeland, which was given to Israel by God... That’s what Zionism is – the belief that Jerusalem is the city, given to Israel by God...

And nothing is new. Those who are anti-God and anti-Christ, are enemies of the people of Israel. Why? Because Israel want to live within the boundaries of the promised land God gave them thousands of years before Jesus was born...

And “Mount Zion”, over the years, has been used to refer to various hills within Jerusalem, but really, for our purposes, it means Jerusalem... And through the millennia, the bible lands, and the city of Jerusalem itself, have been:

- fought over;
- occupied; and
- its rightful inhabitants have been condemned...

*Today, there is hope for peace in Israel. As it turns out, today is the day that the hostages are to be turned over. And many are claiming, that today is the day where there **will** be peace in Israel...*

Maybe so, but going on history, it will probably only last a few years at the most. But I can tell you in all confidence, that one day, there **will** be Peace in Israel. At the return of Jesus, the Prince of Peace will descend upon one of the most embattled regions in the whole wide world.

In the book of Revelation, which talks about the return of Jesus, we're given an image of the Heavenly city of Jerusalem, descending from heaven to Earth...

You know, a lot of people believe that after the final judgment, we all go up to heaven to be with God in Heaven. Wrong. God brings Heaven to Earth, and the Earth will be completely renewed...

This is what we as Christians look forward to – something that does not yet exist.

And the description goes on:

And we come to: innumerable angels in festal gathering
There will be more angels than what anyone can count,
putting on a party.

It will be: the assembly of the firstborn who are
enrolled in heaven

The “firstborn” are Christians. God, is our Heavenly Father. We are heirs of the Father. It is Christians, who will be brought into the Kingdom of God, to eternal life.

Generally, most people like to think it's the nice people, or those people whom we like, who will be in heaven. It is nothing of the sort. Heaven is a place for the “firstborn” – for those who are children of God. It is for those who have been enrolled/registered to attend...

Now, I've been thinking lately: There's a lot of sick people; The doctors busy/work long hours, so I might be a doctor too, and give them a hand... I've done a bit of butchery, and I'm OK with a sharp knife, so I might do a bit of surgery in the theatre too...

Am I allowed to do that? No. Why? Because I was never enrolled to study medicine, and I am not registered to practice as a surgeon...

It is only those who have their names registered in the Lamb's book of Life, who will get to heaven...

And we also come to God, the judge of all ... And oh, that might sound a bit scary. *Ted would roll on his back at that one...*

But for those who are enrolled/registered, meeting God, the judge of all, is not a scary thought,, because we have nothing to be afraid of... At the return of Jesus, the Spirits of the “righteous”, will be made perfect.

Let me put legs on that one, for you.

To become a Christian – to have your name registered/enrolled into Heaven, means you have to make a booking. How do we make a booking?

- We repent of sin, and
- we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Jesus died, to take the punishment of our sins.
And so He forgives us.
- And as we are forgiven, we are no longer “guilty”.
We become, “righteous”...
It’s not our **own** righteousness – it’s not because we have been so good, that we have earned righteous.
- The forgiveness of God is so thorough, we are joined to Christ, and the righteousness of Christ, becomes **our** righteousness.

Back in Hebrews 11, we heard the story of Cane and Abel. When Cane killed his brother, God said: **The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground.** It was a cry for justice/vengeance. It is a cry that God hears, and a cry that God will act upon.

But we’re told here, that the blood of Jesus, **speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.**

In other words, the blood of Jesus, overcomes the cry for vengeance. And if the sin of murder, can be forgiven by the blood of Jesus, then your sins (and my sins) can be forgiven too. And so, on the day that Jesus returns (the Day of

Judgment), those who are righteous (because the blood of Jesus has overcome their sins), will be made perfect.

I'm looking forward to that day. I'm not yet perfect. Are you???

Yes, the blood of Jesus has paid for our sins, and we have the righteousness of Christ, but we still do wrong. And we still have to keep repenting of sin.... But we also look forward, to when we will be made perfect, and sin will be no more...

Are you looking forward to that day... I am...

The old will pass away, and the new, eternal, will arrive. There will be a new Earth; We will receive a new, resurrection body – one that is perfect. It will never:

- get old;
- grow tired;
- get sick; and
- die.

This physical world and physical life, is temporary. The one to come, is eternal.

2. The awesomeness of God.

The second point, is the Awesomeness of God...

I used to say this all the time, and I haven't said it for a while, so I'm going to say it again... I would love to reclaim the word "awesome" for what it truly means. It's a word that describes something that strikes awe into our hearts. The original meaning of awesome is "profoundly reverential"...

Whereas these days, the word "awesome" gets used to describe something nice or pleasant, like a cup of coffee, or a pie... I wish we could reclaim the word "awesome" for what it really means...

V²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.
That, is a picture of the awesomeness of God.

The question before us, is "How should we relate to God?"

We're not under the Old Covenant, where the People of Israel encountered God and they were struck with terror... This isn't our experience...

Through Christ, we become "children of God", and we are not struck with terror...

But sadly, sometimes, familiarity breeds contempt. And we touched on this at the beginning... Sometimes, we do not give to God, the honour and respect, which He is due...

The God Whom **we** worship, is the same God, Who struck **fear** into the hearts of those who felt the mountain shake; and saw the smoke; and heard the loud voice of God...

And Hebrews gives us a warning, that if **they** didn't escape (when they disobeyed God), when they were warned from Earth,,, How is it, that **we** will escape if **we reject him who warns from heaven.**

Back in the Old Testament, He shook the Earth. But when He comes again, the Heavens are going to be shaken...

Our God, is a consuming fire. He isn't:

- Your mate;
- Your pall;
- Jesus, my boyfriend;

Nor is He:

- a butt of a joke; or
- a laughing stock...

He is the Lord God almighty.

And so we come to the 3rd lesson.

3. The Holiness of Worship

V²⁸ Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,
29 for our God is a consuming fire.

With the New Covenant, has come freedom and joy. But the danger is that we might lose the sense of reverence and awe for our Holy God?

And holiness of Worship, has two aspects to it. It's about conducting ourselves before God, with reverence and with awe... And this should highlight to us, the 2nd aspect::: Our personal holiness. If Jesus died, to set us free from sin, let us not continue in sin.

You see, when Moses trembled with fear, **he** was fearful because of the sin of the people and how they had abandoned God... And this whole section that we're reading today, isn't a little piece all on its own... It's tied to the verses that came before it – to the verses that we studied last week... It's tied with the word “For”... In other words, “I’ve just given you a commandment, and this is the reason why...”

What was the commandment? He was talking about our need to repent of sin... .

Last week, was:

- Strive for peace with everyone;
- Strive for the holiness of God;
- See to it, that no one fails in the grace of God;
- See to it that no one wanders away from God;
- See to it, that no one is sexually immoral;
- See to it that no one is unholy

Why???

For; For; For...

For:

- We haven't come to a physical mountain that physically shook;
- They couldn't endure the presence of God;

- They were filled with fear;
- We have come to the heavenly city;
- We are saved by the blood of Jesus;

For:

- God will be the judge of all;
- If they didn't escape when they disobeyed God, Why would we?
- For the heavens and the Earth will be shaken...
- And everything that now exists, will be taken away, so that which cannot be shaken, can come.

For:

- Our God is a consuming fire...

All that we've studied today, is giving the reason why we should worship God in reverence and awe, and why we make every effort, to follow Him into righteousness and holiness.

Next week, we're going to talk more about worship, and the sort of worship God enjoys.

Are you enrolled in the Kingdom of God? Is your name on the register? Are you booked in to eternity??? If you're not sure, come and talk to me after the service, because bookings are being received today.

Let's move now, into worship... A worship of singing the praises of God, and as we leave this place, let us move to a worship of holiness.

Amen.