

A life that doesn't refuse God
Kingham & Churchill 5/7/2009
Readings: Luke 6:36-42; Hebrews 12:25 to 13:6

Introduction

The day Colin Firth was launched on an unsuspecting world as Mr Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, the foundations shook.

Well, they did in our household!

Do you remember towards the end when Darcy has asked for Elizabeth's hand in marriage?

Her father calls Lizzy into his study in a state of shock.

He says to her: 'Of course I gave him my permission; how could I refuse anything of such a man?'

Darcy was immensely wealthy, powerful, and important.

Not a man to cross.

So much so that Mr Bennett couldn't hold back even the hand of his most-beloved daughter.

'How could I refuse anything of such a man?'

We're near the end of our study of the book of Hebrews and today's reading began at chapter 12v25 with similar words:

"See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they didn't 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?"

And again the writer warns them, and through them us today, against turning our backs on Christ.

When God speaks from heaven, as he does every time you open your Bible, then only a fool refuses him.

So with that warning in mind, let's pray before we consider what God is saying to us through Scripture today.

Why we should not refuse Him - don't mess with the living God (12v25)

But before he tells us in what ways we shouldn't refuse God, our author tells us why we shouldn't refuse him.

And he gives us two reasons, there in v25.

The first is that our God is not to be messed with!

Back in v20-22 he had reminded them of when God spoke through Moses at Mount Sinai, and gave Israel the Old Testament Commandments.

There was fire and storm and the people were terrified.

In fact, v21, "The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, 'I'm trembling with fear.'"

As v29 says, "our God is a consuming fire."

Or as Hebrews 10:31 says: "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Don't mess with the living God!

So v25 says "See to it that you don't refuse him who speaks. If they didn't 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?"

But how and why did the people of Israel refuse God?

Well, Deuteronomy chapter 5, throws some very disturbing, light on the hearts of God's people at Sinai.

And on my heart too, if I'm honest.

Have a listen to this.

Because the people are terrified, they tell Moses they're fine with God speaking: 'Just keep him at a distance will you?'

Deuteronomy 5v27: "Go near and listen to all that the LORD our God says. Then tell us whatever the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey."

Now I'm not sure what they expected God to say to them.

Because it didn't turn out to be all that frightening.

In fact, it was very good news, especially compared to their experiences as slaves in Egypt.

What God said was that he was making a covenant with them.

He would be their God and they would be his people.

Living under his rule in his promised land.

How frightening was that?

Now it is true that he set out commands they must live by.

They couldn't carry on living as if they weren't God's people.

But every command God gave them was always and only for their very best, because he loved them.

It's a real pain having to get the car serviced and the oils changed at regular intervals, isn't it?

But I've seen the effect of never changing engine oil.

And it does not fit into the 'healthy lifestyle for cars' category, let me tell you!

All they had to do was live per the maker's instructions.

That would make them happy, fulfilled and peaceful.

How frightening, for that matter how difficult, was that?

Well, I said Deuteronomy 5 throws some very disturbing light on the hearts of God's people.

And here it is in Deuteronomy 5v28-29.

They've said 'You talk to him; tell us what he says; we'll do it.'

Here's the Lord's response to Moses: "I've heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good. Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!"

Did the Lord believe they'd said it? Yes.

Did he long that they would do it 'so that it might go well with them and their children for ever'? Passionately!

Did he believe they'd do it? Not a chance!

Why not? Is God getting cynical?

No, it's because God doesn't listen to what we say, but to what we think and are and do. It's what the Lord told Samuel about his choice of David as king: "The LORD doesn't look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." ^{1 Samuel 16:7}

And when God looked into the heart of that young David, he says he saw "a man after his own heart." ^{1 Samuel 13:14}

The question you and I must ask ourselves is this.

Am I a man or woman after God's own heart?

Or am I all talk?

Because whatever is there in my heart, however good I may be at hiding from other people, it's an open book to God.

Don't mess with the living God.

"See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks."

Why we should not refuse Him - this world won't last (12v26-28a)

The second reason why we shouldn't refuse God when he speaks is in v26.

It's because this world is only temporary, but the coming one is permanent.

Human kingdoms won't last; the Kingdom of Heaven will!

In v26, still talking about Sinai and Moses, he says:

"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."

And he goes on to say that as believers in Christ, we look forward to "a kingdom that cannot be shaken".

Again, it is good to look up the context of the quote, which in this case comes from the prophet Haggai, chapter 2v6.

I don't know that because I'm clever; it tells me in a footnote at the bottom of the page of my Bible!

And as I don't know exactly where Haggai comes in the Bible, I look him up in the index at the front.

And what I find if I read round the quote is that this is a promise about the coming of the Messiah.

Listen to the whole quote: "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, ...and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory.'"

This isn't one of the many 'born in a manger' prophecies.

This is one of the many 'Jesus will return as King of kings and Lord of lords at the end of time' prophecies.

The apostle Peter writes this in his first letter, explaining why the Christians were facing such hardships:

"These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed."

Do you see, it's all about what will survive when God destroys this physical world we live in?

Or as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 13v8: "Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away."

And chapter 7v31: "this world in its present form is passing away."

So, "See to it that you don't refuse him who speaks."

Firstly, because you don't mess with the living God.

And secondly because only the things he speaks about, that he thinks are worthwhile, will last beyond this life.

Everything else will not!

How we should not refuse Him (12v28b-13v1-6)

I hope you're determined not to refuse God when he speaks, but how do you do that?

Of course, it might be in any number of specific ways.

Probably most of you here could tell of how God has spoken clearly to you recently through the Bible.

For example, one person told me how a recent sermon really challenged them to make changes in their life.

That's because the Bible is 'living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword', as Hebrews 4:12 says.

But there are some pretty universal principles that all of us as Christians need to be brought back to time and again.

And to this he turns in v28: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken..."

by that he means eternal life for all who trust in Christ...

"let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe."

The word translated 'worship' means service, serving God.

So he's talking not just about worship in church, but the worship of the whole of your life.

And how do you serve God "acceptably with reverence and awe", and it's there in chapter 13?

By being loving, in v1-3.

Being pure in v4.

And being content in vv5-6.

He's not telling them something new when he says in v1 "Keep on loving each other as brothers."

He says "keep on loving" and "Do not forget to entertain strangers."

They were doing it; they needed to keep doing it; some of them needed to do it more.

And I expect God would say much the same to us here.

Remember what Jesus told the 12 just before he died?

“By this all men will know that you’re my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:35

We need to keep asking ourselves searching questions about that, don't we?

Do people realise I'm a Christian because of the love that I show for the other Christians in the church?

And that they show for me?

What have you actually done in the past week, as an outworking of Jesus' command that you love other Christians?

You may not have had many opportunities to entertain strangers and give them hospitality.

But what about newcomers to our church?

Wouldn't it be great if every time someone new started coming to church, somebody invited them round?

Or at least talked to them before and after church?

In Jesus' day inns were immoral, unhygienic and expensive.

So if Christians hadn't offered hospitality to Christians passing through, the gospel couldn't have spread as it did.

So applying that side of hospitality, what have you done recently to aid the spread of the gospel?

Here, in other parts of the country, abroad?

And many of the Christians were being imprisoned, so in verse 3 he says: “Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow-prisoners, and those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering.”

Two things leap from the page, don't they?

Firstly, if I am going to love my neighbour, I need to think myself into their situation, and not many of us are naturally very good at that.

What must it feel like to be out of work?

To be bereaved?

To be ill or disabled?

To be a lone parent or married to a non-Christian?

What specifically will be hard for that other Christian?

Think hard; pray hard; use your imagination; ask questions.

I you've a hard heart, it will be softened no end.

And then ideas about how to love others will come to mind.

Then just go and do it!

Second leap off the page, most of us don't know Christians in prison, though you can support them through for example the Barnabas Fund.

But most of us will know people who are effectively imprisoned by illness, age, infirmity, loneliness, depression.

Don't forget them!

Ask yourself ‘What must that feel like?’

Not to be able to get to church or Bible study?

To get little Christian fellowship, encouragement, teaching?

There are folk like that who have been part of our church.

Why not visit them, as some of you already do: they'd love it?

You could tell them what's going on in the church here.

Why not treat them to something they're missing?

And if you do that, do talk to them about the Lord.

Christians who are stuck in often find it so hard to have no-one to talk to about their faith, their doubts, their joys.

So be loving and think radically about how, and then v4 be pure.

“Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”

That means marriage should be held up as a great thing, because God says it is.

And sex is only for within marriage, because God says it is.

And finally, be content, v5.

“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have...”

Why? “...because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you’”

Jesus said it first in the sermon on the mount:

“do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ...But seek first [your Heavenly Father's] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Matthew 6:25&33

Conclusion

So let's see to it that we don't refuse him who speaks through Scripture.

After all, only a fool messes with the living God.

And anyway, only the things he speaks about, that he thinks are worthwhile, will last beyond this life.

So let's keep on radically loving one another, even getting better at it.

Let's keep ourselves pure.

And watch out for that slippery love of money!

Prayer (do business)