

Hebrews 12:18-24 "Which Mountain Do You Live On?"

In our text this morning we're about to see, once again, the contrast between the shadows and types of Christ found in the old covenant and the realities themselves found in the fulfillment of our Lord who instituted the New covenant in His blood. This is a continuing theme in this letter: Judaism vs. Christianity.

Keep in mind that our writer has been addressing these Hebrew Christians who have experienced both covenants first-hand. They knew what it was like to follow the law and the requirements it demanded to approach God through the priesthood of Israel.

And now they personally knew what it was like to lay aside the old in favor of the new as they embraced the Messiah by faith who came to fulfill the law and become our perfect representative, making Him both sacrifice and High Priest who would offer His life to the Father on our behalf.

As we see here in our letter there really are only two choices men use to approach God: through their own efforts by means of some good work, or by faith in God and His grace provision through His Messiah, Jesus.

This is seen in the verses we looked at last week when our writer warned his readers not to seek after a fleshly or godless approach to their Creator.

HEB 12:15-17 "See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. 16 See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. 17 Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears."

Esau's approach was a godless approach. And by that we mean that he did not bow to God and His provision, rather he scorned God and the Lord's way, which is the only means of receiving the spiritual blessing which lasts forever. Esau was only concerned with the fleshly or earthly, what he could see with his natural eyes.

And what our writer is about to show us is that what we can see with our natural eyes, or that which can be touched, will not suffice to meet our deepest need of being reconciled to God, even when

that which can be touched is given by God Himself as we will now see.

HEB 12:18-21 "You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; 19 to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, 20 because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." (Exodus 19:12,13) 21 The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." (Deut. 9:19)

Our writer is telling his readers that they have not approached God in the way that was only meant to show condemnation, which is what was demonstrated on Mount Sinai, as the law was given by God to Moses. No, their way of approach came only through approaching the heavenly Mount Zion as we'll see later on.

But let's look at Mount Sinai which is what we see in verses 18-21, even though Mt. Sinai is not directly mentioned here in our text.

HEB 12:18 "You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm;..."

The reference is obvious and the place we see this is in the book of Exodus.

EXO 19:12,13-18,19 "Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. 13 He shall surely be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on him. Whether man or animal, he shall not be permitted to live.' Only when the ram's horn sounds a long blast may they go up to the mountain." 18 Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, 19 and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him."

This was not a scene where people were rejoicing in the presence of the Lord. This was not a scene where God came down to meet His people and invite them to partake of His presence.

Imagine, having been called out by God and shown His mercy in Egypt, as He delivered you from under the oppressive hand of Pharaoh, and then for the first time He manifests Himself to you as

a nation as He descends upon Mt. Sinai in such a way where He actually warns His people to stay clear.

The reason they were to stay clear was because of His holiness and majesty. It was here on Mt. Sinai that God was going to establish Israel as His own possession, but it would be under His rule and under His covenant that He made with them.

Their part of the covenant was to obey the voice of the Lord as they, by faith, followed Him all their days. This is what God told Moses to tell the people.

EXO 19:4-6 "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession, for the whole earth is mine. 6 You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

God was establishing His covenant with them, but it was a covenant that spoke of their inadequacies and their sin and their need to depend fully on God to where they must show their faithfulness and faith as they obeyed His commands.

And it was His commands which He gave from Mt. Sinai. Notice the picture. The mountain is burning with fire; it has darkness, gloom and storm. This is not a scene from the "Sound of Music."

But what's interesting is that all of these experiences can be encountered with their physical senses. This is a mountain they can conceivably touch; this is a sight they can see; this is an event they can hear and if the smoke is that of a nature where something is burned they could even smell the experience.

Not so with Mount Zion as we'll see in a few moments. Mount Sinai, the place of the giving of the law, was an awesome spectacle and it was designed specifically by God to give the people a sense of awe of Himself. It also gave them a proper perspective of the holiness of God who is just in all His ways and must not only recognize sin, but judge it as well. This we see in the giving of the law.

But, God also spoke through the actual manifestations themselves, which took place on the mountain. Our writer begins with God appearing in a blazing fire. In the scriptures fire is seen as a symbol of divine judgment. We read in DEU 4:24 "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."

God desires a people to be His possession and not to play the harlot with other gods. He promises to visit a sinful, hard-hearted people with judgment. And as A.W. Pink notes, "the fire denotes the [formidable] majesty of God as an inflexible Judge, and the terror which His law strikes into the minds of its violators with expectations of fiery indignation."

The darkness, the gloom and the whirlwind follow in the wake of this fiery ordeal coming from God to remind us that His judgment is terrible and swift. Our text continues as we read HEB 12:19-20 "to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, 20 because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." (Exodus 19:12,13)

It was bad enough that the sight of God's majesty in judgment was displayed in this awesome way, but to have God speak to the people was more than they could bear. The trumpet blast was combined with the words of God.

EXO 19:16,19 "On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. 19 and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder...."

Where did this sound of the trumpet come from? Remember, that the angels accompanied our Lord on Mt. Sinai. In fact, it was through the agency of His angels that the law was administered, even though it was delivered by God.

GAL 3:19 "What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator."

These angels are even described in very similar language, as we have in our text, as being fire and wind.

HEB 1:7 In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire." (Psalm 104:4)

His angels are part of His judgment and the trumpet we hear described on the Mountain in Sinai surely has an association with the judgment we see in Revelation where the seven angels measure out the judgment on the earth.

REV 8:6-9 "Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. 7 The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. 8 The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, 9 a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed."

The judgments continue in those days through the agency of the seven angels. And so too, here in our text the angels' trumpets of judgment surround the mountain in Sinai and are to demonstrate that God must judge sin and the standard is His perfect righteousness which is more than the people can bear.

We're told in verse 19 that they "begged that no further word should be spoken to them." Even the words which God spoke to Moses could be associated with the blast of trumpets. This too, we see in the book of Revelation.

REV 1:10 "On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a *loud voice like a trumpet*, 11 which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

REV 4:1 "After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And *the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet* said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

The trumpet announces and God speaks through it and it cannot be associated with any other sound. "Thus say's the Lord", and He speaks and everyone listens. And on that day in the desert standing beneath Mount Sinai, the people listened and wished they did not have to hear, for the sound of the commands was more than they could bear.

HEB 12:20 "because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned."
(Exodus 19:12,13)

There was no room for grading on the curve. God was not playing games with His people and He made it quite clear that no one could approach His glory and live, because all have sinned and fall short of His glory. No sin can dwell with God and this day on

Mount Sinai confirmed it. And though no animal can sin, all creation is associated with the curse of sin.

Even Moses was terrified at the awesomeness of God's presence as we see in HEB 12:21 "The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." (Deut. 9:19)

This is confirmed in DEU 9:19 "I feared the anger and wrath of the LORD, for he was angry enough with you to destroy you. But again the LORD listened to me."

Does all of this sound like the type of place we would want to go to find favor with the Lord? Not me! And not with our writer of Hebrews. This is why he started this section off by saying, "You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm;..." (HEB 12:18)

In other words, you did not find your salvation in the law given at Sinai or in the judgment promised for those who did not abide by this law. You found your salvation in a mountain which cannot be touched or seen. You have found your salvation in the risen Christ.

But what we see here is that the writer of Hebrews reminds his readers, as Paul did with the Galatians, that the temptation to go back to the law given at Mount Sinai will only produce judgment and death.

Listen to what Paul told the Galatians.

GAL 4:21-27; 5:1 "Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. 23 His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. 24 These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. 25 Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. 27 For it is written: "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." (Isaiah 54:1) 5:1 It is for freedom that

Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

Did you notice what Paul said there of Jerusalem? The earthly Jerusalem corresponds to the Old Covenant and the law. But, he says, "the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother."

This is where our writer in Hebrews is going.

HEB 12:22-24 "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

No, we haven't come to Mt. Sinai where the only thing we have is the law which condemns, we have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem where Christ rules and reigns and extends grace and mercy.

What a contrast. Many Christians have a tendency to see their relationship with God as one which looks more like Sinai than Zion and they walk around in a perpetual state of gloom thinking that God's trumpet of judgment is going to personally sound for them.

But Mount Zion is seen here as a spiritual dwelling with God that we have today by faith in Christ and will be a full reality in glory. This, by the way, is a glimpse into the very city to which Abraham and his descendants looked forward.

HEB 11:9-10 "By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

Abraham knew the difference between a physical inheritance in this present sin cursed world and a world ruled and led by the Spirit in the presence of Christ on the new earth, also physical, but without the curse and sin. He put His faith in the God who promised this world to come as he saw by faith with spiritual eyes.

He has come to know the down payment of this inheritance, which is descriptive of the eternal heaven on earth, where the bodily risen Christ's presence is realized in fellowship with those who have gone before us to be at home with the Lord, absent from the body, with the hope of our resurrection with Christ.

For you and me this city, this New Jerusalem, this Mount Zion is still before us. This is what our writer of Hebrews brings out in HEB 13:14 "For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come."

This is the city the apostle John speaks of in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 21:2-5 ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." ⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

And yet, we know, as F.F. Bruce points out, "the privileges of its citizenship are already enjoyed by faith."

You and I belong to Mount Zion today. Our citizenship in that city is secure, our life with our Savior is most certain, because He has sealed us for the day of Redemption. The rest of the description of this Mt. Zion is seen in what follows....

HEB 12:22 "You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

This is a celebration in the present heaven. "Thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly,..." Again, a stark contrast with the fire and gloom and the whirlwind we see in Mount Sinai where, believe me, no celebration was taking place.

These angels attend at God's throne and are sent by Him to minister unto us. Their celebration is not only because they have access to their Creator whom they love, but because they play a role in ministering unto Christ's flock, which they delight in.

HEB 1:14 "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

If the angels rejoice in our salvation, how much more should we, the recipients of this great gift, rejoice with them even today before God, knowing there will be a great celebration in heaven when we all come together at the final day when the new heavens and the new earth become a reality.

Every man, woman and child who has been covered by the blood of Jesus Christ will be there and rejoicing for all eternity. This is what our writer means when he infers we will be coming "to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect,..." (HEB 12:23)

Remember when Jesus sent out 72 disciples to declare that the Kingdom of God was among them in Christ? And they went out with power performing signs and wonders. They came back with a great report of mighty deeds being done and the gospel going forth. That was something to get excited about and yet Jesus' response was an interesting one.

LUK 10:18-20 "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but ***rejoice that your names are written in heaven.***"

Our joy is not derived by what we necessarily see or experience in this world, as glorious as that may be; our joy is knowing that our names are written in heaven and that we belong eternally to God. The contrast could not be more clear as we read in REV 13:8 "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast - ***all whose names have not been written in the book of life*** belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."

We who were chosen before the foundations of the world should be humbled that our God has plucked us from the fire as we consider that we have been delivered from death to life with a promise and a hope of being with Him forever.

We who are in Christ had our names written in the Lamb's Book of Life even before the creation of the world. We are part of the church of the first-born who are enrolled in Heaven and we will come to God, the Judge of all men, and we will be reunited with the spirits of righteous men made perfect, which is speaking of those saints who have gone before us, who have been made perfect or complete through the shed blood of Christ.

And we will come before Jesus, as we see in verse 24 of our text, "the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." Our access comes only through His atonement on our behalf. This is why we rejoice, this is why we celebrate, this is why we don't despair as those who stood beneath Mount Sinai and trembled at the judgment of God.

We have had our judgment taken care of at the cross. We have been declared not guilty because of our faith in our Lord and Savior. There's no need to tremble in fear wondering if God loves us or wants our fellowship, because the fear we should rightly have, outside of knowing Christ, has been taken away and peace has taken its place.

The blood of Abel may cry out from the ground for justice, but the blood of Christ has satisfied the justice that God demands. The wages of sin is death and Christ has taken our penalty of death and nailed it to the cross where it has been taken out of the way so that we have access to the Father and may reside with Him forever in peace, and we realize that peace today by faith in Christ.

What a glorious salvation, what a glorious new life as we look forward to the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city, Mount Zion whose architect and builder is God. Jesus Christ is the mediator of a new covenant. The old has been put aside for the new. There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Do we live at Mount Sinai? May it never be! We've come to the city of the living God. May we warn the world and give them the hope that they don't have to find only judgment and condemnation as at Sinai, they may come out and be liberated to Mt. Zion and know what it is to find peace and grace and mercy and life eternal in Jesus Christ.

There is a new covenant and it's a covenant signed and sealed with the blood of our Lord and Savior. It is this covenant which we rejoice in because therein is life.

HEB 8:10-12 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 11 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. 12 For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."
(Jer. 31:31 -34)

2Cor.13:11 "Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you."

There will be a day when the Lamb of God and His bride, (you and me in Christ), will come together and what a day that will be for rejoicing.

REV 19:5-7 "Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!" 6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready."