

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part fifty-three

Sunday, May 27th, 2018 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2051

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ENTERING THE KINGDOM THAT CANNOT BE SHAKEN

Hebrews 12:18-24 - "For *you have not come* to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest [19] and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. [20] For they could not endure the order that was given, 'If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.' [21] Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I tremble with fear.' [22] But *you have come* to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, [23] and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the *judge of all*, and to the *spirits of the righteous made perfect*, [24] and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

You can see what our writer is doing as he begins to wrap up his lengthy letter to these persecuted Hebrew believers. He's unpacked all the theology of the New Covenant. He's encouraged them through the details of the maturing plan of God even in the middle of their difficulties. Father God can bring a "*peaceable fruit of righteousness*" out of their present trials (12:11). But there's one thing more he wants to place before their discouraged minds.

When the *journey* is hard it helps to remember the *destination*. In today's text our writer reminds his readers - and *us* - that we didn't just sign on to a doctrinal statement or join an organization when we professed loyalty to Christ as our Redeemer and Lord. There is a bigger picture not yet visible. And it's easy to forget we entered into something more glorious than is physically visible or tangible right now.

And our writer's way of making his point is to paint a *study in contrasts*. Particularly for these *Hebrew* believers, he wants to show the folly of turning back to the Old Covenant through Moses and the law by contrasting it with what they came into through Christ and the New Covenant empowered by the Spirit of God.

1) APART FROM THE MEDIATING WORK OF JESUS CHRIST THERE IS ONLY ONE REVELATION OF GOD FOR PEOPLE LIKE WE

Hebrews 12:18-21 - "For you have not come to what may be touched, a *blazing fire* and *darkness and gloom* and a *tempest* [19] and the sound of a trumpet and *a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them*. [20] For they *could not endure the order that was given*, 'If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.' [21] Indeed, *so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I tremble with fear.'*"

Don't rush over those terms - "*darkness*" - "*gloom*" - "*tempest*" - "*terrifying*." This isn't a description of *hell*. This was the presence of *God*. And it begs a question. God could have spoken to these people in any way He chose. Why does He want to be seen like *this*? This is the very first time we have record of God *speaking* to His people - the very first time in the whole Bible. Why would He not want to appear more *approachable*? Why not more *lovable*? Wouldn't the *Aunt Jemima* picture of God in "*The Shack*" stir up better emotions and feelings of love than this?

I am convinced there are *two reasons* for the nature of God's appearance on the mountain. One we will deal with now. The other we'll return to at the close of this message.

Here's reason number one. *God is always a threat when approached by sinful people on the basis of law and merit*. God is *unapproachable* through law. You can't get to Him through your own religious devotion and seeking. And this revelation of God to His people in the manifestation of His law removes forever the idea that God is *sentimentally soft* when it comes to the kind of holiness He accepts.

There has arisen - I know not from where in the Scriptures - the notion that God can be approached by everyone simply because He is always *automatically* embracing of everyone by His very nature. We have grown accustomed to thinking of divine forgiveness as rooted *naturally* in the character of Father God *apart* from any mention of the atoning cross of Jesus Christ, God the Son.

Here are some words I read to the staff in our devotional time this past week from *Oswald Chambers* in his classic work, "*My Utmost For His Highest*" - "*Never build your case for forgiveness on the idea that God is our Father and He will*

forgive us because He loves us. That contradicts the revealed truth of God in Jesus Christ. It makes the cross unnecessary, and redemption 'much ado about nothing.' God forgives sin only because of the death of Christ. God can forgive people in no other way than by the death of His Son.... "

Look carefully at this revelation of God on mount Sinai. Our writer of Hebrews knows what he's doing in siting this account. The mountain is completely ***off limits*** to the people - even to the animals. No one dare touch it on penalty of death. The whole account isn't to reveal ***closeness*** to God. It's designed to reveal ***distance*** from God. Sinners dare not draw near. God is deliberately revealing Himself as a ***threat*** to any who would make approach through works of law. ***That's*** what Sinai is all about:

Hebrews 12:20-21 - "For they ***could not endure*** the order that was given, 'If even ***a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.***' [21] Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ***1 tremble with fear.***"

What sobering words! This is God's design. Take Jesus Christ, God the Son's redeeming work out of the picture - and this is done in virtually every religion of the planet - and this is the only revelation of God you have left. And this is as God wants it to be. Everything we know about the true God in the Scriptures is revealed to make the cross of Christ central in our spiritual pursuits. We have ***gospel*** access to God or we have ***no*** access to God.

2) **THERE IS NO DECREE FROM GOD THAT HAS TRANSFORMING POWER TO WIN OUR FALLEN HEARTS**

Hebrews 12:19-20 - "...a ***voice whose words*** made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. [20] For they could not endure the order that was given, 'If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.'"

It's easy to forget God didn't just carve the commands into stone with His finger. As Moses summed up the Ten Commandments he closes his address to the people with these words of reminder - **Deuteronomy 5:22** - "***These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and he added no more. And he wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.***"

We need to pay attention to this. One could easily get the impression the real need today is knowing God ***exists*** - that if only He would clearly ***reveal*** Himself - if He would ***talk to us*** - we would all know what life was all about and everything would be good. After all, aren't we all seekers after truth?

Now look at our text in Hebrews and its Old Testament roots in Deuteronomy. God speaks ***at length*** to His people. He actually ***utters sentences - words - in the specific language of the people.*** And the people tell Moses to ***make God stop talking to them!*** They ***hear clear, loud, verbal, comprehensible words from God and all of those over the age of about 20 will still rebel against everything God said and will shortly die in the wilderness.***

You can see how this point of rejecting the words of God follows logically on the kind of frightful manifestation God gives on the mountain - our first point of study. People always ***think*** they want to hear from God when they forget about ***their sin*** and ***God's undiluted holiness.*** It's easy to imagine we want to find God when we forget the dangerous distance between the real God and our fallen hearts.

To seek for an encounter with God ***that is loving and inspiring and helpful - that is in any way transforming*** - outside of Jesus Christ is to look for ***grace*** where there is nothing but ***judgment*** - to look for ***safety*** where there is nothing but ***danger.*** Again, in the deepest sense every revelation of God in the Bible ***is*** gracious. God is never ***evolving*** from wrathful to gracious. But all of these Old Covenant manifestations of God are gracious only in the sense that they are all designed to drive sinners to the cross of Christ. God knows we won't discover our deep need for grace without His help. God never deviates from this plan.

3) **ONLY THROUGH THE GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT CAN PEOPLE BE BROUGHT TO DWELL JOYFULLY WITH A HOLY GOD**

Hebrews 12:22-23 - "But you have come to ***Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem....***"

I think it is obvious that there are blessings promised through this heavenly ***mount Zion*** and this ***heavenly Jerusalem*** that were never fulfilled at all in the Old Testament. ***Zion*** and ***Jerusalem*** were only pictures - ***pre-views*** - of what would one day be provided for ***all*** the people of God through the kingdom of Jesus Christ purchased through His atoning blood.

So when you hear pastor Chris or anyone else read from the Psalms of the blessings and promises made to **Zion** or the **people of God** you need to remember that while they *did* and *do* apply to Israel they are more gloriously and completely fulfilled through Christ Jesus to **all** of God's people.

That's why Paul can say **all** of the promises of God are fulfilled for us through Christ - **2 Corinthians 1:20** - "**For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.**" This is the divinely intended will of God for you and for me because, through Christ, we were always included in the blessings of Abraham - **Galatians 3:29** - "**And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.**"

Now, with all this in mind, look again with fresh eyes at the blessings of coming to **Mount Zion** (Hebrews 12:22). Because our writer wants this contrast to shine in the brightest glory possible.

We're reminded **salvation** comes from **Zion** - **Psalm 14:7** - "**Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people....**" Remember Sinai. There we found **darkness, gloom, tempest, and terror** (12:18-21). Not so with coming to **Zion**, the picture our writer of Hebrews chooses to symbolize all we have been blessed with through Christ.

We're reminded **joy** comes from **Zion** - **Psalm 48:2** - "**....beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King.**" Our writer picks up this image of **joy** as the application of redemption through the New Covenant. The joy people crave as created beings still carrying the defaced image of God can only be found in approaching their **Creator** through the appointed **Redeemer, Jesus Christ**.

4) **THERE IS A PROMISED COMMUNION AND FELLOWSHIP BEYOND THE REALITY OF PHYSICAL DEATH**

Hebrews 12:22-23 - "**But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, [23] and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven....**"

We're immediately brought to this picture of life and communion un-erased by physical death. There is a conscious and populated **"gathering"** described here. This is the opposite of darkness and loneliness. And one can only imagine what this might mean to a group of persecuted believers who had just been considering those who were **"stoned, sawn in two and killed with the sword....having not received the deliverance they expected"** (11:37, 39).

Such is the nature of the **"assembly of the firstborn"** (23). We know who the **"firstborn"** is - **Colossians 1:15** - "**He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.**" All who are in Christ have the glory of sharing in His eternal life and restored treasured fellowship.

But there's something even more wonderful about to be described by our writer:

5) **GOD IS STILL THE SAME JUDGE, BUT HE SMILES ETERNALLY ON THOSE IN CHRIST JESUS**

Hebrews 12:23-24 - "**....and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, [24] and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.**"

There is so much here. Let me quickly summarize:

- a) **God is still the unchanging Judge but we are seen in the perfection of Jesus Christ.** Remember, this is not a different God. **God** remains the same. It is our **spirits** that have changed. There is a spiritual power in the New Covenant work of Christ that accomplishes what the law of the Old Covenant never could.

Remember, the reminder of **Sinai** was kept away. The invitation of **Zion** is experience the joyful presence of Father God and completed righteousness through Christ.

- b) **The sprinkled blood of Jesus speaks better hope than the shed blood of Abel** (24). We all know the account of the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. That blood, so the text says, **"Cried to God from the ground."** It was a cry of jealousy and envy and hatred and vengeance.

Our writer says the sprinkled blood of Jesus - shed on the cross - also speaks. There are some similarities. Jesus too, was murdered by wicked men. He too died a death He didn't deserve. He too died a violent death. Again, there are similarities.

But there is also glorious *difference*. Christ's blood speaks of *forgiveness* rather than *vengeance*. It speaks of *pardon* rather than murder.

It still speaks the same message today.

6) **GOD'S APPEARANCE ON SINAI IS A REMINDER OF HIS FUTURE APPEARANCE AS JUDGE OF ALL WHO REJECT HIS GRACE IN CHRIST JESUS**

Hebrews 12:18-21 - "For you have not come to what may be touched, a *blazing fire* and *darkness and gloom and a tempest* [19] and *the sound of a trumpet* and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. [20] For they could not endure the order that was given, 'If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.' [21] Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I tremble with fear.'"

For those who can remember all the way back to the beginning of this teaching I said there were *two reasons* for the nature of God's manifestation on Mount Sinai. The first was to show his unapproachability apart from the mediating work of Jesus Christ.

Here's the second reason. *His appearance was to pre-figure His response to those who reject Christ at the final judgment.* Of all the dozens of commentaries I've been studying for this series only the old classic 7 volume series by Puritan *John Owen* published in 1854 gets into this.

Notice that phrase - I purposely didn't highlight it earlier in dealing with these verses - "*...and the sound of a trumpet*" (19). But there's no mentioning of any person blowing a trumpet. This wasn't humanly sounded. And I don't think it presses things too far to see how this lines up with almost every prophetic passage in the New Testament where the second coming and final judgment are mentioned.

We have as powerful a description as I know of in scripture of what it is like - exactly what it is like - to face a good, holy God apart from the atoning work of Christ. You feel like you're reading the book of Revelation and the final outpouring of God's wrath. We're forced to face the truth of divine revelation from start to finish. Reject divine grace in God the Son and there is nothing but wrath left. And God, in a severe mercy, has made this warning as vivid and plain as ever could be.