

You Have Come to Mount Zion

Hebrews 12:18-24

Halifax: 17 March 2024

Today, we will continue our sermon series in the epistle to the Hebrews.

Review: Over the past few weeks, we have seen in Hebrews 12 that, our life as Christians is represented as endurance, or a race that we must complete.

- A. He is the way, or the road, from sin and misery to our heavenly Father in glory.
 - We look to Him as the one who has gone ahead of us (as our captain) to forge the way through the barriers that sin has put between us and God so we can come after.
 - We also look to His example that we may endure.
 - And we look to Him for the grace and strength He provides to enable us to endure.
- B. We have seen that those who are in this way of Christ are chastened and trained by the Father.
 - This is a painful process because it involves severing us from sins and idols that are dear to us.
 - Pictures that are used in the Bible to describe it include:
 - refining us in the refiner's fire (as silver is refined),
 - threshing us, which involves crushing to separate the wheat from the chaff,
 - and pruning us (cutting us down to humble us because of our pride).
 - Though it is painful, we should be glad that God is preparing us for glory. To be chastened and trained like this shows that we are truly His sons.
- C. Last week, we saw that we must not let ourselves become sluggish in the way.
 - The cause is too important. We are going from sin misery to God our Father in glory. We should be eager.
 - We are called to pursue peace with all people and holiness (godliness, conformity to the Lord,) without which no one will see the Lord.
 - If we are not pursuing peace and holiness, it shows that we are not really in the way of Christ—we have not yet been saved—
 - Those who come to Christ for salvation come in order that they might come to God.

Introduction: Today, we are going to see still more about the way.

- We are going to see that the way itself—the way to which we have come that we might come to God in glory is the city of God, the church.
 - Don't be confused by the fact that Hebrews shows us coming to Christ and to God's glorious city as the way to come to our Father in glory.
 - We enter His house in this world, but we are not yet with Him in the full and glorious way we shall be when we depart from this world to be with Him.
- Our Scripture reading is Hebrews 12:18-24.
 - I will read it now. This is the word of God.

Heb 12:18-24: For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, ¹⁹ and the sound of a

trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard *it* begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. ²⁰ (For they could not endure what was commanded: “And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.” ²¹ And so terrifying was the sight *that* Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.”) ²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the

city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, ²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel.

And there we will end the reading of God’s holy word.

We will follow our text,

- First looking the mount to which we have not come (if we are believers),
- And then to the mount to which we have come.

I. We have not come to Mount Sinai.

A. We are first told that it is a mountain that can be touched.

1. The people were forbidden to touch it lest God’s anger break out, but it was a mountain that could be touched—it was possible to touch it.
 - a. What is the point here? It is that the road is not carnal but spiritual.
 - Jesus emphasised this in John 4 when He spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well.
 - She asked Him if worship was supposed to be done at the temple in Jerusalem, or on the mountain at Samaria where her people worshiped.
 - **Jesus said to her (John 4:21-24), “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.’ ”**
 - Jesus is pointing out that God is a spirit.
 - That means that He does not have a body or a physical throne. Of course, I am talking about Jesus who took a body when He came to save us...
 - But in His divine essence, He does not have a body but is a spirit who is not confined to one place or another.
 - b. When Jesus says that the true worshiper will worship in spirit and truth, He is explaining that we will approach God spiritually rather carnally (using things that we can touch); and in truth with the true sacrifice for sin rather than ceremonies that are only shadows or pictures of the true sacrifice, or priests that are only dressed up to represent the real priest.
 - Instead of an enactment, we will be enabled to actually come to God... in truth rather than in mere shadows.
 - He is saying that this change has come because He has come—the true priest with the true sacrifice who goes into the true tabernacle to offer His

sacrifice at the true altar that cannot be touched because it is not a physical altar but a spiritual one.

- The ceremonies and altars and priests are all dispensed with now that the one of which they were all shadows has come.
2. So you see, the Hebrews, who were thinking about returning to their Jewish rituals, are being reminded that **as** those who have come to Christ, they have not come to a mountain that can be touched.
- Now they are worshipping God who is a spirit in spirit and truth.
 - Going to shadows and rituals would be to return to what is inferior.
 - The focus is not on shadows, but on our Saviour Himself, and in fact, to return to the shadow would be to ignore that He has come.
 - In the New Testament, we preach the gospel instead of offering ceremonial sacrifices at a temple made with human hands.
 - The way now is faith in Christ and His saving work.
 - The way is not things that can be touched like mountains and sanctuaries and images and robes and altars and holy places.

➤ That is wonderful.

B. But even more wonderful is the fact that we do not come to the mountain that burned with fire.

1. God showed Himself to be inapproachable to them at Mt. Sinai.
- He showed them that they dare not approach Him, being sinful, lest He break out against them in wrath to destroy them.
 - They were rightly terrified to come to Him or to even touch His holy mountain.
 - Look at what it says in verses 18-21: **For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard *it* begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. ²⁰ (For they could not endure what was commanded: “And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.” ²¹ And so terrifying was the sight *that* Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.”)**
2. Why did God present Himself to the people like this?
- a. He presented Himself like this to show them and all people after them that we dare not come before Him without a sacrifice.
- He presented Himself in this terrifying way right after He brought them out of Egypt and right before He revealed to them the plan for the tabernacle and the instructions for its priests and their services.
 - He wanted them to realise that He was holy and that because they were sinners, they could not come before Him without the shedding of blood for the forgiveness of their sins.
- b. His wrath and judgment were all portrayed carnally—with the blackness and the ground shaking and the thunder and lightning.

- And with the verbal warnings and sentence of death to anyone or any animal that should approach.
 - God was showing that we and all that is associated with us is unclean.
 - They were not to even touch those that crossed the line, but to kill them from a distance lest they be associated with their transgression.
- c. No one should ever approach God without His provision for their sin!
- 3. This is an important lesson that ought to be remembered and taken to heart.
 - a. God, in His mercy, is warning us.
 - On the last day, every one of us will be brought before Him.
 - He will raise the dead and He will bring every person before Him to judge us.
 - If we are brought before Him without an atonement, His wrath and judgment will envelop us because of our sin.
 - We are unfit to enter His presence.
 - b. If the mountain that can be touched is like this, how much worse will it be to come before Him in spirit and in truth on the day of judgment.
 - We will have more to say about this next week.
- C. But the main point here is that as Christians, we have not come to this mountain where God's wrath was revealed against those who have no provision for their sin.
 - 1. These Hebrews who trusted in Christ had not come to Mount Sinai where there was no provision for their sin.
 - Back when that was done, in the time of Moses, the Lord graciously gave them the tabernacle with its sacrifices for sin to show them how they could approach Him in that ritual worship of types and shadows with His provision.
 - But if these Hebrew believers tried to go back to the provisions of tabernacle now that Christ had been revealed,
 - They would be going to Sinai where was no offering for sin.
 - Now that Christ had come, the sacrifices at the temple were worthless.
 - 2. And so it is for Christians today.
 - If we leave Christ and turn to earthly priests who can be touched who offer sacrifices on earthly altars that can be touched to atone for our sin, we turn from Christ to what is worthless.
 - We come to Sinai—where there is no peace—where we are always left striving with a guilty conscience because we have forsaken the only provision that God has for our sins.
 - He does not have an earthly tabernacle.
 - He has a church where the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed—forgiveness of sin by His blood offered once for all when He died.
 - All we have is a ceremony of washing (baptism) and a ceremony of remembrance where we are taught to look to Christ crucified, not as if He is being offered, but as the one who has already been offered and accepted.

TRANS> That brings us to the second thing our text shows us.

II. We have come to Mount Zion. It is quite different than Mount Sinai!

- **Let's look at what is said about Mount Zion!**
- A. First, it says that we have come to the living God.
- ²² **But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God,**
1. We have come to Him in spirit and truth rather than in type and shadow.
 - Christ has revealed the Father to us in a way that He had not been revealed before He came.
 - He has, as we have seen, actually opened the way between us and God so that we have real communion with God.
 2. Granted, we are still at a distance until we, to use Paul's words, "depart to be with Christ," but now we are reconciled to Him.
 - We do not come to thunder and smoke and a shaking earth, but to a welcoming Father loves us and who is happy to see us.
 - To a Father who knows us in Christ, the Son of His love, who represents us.
 - To a Father who rejoices in our progress as He teaches us and disciplines us.
 - A Father who hears our prayers and who helps us when we call on His name, enabling us to live faithfully by His grace through the working of His Spirit.
 3. Christian, don't act as if you have come to a frowning, condemning, inapproachable Father—not if you have come in Christ.
 - You have not come to Sinai where there is no provision—or even to the earthly tabernacle where there was provision for that ritual approach...
 - You don't need priests and sacrifices here—you are reconciled by Christ.
 - You have come to the living God.
- B. We have come to the heavenly Jerusalem. This is the city that Abraham sought whose builder and maker is God, eternal in the heavens.
- **Heb 12:22-23: But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,**
- What wonderful things are spoke about this great city!
1. We have "**come to an innumerable company of angels.**"
 - These are marvellous holy worshippers who surround God's throne and minister to us.
 - They are with us when we worship.
 2. This city also has all who have been gathered to God as His redeemed sons.
 - We have come, verse 23, **to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven,**
 - The church is those who are called out of the world to come to God.
 - And all the people are called firstborn sons.
 - Do you know why?
 - Because the firstborn son was the heir. He inherited his father's house and remained in the house forever.
 - We have all the rights and privileges of sons.
 - We are protected, provided for, and cared for.
 - Heaven is our home where we will behold our Father's glory and wisdom, His beauty and love, His holiness and truth.

3. We also come **to God the Judge of all**,
 - He is the judge of all the earth. At Sinai, that was bad. It meant that we were condemned and absolutely forbidden to draw near.
 - But now it is good because in Christ, God the righteous judge declares that we are righteous—He has justified us through faith in Christ.
4. In this city, we also come **“to the spirits of just men made perfect,”**
 - This is that great company of believers from Abel until the present day who have already departed to be with Christ.
 - What an encouragement these spirits of just men made perfect are to us!
 - We are just, or righteous, like them, through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - But unlike them, we are not spirits who have been made perfect.
 - That is what happens when a believer dies—his body goes to the grave and His spirit goes to God—and is made perfect.
 - In other words, there is no more sin in him!
 - Every thought and intent of his heart is holy and pure.
 - We still bear about this body of death.
 - Like Paul, we want to do what is right, but we find that evil is present with us and we cry out, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?”
 - And when we say, “I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord,” we might well think of these **just men made perfect** who have been delivered.
 - As they are, so will we be.
 - We are with them in God’s city.
 - Though we are not yet with them in glory, we know that we shall be because we are coming in the same way that they came—the way that cannot fail—looking unto Jesus.

C. And now we are told that we have come to Jesus.

- V. 24: **to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel.**
1. He is the one who makes this city possible.
 - He makes it Mount Zion where sinners are made righteous and where the spirits of just men are made perfect.
 - Without Him, there would only be Sinai—the place of condemnation.
 - Without Him, there would be no provision for sin.
 2. You see the emphasis on **“the blood of sprinkling”** that we have seen all through the book of Hebrews.
 - That is His blood that was shed to take away His people’s sins.
 - By coming here to die on the cross for us, He has paid the full penalty of sin.
 - If we have come to Him, we are already fully accepted, fully forgiven, fully justified.
 - We are able to have full confidence before God of our complete acceptance.
 - Because of Jesus our Priest and our righteous King, God is not dishonoured but honoured by receiving us.

- Not one iota of His righteousness is compromised by accepting us because Christ our priest has done such a work that even the worst sinner can come.
3. His blood speaks better things than that of Abel.
- Abel's blood cried out for vengeance against his enemy, but Christ's blood cries out for the salvation of sinners!
 - How loudly it shouts in the ears of God for mercy to sinners!
 - Thomas Adam says,
 - Why does it [the blood of Christ] not cry as loud in my ear, and in the depth of my heart for gratitude, for love, for faithful and true allegiance, for zeal and fidelity in the service of my Lord, for obedience to every command, and to all that is written in his book? Lord Jesus, thou knowest that can only be in a day of power, when thou sayest "Ephphatha," [be opened] and speakest thyself into my heart. Oh, speak; come quickly to a sinner bound hand and foot, and lying at the point of death.

Conclusion:

My dear friends, we have seen today that we become part of this glorious city, this holy church, when we come to Christ that we might come to our Father's house in glory.

- Already we have communion with Him and with His people.
- It is a glorious city because it is cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ for forgiveness.
- We are all heirs of God's glorious house, so let us go together encouraging one another and supporting each other and stirring up each other in joy and hope and good deeds.

My friends, know that you will all come to stand before God someday.

- There are only two roads on which you may travel.
 - The road with Christ and His church, or the one without Him.
 - The one without Him is Sinai—the way that brings you before God without grace, without mercy, without a sacrifice for your sin, without anything but your own sin for which you will be condemned forever.
- Believe me, you don't want to come to God without Christ.
 - If you do nothing, that is the road by which you will come.
 - Take the other road—The Lord commands you to come to Him.
 - He will bring you to the Father with joy and you will meet Him with joy.
 - Where else can you go?