

The Mountain To Which We Have Come

August 22, 2010

Hebrews 12:18 – 29

Listen now to the reading of the Word of God for the people of God.

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

²²But 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, ²³to 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, ²⁴to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

²⁵See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not 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? ²⁶At 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." ²⁷The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

²⁸Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹for our "God is a consuming fire."

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray:

Thank you, Lord, for the song you've planted in each us, a melody which rings out no matter what our circumstances may be. Some of us here today need your strength, for our voices are barely heard above the noise of our problems. Others of us require your leading, for in the confusion of life we are losing our sense of direction. Some need your word of caution concerning roads we are hell-bent on traveling. Others could use your encouragement as we walk the path you have opened for us. When we sing our praise, Lord, in the same breath we are asking you to move amid our problems, our confusion, our mistakes, as well as the good we do, and make your praise a part of our daily life. Help us to rejoice and be glad. In the name of Christ, our Savior and our joy, we pray. Amen.

Just a couple of weeks ago we began our study in Hebrews with a message entitled, “Walk by Faith.” We were reminded that in all that we do, no matter what the outcome, we should continually walk in the way that God is leading us; with no assurance that we will ever see the promises made to us fulfilled in our lifetime. Only in God’s time will the Kingdom of God be restored and made manifest “On Earth, as it is in Heaven.” A wonderful example of this was in the story of Rahab, one of the many great–grandmothers of Jesus Christ, who would have had absolutely no idea that the promise made to her to spare her and her family would in turn lead to the greatest birth ever known to humankind.

If we look again at the language of the reading from last week, it appears that Paul is instructing us to do a little more than just walk. He is indeed calling us to *run*. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” (Hebrews 12:1). And so, as we continue with this morning’s reading, let us be encouraged that whether we find ourselves strolling along, walking briskly, or running as in a race, there is still a destination at hand; one that should be on our every forethought, regardless of what else the world may have to offer us.

Last week, I tried to communicate to you the importance of being satisfied with the outcome of our lives. *When all is said and done*, we should be able to look back and say, “Wow – that was great! Look at all that was accomplished. Souls were saved, sickness was healed, orphans were housed, widows were well taken care of; people were made to feel important, loved and encouraged – all in the name of Christ!” Now mind you, in a Utopian Society, this would all be accomplished without a hitch. The path that we walk/run would be free of

heartache, pain, and conflict but the truth of the matter is, we are going to encounter these tumultuous moments and even more so because Satan doesn't want us to fulfill what God has called us to do.

Evangelist, author and teacher Tony Evans reminded me this week of something that I probably knew, but had failed to make an integral part of my own journey and that is the reminder that this World once belonged to Satan. When God created humankind, placed them on the Earth and gave them dominion and charge over everything in it; God gave those who were *less than* authority over those who were created to be *greater than*. Though we have been made a little less than the angels above, we have been given great power and authority in the name of our God and especially in the name of our now risen Savior Jesus Christ. If any one of us today found our homes invaded and taken over by outsiders, we would do everything we could to take back what we believe to be rightfully ours and this is exactly what Satan has been trying to do since the deception in the Garden when the evil one first distracted Eve by drawing attention away from all the blessings that had been given to Adam and her and began to draw attention to the one thing that God had instructed them to stay away from.

In the case of Adam and Eve, the forbidden fruit lay on the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. With each of us, Satan continues to draw our attention away from the blessings of God and as our attention is drawn away from these blessings within our own lives, the evil one works overtime to redirect us to the things that God has warned us to stay away from. The path we have been called to walk/run, the path that is ordained as God's Will and Way for our lives will not be free from the challenges and deceptions of the evil one, but as we the words we pray each week during our time we call *Prayers for the People* indicate, we may be tempted by

the wiles of this world, but we do not need to be *lead into temptation*. What is it that we pray? “Lead us *not* into temptation, but *deliver* us from evil,” that is, the evil one, “For yours is the Power and Glory, forever and ever. Amen!” What a wonderful acknowledgement and affirmation this is for us each week; to know that even though we may be tempted, we do not have to be lead astray and we are offered protection by the Power and Glory of *Avoonan D’bismaya*, our Creator, the Birther of the Cosmos.

Today Paul draws our attention to two mountains. The mountain described first is Mount Sinai, to which Israel came following their deliverance from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 19:12 – 19) The way in which this mountain is described in Exodus leads some to believe that the mountain would have been much like a volcano; “When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear.” (Exodus 20:18) They were so afraid, verse 19 tells us, that they begged Moses to speak to them rather than God, for they just knew if God spoke to them that they would surely die.

In our journey today it is inevitable that each of us should come to a mountain. But I have good news for you today. The mountain to which we have come is NOT Mount Sinai, rather it is the second mountain that Paul describes for us this morning beginning in verse 22. “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, 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, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” (Hebrews 12:22 – 24)

What an AMAZING Word! The *mountain* to which we have come is one that encourages us to *draw near* to God. In our description of Mount Sinai we saw that the people were so afraid of the mountain that they wouldn't go anywhere near it. They just knew that death and destruction were certain if they did and as the Bible teaches us, this description is exactly the way it was portrayed in the book of Exodus. But Mount Zion, if you will, is the antithesis of the experience of Mount Sinai. In coming to Mount Zion, we have nothing to fear, but rather we have something we can really get excited about. In coming to Mountain Zion we have also come to . . .

“the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” The heavenly city of Jerusalem mentioned here is the dwelling place of God (Isaiah 28:16, Psalm 2:6 and Revelation 14:1). It is the same heavenly city longed for by Abraham and the others (Hebrews 11:10, 13 – 16) and is the same heavenly city we will one day experience ourselves. (Revelation 3:12, 21:1 – 7, 22:14).

“The heavenly city,” B. W. Johnson writes in the People's New Testament, “is where our Lord dwells and is our eternal home. In coming to Christ we have come into the covenant which gives us the right to a place in that city.”

Here at Mount Zion there are thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly (note the word joyful here offers us the opposite feeling of fear encountered at Mount Sinai). The angels are gathered in general assembly and they are joined there by the church of the firstborn registered in heaven, that is, they are joined by the church universal, made up of all who are saved. (Acts 2:47)

At Mount Zion we encounter “God the judge of all,” the judge of all the Earth (Genesis 18:25), the One to whom we must pay attention to, the One to whom we are to listen, to observe and to take notice of. (Hebrews 12:25) We meet here the “spirits of just men made perfect”, that is those who encompass the roll call of the faithful given earlier in chapter 11. People like Abraham, Noah, Moses, Joshua and Rahab are here. And then there is, of course, the Son, our Savior and our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the *Mediator* of the New Covenant, that is, the *Mediator* of a *better covenant* (Hebrews 8:6) which we are called to remember each Sunday during our time of Communion. Though the blood of Abel still speaks through the example of his faith (Hebrews 11:4), the blood of Jesus speaks even more loudly and with more power and volume (Hebrews 10:11 – 14).

In coming to Christ and being redeemed by the blood of the New Covenant, we find that we have drawn near to a wonderfully inspiring and encouraging place; *the mountain to which we have come* is Mount Zion. It is a place that offers many wonderful blessings for us, both in the present and with promise for the future.

I want to invite you this morning to make your way to *the mountain*, the mountain of heavenly Jerusalem, a place where lives are restored, hope is found and love and encouragement are forever flowing. The journey won't always be easy, but great is your reward for sticking to the path that God has chosen for each of you. In God's time and by God's plan, we will each come to Mount Zion. Won't you come today as we sing our sermon hymn, *Be Thou My Vision*. Won't you come, today and acknowledge before God and those around you today the journey, the call, and the path that God has placed before you. In the Name of the One who has established for us a covenant which restores us to our Creator above. Amen