

Coming to the Right Mountain

Hebrews 12:18-29

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, June 11, 2023

Good morning, everyone. We have been talking about running the race for Christ in the book of Hebrews, if you've been with us for the past couple of weeks. I don't know about you, but maybe this is coming across in the preaching, but I find this portion of Scripture so encouraging to me on a personal level, just because I can relate to it.

When the Bible talks about being at war, I can't really relate to that. I've never been a soldier. I've had relatives who've done that my grandfather fought in World War Two, my cousin fought in the war in Iraq. And they know what it's like to face an enemy on the battlefield and charging him with your weapons in that kind of engagement. I've never done that. I've always been a civilian. I've led a very simple life in that way.

When the Bible says that we're slaves of Christ, I don't know what that's like either. I've never served as someone's property before. I've never been owned by another master who has told me to do this, and don't do that, and say this, don't say that. Where gives the illustration of farming, I've been around farmland my entire life, but I've never actually been in it very much. Except Chilliwack, you smell it everywhere you go. So the farmland kind of gets in you whether you're in it or not doesn't matter.

But I have run a race before. That's something I've done. And I know what it's like to go shooting off down the track with the wind blowing at my back and the sun shining down on me and the sweat coming across my brow trying to win the prize. I understand that illustration. I know what it's like. And the reason I find it so helpful is because it reminds me life is quick, and that it doesn't last that long. You only get so many seconds and that's it. If you've been in a race before, you know, when that gun goes off, it's just over like that. And your life is like that. Which is why you have to treat it very carefully. You can't be apathetic about life; you can't be flippant or careless, or just throw your hands up in the air and let go and let God. You've got to make every second count for His glory because one day, you're going to be standing before the Judge of the race.

And that's what the beginning of Hebrews 12 is about., and if you haven't had a chance to hear some of those messages, I would encourage you maybe to go back and listen. I think it would be very much a blessing for you.

But in the second part of this chapter, what you're going to find this morning is that the author is going to change the image from a runner to a mountain. And he's going to go from the picture of a man who's striving and sweating and straining for something to an object that sitting still, in order to represent death. The picture of the mountain in the second part of this chapter is given as a symbol to show you what happens after you die, and the race is over. And what happens, the Bible says, is that you will go before God in order to arrive at one of two places. And before I say anything more about that I just want

to read this passage to you. You might say, “Well, Pastor Jeremy, we just read this.” Yes, you did, but I think you need to read it twice this morning just to let it kind of sink in a little bit. This is some rich stuff. If you look in Hebrews chapter 12, starting in verse 18, the word of God for us today says this. It says,

For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. For they could not bear the command, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned.” And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, “I am full of fear and trembling.” But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

We're going to end the reading there. And before we jump into it, let me just have a word of prayer with you so we can get our hearts around what we're going to discuss this morning.

Heavenly Father as we come to this text, we are diving into the deep end of the word of God, and we're studying the end of all mankind that will end up in one of these places. Lord, would you open our eyes to new things in Your word? Would You show us the glories of the gospel today and what Christ has done to give us our salvation? Father, every man, woman and child, one day is going to come to one of these two places, they're going to go to heaven or hell. And Lord, the most important thing in life is that they choose Christ so they may enter into heaven. Would this word, and the things we say today, maybe awaken some to their dead state, and to the fact that they are lost. For others, would it just give us so much joy to remember what Christ has done? And may He be exalted and supreme in what we're about to say. In His name we pray. Amen.

Well, as you read this text this morning, I don't have to tell you this is an unusual passage. It's maybe one of the strangest ones in the book of Hebrews, but the message is actually pretty clear. If you notice when you read it, the author's contrasting two things. He says in verse 18 that you have not come to a mountain that can be touched. And that's another way of saying you've not come to Mount Sinai or the place where God gave Israel the law. We'll say more about that in a moment, but verse 22 says, “You have come to Mount Zion.” That's the contrast. You didn't come to that; you came to this, which means you've come to the place where God gave the New Covenant to us through Christ. And the reason he does that, if you're putting the whole chapter together is because he's reminding you, this is the end of your race. This is what it's all about. You have come to Mount Zion now, if you're a Christian. You've entered into a new relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, where He took your sins on the cross, paid for them in full, and brought you into heaven. That's what you're running for. That's what's causing you to go down the track. So as you come to the last lap, and you take your final steps, and you

cross the finish line, you know, God will say to you, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.” That's what it's all about.

Because when you boil this passage down, let me talk about it from a broader perspective. It's essentially saying the whole issue of religion can be divided into two categories here. Two places. Doesn't religion seem complicated nowadays, with all the differences? Let's make it simple. There's two religions.

The first one is the religion of law. And under this approach, a man tries to go to heaven on his own human achievement. He tries to find God the old-fashioned way, by earning it with his works and deeds and efforts, sweat, labor, toil, by pulling himself up by his own bootstraps, as we would say, in Tennessee. So that at the end of the day, he takes all the things he's done for God, and he puts them on a scale. And if the good outweighs the bad, he wins. The bad outweighs the good, he loses. But either way, it's all about him. He's the star of the show. He's the one that gets the credit. He's the one that pats himself on the back. So as long as he does enough, God is pleased with it. Why wouldn't He? Right? I'm wonderful. I'm a nice person, I pay my taxes, I go to church, I live a good decent life. That's the mentality. The problem with that is that God doesn't care, if you're still a sinner, right? It doesn't matter to Him, if you fail to keep the law, you go straight to hell.

Which brings you to the second category of religion that's talked about here. And that is the religion of grace. Don't you like the word grace? Isn't grace the most beautiful word in the English language? This is represented in the second mountain. Under the second one, God realizes how spiritually bankrupt you are, and how utterly lost your soul is in sin. So He provides everything that's necessary to forgive you. And by everything, I mean everything. Every righteous deed, every good act, every ounce of merit, it's all taken care of by Him. So that He puts everything on the scale and you put nothing. He puts it all on the balance, all the collateral, and you receive it as a free gift from his hands. He supplies His Son to die for sinners. He gives you the cross to provide payment. And as David just said, He gives you the Holy Spirit to regenerate you but that's God all the way. God is the only one that gets credit.

And I might add that when you come to this text that we're going to talk about, you're going to see that's it. That's the only two religions that are mentioned here. There's no other ones. There's not three or four mountains in here; you're not going to find six or seven different ways to come to God. There's two. There's mountain number one; there's mountain number two. Door A, door B. You're not picking flavors of ice cream here. You don't get to mix and match. You don't get to say, “I want a little bit of this with a little bit of that. I'll be a little bit of a Buddhist, Muslim, Islam, Hinduism.” It's not the way it works. There's two paths to pick from on the issue of salvation. And what the author is saying here is you want to pick the right one because if you don't, your eternal soul is at stake.

It's a serious passage. In fact, the reason I'm making such a big deal of this is I've met a lot of people here in Chilliwack, who told me they grew up in a home, where they were told that in order to be a Christian, you had to do a bunch of things, and stack them up, like works on a scale. So God would

accept you. I've been here for six years now, so I've actually had enough time to make a list of these things. But throughout the years, people have informed me that they were raised up to believe that in order to be saved, not to make a good decision and guard your sanctification, but to be saved, you couldn't go to the movies, or drink alcohol, or watch TV, or work on the Sabbath, or wear makeup, or put on earrings, or have short hair if you're a girl, or long hair if you're a man, wear casual clothes to church on Sunday, read from any Bible translation but the King James, celebrate Christmas, celebrate Easter, you can't do Thanksgiving, you can't put your kids in this or that school, sing from this or that hymnal, go to this or that church because there's only one church and that's whatever church your parents go to. But the problem with that way of thinking is that none of those things can save you, Amen? All of them are utterly bankrupt without the Lord Jesus Christ. So you don't want to put your stock in that. First you put your stock in Him.

I mean, listen, friends works are important. Don't ever get the understanding that they're not. And the law is important. Romans 3:20, says, "through the law, we become knowledgeable of sin." So it's necessary for you to study the law, you need to understand the law, you've got to be familiar with the commandments. But it's also important to realize that the law cannot, and I mean, cannot, and I mean, cannot bring you into heaven. It's been said, "The law is a wonderful judge, but a bad doctor." Because when you try to be healed by it, it doesn't work. It's just designed to cut you. And to show you where your illness is. You go to Christ for the healing. And you've got to learn how to see it this way, if you're going to come to the right mountain.

If you remember the setting here of what the author is saying, he's writing this to Jews, who had lived under the law at one time. And they experienced all the terrible things that we're going to talk about in the first part of this passage. But by the grace of God, they had come out of it by putting their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And now the author's telling them, don't go back to that anymore. It's not worth it. If you've left the former ways behind, let it go. And I think he would say the same thing to us this morning. For those of you who grew up in a legalistic home, let it go. And for those of you who were told that you have to earn your salvation by works, let it go. And for those of you who are taught that you had to be good enough to be saved to receive God's favor, do the same thing. Because what you have in Christ is so much better.

And we could just stop the sermon there, couldn't we? Maybe just to say a word of prayer and close and we'll all go home. But we haven't gotten to the text yet. Just explaining this text, just preaches the gospel.

But let's talk about what the text actually says in the wording of it. So let's do that by looking at the two mountains in Hebrews 12. You actually have a handout in your bulletins that you can go through if you would like and just sort of see some of the things we're talking about here. I was trying to compare these two for you, so it'd be helpful too. But if you're taking notes, we're going to look at these two mountains that represent the two types of religion.

The first one is Mount Sinai, which is given as a symbol of the Old Covenant; or the wrong way to come to God now that you're a Christian. The author has gone through the book of Hebrews, we've been in it for over a year now, and he's showing you verse after verse how Christ is superior to the Old Covenant. But as he's coming kind of to the end of the book, he's summarizing his thoughts, and he's gonna stack it all up in two categories. The first mountain is showing you the wrong way to come to God. Now that you're a Christian, the law is not wrong. And I'll explain that in a moment. The law is not bad, but you can't be saved by it. That's what he's saying here. If you read in verse 18, again, you'll notice the name Mount Sinai is not mentioned here; but this is obviously what he's talking about when he says, "You have not come to a mountain that can be touched." And what that means is that you're a Christian now; you Jews are saved. And how did it happen? How were you born again? How are you redeemed? Well, it didn't happen by coming to a physical place, doing physical things, keeping a physical law. That's not how you were saved. He's gonna give you the negative before he gives you the positive, and in order to do this, he gives several characteristics of Mount Sinai here. Let's just walk through these.

The first one is that the mountain was on fire, which means it's full of wrath. That's what fire represents in the Bible; it shows you God is angry. It shows you some other things too, but that's one major element of fire. You see this in verse 18, when it says, "You have not come to a mountain that can be touched, and to a blazing fire." And what the author is referring to here is the fact that when God gave the Law to Israel, you can read about that in Exodus 19 and Deuteronomy 5, the mountain or the top of it was set on fire. So it was a burning mountain, which spoke of judgment. It gave the impression that God is holding the people of Israel accountable for their sins, He's calling them to account. And He's angry as He does it because they've sinned. Mount Sinai is not a friendly place, it was hostile, violent, cold. I promise you, if you would have stood at the foot of Mount Sinai on this day, you would have not wanted to hang around for a while. And if you would have sat beside it and watched as an innocent bystander, you would not have thrown a picnic or taken pictures and put it on Facebook. There's no social media on this mountain; you would have been scared. It would have been a frightening thing. You could say it like this, Mount Sinai in a way, in a sense look like hell. Hell is a place full of fire. It's around where the worm does not die, the smoke is not quenched because God is judging people there. That's what's taking place here. The fire was a sign that you have to stay away from God. You can't come near. God is too Holy, too righteous. too pure for you; so there's an inseparable barrier between the two of you. There's a fence that's a million miles high, a million miles wide; it shows you God is here and you are here. He's on the throne, like we read about in Isaiah 6, and you're not. And you can't cross the barrier with your works. If you do, He'll consume you with rage. You read a lot of Christian books today. And you find they tell you a lot about the fact that God is a happy God right now who would never hurt a fly and God is joyful in heaven. And He's at peace with the people in heaven. But He's not at peace with the people down here on earth. God is not giving hugs to those who break His law. He's not giving high fives. In this passage, He looks like He's ready to kill someone.

Which brings you to the second characteristic in the text. And if you're just reading along here, that is that there was darkness and gloom and whirlwind on the mountain. You can read that in verse 18 there. That means there was a thick cloud on that day that blocked everything from your view so that when you looked at the mountain, you couldn't really see the top of it where God was. You could see the hill and you could tell it was there, but you couldn't make out what was going on because it was covered in fog. And that shows you not only is God unapproachable due to His holiness, He's also unapproachable due to your ignorance. There's no way for you to fully understand what God is like in this place. Adam just told us that God is other than us. He's transcendent. This is what it's talking about. There's no sense of intimacy. There's no feeling of openness. God is shut off from your view. When you try to come to God through the law, verse 18 demonstrates it's always gloomy. That word, the Greek word could be translated despairing. It doesn't just refer to doom but dark gloom. Deep gloom, the kind that puts dread into you. No one looked at the mountain and laughed. No one came to it and smiled. To the contrary, Mount Sinai is a place that wipes the smile off your face.

The law does this. You guys know this? Before you approach the law of God, you think you're pretty good, don't you? And before you read the commandments, you feel like I'm doing fine. Afterwards, you realize you're nothing but a rotten, stinking sinner who deserves to be punished. Some of you have watched The Way of the Master videos online where they approach someone on the street. And they ask him, "Do you think you're a good person?" And if they say "Yes," and they walk him through the 10 commandments, and they say, "Have you ever told a lie? What does that make you? It makes you a liar. Have you ever stolen something irrespective of its value? What does that make you? It makes you a thief. Have you ever lusted after someone and committed adultery in your heart? What does that make you? It makes you an adulterer. So by your own admission, you're a lying, thieving, adulterer. You've broken three of the commandments, there's seven more to go. And where should God send you when you die?" It's gloomy. It's intended to be this. This whole account here is a time of national humiliation for Israel. God is bringing the whole country down to his knees.

Third characteristic is that there was the blast of a trumpet and words which were too terrible to hear. That's something that's demonstrated in the biblical account because Exodus 19 talks about the blowing of a trumpet at this place. Some translations render it that it was a ram's horn at Mount Sinai. But apparently, that was not all that was going on. Because Deuteronomy 4:12, says that the Lord spoke to them from the midst of the fire, and they heard the words, but saw no form, only a voice, which means God did not appear physically on the mountain. And He didn't show up in a theophany, or the angel of the Lord, something like that. He just spoke. He just gave His word and that was enough. Because the passage in the Old Testament says as He did that, the people of Israel begged Him to stop, and they were so scared, they said they can't take it anymore. Verse 20 in your text here says that it bothered them so much. Even the smallest commands were troublesome, because they couldn't bear to hear when He told them that even if even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned. And the reason it was having that kind of impact is because the Judge of all the universe was giving His word. And the God of all creation was summoning them to obey. And the thought of it was overwhelming to them.

I think if you've been a Christian for any length of time, we've all had the experience of, of witnessing to someone sharing the Word of God, taking them through the commandments, and hearing them say, "Stop. I can't take it." I've even seen my little niece put her fingers in her ears. It's penetrating the conscience.

Which brings it to one more characteristic, and that is that the mountain scared Moses. Which means it didn't just scare Israel, but it frightened their leader too. The author brings this up in the next verse to show you how sobering this was. Because you would think if anybody was comfortable on that day, it would be Moses. And if anybody in Israel would have been able to stand before God and hold his head high and be confident, it was him because he was the great deliverer. But apparently not because verse 21 says, "and so terrible was the site that Moses said, I am full of fear and trembling." Moses wasn't just fearful; he was full of fear. He wasn't just nervous, he was trembling, his body was shaking at what he saw.

And as you come to the end of verse 21, the next verse transitions into the next section. So I think it would be good to stop for a moment and just ask you the question to get you thinking about, why did God do this? Why did He give the law this way? And not some other way? What's the point of the fire and darkness? What was he trying to show Israel with the gloom and despair and humiliation? If you think about it, God could have given the law anyway that He wanted to. On that day, He could have made the flowers bloom and the birds sing and the sun come out of the sky. He could have made a band play and confetti fall and streamers descend down from the mountain, so it looked like a big party, and everybody had cake and ice cream. But He didn't. He did it like this. Why? Because He's showing you what the law was for. The law was not given to throw you a party. It was provided to give you a warning of something. And the warning is this: these are my commandments, and you need to obey them or else I will judge you. And these are my rules that you need to follow if you're going to be my people. And if you don't do that, let me tell you what will happen, I will rain down fire on your head. I'm not going to forgive you here at Mount Sinai. There is no mercy here on this mountain. There is no grace that's being demonstrated here. I will hold you accountable for every single sin that you commit every single day of your life. You could look at the law as a divine measuring rod whereby every one of the Jews has to lay down and be measured by God. And it doesn't matter if some are taller than others. And it doesn't matter if some of them look better on the outside because they stay away from movies and stay away from makeup and stay away from holidays or whatever. All that mattered is that they obeyed. The only thing that matters is that they submit and if they don't. God would be angry with them. That's what the fire and terror is all about. They show you that you're dealing with a holy God here, who expects absolute perfection to every detail in His word.

Remember, the reason the author of Hebrews is placing an emphasis on this is because he's writing to Jews who had grown up under the law and been taught the commandments at a young age. They were very familiar with this; this is speaking in ways they know exactly what he's talking about. And as such,

they were they were raised in a culture that taught you had to be saved by doing things like getting circumcised and keeping the Sabbath. The Pharisees made a big deal of that. The problem is that it didn't work because none of those things can atone for sin and remove this stain that it leaves behind on your soul. And Mount Sinai is a good illustration of that. It's almost as if the writer is saying to them, "If you want to be saved by your works, look at your ancestors and tell me, did they do that? No. And if you want to go to heaven by the law, look at the Jews who came before you and tell me did they go to heaven that way? Of course not. All the law did was condemn." So what he's saying here is you need to find another way of salvation than this. This is not going to cut it. No one is saved by keeping the law. Did you hear me say that? Can I say it again? You want to write it down? Write it down on your mirror, write it down on your car, write it down in your phone, don't tattooed on your arm. But whatever you have to do, let me say it again. No one is saved by keeping the law. That means no one in this room. No one in that room. It means no one in this church; no one in that church. I don't care what they wear on Sunday. They're not saved that way. No one in the Old Testament; No one in the New Testament. No one in any part of the Bible. It demands complete and utter sinlessness to be saved that way. And you don't have that. The demands are too extreme.

If you want to write this verse down, James 2:10, says, "Whoever keeps the whole law and stumbles in one point," how many points? "Has become guilty of all." And what that means is that the law is a unit. And if you break one part, you break all of it. And it's a whole system. So if you fail in one thing, it's like failing in every one of them. I've heard it illustrated as a piece of glass whereby if you shatter one fraction, the whole thing is destroyed, and you can't put it back together again with tape. How many lies do you have to tell to be a liar? One. How many sins do you have to make to be a sinner? One. That's why it's impossible. You could try from this point forward for the rest of your life to be perfect. It'll never work because you've already sinned. We've all sinned before we even knew what sin was. You've seen the kids in the nursery downstairs. I mean, they're wonderful, but they're sinners. Nobody murders somebody and gets away with it simply because you only did it once. I mean, the laws of Canada are getting worse, but they're not that bad. I don't think the judge would ever tell you, "Well you killed somebody, but it just happened once you didn't really mean it. You had a bad day, you know, a little bit off, I'll let you slide." No. You do the crime you do the time; it's the same way with any sin. This scene is given to show you that even if you lived a thousand years, you could never make it up this mountain on your own. The people of Israel can't do it. Neither can you.

You know, I told you earlier, there's only two religions at the end of the day. And it's interesting to think about that because every other religion in the world is built upon the principle of trying to earn your salvation by the law. Not this law, necessarily. but some law. A law. A law they made up. For instance, if you study the religion of Islam, they have five pillars of Islam. They have the profession of faith whereby you say there's no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger, that's first. And then second is prayer, they have to pray five times a day facing Mecca. And then third, there's alms or giving charity. And then fourth, there's fasting, particularly during the month of Ramadan. And then fifth, there's the pilgrimage where they have to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. And the idea is that to in order to

go to heaven, as a Muslim, you have to keep all those things every day of your life. Every other religion in the world has something like that. Muslims have it. Buddhists have it. The Sikhs have it. The Hindus have it. So do the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witness, and the Roman Catholics and the Christian Scientists, and every other cult in the world. They all have some sort of standard whereby they tell themselves, "If I do this, I can get to God. And if I perform these tasks, He will accept me." But the reality is, they can't even keep their own law, let alone this one.

You have to go to something else. The Bible says, "By the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in His sight." And that's why thank the Lord, we have another mountain. If this passage stopped in verse 21, let me tell you what would happen, everybody in this room would go to hell. Everybody on the planet would go to hell. If all we had was this, but we don't. There is a second mountain. And let's talk about that as well.

Just to review this first one, remember, this is the wrong way to come to God now that you're a Christian, and that is through Mount Sinai. And I want to tell you, it's not wrong because it's evil. The law is not evil. On the contrary, it is holy and righteous and good. It's just wrong if you use it as an end in itself. The law is just wrong if you stop here. You're not supposed to stop here. It was intended to be a bridge to take you to something more. So many people do that today. When they come to church, they stop with this first mountain. They think it's all about works. They don't think about grace. They don't think about mercy. They don't think about the love of God poured out on you through Christ, which is why they're so miserable. God doesn't want you to live that way. Did you know that He wants you to start in Mount Sinai, and come to the next place, and that is Mount Zion.

So if you're taking notes, the second mountain here in Hebrews 12 is Mount Zion. It symbolizes the New Covenant, or the right way to come to God that was given in order to represent the way of salvation we've all experienced through Christ. And you're going to see, it's about as different from Mount Sinai as it could be. If you look in your Bibles, this second place is mentioned in verse 22 when it says, "But you have come to Mount Zion."

A key word there is that word "but." It shows you the author's making a contrast. And he's giving you a comparison to say that as a Christian, you have not come to this, but to that. And as a believer in Christ, you don't approach God anymore through darkness and gloom and whirlwind, there is another way. And in order to show you this, he gives you several characteristics for this one as well. I think you're going to enjoy these. I really enjoyed studying this this week.

But the first one is that this is the city of the living God, and the heavenly Jerusalem. You see that there in the text. When you come to verse 22, it actually says, heaven is described as a city that you have come to, that's past tense. And what that means is that you're not coming to this city if you work hard enough. And you're not going to get to heaven someday, if you try hard enough through the law. You've already arrived there, in a sense, through the work of Jesus Christ; your acceptance into heaven is a

settled thing in the mind of God. All you're waiting to do now is die. Listen, I know death scares all of us a little bit, but that's when you graduate. Your death is an upgrade from this place. Amen? When it says Heaven is a city here, that that's helpful. It's telling you what heaven is like. It has a population, and a government and citizens. And heaven is a place where there's leadership and order and structure and a way of life and streets of gold and gates of Pearl and a crystal sea.

In fact, before I say too much about this, let me just read another passage of Scripture on this. It's from Revelation 21. And I'll just read this to you. But this is where the apostle John describes heaven. And I can't do any better than just to read you his words. I've never had a vision of heaven. John did. This is what he said. He said,

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 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, 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."...

And when the Spirit showed me the city,

Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper...

And the foundations of the city were made of precious stones.

The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles;...

And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.

I'll end the reading there for that passage.

I've heard people ask before do you take that literally? And I think the answer is yes to a lot of it. There are some phrases where it says like or as and so there's figurative things in there. But I don't think it's a

figurative city. How would it give you hope to know you're going to a figurative city? And how would it give you joy to know that one day when you die, you're going to kind of a fictional place where you're going to float on the clouds strumming harps or something like that? It doesn't help you. That's not what the Lord is saying. And He's preparing to send you to a land, a true land. That's more beautiful than anything you can imagine. You could even say it's more real than the place you're sitting in right now because the presence of God is there. In fact, when it says in Revelation that the city has no need of the sun, for the glory of the Lord has illuminated, that means that not only is the presence of God there, but His presence is there to such an extent that it covers every square inch of heaven like the sun. And His glory fills every part.

And I don't have to tell you, you're not experiencing that down here. This world is not full of the glory of God. It's covered in sin. That's why you can go around town right now and see rainbow flags everywhere; you're living in a fallen world. But one day, the passage says, you're going to enter into something better. When you were under the law, the law said, "Stay away from this; don't come near or you'll die." Now through Christ, it's different. Now the sign says "come." Now the Lord says, "Draw near." And you will have this wonderful salvation.

Which brings us to another characteristic of this mountain, and that is that there are angels there and a general assembly. The reason I put that together is because there's some debate as to whether the terms general assembly should go with what comes after, or what comes before, but I think it should probably go with the angels. So you could translate this to myriads of angels and the assembly they encompass because what the author is describing here is the inhabitants of heaven. He's just told you about the location of heaven and what heaven is like, the city. Now he's telling you who's there, and the angels are there. Don't you want to see the angels? The verse says there are myriads of angels there. That means there's thousands of them. And the term myriad, it's the highest number that can be found in the Greek language. And it's in the plural here, because it means how many angels are in heaven? There's thousands upon thousands upon thousands there. And how many will you meet when you go? There'll be so many that you can't count them. In one of the passages in Revelation, it says there's myriads of myriads, and thousands upon thousands, which makes you wonder how many zeros is that? Well, it's more than you can say. The Apostle John couldn't even count them all up. And the greatest thing about them is that the angels are created to do one thing, and that is to worship God. All these supernatural beings are formed to do one purpose, and that is to serve Him. And the idea is that when you come into this holy city, you will enter into their presence. And when you die, and the Lord gives you the reward, you will enter into a community of creatures. Unlike anything that's down here on this planet, you'll see angels like Gabriel and Michael. There'll be other angels that are anonymous.

Which brings it to the next characteristic, and that is that the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven are there. Which is a reference to the New Testament saints because it mentions the word church. So there won't just be angels in heaven, there'll be Christians as well. And there won't just be supernatural creatures who are different from us, but there'll be men and women who are like us. And

look at this verse 23 says their names are enrolled there, and I think you're gonna like this. It means their names are recorded and written down permanently in the book, The Lamb's book of life. So the Lord knows who they are and keeps track of them. If you think about it, I just told you we don't know how many angels there are. There's too many to count. Well, how many Christians are there? I think it'd be the same. How many people have trusted Christ in the last 2,000 years of church history? We don't know. But let me tell you something. God does. He knows all their names. He's never forgotten a soul. He has their name enrolled in the book. And what that means is that He has your name written in the book if you're a believer, and He has my name written in the book, amen? He has the people who died in Christ today written in the book; He'll have the people who die in Christ tomorrow written in a book. The Apostle Paul's name is there. The Apostle Peter's name is there. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are there. So are John Wesley's and Charles Spurgeon, Jonathan Edwards, and Martyn Lloyd Jones, and John Bunyan, and William Tyndale, and George Whitfield. You name it, they're there. In fact, if you look to your left, and that person is a believer, I'll tell you their name is there. Look to your right, it's the same way. And the idea here is you're going to spend eternity with all of them. And they're going to be sinless, which means you won't fight, won't that be great? I won't have a job. This was an encouraging text, this is all meant to be a blessing to you.

Fourth, God, the Judge will be there. That's a reference to the first member of the Trinity, God the Father. The second member of the Trinity is mentioned in verse 24. But here, you're seeing the first one because when you go to heaven, here's the idea of this one, you will face the Father who is the ruler and judge of all the earth. And when you do that, you will come with boldness before the throne because of Christ. When the Jews were at Mount Sinai, remember, God was judging and they were shaking and trembling, and in fear, and shivering, and saying, "Please don't speak to us anymore. We can't bear it. These words are too terrible to hear." But when you die, you will approach the throne of grace with confidence. So you can find mercy and grace to help you in time of need. God will still be a judge. And He'll still be the ruler of all the earth, but your relationship with Him will change from what the Jews experienced at Mount Sinai.

Fifth, it says that there will be the spirits of the righteous made perfect there. That's a reference to the Old Testament saints. There are New Testament saints we saw earlier with the word "church." These are the Jewish ones who died before the New Testament times. They are the ones who we read about in Hebrews 11 or the Hall of Faith, who came to the Lord before us. Because in heaven, we're not going to be the only ones there. Able will be there and Enoch will be there. Noah will be there and Abraham will be there. Isaac and Sarah and Jacob and Joseph and Moses and Rahab and Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah and David and Samuel. I told you before, you could look at Hebrews 11 like a relay race, where one person comes to the track with a baton in his hand, and he runs his lap before handing it off to the next runner and dying. And then the next person runs his lap, and he hands the baton off to the next person and then dies. And then the next runner does that. That's what's happening here. And one day, you're gonna meet the other runners. You're gonna swap stories with them. You're going to sit down beside Noah and say, "Noah, what was going on with the ark?" You're gonna sit down

with Moses, we had the young adults over, we're talking about this last night. "Moses, what did you mean when you said you were the most humble person on earth in the Old Testament? What's going on there? Come on, man." You're gonna have conversations with these people.

And one more characteristic here and I went through some of these pretty quickly for the sake of time, there's so much here, you can't cover it in detail. But I believe he saved the best for last when he says in verse 24 you will also come to Jesus. Now, that may sound almost anticlimactic; it's just so obvious. You might think. "Why does the author put this in here?" Of course, Jesus is in heaven. We know that.

Well, if you notice in verse 24, he calls him "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant." And the word "mediator" refers to someone who's the middleman between two people in a conflict, so that he steps in between them, and he reconciles, and he makes peace. And the reason he mentions Jesus as the mediator is because the whole reason you're going to heaven is because of Jesus Christ, amen? And the whole reason your relationship with God is different from what the Jews experienced at Mount Sinai is because of Him. So the author leaves Jesus at the end here to tell you that when you die, not only will you meet the angels, and the church, and the Father, and the people of Israel who've gone before, you'll meet Him and you'll look at His face and you'll see the nail pierced hands and you will see where they put the spear in His side, and you will weep tears of joy knowing that the only reason you're in this place is because of Him. I've heard it said that heaven will be a glorious place, but the most glorious thing about it is the fact that you'll be there at all.

In fact, if you read this passage from beginning to end, it actually says you will come "to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel." And what's that saying is that Jesus blood speaks better than Abel's because whereas Abel's blood cries out for justice, Jesus' blood paid for it. And whereas Abel's death, he wanted revenge on account of what Cain did, Jesus' blood brings forgiveness. So it's better. It takes care of everything necessary to pay for your sin.

You know, it mentions blood here. There's a passage in Revelation in chapter five, where it says something interesting, I'm going to read this to you. It's talking about what's taking place in heaven. And what the people are focusing on there. Think about all the things in heaven, what are they going to be talking about, singing about, interacting about? Revelation five says this. It says,

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, I saying with a loud voice,

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain."

In other words, in heaven, they're going to be talking about the death of the Lamb, and the cross, and the time when He went to the crucifixion. Now why? Why would the angels be so focused on that topic? Well, earlier it says, "For He purchased for God with His blood, men from every tribe, and tongue, and people and nation." That means there's only one reason why all those men and women are in heaven today. And that is because of Jesus' blood. And there's only one thing that made it possible for sinners like us to stand in the presence of a holy God, forgiven and clean and purified. And that was His death, and the angels know it. Angels, they don't get to experience God's grace like you do. When an angel sins, he's cast to hell. There is no mercy for the angels, but you get to experience that. So when they look out and see it, they just have to talk about it. They can't help themselves.

Friends, do you know why you're going to heaven today? It is because of the blood of Jesus Christ. And do you know why God forgives you? It is because of the blood of Jesus Christ. Do you know why the two of you are reconciled? The same thing. Do you know why there's a second mountain for you? It's because He washed your sins away.

The hymn even says this. It says,

What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

O precious is the flow
that makes me white as snow;
no other fount I know;
nothing but the blood of Jesus.

And after saying all that, the author is going to kind of close off this section of the text and bring up another one next week. But I think it would be good to stop for a moment and ask the question again, okay, well, why does he talk about Mount Zion like this? He's just described Mount Sinai and all the terrors. But he's describing Mount Zion, and it's totally different. It's talking about heaven. He's mentioning the city of the living God, church of the firstborn, the angels, this place is just glorious. Why does he say that? He could have described it any way he wanted to. Well, he does this to remind you that under the New Covenant, through the death of Christ, and you putting your faith in Him, and trusting in Him, this is what happens. You get to be with the angels, the most pure holy creatures in the universe. And you'll see myriads of them 1000s, 10,000, billions and trillions, however much you can count. And you'll see people like Paul and Peter because in the New Covenant, Christ puts you into the same place they are. You'll shake hands with those who have gone before you like Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and Charles Spurgeon and all those other people. You'll see God the Judge, you'll see the spirits of the

righteous made perfect or the Old Testament saints, and most importantly of all, you'll get to meet Jesus, the One who died for you.

And the question the author's asking in the book of Hebrews is, remember the question, "Why would you ever want to leave this now? If you have all of this, and God has given it to you freely through His grace, why would you want to trade that in for the law?" Remember, there's only two religions in the world. There's the first mountain; there's the second mountain. There's two ways to get to God, you have the way of law, you have the way of grace. And the way of grace is so glorious, why would you ever want to give it up? You need to stick to what you have in Christ. It's so much greater.

In fact, if you're reading this passage with us this morning, and you're wondering, "Well, how do I do that? Pastor Jeremy? What do I need to do in order to come to Christ and choose this way of grace that you're talking about? Because I've spent my whole life living under the law. And I grew up in a legalistic home. And I was raised in a place that I had to do this and don't do that to come to God. and stack my works up on the scale and be a good, nice person." Well, let me tell you the answer. And the answer might surprise you a little bit, here's what you need to do first. First, you need to go to the law and understand what it says. And I didn't stutter. What I mean by that is, if you've grown up in a legalistic home, where you thought you could keep the law to be saved, you are deceived. You can't keep the law. You never could. And you've got to understand that. That's where it begins. You need to open up the Bible to Deuteronomy 5, read the 10 Commandments, where it says, "Do not lie." And you need to realize you have lied. I don't care what you wear. It doesn't matter what you look on the outside, you have failed. And then read where it says, "Do not steal," and understand you have stolen. It doesn't matter how expensive it was, doesn't matter if it was just your friend's toy, you still did something wrong. You have lusted, you have blasphemed, just go on down the list. And let the thought of that pierce your soul and drive you to Christ. That's how you get this. You start off with the first mountain and you come to the second. You go through Sinai and see the horrors of that place, and then you come to the place of grace and mercy and forgiveness and peace in the precious blood of Christ.

Listen, friends, Jesus Christ and the way of salvation is open to you this morning. That door is not closed. Cavalry is available. The cross is there for anyone who wants to believe. Jesus died with His arms open wide.

So this is for you. In fact, some of you may say, "Well, you don't understand pastor Jeremy, what will my parents think of me? You know, I've spent my entire life living under a system of works. What will my friends say if I leave that behind?" Let me answer your question with a question. Who cares? Why does it matter what your friends say? Why is it important what your parents think? They're not the ones that are going to judge you one day. They're not the ones you're going to answer to when you die. God is. You get right with God. Remember this race, it only lasts so long. And this life you're living down here, going around the track, running and sweating and striving, it's only so many days and then it's over. And you don't know when it's over. It could be over today, tomorrow, 50 years, I don't know but it

will be over one day. And when it does, you will stand before the Judge of the race. And you'll go to one or two places. The issue is Which one will it be? Mount Sinai or Mount Zion My prayer for you this morning is that you choose the right one. It's right here for you today to receive in the grace of God.

Next week, we're going to look at the next passage in Hebrews where it says, "Do not refuse Him who is speaking." So this is just a little advertisement for that. But that means this is what you need to do in light of what you've heard about these mountains. Listen, don't refuse the gospel. Don't say, "I don't need to pay attention to this. I've heard it before." That's a terrible attitude. Give it your utmost respect. And we'll talk about that next time we're together.

For now, in my studies this week, the story was told of a man who was arrested for speeding. And he was told to go down to the courthouse to pay the fine. But he asked the police officer to stop by his house first. And when they were there, he showed the policeman what a wonderful father he was, and a good husband, and a hard worker. And at the end of about an hour's worth, he turned to the policeman, he said, "Well, officer, do I still have to pay the fine?" And the officer said, "Yeah, of course." The man said, "But I'm a good dad." The officer said, "But you're a terrible driver. Go pay your ticket." Friends, here's the point. Listen to this. It doesn't matter if you're doing well in one area if you're failing God in the other. Failure is still failure. Sin is still sin. And you need Jesus to pay for all of it. He is there waiting for you. Let's close in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, Lord, we thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ, and the fact that He has paid for all of our sins. We all need to experience this grace this morning. Every man, woman and child needs to come to Mount Zion. And Lord, I pray that that would be the case for those who are sitting here today. Lord, our hearts are always pricked when we hear the Gospel. We're always confronted when we come to the law. We all fail it. And You've extended so much mercy to sinners like us.

With this mercy lead us to follow You and run down the track harder for the glory of God. Lord, our prayer as we read these things, is not just to be hearers of the word, we want to be doers. And we want to live in light of this mercy. And we want to take the law seriously and live holy lives before You, but at the same time, we want to always know that our foundation is not works but grace. Would You help us to know that this morning, would Christ be glorified in the life of Your church and the life of Your people?

I don't know where everyone does come from this morning. And there may be some here today who needed to hear this word. It may be for the first time, maybe they never thought through the issue of the law and grace. And if that's the case, Lord, would You do a work in their hearts? We pray in the power of the Spirit. And would You receive all the glory for drawing sinners to Yourself? We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.