

Experiencing the Presence of God
Week 4: Training our Spiritual Eyes
August 28, 2022

1. Introduction

- a. Welcome - BBQ - last day of EPG
- b. Series Preview - Labor Day = communion/presence - Sept 11 = Culture series
- c. Series Review
 - i. Exodus 3 - Burning Bush - God's invitation to experience his presence - noticing, investigating & hearing - Moses was 40 years in another country, separated from his people who were in slavery
 - ii. Exodus 19 - Mount Sinai - Overcoming barriers to God's presence - confession & forgiveness - Israelites had been traveling three months in the wilderness
 - iii. Acts 2 - Pentecost - Empowerment through God's presence - building his kingdom - the disciples had just seen their leader, their Messiah, ascend into heaven and they were waiting for what would come next
 - iv. Today - Hebrews 12 - Training our Spiritual Eyes - the Hebrew followers of Jesus were weary of following the new way in a hostile world - many of them evidently wanted to give up so the later chapters of Hebrews are encouragements to endure
- d. Read Hebrews 12:18-29 paying attention and noticing what stands out. Invite God to speak to you.

2. Training our Spiritual Eyes to See God's Kingdom

- a. **Conclusion: Be Thankful (28-29)**
 - i. Thankfulness is the means by which we serve God acceptably with reverence and awe.
 - ii. Cultivate thankfulness
 1. **Psalm 95.** Enter his presence with thanksgiving
 2. **Psalm 100.** Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and bless his name.
 3. **Philippians 4:6.** Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

4. **Colossians 3:17.** And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.
5. **1 Thessalonians 5:18.** give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

iii. Consuming fire

1. **Deuteronomy 4.** Jealous God!
2. Thankfulness is the way to be acceptable to God.
 - a. When we get a gift we don't deserve and couldn't possibly afford or repay, the only acceptable response is to be thankful.
 - i. No good to try to prove our worthiness
 - ii. No good to minimize the gift
 - iii. **STORY. House Sitting at the Freemans'**
 - b. When we give a gift like that, all we want is gratitude.
3. So how do we cultivate the kind of thankfulness that's acceptable to God? We need to see him and what he has given us. How can we do that? We need to train our spiritual eyes.

- iv. **VISUAL.** Autostereograms - show image on screen - you have to look through the 2D image to see the 3D - look through the confusion to see the real picture - it's frustrating not to see it; relieving to see it
1. In order to see the picture, your eyes have to adjust focus to perceive the contrasts within the image.
 2. Three layers of contrast in Hebrews 12 that help train our spiritual sight.

b. **Contrast: Mount Sinai (18-21) vs. Mount Zion (22-24)**

- i. Earthly city vs. Heavenly city
- ii. Fear vs. Joy
- iii. Boundaries vs. Accessibility
- iv. ***See that there is a real, spiritual home you have already come to if you're following Jesus. You can't see it with your physical eyes, but it exists. In fact it's more real than the world we see around us because it will last forever. Be thankful you've been welcomed into a new home.***

c. **Contrast: Blood of Abel vs. Blood of Jesus (24-25)**

- i. Better things - faith vs. sight
 1. **Hebrews 11:1-4.** Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. For by this our ancestors were approved. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was approved as a righteous man, because God approved his gifts, and even though he is dead, he still speaks through his faith.
 2. **Hebrews 11:13-16.** These all died in faith, although they had not received the things that were promised. But they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth. But they now desire a better place—a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.
 3. **Hebrews 12:2.** Run the race ... keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
 4. Jesus sat down in Mount Zion, where he now resides. A better word of encouragement than Abel.
 - a. It's the difference between someone ahead in the race and someone who's finished, come back, and is running with you to the finish line.
 - b. *See that Jesus has finished the race, knows the way, and has given you the gift of his presence running with you to the finish line. Be thankful for his companionship and guidance.*
- ii. Warning on earth vs. Warning from heaven
 1. **Hebrews 1:1.** In the past God spoke through prophets, but in these last days he has spoken through his Son.
 2. WARNING. Don't snub the gift of Jesus' companionship by running your own way! Trust that he knows the way better than you and rely on him.
 - a. How do you do that? Train your spiritual eyes to perceive his presence.
 - b. This is especially important because running the race of faith (of life) means navigating some rough terrain.

d. **Contrast: Shakeable Things vs. Unshakeable Things (26-27)**

- i. Haggai 2:6. Context = “be strong, my Spirit is with you, don’t be afraid.”
 - ii. Physical vs. Spiritual
 - iii. Earthly authorities vs. Heavenly authorities
 - iv. ***When you feel like the world is winning and things will never change. When you’re weary of hanging on, know that in time God will shake away everything that is not part of his kingdom and reveal what is unshakeable. The spiritual reality of Mount Zion will be the only reality for eternity, and you are welcomed into it as a follower of Jesus. Be thankful that your true home is unshakeable (like the house built on the rock).***
- e. **Conclusion:** Like seeing the image in an autostereogram, we must train our spiritual eyes to adjust to the realities of the world we cannot see. As they come more and more into focus we learn just how much we have to be thankful for, and we can serve God with the reverence and awe that he deserves.

Imagination Prayer

God has given all of us the gift of an imagination (even the most left-brained among us) - the ability to form mental images of things not present to our physical sight. This morning, we are going to use our imagination to picture Mount Zion from Hebrews 12. As best you can—engage your imagination and invite the Holy Spirit to help you envision what he wants you to see. Invite God to speak to you, engage his presence, and remember what you hear.

Let’s begin by closing our eyes and taking a deep breath.

In chapter 12, the author of Hebrews is contrasting the law-oriented, fearful, and unapproachable nature of Mount Sinai with the grace-filled, hospitable welcome of Mount Zion. The image of Zion is one of deep love and incredible joy rooted in the presence of God. It is a place for those who know and walk with Jesus to rest, celebrate, and worship the one who’s love sets us free to dwell in the fullness of God.

Listen again to this description of the unshakeable spiritual kingdom of God.

You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless thousands of angels in a joyful gathering. You have come to the assembly of God’s firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God himself, who is the judge over all things. You have come to the spirits of the righteous ones in heaven who have now been made perfect. You have come to Jesus, the one who

mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness.

Scene One

Imagine yourself now walking on a path in the mountains. Look around. What do you see? Breathe in the crisp mountain air.

Continue to walk along the mountain path. As you come to the top of a hill, Mount Zion comes into view. The city of God is before you. Take in the size of this shining city. Notice the walls around it. They shine as if they are made from jewels and precious metals. Do you see the city gates? The gates are wide open. These gates are never closed.

Imagine you are approaching the gates now. As you walk through, notice the angels. There are many, more angels than you can ever count. And they are celebrating. What are they doing? How do they celebrate in the Lord's presence?

15-Second Pause

Scene Two

As you continue into the city, notice the people, God's beloved children, the righteous ones who have been made perfect. Look at the crowd, people from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne worshipping God. What do you notice about them? What do you see as you look at their faces?

15-Second Pause

Scene Three

As you move through the crowd, you come into the presence of God, the judge of all things.

Short Pause

Then at God's right hand, you see Jesus. As you stand before God the Father and Son, what are you feeling? What emotions are stirred up at this moment?

20-Second Pause

Now look at Jesus. How are you moved to respond to the one who spoke the world into existence and loves you so much he was willing to lay down his life for you?

20-Second Pause

And now, how is Jesus responding to you?

20-Second Pause

Linger here in this moment with Jesus. It's not crazy to think Jesus is with you now, because he is. He told us himself, "I am with you always."

30-Second Pause

As we move into another time of engaging God through worship, invite him to continue speaking to you as we sing.