

# THE TWO MOUNTAINS

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*Hebrews 12:14-29*

## INTRODUCTION

There are moments in life when we trade something lasting for something immediate.

We trade prayer for doom-scrolling, peace for resentment, presence for distraction, and what matters most for what feels easiest right now.

Usually, it does not feel dramatic. It feels small, reasonable, manageable. It feels like one bowl of stew. That is why Hebrews brings up Esau, (*who's appetite was screaming louder than the future he knew he had*) who traded his inheritance for a meal, and then sets before us two mountains:

Sinai, the mountain of fear and distance, and Zion, the mountain of nearness and welcome through Jesus Christ. So the question is this:

**What are you trading away?**

**And from which mountain are you living?**

Because that will determine how you endure, how you worship, how you hear God, and whether you will trade what is holy for what satisfies only for a moment.

## I. ENDURE RIGHTLY: PEACE, HOLINESS, AND VIGILANCE

**READ:** Hebrews 12:14-15

*“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.”*

These verses mark a shift in Hebrews. Earlier in the chapter, the writer has been speaking about endurance, suffering, discipline, and perseverance. Now he shows us what endurance looks like in real life.

And notice the two commands: strive for peace with everyone, and strive for holiness. One is outward. One is inward. Peace concerns our life with others. Holiness concerns our life before God.

And that matters because suffering can deform a person in both directions. When people suffer, they are tempted to become bitter, angry, resentful, and relationally destructive. And inwardly, they are tempted to lose moral seriousness, loosen their grip on holiness, and drift into sin.

So Hebrews says: pursue peace. Pursue holiness. Watch carefully. Do not let suffering become bitterness. Do not let pressure become spiritual carelessness. Do not fail to obtain the grace of God.

And notice this: bitterness is not treated as a private issue only. A root grows underground before it shows itself above ground. But once it springs up, it troubles many. Bitterness spreads. Resentment contaminates. Sin rarely stays contained.

So this text becomes very plain for daily life.

When you are hurt, do you pursue peace, or feed resentment? When you are tired, do you pursue holiness, or reach for relief? When you are anxious, do you bring that anxiety before God, or medicate it with noise, distraction, appetite, and avoidance?

**This is not abstract theology. This is Tuesday afternoon theology. This is the theology of your phone, your habits, your imagination, your private frustrations, and your reflexes under pressure.**

## II. DO NOT TRADE YOUR INHERITANCE

**READ:** Hebrews 12:16-17

*“that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.”*

Now Hebrews gives us a concrete example: Esau.

He is the image of a man who, in a moment of weakness, appetite, and pressure, traded something precious for something immediate. His birthright was not just extra property. It was inheritance, sonship, blessing, place - a share in the Father's house.

But he treated what was holy as though it were common.

To be profane is to take something sacred and handle it cheaply. To treat what is holy as negotiable. To act as though inheritance can be exchanged for appetite.

And that is why Esau is such a warning. The point is not merely that he made one bad choice. The point is that he exchanged what mattered most for what relieved him in the moment.

And the bowl of stew takes many forms: sexual sin, intoxication, escapist indulgence, resentment, distraction, compulsive comfort, or the habit of numbing yourself rather than bringing your pain before God.

**Point: The bowl of stew is whatever gives immediate relief at the cost of long-term faithfulness.** So the question is not only, “What is wrong?” The deeper question is, “What am I trading away in order to feel better right now?”

*What Esau did outwardly with stew, we often do inwardly with our loves. We trade prayer for stimulation, silence for noise, presence for scrolling, and communion for appetite. That is worldliness: desiring what is immediate in such a way that you surrender what is holy to get it.*

And when the text says that afterward Esau found no place for repentance though he sought the blessing with tears, the point is not that repentance in the abstract is impossible. The point is sharper: what is squandered cannot always be restored on demand as though nothing happened. Some things, once traded away, carry consequences that tears alone do not erase.

**Point: Do not trade what is holy for what only helps you survive the moment.**

### III. YOU HAVE NOT COME TO SINAI

**READ:** Hebrews 12:18-21

*“For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, ‘If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.’ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I tremble with fear.’”*

From there, Hebrews turns to Sinai.

And Sinai is the mountain of terror, awe, distance, and unapproachable holiness.

It is tangible, earthly, fearsome. There is fire, darkness, storm, trumpet, divine voice, and strict boundaries. All of it underlines one truth: God is holy, and sinful man cannot endure His presence apart from mediation.

That is why the people begged that no further word be spoken to them. That is why even Moses is described as trembling.

Sinai tells the truth. It tells the truth about God: He is not manageable. He is not a mascot for our values. He is not a religious accessory to our lives. And Sinai tells the truth about us: we cannot simply walk into the presence of the living God on our own terms.

There is revelation there, but not entrance. There is glory there, but not feast. The people stand below in fear. They need a mediator.

And many people still live there emotionally, even when they know Christian language. They relate to God through distance, fear, bargaining, and avoidance. They assume that if they come too near, they will be destroyed. They try to keep God useful, but not too close.

*Bridge: But Sinai is not the last word. The movement from Sinai to Zion is not a change in God. It is a change in how human beings are brought near to God. The same divine holiness that terrifies from afar becomes life when we are brought near rightly through Christ.*

### IV. YOU HAVE COME TO ZION

**READ:** Hebrews 12:22-24

*“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”*

Then comes one of the great declarations in Hebrews: you have come. Not, “you might come.” Not, “you will one day come only.” But, you have come.

Sinai was the scene of distance. Zion is the reality of access. And Hebrews is not speaking merely about the earthly hill in Jerusalem. It is speaking about the heavenly Jerusalem, the true sanctuary, the assembly of God's people gathered around the Mediator.

Believers have come to the city of the living God, to angels in festal gathering, to the assembly of the firstborn, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood. At Sinai the people stood below in fear. Here, through Christ, believers are said to have come into the heavenly assembly itself.

And that means salvation must not be reduced to a distant legal status only. Salvation is not merely that something has been declared about you from afar. It is that in Christ you are brought near, joined to His life, and made to participate in what is His.

Your desires begin to be healed. Your worship begins to be reordered. Your humanity begins to be made fit for communion with the living God. To be saved is not merely to be excused. It is to be brought into Zion and remade by the Son who brings many sons to glory.

And notice the inheritance language: the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven. That is birthright language. Sonship language. Inheritance language. Esau despised the birthright. But Christ, the true Firstborn, does not despise the Father's will. He does not sell the inheritance. He brings many sons to glory.

**QUOTE:** Hebrews 2:10-11

*“For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory...”*

*“For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers.”*

And this is not foreign to Paul.

**READ:** Ephesians 2:13, 18-19

*“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”*

*“For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”*

*“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”*

That is Zion language. Access language. Household language.

The church is not merely a religious audience watching a presentation. The church is a gathered household, a festal assembly, a people brought near by a High Priest.

And that means the Christian life is not lived from panic, distance, or spiritual improvisation. We do not endure by white-knuckling ourselves into holiness. We endure by living from the place Christ has opened.

We pray as those brought near. We gather as those belonging to the household. We repent not as strangers trying to bargain our way in, but as sons and daughters being restored in the Father's house.

So the practical question becomes: am I living as though I still stand at Sinai, far off and afraid, or as one who has come to Zion through the Son?

## THE BLOOD THAT SPEAKS A BETTER WORD

Hebrews says we have come to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

**QUOTE:** Genesis 4:10 *“The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.”*

Abel's blood cried out for justice. It testified to innocence violated and brotherhood broken. But Christ's blood speaks a better word: mercy, forgiveness, cleansing, healing, restoration.

That is why obedience is never mere moral effort. We are not trying to purchase sonship. We are responding to a word already spoken over us. We are responding to blood that has already secured our place in the household.

And that is why works cannot be treated as irrelevant. If Christ has truly brought us near, then that nearness begins to take flesh in repentance, faithfulness, love, worship, endurance, and a real reordering of life.

**Point: Grace does not compete with obedience. Obedience is what grace looks like when the life of the Son begins to appear in His people.**

That is why daily life matters. What holds your gaze shapes your soul. What commands your attention tutors your loves. What you behold, you begin to imitate.

**READ:** Ephesians 4:17, 20, 23-24

*“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.” “But that is not the way you learned Christ!”*

*“and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,” “and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

You do not defeat Esau merely by gritting your teeth. You defeat Esau by learning to desire differently. And you learn to desire differently by dwelling in the reality of Zion until your loves are reordered.

*Bridge: That is why worship matters. That is why prayer matters. That is why Scripture matters. That is why the gathering matters. That is why the table matters. At the table, Christ does not merely remind us that we have been brought near. He nourishes His brought-near people with the life of the covenant.*

## V. THEREFORE RECEIVE THE KINGDOM RIGHTLY

**READ:** Hebrews 12:25-29

*“See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’ This phrase, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of things that are shaken - that is, things that have been made - in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”*

Because believers have come to something greater than Sinai, the warning is more severe, not less. If those who heard God's word under the old covenant were judged for refusing Him, how much more must we not turn away now, after receiving the greater revelation in Christ? Greater privilege means greater accountability.

Then the writer speaks of shaking. At Sinai, God's voice shook the earth. But now Scripture promises a greater shaking - not only of earth, but of heaven. This is the language of final judgment, of cosmic sifting, of revelatory separation.

What is unstable, passing, and weightless will fall away. What is substantial will remain. So all the things people are tempted to cling to - the very things for which they might sell their inheritance - are destined to pass away.

Comfort will not last. Control will not last. Reputation will not last. Stimulation will not last. The stew will not last. That is why steadfastness is not merely heroic. It is rational.

And Hebrews says that we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Not only that we will receive it one day, but that even now, in Christ, we are participating in that unshakable reality. Therefore the fitting response is gratitude, reverence, awe, and acceptable worship.

And that is why this matters so much in ordinary life. People are constantly tempted to anchor themselves in things that cannot last: comfort, control, reputation, stimulation, financial security, or the approval of others. But whatever can be shaken will be shaken.

So when anxiety rises, one helpful question is this: am I being shaken because I have treated something temporary as though it were ultimate? Hebrews calls us back to sanity. You are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Therefore build your habits, your loyalties, your attention, and your worship around what will remain.

And then Hebrews ends where Sinai once began: "For our God is a consuming fire." But now the image deepens. Fire destroys what is worthless, but it also purifies what is precious. God's holiness is both warning and promise.

If a life is built only of what is corruptible, the fire leaves nothing. But where grace has formed something true, the fire burns away impurity and reveals what remains.

**Point: In Christ, that fire is no longer aimed at your destruction, but at your purification. He burns away what is false, proud, divided, and profane. He consumes the Esau in us, not to annihilate our humanity, but to make it radiant in communion with Him.**

## CONCLUSION

So the question returns: **Slide:**

**From which mountain are you living?**

**Are you living like Esau - ruled by appetite, reaching for immediate relief, trading away what is holy for what only gets you through the moment?**

**Are you living as though you are still at Sinai - standing at a distance, dealing with God through fear, bargaining, and avoidance?**

**Or are you living from Zion - from communion, inheritance, sonship, priestly nearness, and the kingdom that cannot be shaken?**

So let the text meet you where you actually live.

When suffering comes, pursue peace instead of bitterness. When appetite rises, pursue holiness instead of relief. When guilt and fear tempt you to stand far off, remember that in Christ you have come to Zion. And when the world shakes, do not cling to what is passing away.

The Christian life is learning, day by day, not to trade what is holy for what only helps you survive the moment.

When pressure comes, ask:

**What am I running to?**

**What am I neglecting?**

**What am I becoming?**

### **Benediction:**

Hebrews does not leave us uncertain. It says: you have come to Mount Zion. You have come to the city of the living God. You have come to the festal assembly. You have come to Jesus. You have come to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word.

So do not trade your inheritance. Do not let bitterness take root. Do not refuse the One who is speaking. Do not anchor yourself to what is passing away.

The true Firstborn has come, and He is bringing many sons to glory.

Therefore receive the kingdom rightly. Offer acceptable worship. Fix your eyes on Christ. And let the holy fire of God burn away everything in you that still belongs to the mountain of distance.