

Jesus: Our Great High Priest Forever
(Week 26)
Hebrews 12:18-29
“How Will You Be Judged”

Introduction

As his letter to the Jewish believers draws to a conclusion, the author of *Hebrews* makes a final appeal to those who would forsake The Church to return to the rituals of the Old Covenant. He implores them to consider what they have left and to where they have come. He reminds them of the stark contrast between The Law and the grace found in Christ. He wants his readers to understand just what they would be forsaking, if they fall away and return to The Law of Moses. As an illustration, he reminds them of two famous mountains in the wondrous story of Israel; Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. Both of these mountain peaks bore incredible significance to the Jewish people. Sinai (also called Horeb) was the mount upon which Moses had encountered the burning bush, and also, where he led the children of Israel to receive the Ten Commandments. Zion (Tziyown in Hebrew) was the mount which King David had conquered and upon which he established his throne. Therefore, Zion became synonymous with Jerusalem and also, represented the coming kingdom of the Messiah. The first mountain (Sinai) represented The Law, and the other (Zion) points us to The Grace of God.

You see, everyone will one day stand in judgement before God. He is the Creator and King of the universe. Therefore, every created thing is subject to His authority. We will all give an account of our lives before this Great King. There can be no exceptions. The only question that remains is simple. How will you choose to be judged? Will you be judged by The Law (your own works), or by Grace (based upon the finished work of Christ)? The choice should be a simple one indeed, but should we need reminding, the author of *Hebrews* compares them for us side by side in **verses 18-29**.

Sinai is a frightening place, a place of fire and judgment, while Zion is a festive gathering to the assembly of the firstborn of God. The comparison of the two leaves little doubt as to which should be preferable, but sadly, many people then, and still today believe that they will one day be able to stand before God clothed in their own righteousness. It is a foolish choice to reject the grace of God, offered to us through the blood of His Son, but many will reject it nonetheless.

The preacher wants us all to be aware that the final judgment day is fast approaching. And, we must decide for ourselves just how we are to be judged. We can be judged by our own works (Mt. Sinai) or by the finished work of Christ (Mount Zion). But, make no mistake, the judgment will come.

Judged By Our Works (Mount Sinai vs. 18-21)

“For you have not come to what could be touched, to a blazing fire, to darkness, gloom, and storm, to the blast of a trumpet, and the sound of words. Those who heard it begged that not another word be spoken to them, for they could not bear what was commanded: If even an animal touches this mountain, it must be stoned. The appearance was so terrifying that Moses said, I am trembling with fear.”

Hebrews 12:18-21

The writer of *Hebrews* is vividly describing the day when God Himself descended upon Mount Sinai to give The Law to the people. It was a terrifying day indeed. Even Moses, who had spoken to God face to face before, was filled with dread at the sights and sounds of The Holiness of The Everlasting God. The display was intentional so that the people would be made well aware that God was not a God to be trifled with. His holiness was infinite and to stand in His presence required nothing less than holy perfection. It is a perfection that no earthly mortal man would ever be able to achieve. To stand in the presence of God, in our own feeble attempts at righteousness, is to fall to the ground in terror. This is Who God is and this is Who He shall forever be.

Just consider what it was like upon this day, when God's presence encountered the people upon Mount Sinai. The mountain was covered with thick black smoke, for no one can see the face of God and live (**Exodus 33:20**). Not only was there smoke, but fire as well. The mountain (which is mostly granite, by the way) burst into flames, when God descended upon it! Consider the amount of intense heat that would be required to burn granite, and you are beginning to get the picture. And, as if this wasn't terrifying enough, there were sounds of angels blowing trumpets accompanied by the voice of God Himself like the sound thunder echoing in the valley below. Moses actually came back down the mountain at God's instruction to once again warn the people not to touch the mountain, or they would surely die! You can read the entire story for yourself in **Exodus 19-20**.

The people were so terrified on that day that they actually begged Moses to ask God to stop talking to them!

"All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain surrounded by smoke. When the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. 'You speak to us, and we will listen,' they said to Moses, 'but don't let God speak to us, or we will die.'"
Exodus 20:18-19

Now, I want you to imagine what it was like to stand before Mount Sinai upon that day. Mount Sinai, a place so shrouded in thick smoke veiled in such impenetrable mystery that no one even knows what its name means! It was so terrifying a place, that to touch it meant death. Even if one of the animals from the Israelites flocks were to accidentally brush against the mountain, it was to be stoned to death! For no one can approach the holiness of God at Sinai. NO ONE. That, my friends, is exactly what it will be like upon judgement day for those who believe that they will be able to stand in the presence of God in their own righteousness. The first century Jews were considering going back to The Law and abandoning the grace of God. The preacher wanted them to understand that to do so was to face God's judgment without remedy. And, to do that... meant death! This is the fate that surely awaits any who decide to turn their back upon Jesus. Mount Sinai is a death sentence. Run to mount Zion and live!

Judged By The Finished Work Of Christ (Mount Zion vs. 22-24)

"Instead, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of The Living God (the heavenly Jerusalem), to myriads of angels, a festive gathering, to the assembly of the firstborn whose names have been written in heaven, to a Judge, Who is God of all, to the spirits of righteous people made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of a New Covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which says better things than the blood of Abel."
Hebrews 12:22-24

Now I don't know about you, but Mount Zion sounds like a better place to be! Where Sinai is unapproachable, Zion beckons us to come and be welcomed into the presence of the assembly of the firstborn. You see, we don't come to Zion based upon what we have done. We come based upon what Christ has done on our behalf. Just as King David conquered Mount Zion so many years ago, King Jesus, the Son of David, has conquered the heavenly Zion for us! We can live in the heavenly city of peace for all eternity, thanks to Christ and His blood that was shed to purchase our inheritance! Who could resist an offer such as this?

The name Zion literally means "raised up" and is used to describe a fortified place upon a hill. It is a place of sanctuary for God's people. It has become synonymous with the name Jerusalem which means "Abode of Peace". So you see, thanks to Jesus, our inheritance is a fortified position in God's holy city of peace. This is what the writer of *Hebrews* has previously described as the place where Abraham longed to be:

"For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God."
Hebrews 11:10

Oh, to live in the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of The Living God, that Place of Peace, where we need not feel ashamed and undone in the presence of The God of Sinai. We shall enter there with boldness, as the firstborn of God, not despising our inheritance like Esau, but clothed in the very righteousness of Christ, to stand spotless before the throne! And, how may we receive this great inheritance? By trusting, not in what we have done, but what *He* has done FOR US! Zion is the mountain of grace.

Therefore, we have been given an invitation to come to Zion, the holy city of God, to accept the grace offered to us by Christ Jesus and live. We have been given an opportunity to join with the “myriads of angels” praising God around His Throne. On Sinai, the angels are blowing trumpets of judgment, which is exactly what will happen at the end of the seven year tribulation period described in the book of *Revelation* (**Revelation 8:6**). But we, the redeemed, the church of the firstborn of God, will join with the multitudes of angels in the heavenly Jerusalem. Grace is better than the law. Can I get a witness?

Perhaps my very favorite verse of this passage is often overlooked. **Verse 24** declares that when we come to Mount Zion, the City of Grace, we find the blood of Jesus, which “says better things than the blood of Abel”. What an incredible verse! Earlier in **chapter eleven** the writer mentioned Abel, a man whose devotion to God had cost him his very life. *The Bible* tells us that when Abel was murdered, his blood cried out to God from the ground.

“Then He (God) said, ‘What have you done? Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.’” **Genesis 4:10**

And what was Abel’s blood crying out for? For justice, that’s what. Abel was murdered, simply for being obedient to God, and his blood cried out to God from the ground. Someone needed to pay for what had been done to Abel. Jesus was also murdered for His obedience to God, but His blood cries out something much better. It cries out, “It has finished!” And, that justice **has** been served! Jesus paid it all. His blood paid for every sin, for every injustice. Jesus’ blood paid the judgment in full. The wrath of God has been satisfied, and we can find forgiveness. If this verse doesn’t make you cry, then it should. For the blood of Christ says much better things than the blood of Abel. It says “Come to Mount Zion... and LIVE!” It begs the question: “Do you want to be judged based your good works or the finished works of Christ?”

But Make NO Mistake, His Judgement Is Coming (vs. 25-29)

“See to it that you do not reject the One Who speaks. For if they did not escape when they rejected Him who warned them on earth, even less will we if we turn away from Him who warns us from heaven. His voice shook the earth at that time, but now He has promised, yet once more I will shake not only the earth but the heavens. This expression, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what is not shaken might remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful. By it, we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”

Hebrews 12:25-29

When God descended upon Mount Sinai, the very earth trembled at His presence. But, when He returns to judge the world, He will shake all of creation. The writer quotes here a passage from *Haggai*:

“For The LORD of armies says this: ‘Once more, in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.’” **Haggai 2:6**

It is important to note that God promised to do this “in a little while”. God’s judgment is coming my friends, and I believe that it is coming very soon. Are you ready to stand in judgment? Are you trusting in your good works, or have you been to Calvary to place your hope in Jesus and His finished work upon the cross? See to it that you do not reject the One Who speaks (**vs. 25**). Come to Mount Zion and live.

God is going to destroy all of creation, and He will bring forth a new heaven and a new earth. There will be a new Jerusalem, the holy city of God, where those who are the firstborn of God (Believers) will live and find rest and peace. Those who reject His offer of grace will be destroyed along with this old sinful world. God will literally shake all of creation. The apostle Peter describes this dreadful “Day of the Lord”:

“But the day of The LORD will come like a thief; on that day the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, it is clear what sort of people you should be in holy conduct and godliness as you wait for the day of God and hasten its coming. Because of that day the heavens will be dissolved with fire and the elements will melt with heat. But based on His promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.”

2 Peter 10-13

This old wretched world isn’t going to be around much longer. Thankfully, this life is not all there is. The fifth and final warning in the book of *Hebrews* serves as a reminder that God will very soon destroy everything that we can now see and touch. But, here is the good news for the child of God, we have been given an “unshakable kingdom” as our inheritance (**vs. 28**). The old heavens and earth shall pass away, but the kingdom of God will last forever. So, to all you who are the “firstborn of God” lift up your heads and give praise! When everything else falls apart, we still have so much to be thankful for. We can endure, no matter the circumstance, and serve God acceptably with reverence and awe! He cannot fail. He **must** prevail. So heed the warning and do not reject He who calls to us from heaven. He is not a God to be trifled with. Our God is a consuming fire! You will one day find yourself standing before this Judge, Who is God of all. You will either be judged by your own works, or by the finished work of Christ. The choice is up to you. And as the writer of *Hebrews* would say:

“How will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation.”

Hebrews 2:3

Choose this day how you will be judged.

Will it be at Mount Sinai or Mount Zion?

Jesus is calling.

Choose life.

And ALL of God’s people said... TRUTH!!!