

A New Kind of Community
November 30, 2014
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Hebrews 12:18-29

Chapter twelve of Hebrews paints a picture of the Christian life as running a race of endurance. Running in spite of pain and trials. Focusing on Jesus who gives us the opportunity to be in this family of runners, and the faith to complete this race. We're to run supporting our brothers and sisters in peace and unity, cheering each other on to complete the race. To stay holy and clean as we run. And to help new runners to get into the race, and all runners to stay in the race. Today's passage helps us see the finish line, a place called Mount Zion.

Beginning in verse 18, the writer of Hebrews again compared an Old Testament image with a new covenant picture. **Why did he continue to compare the "old" with the "new" for his readers?**

We might sum up this passage as a comparison of INTIMIDATION versus INTIMACY. These first century Hebrew Christians had been taught from birth to be INTIMIDATED by God's awesome power. They were struggling to grasp the new reality: We can live in AWE of God's power and holiness, and have an INTIMATE relationship with Him through Jesus. Today we sometimes suffer from the other extreme: So comfortable with the privilege of an intimate relationship that we lose our AWE of God.

Let's read verses 18 through 21:

18 For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest 19 and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. 20 For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." 21 Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear."

- **What are verses 18-21 describing?** Exodus 19:11-20 gives the full story. God was about to give the ten commandments and he instructed Moses to assemble the people:

Exodus 19:11–20 (ESV)

11 and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12 And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. 13 No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain." 14 So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people; and they washed their garments. 15 And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman." 16 On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. 17 Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. 18 Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled

greatly. 19 And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. 20 The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

- **If these people grew up hearing this read in temple, what was their image of God?**
- **What are some words we could use to describe how they saw God?**
- **Let's talk about the word "awe." What does it mean?**
- The Oxford Dictionary: "*Awe - A feeling of reverential respect mixed with fear or wonder.*"
- The Holman Bible Dictionary: [The term awe] refers to an emotion combining honor, fear, and respect before someone of superior office or actions (Pss. 4:4; 33:8; 119:161 KJV) (Gen. 28:17; 1 Sam. 12:18; Matt. 9:8; Heb. 12:28 NIV). It most appropriately applies to God.
- **How in modern language have we "misappropriated" or "misused" that word "awe?"**
- "*That cheesecake was awesome!*" "*Those jeans look awesome!*" "*That game was awesome!*"
- It's no wonder we don't stand in awe of God if we stand in awe of cheesecake, blue jeans, or yesterday's football game! We don't have a word to describe the creator of the universe because we've thrown it away on everyday stuff.
- **What could we post-modern people learn from these Hebrews' image of God?**
- We can learn from them, but THEY needed to learn about the new covenant. Back to Hebrews 12:22-24.

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

- Verse 22 says "you have come to Mount Zion...the city of the living God. Does this mean he marched all these Hebrew Christians to a mountain? **What's he talking about (Hint: V.18)?**
- **How is this mountain different than the other mountain? Who is going to be there?**
- Verse 23 says we'll see "*the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.*"
- **Why is that encouraging to you and me?**
- Ever get to a hotel to discover they messed up your reservation and there was no room?
- In Luke 10:20 Jesus said: "*...but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*"
- Verse 24 reminds us how we get into this NEW heavenly Jerusalem, the blood of Jesus:

Warren Wiersbe writes:

"Abel's blood made Cain feel guilty (and rightly so) and drove him away in despair (Gen. 4:13–15); but Christ's blood frees us from guilt and has opened the way into the presence of God. Were it not for the blood of the New Covenant, we could not enter this heavenly city!"

- Though Hebrews was written mainly to believers in Christ, there are several times the writer shifts to a "warning" for those who haven't believed:

25 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. 26 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." 27 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. 28 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, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

- Describing God as a “consuming fire” can be a little scary. But those who have trusted Christ don’t need to be afraid.

Dave Guzik writes:

“The truth that God is a consuming fire is a comfort to the believer. They realize that the Father poured out His consuming fire of judgment on the Son in our place. When He did, it completely consumed the guilt of sin in all who believe. The penalty of sin was consumed in Jesus at the cross.”

Ray Stedman put it this way:

“God is light and God is love, and when you put those two together you get fire. Fire is both light and warmth. As someone has well pointed out, fire will destroy what it cannot purify, but it purifies what it cannot destroy.”

If we’re covered by the blood of Jesus, God’s consuming fire won’t destroy us, it will purify us.

- This passage shows us the same God but two very different scenes.
- Mount Sinai was a FEARFUL scene. Mount Zion is a FESTIVE vision.
- **Why (in spiritual terms) are these two mountains so different?**
- **Since God’s nature and character haven’t changed, what has changed?**
- It’s pretty straightforward to see how the writer of Hebrews was teaching his readers in that day. *“There’s a new and better covenant, don’t cling to the old one.”*
- **How do we apply this passage to our lives today? How can we benefit from looking at both of these “mountains?”**

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- We tend to try to categorize things as “one or the other.” Somethings are “both, and.”
- God is powerful, awesome, just, and holy, and sometimes we need a little more reverent fear!
- God is also, loving, patient, long-suffering, and we can approach Him personally.
- How can He be BOTH? How can that be possible? We learned that in chapter four. God made it possible through our great High Priest, Jesus. Because of Jesus, Hebrews 4:16 encourages us: *“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*
- This week let’s make our prayer to fully appreciate BOTH the AWE and the INTIMACY of our Heavenly Father.
- Let’s also spend some time gazing at the “finish line” we have in our future. As verse 28 says: *“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...”*