

Faith Fueled By New Covenant Joy

Hebrews 12:18-24

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If you would, open your bibles to Hebrews.

(Note: spots of dropped audio from beginning of sermon)

The living quarters are constantly damp. The walls around you are covered with mold. The ship is increasingly infested with rats.

(audio drop)

It's getting larger to the point that you have to retreat below deck into your hammock to wait out the storm.

But as you lay down, and they're singing this:

How blessed am I, how full of joy. I'm so thankful for this voyage.

My mind beholds that coming shore where I will live forevermore.

No more sorrow, worry, care. Lord bless this boat that hurries there.

Though wind and waves do threaten still, with hope and joy my heart is filled.

Confused by such a song, it seems to be so out of touch with your actual surroundings. You climb out of your hammock to go and find the source of the song. And there find a man singing and you begin to question him. Sir, how can you sing such a hopeful song? Don't you see the rats? Don't you see the roaches? Don't you see the moldy walls? Aren't you hungry? Don't you see the storm brewing just ahead? What is this song that you sing?

To which the man replies, oh yes, I see all of these things, but I know something you do not. The place this boat is taking us is a paradise. A place where people live in peace and harmony. A place that overflows with the best food, the purest water. A place where the people live in a constant state of celebration and gratitude.

And you say, but yeah, how can you be sure though, if we arrive at this place, that you'll be accepted and that this will be your experience and that they'll share such riches with you? And to this final question, the man's smile gets even brighter as he answers, because my father is the king.

As believers, you know, we live in a fallen world that's often full of tragedy, difficulty, grief, hardships. And yet the scriptures call us not to despair over these things, but to live with hope and even to enjoy life in a fallen world.

But how? How can we do that in such a place? In our passage today in the book of Hebrews, the author is going to turn our attention to the future joy that is ours in Christ. To be built up in our faith today because of what has been secured for us in eternity. His purpose is that we would have a steadfast faith, to be emboldened in our faith because of the future joy that is ours in Christ.

Remember quickly with me, the theme of the letter as a whole is **The Superiority of Christ**. That's been proven to us now in multiple ways. Those are there on your screen. Jesus is really better than every aspect of the old covenant.

Most recently, we've been in Hebrews 12, verses 12 to 17. There we saw three commands that gave us four responses to God's good design for discipline in our lives. We are to **Take Heart, Run Straight, Pursue Peace, and Pursue Holiness**.

That's led us most recently to look at three dangers that we must be on guard against in our own hearts and in the lives of the people of the church. The first danger was **The Drifter**, a person who is dangerously towing the line of coming short of the grace of God. Danger number two, **The Defiler**, the person who's not only hardening their own heart against the Lord, but who begins to whisper into the ears of others to seek to draw them away. And then finally, last week, **The Defiled** in verses 16 and 17. We studied the sad example of Esau, an immoral and godless man who sold his own birthright for something as fleeting as a single meal.

We're to be on guard against such dangers. And in our passage today, the author is going to remind us how foolish it would be to ever trade the riches that are ours in Christ for some works-based system like the old covenant. And in so doing, he's yet again going to give greater fuel to our faith that we might stand steadfast in Christ regardless of our circumstances.

The theme of our passage this morning is **The joys of our new covenant inheritance should motivate an enduring faith**. The joys of our new covenant inheritance should motivate an enduring faith. Read with me Hebrews chapter 12, beginning in verse 18 through verse 24.

"¹⁸ For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ For they could not bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned." ²¹ And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling." ²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, ²³ 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, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel."

Now this morning I'm going to attempt to set a record and cover all seven of these verses in one message. If you've been with us you know that is a feat. The reason for that is because sometimes there are passages that we come to in the scriptures that we are in danger of missing the point if we break them down in too small of bits. And so today we're going to cover this whole passage because really all seven verses drive to one grand theme. And I don't want to miss that theme by breaking it apart.

What we have here in these seven verses is a contrast between two scenes, two approaches to the holy God of the universe, one under the Old Covenant and one under the New. And

we'll compare and contrast these two wonderful scenes together, two approaches, if you will, to God. And they couldn't be more distinct.

The effect this morning, the takeaway, is that we would be stirred up in our faith to hold on, to continue to persevere in this temporal life because of meditating on the inheritance that is ours in Christ.

Remember, these Jewish believers who are receiving this letter are wavering in their faith. And it seems from the context that some of them are even thinking of maybe going back to Judaism and their life under the Old Covenant. And the author is desperate to help them to see that it would be foolish, just as Esau foolishly sold his birthright for a single meal, how foolish would it be to reject the riches we have in the New Covenant in Christ to go back to the Old.

So let's look together at the first scene together. Scene number one, **The Fear of Sinai**, verses 18 to 21. He begins here with the negative statement in verse 18, "*for you have not come.*" Now understand the structure of this passage hinges on that verb to come. It's repeated again in verse 22. Here it is given in the negative sense of what we have not come to. The verb can also be translated as to approach. You have not approached or come.

But notice positively in verse 22 when we get there it will say, "*but you have come.*" So there we have our two scenes, if you will, of two different ways of approaching God. But he's speaking to those of us under the New Covenant who are already in Christ. So this first scene negatively is how we have not come to God. There are seven descriptions of how the Jewish people approached God as the Old Covenant was ratified there at Mount Sinai in the wilderness.

This is one of the most famous scenes in the Old Testament. Actually, this is one of my favorite passages. It comes out of Exodus 19. You remember the giving of the Ten Commandments followed by the giving of the Law. This is the wonderful, really terrifying, awful moment in which they come before the holiness of God at Mount Sinai.

Now in Hebrews, verses 18 to 21, we have a summarization of that event because these people are Jewish Christians. They know the Old Testament. This would have been a very familiar scene to them. Maybe it's a familiar scene to you this morning. But I think it's important that we go back and read the account in Exodus to better understand this summarization that's given to us here in Hebrews.

So go back with me to Exodus 19. We're going to read verses 9 to 17 and then skip to chapter 20 and read verses 18 and 19. But this is the event the author has in mind in this first scene.

Exodus 19:9. Now remember, the people have come out of Egypt. They've just entered into the wilderness, and now they are ratifying this covenant relationship that they will have with Yahweh. Verse 9:

"⁹ The Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever." Then Moses told the words of the people to the Lord. ¹⁰ The Lord also said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate

them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; ¹¹ and let them 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 You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. ¹³ No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.’ When the ram’s horn 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 He said to the people, “Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.” ¹⁶ So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. ¹⁷ And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.”

¹⁸ Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. ¹⁹ When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with 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. ²¹ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, “Go down, warn the people, so that they do not break through to the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish. ²² Also let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, or else the Lord will break out against them.” ²³ Moses said to the Lord, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us, saying, ‘Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.’” ²⁴ Then the Lord said to him, “Go down and come up again, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, or He will break forth upon them.” ²⁵ So Moses went down to the people and told them.

Now skipping down to verse 18 of chapter 20, after the giving of the Ten Commandments, we read this:

¹⁸ All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. ¹⁹ Then they said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.”

Now that is the awesome, terrifying account that is mentioned here in Hebrews chapter 12. And instead of making comments about different aspects of what we just read, I'm going to let the author do that. I want you to see the seven descriptions that he uses of this Old Testament account and the point that he's trying to make for us this morning in these verses.

Verse 18 begins, “*For you have not come*,” first of all, “*to a mountain that can be touched*.” He's speaking of this moment, this scene we just read in which the people came to a physical mountain, Mount Sinai, made of rock, made of dirt. This was a real temporal place on earth.

Secondly, he says, you have not come to a “*blazing fire*.” This is the description of what that mountain was like. It was set ablaze, the entire thing going up in flame. It was a physical demonstration of the holiness and the power of God. It would have been an awesome sight, a terrifying sight. You remember Moses had seen the burning bush. This is something very different. This is a burning mountain. This is something so large that the entire congregation of Israel, numbering in the millions, can see this entire mountain aflame. It's a mesmerizing sight. So terrifying was it that when the people saw this sight, it says they drew back, get away, get away from that burning mountain.

Not only that, but he says, we, as New Covenant believers, have not come to “*darkness and gloom and whirlwind*.” Just picture yourself there at the foot of that mountain for a moment. And not only is the mountain ablaze with fire, but it says there was darkness, the kind of darkness that can be felt. There was gloom and a whirlwind. That is a swirling wind. Think of a tornado type event where this is the power of God on display with all the natural elements working together to demonstrate His glory. It was a signal that God is in a completely different category. One, He's in a completely different category from all the false gods they were surrounded by in Egypt.

But not just that, He's in a different category than us. He is transcendent. He is other. He's different than you and I. Everything about that scene was designed by God to say this: Do not come near. Don't come near to me. If you do, you will not survive it. You cannot be near me.

Not only that, it says we have not come to the “*blast of a trumpet*.” Now imagine this. No human being has yet gone up the mountain, and yet there is this loud trumpet blast coming from the mountain to summon the people to come. Who's blowing the trumpet? And one that is so loud that this many people can hear it ringing in their ears. God alone is on the mountain surrounded by angels, no doubt. But there is no human being blowing this trumpet. There's no other appropriate response than to fear the holiness of the transcendent God, to recognize I am a sinner, and I have no business going near such a holy God. I have no business over there.

Not only that, when God spoke to the people, here is the response. It says, and “*the sound of words which sound with such that those who heard beg that no further word be spoken to them*.” This is why we read Exodus 20:18-19. The congregation, when they hear the voice of God, it sounds like thunder, thundering from the mountain. And it's so overwhelming that they tell Moses, you know what? We're good. You go ahead. You talk to God and you tell us what he says. But we don't want to hear from him anymore because we'll die. We don't think that we can survive hearing the voice of such a holy transcendent God.

And the reason that they were afraid specifically that they might die is because of the warning that God had given them in preparation for this event. It says, “*for they could not bear the command if even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned*.” We read this in the account, but God warned that no living being was to touch that mountain, not even an animal. And if a human or an animal did touch the mountain, they were to be put to death. Not only were they to be put to death, you were not even allowed to touch them in the process of execution. They had to be stoned or shot through, likely with an arrow, because

here's the symbolism. They've touched the holy mountain and it's so holy that you dare not even touch the one who touched it. That's the idea. Don't come near.

In fact, it was so terrifying that the author of Hebrews is inspired to include a detail that's not mentioned in Exodus 19. He says, and so terrible was the sight that Moses said, "*I am full of fear and trembling.*" Imagine that. Imagine being in Moses' shoes and seeing this sight and God tells you and you alone, go ahead and come on up the mountain. Imagine how terrifying that would have been.

And this is the mediator, by the way. This is the chosen mediator between the people and God of this covenant and yet he himself is overwhelmed and totally overcome by the fact that God is so holy and yet we are so unworthy to be near him. Now this is the first scene, in summary, that we're to have in mind. But don't forget how it begins in verse 18: "*For you have not come to this mountain.*"

You and I, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ under the New Covenant, this is not how we are privileged to approach God. So how do we come to God? Well, this is scene number two. This is the comparison. **The Joy of Zion.** The Fear of Sinai contrasted with the joy of Zion, beginning in verse 22. "*But you have come.*" Now here's the positive. And notice the verb tense used. The verb tense is not unimportant here. This is in the perfect tense.

Usually in English when the word have is included in the verb, you know that's a signal it's likely in the perfect tense. The perfect tense speaks of an action that took place in the past but has ongoing ramifications into the future. Even indeed in this case into eternity for us. And so this demonstrates, by the way, the theological balance of how we're to think about the future, our eternity. There are these aspects, even as we see in this passage, of what is ours to come that is already ours in seed form. Sort of an already, not yet reality. He speaks of this as if it's already happened because it's guaranteed to us even though we're not physically there yet.

Just as Paul assures the Ephesians in Ephesians 1 that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit. Just as he assures the Romans that we have been justified. We have been sanctified. These are realities. You can take them to the bank if you're in Christ. And therefore, because we have these future realities that are already secured as ours in the present tense, it should affect the way we live. That's the idea. Our present day life should reflect our eternal future that is secured in Christ.

So, the first scene is summarized in seven descriptions. The second scene is summarized in nine descriptions. So what have we come to? How do we get to approach the Holy God?

Well it says, verse 22, but you have come to, first of all, "*Mount Zion.*" Now Mount Zion is different than Mount Sinai. Mount Sinai, it made clear, was a physical mountain, a location that the people actually physically went to. Sometimes in Scripture, Mount Zion is spoken of as a reference to Jerusalem. But in this case, this is not a physical place on earth. He says, "*and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.*" In this case, Mount Zion is a description of heaven, of being with God, the living God, in His actual presence.

This is the heavenly Jerusalem, the place where God's glory is fully on display. Hopefully you understand God is everywhere all the time, at the same time, and yet He has placed himself at such a place as heaven where He has an address, a place where He has chosen to dwell physically with His people where they will see His glory shining brightly, living with the living God. That's what this is, the heavenly Jerusalem.

Notice we're not invited to come near such a place and gaze over the wall to look at Him with binoculars from afar, as the people at Sinai were, where they're drawing back, looking from a distance. No, we're invited to be there in such a place, to draw near to that city, to be in the city as citizens of such a city, to live with the living God.

But not only that, notice who else is there. He goes on to say, and to myriads of angels, literally an innumerable amount of angels, 10,000s upon 10,000s of holy angels were invited to approach God, to come to this place and to dwell with them. Imagine that. Just think about how people react to angels throughout scripture.

When a holy angel appears to a person, what do they do? Typically, they fall down on their face. Sometimes they pass out. Sometimes they're fearful that death is close at hand. Why? Because these are holy angels coming from the very presence of God. It's a terrifying thought as a sinner to be in the presence of a being so holy, and they themselves are not God, and yet even still people react this way.

But what does this say about what it will be like in the future? It'll be normal, normal life for us to live, not only with God, but with those that serve Him, His holy angels. No more fear, no more cowering in their presence. This is normal life in that place.

Not only that, but we've also come, it says, to "*the general assembly*." That's the way it's worded here in the New American Standard. I think that translation actually falls short of how it ought to be translated. The actual Greek word means a festal gathering. It's an assemblage of many persons for a special occasion. The Legacy Standard Bible translates it this way: "*and to myriads of angels to the festal gathering*." The ESV translates it, "*and to innumerable angels in festal gathering*".

But that idea of a festivities, a festive place where the people have gathered for the purpose of a special occasion is what is meant. There is some debate as to whether or not this applies to the angels specifically or to all the people there. I would lean more towards all the people there. But either way, the main point of this is that this festal gathering presents a very different tone, doesn't it, than the first scene. The first scene is one of terror, of shock and awe, of recoiling from that mountain.

But this is a place of celebration, a festal gathering. There is joy and gratitude in the air, not doom and gloom and oppressive. This is a city of utmost joy. There is a celebratory feeling that permeates the entire assembly, both angels and people in that place. Gone are the dark clouds and the fire and the whirlwind of Sinai. It's replaced now by the joyous celebration of Zion.

Not only are the holy angels there, this festal gathering, but the sum total of God's redeemed people are there. It says, "*and to the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in*

heaven." I think in this case that the Greek word for church, you may be familiar with, *ekklesia*, in certain contexts just means an assembly. Most English translations put assembly here. I think that's a better translation because this is not just a description of the New Testament church, but of all the saints of old are gathered there. Everyone, everyone since Adam and Eve and onward, including those who have died in Christ under the New Covenant, but they are all now under the New Covenant because the blood of Christ has been applied to them.

They are those who are, it says, "*enrolled in heaven.*" That is, their names are written in the Lamb's book of life. They are His, as it says in Revelation 20: 15 in that future day:

"¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

Why are they referred to as the firstborn? That's an interesting way to refer to this assembly. In fact, elsewhere in the New Testament, that particular Greek term for firstborn is reserved for Christ. He is the firstborn. So why does it apply the term firstborn in this case to this assembly, and what does that mean? Well, I think in context, it's a reference to what we just studied last week with the example of Esau.

Remember, Esau was the firstborn, and therefore the right of the firstborn was his, and yet what did he do? He squandered it. In this sense, because we are co-heirs with Christ, He is the firstborn, but by His grace, we are His and connected with Him and made co-heirs.

Romans 8:16-17:

"¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him."

Esau sinfully squandered his birthright, but the true people of God, the assembly of the firstborn, have the privilege of an inheritance that they will never squander. They are the co-heirs of the true firstborn, the Lord Jesus Christ, and because their names are enrolled in heaven, written in the book, that can never be taken away, and they will never lose their inheritance.

But things just keep going from great to greater because, of course, who else is there? Not just the angels and this festive gathering, but the text goes on to say, and "*to God, the judge of all.*" You have come to God, the judge of all. We will have the privilege, Christians, of dwelling with the living God Himself, the righteous judge of all.

In the case of Mount Sinai, the people were not invited to have fellowship with God. They were told to stay back. In fact, his presence was veiled by a cloud and fire and smoke, even darkness, but we, the people of God, are invited by Christ to this gathering in which we will be with God Himself in the glory of His presence forever and ever. And what you have to understand is that God will not have to set aside His role as judge for us to be there. He's still the judge of all.

This is also a time to speak of another common misconception about God. The distinction between the first scene and the second is not a change in God. Understand, God is no less holy now than He was then at Sinai. He is still perfect in holiness, perfect in justice. So what

has changed between scene number one and scene number two? Not God, but the way we approach God.

In scene number one, there is the approach towards God of law in which if you want to come near me based on your own efforts, you have to understand you're unworthy. You cannot come based on law. But in the second scene, how do we come? By grace, through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the end result is we will be with God in His actual presence. He will still be the judge of all, but the judgment against us is settled. It is done. The righteous judgment in our justification has already been proclaimed. This one is righteous, based not on his righteousness, but the righteousness of my son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, He doesn't set aside His holiness, He doesn't set aside His righteous seat as judge, but we are there without fear of judgment because we are covered with the blood of Christ. What an inheritance.

Notice, He also is committed to making us what we must be to dwell with him in that place. Because it says, not only have we come to God, the judge of all, but it goes on to say, "*and to the spirits of the righteous, made perfect.*" This is a reference again to all those gathered there in that heavenly city, a compilation of every soul that has been redeemed since the fall.

Notice they are still in spirit at this point, which tells us this is not a reference to the millennial kingdom or the eternal state that we will be in once we have a new body. The Bible's clear that we will not forever just be spirits, but the goal, the plan, is that God would give us new redeemed bodies where we are body and spirit forever. But in this state, that has not yet happened.

This is the gathering in heaven, and so they are spirit, but notice what kind of spirit. It says the spirit of the righteous, "*made perfect.*" Now, notice the word order there. It's very important. They are the righteous, made perfect. It does not say they are those who have made themselves righteous, or those who have attained righteousness. No, but this is an action that happens to them passively. That is, an outside force acts upon them, the spirits of the righteous, made perfect. What am I getting at? This is the gospel.

God makes us what we must be in Christ. God has made them righteous. God has given them this glorification that they desperately needed. Understand, we must be holy to dwell with such a holy God, but it is God who will make us what we must be on the basis of His Son, so that the Israelites, who were not made perfectly righteous at that time, had to draw back from the presence of God, in this heavenly city, every soul will be made righteous, and therefore they will dwell with Him forever in perfect fellowship.

It's a reminder also, by the way, that one day we will be there with that great congregation, with all the saints of all time, all the peoples and stories that we've read and memorized from the Scriptures since our childhood. Those people are not dead in the truest sense of non-existence. They're still existing. They're just there in the presence of God, and we will be with them, as Jesus said, that God is the God of the living, so that when He says, I am the

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, those men are still alive, not on this earth, but with God in His presence.

I want you to think about the implications of that for a moment. I want you to think about the person right now that is the most spiritually encouraging to you. What relationship that when you fellowship with them, you are the most built up in Christ, like a breath of fresh air. You share a mutual love and joy in Christ, and you leave that conversation built up on cloud nine in the Lord. Who is that person?

Now, I want you to imagine perfect fellowship that supersedes that to degrees that we can't describe, not just with one person, with every citizen in the Kingdom. All of them perfect in righteousness, all of them overcome by the glory of God and the love of Christ so that not just some conversations lift you up in Christ, but every conversation has the aroma of Christ.

This is what it will be and more to be in that place. It's beyond what our minds can conceive. And of course, it gets even better because who else is there? And to "*Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.*"

Of course, He's there. The Father, the Son, the Spirit, but Jesus Himself in physical body, being able to see Him as He is. And unlike Moses, the mediator of that first covenant who trembled in fear as he went up that mountain, Jesus does not tremble in fear. He's in perfect harmony and fellowship with the Father. He is the apple of His eye. In fact, it is upon the basis of the perfect fellowship of the Father and the Son that we have fellowship with the Father and the Son.

And therefore, we don't have to worry that somehow after 10,000 years upon 10,000 years, that God's going to change His mind or get bored with us. No. The Son will always be there, the Mediator, the One who purchased it all, and because we are in Him, we will always be welcomed there, always having perfect fellowship with Him and the Father, the Spirit, even the angels, and of course the redeemed.

After all, it was Jesus' own blood that purchased, ratified such a covenant. And that's where the author takes our attention next. This citizenship has a basis and is the sprinkled blood of Christ. He says, "*and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.*"

This sprinkled blood is the blood of Jesus Christ, the blood that secured and ratified this New Covenant as He told His disciples in the upper room that night before He was arrested, Matthew 26:27-28:

"²⁷And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins."

And this is the crucial difference that we've learned in Hebrews between the precious blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, and all those animal sacrifices under the Old Covenant. Jesus Christ did it once for all. With His blood, He secured this new covenant eternally for His people by which we approach God on the basis of grace.

Remember, after all, back in Hebrews chapter 10, verse 19, when we first began to apply all the rich truth that we've learned, the first section of application points to this blood of Jesus as the basis for our approach to the Father:

"19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water".

The Old Covenant was built on law, a constant reminder that God was holy and could not be approached apart from a blood sacrifice, an innocent sacrifice. But Hebrews has proven to us that Christ is the sacrifice above all sacrifices, and by His blood we have secured this eternal relationship with God whereby we will one day be in that eternal city. Mount Zion is built on grace. Everything about that place screams grace.

It's as if Ephesians 2:8-9 are etched into every wall: "*8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God,⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*"

Mount Sinai screams you may not approach me. Mount Zion proves that Christ has paved the way for us to live with the living God forever. This is why the blood of Jesus speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

You remember Abel? Murdered by his brother Cain. God confronts Cain after murdering his brother, and this is what he says in Genesis 4:10: and "*10 He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground."*

This is the voice of the blood of Abel. And what did Abel's blood cry out? It cried out condemnation. The fact that Cain was to be justly punished for murdering his brother. He was condemned by the blood of Abel. But the blood of Jesus cries out forgiven. I've washed them clean. I have taken the condemnation upon Myself that was rightfully theirs, and I've paid it all. And so the blood of Jesus cries out justified, saved, forgiven, made new. Therefore, His blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

And now we begin to see the author's point this morning. He's calling to every single believer who's struggling in their faith to wake up and realize the gift that is ours in Christ. Don't throw away the wonders of being a citizen of such an eternal heavenly kingdom for any temporal thing. Don't cast it away that you might chase after sin. Don't cast it away for some works-based righteousness. And don't cast it away because you're weary and beaten down by the trials and tribulations of life.

We have a citizenship in that holy place. Our Father accepts us there on the basis of the blood of his Son. And we will always be with the Lord.

Remember holiness is what is required to see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14:

"14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord."

And we're reminded also that God doesn't wait just until that day to share His holiness with us, but through the process of progressive sanctification, He shares His holiness with us in progressive measure. Hebrews 12:10:

"10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness."

Listen, this is a call to be strengthened in your faith, to run the race, not to be distracted, to turn aside for any lesser thing. As we've made clear, it seems that the original audience was most enticed by the potential of going back to the legalism of Judaism. I feel confident that's probably not your temptation this morning of things that you're tempted to be distracted by. Maybe it is, we can talk about that, but probably not.

In our context then, what is it that we're tempted to be drawn to and forget these wonderful heavenly realities that are ours? Well, as we close, let me just give you three things to consider. Number one, **Resist The Allure of Self-Righteousness.** Resist the allure of self-righteousness. It may not be Judaism, but our world is filled with self-righteous options that are presented as real options for how we might come to God. And I'm sad to say that there are a growing number of those who are professing evangelical Christians who are moving away from the gospel of grace to embrace a works-based system of some kind.

It seems that, at least from those examples I'm hearing of, the most too popular options that people are drawn towards would be Catholicism or Eastern Orthodox churches. There's a growing movement of people leaving Protestant churches to go to those churches, and I think there's many reasons for that. One of the common ones seems to be that people are mesmerized by the kind of pomp and circumstance that comes with the style of worship in those movements, and they seem to them to be more serious about their faith than evangelicals.

And to be clear, many evangelical churches have watered down the gospel, and they've turned their worship services into comedy shows and rock concerts, so there's a reason people are tempted to think that. But let's be clear, what's at stake here is none other than the gospel of grace. And there is no other gospel that will save.

The gospel of grace is the gospel. And anyone that tells you that what you really need to do is mix some of your righteous works with the grace of Christ is lying to you. The only gospel that will save is the pure gospel of Jesus Christ, that we are sinners, that we deserve His wrath, but Jesus Christ has done it all. He lived a perfect life that we could not live. He offered it on the cross to pay for our sins, and He rose again alive on the third day. And only by turning from our sins and repentance and putting our faith in Jesus Christ alone, and what He has done for us, can we be saved.

There is no mixture of our efforts to that. To mix our efforts with the gospel is to go back to the first scene in which we are separated from the holiness of God, and you will find yourself condemned in any system that requires you to earn it. The gospel of grace is the only gospel.

So Christians, we may not be tempted towards Judaism, but don't allow any other system that this world would offer in our day and age to be one that would ever tempt you away from the pure gospel of grace in such a Savior as Jesus Christ.

Secondly, we must **Resist** on the other side **The Allure of Antinomianism**. Antinomianism is the opposite ditch of self-righteousness. Antinomianism is the idea of no law, that is that really because we are saved by grace, it doesn't really matter how we live, we're forgiven, and so just chase after whatever you want. You don't really have to fight sin. But Paul says that's actually not true at all.

Romans 6:1-2:

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?"

So don't give in to that lie either, that sin is worth chasing after, walking away from such an inheritance for something as temporal and fleeting as the pleasures of sin.

No, instead this is what we must do. **Embrace The Allure of Heaven**. Embrace the allure of heaven.

As we began the message this morning, we told the story of a man singing joyously while riding on a pest-infested ship sailing into a life-threatening storm. And what fueled his joy was his commitment to meditate on the place to which he was going. And in a real way, that is the key to living the Christian life. We are surrounded in this temporal world by temporal things vying for our attention, either to lust after the riches of this world or to despair over its hardships.

But either option will take your eyes off of the place that they must be. Paul says it this way, Colossians 3:1-2:

"Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth".

Listen, do you feel this morning like you're on a rat-infested ship headed right into a terrifying storm? If you don't, the truth is at some point you might. You probably will as we endure the trials of this fallen world. What can you do? What can you do if that's the way you feel this morning and remain joyful and hopeful and calm in the midst of the storm? You obey our text this morning and you set your mind on the things above.

What does he say in verse 22? But you have come to this. This eternal reality is yours. Meditate on the riches of heaven. Meditate on Christ. Meditate on the fact that there's a sense in which it's already ours and the fact that we will most certainly be there because of the blood of Christ should affect the way we live and think and speak today. Has eternity affected your present? That's the question.

As we leave this place, may we have these words ringing in our ears. *"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem"*. May that be the meditation of our heart.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we ask that You would help us to see the riches that are really ours in Christ, not to be overly mesmerized or discouraged by the temporal things that surround us in this world, but to be caught up in Christ Himself and what He has secured for us by His own blood. Help us to be a people who set our minds on things above and because of that, live for Christ's glory in the present, glorifying Him and enjoying Him forever.

Help us in these things by your grace. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.