

Jesus: Our Greater Reality

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Date: 10 April 2016

Preacher: Jonathan Gemmell

- [0 : 00] Well, please do have a seat and grab your Bible again and we'll be in Hebrews 12 for the next wee while together. Join us on the penultimate episode of our series, Out from the Shadows, as we've looked at the book of Hebrews for the last number of months.
- This morning we arrive in Hebrews chapter 12, verses 18 to 29. Jesus, greater reality. Next week in Hebrews 13, the writer gets very pastoral.
- He's going to give us lots of instructions. But this passage this morning really does literally become the pinnacle of all that he said so far in Hebrews.
- So if we're going to learn great and life changing things from it, let's pray together. Father God, we come to this, your word.
- Father, we come in humility and foolishness. But Lord, we come with heart burning that you might teach us wonderful things about yourself from it.
- [1 : 12] So Lord, may we see all that we now have because of your son, Jesus. Father, melt our hearts afresh, we pray in Jesus name.
- Amen. Amen. This is Samuel Pierpont Langley. A name I'm sure most of you know nothing about, but he was a really big deal at the end of the 19th century.
- He was the arch rival of Wilbur and Orville Wright in the race to produce the world's first manned flying machine.
- And looking at it objectively, you'd have to say that Samuel Pierpont Langley probably should have won. We should probably know Langley far better than we know the Wright brothers.
- Samuel Pierpont Langley was well funded. He had a grant of \$70,000 to do these experiments in flight.
- [2 : 14] He had a crack team of well educated physics professors and engineers. He was on the board of Harvard and he selected the best to be on his team to make this flying machine.
- He was also the curator of the Smithsonian Museum. So he had lots of textbooks and resources. Langley and his team also were full time.
- They devoted all of their waking hours to making this plane that would fly. Wilbur and Orville Wright, on the other hand, didn't have a college degree between them.
- They funded themselves on the meager earnings from their bicycle repair shop. And they did it all in their spare time. This really was a David versus Goliath race.
- However, we are familiar with the Wright brothers. And most of us have only heard of Samuel Pierpont Langley for the first time this morning.
- [3 : 22] And the reason Wilbur and Orville won and Samuel didn't was not in ability. It was not in their goal to produce a flying machine.
- It was in their motivation. Samuel Pierpont Langley kept telling his team, if we produce the first flying machine, we will be rich. Wilbur and Orville, on the other hand, had this consistent mantra written on the wall of their workshop.

If we produce the first flying machine, we will change the world. And therefore, it was Orville and Wilbur that won.

And that's a great lesson, isn't it? That it's not just hearing the instruction, we need to build a flying machine. But it's also having adequate motivation in order that that will happen. If we make a flying machine, we will change the world.

And you have to say, they have. As we all jet off on exotic holidays over Easter. Exhortation plus motivation is a really powerful concoction that brings about real change and real action and real fruit in people's lives.

[4 : 40] Exhortation plus motivation. And as we come to the end of Hebrews 12, the writer is giving us lots of exhortation. And he's giving us wonderful motivation.

So last week in Hebrews 12, we had this exhortation. Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

And let us run the race with perseverance that is marked out for us. That is an exhortation. Get rid of things that hinder, throw off sin. Run with perseverance. And then we get the motivation.

Do this because of the glorious example of Jesus who's run this race better and before us. And do it because of the loving discipline of our Heavenly Father in the gymnasium of life.

Exhortation. Throw off. Run with perseverance. Experience. Motivation. Because of Jesus. And because of the love of your Heavenly Father who's training you so it might be done.

[5 : 48] And so in the remainder of chapter 12, we're going to get three more exhortations. And three more wonderful motivations. And if we see these, they really will be life transforming.

So the first one is this. Be holy because you have come to a better mountain. Be holy because you have come to a better mountain.

Verses 14 to 17 have been this exhortation to be holy. Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord.

We then get verse 16 which is the negative example. Don't be like Esau who was immoral. Who got it wrong. And so the exhortation that comes is be holy.

And what follows in verses 18 to 24 is the motivation. Why should we be holy? Why should we live set apart for God? Why should we be marked out as different?

[6 : 53] Because of our faith in God. Well the answer given is because we've come to a better mountain. We've come to a better mountain.

Verses 18 to 24 are a simple compare and contrast. The writer is comparing the physical Mount Sinai and Israel's experience as they receive the old covenant in the wilderness.

With the spiritual Mount Zion which is ours through the new covenant inaugurated by the Lord Jesus. And so this is Annapurna in Nepal.

It is the most dangerous mountain in the world. There have been 200 successful climbs to the summit. And 61 fatalities.

200 people got to the top. 61 people died trying. That gives it what is called a fatality rate of 32%. 32%. One in three people who tried to climb it die.

[7 : 54] K2. 26.5%. And Everest. 3.9%. But what we have here in 18 to 21 is a far more deadly mountain.

18 to 21 reminds us of Israel's experience at the foot of Mount Sinai. And the description is petrifying.

Picks up all the imagery from Exodus 19 and Deuteronomy 4. And the writer paints to the Hebrew readers and to us a familiar picture. Seven distressing details.

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched. That is burning with fire. To darkness, gloom and storm. To a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words.

That those who heard it begged that no further word would be spoken to them. Because they could not bear what was commanded. If even an animal touches the mountain it must be stoned to death.

[9 : 00] The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, I tremble. It is an ominous picture. As they looked at this mountain that was burning.

That was shrouded in gloom. That was stormy. The air was filled with a deafening trumpet noise. And a voice spoke and it was unbearable.

What we see in Exodus 19 is when they get there the people are pressing right up close to the mountain. But once the trumpet blast comes they start to move backwards.

And the elders have to say, no you need to come forward. A commandment that was unbearable about the absolute ferocious utter holiness of God.

Meaning that even an animal that touched the mountain must be killed. A terrifying picture of the holiness of God come down on Mount Sinai.

[10 : 07] The whole message at Sinai is that God is so holy you dare not approach. God is ferociously holy and people that come into contact will be consumed.

Just to top it all look at verse 21. The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, I am trembling with fear.

I've always had the utmost respect for pilots. Do you know when you're on a plane and you go through turbulence. And even people that are staunch atheists are having prayer meetings together.

The turbulence is so awful. And the pilot comes on so calm. Ladies and gentlemen, we apologize for the slight discomfort that you've just had.

It's very reassuring, isn't it? Well just imagine being these people. Where Moses, the guy who's supposed to be calm and have it all together. He is trembling with fear.

[11 : 06] He is supposed to be the mediator of this old covenant. And yet his knees are knocking just as much as the people of Israel. Sinai was a mountain of dread as the holiness of God descends and is witnessed by Israel with even Moses, the mediator.

Unable to bear the experience. Sinai was a mountain of dread. Sinai was a mountain of dread. And the writer to the Hebrews is saying, this is not the mountain you've come to. You have not come to this mountain.

You've come to Mount Zion, which in stark contrast is completely other. But you have come to Mount Zion.

To the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly. To the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.

You have come to God, the judge of all. To the spirits of the righteous made perfect. To Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant. And to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

[12 : 18] And whereas the picture of Sinai was ominous and petrifying, the picture of Zion is glorious and joy-filled. The city of the living God.

The new Jerusalem and Mount Zion are so often used synonymously in the Old Testament. This is not a place where the holiness of God has descended.

This is the place where God himself dwells. It is a place of light. When you fly into Edinburgh, you know where Edinburgh is because over and against the Lothians and North Lanarkshire and West Lothian, there's this, the sky is filled with light and this is the city to which we've come.

It's totally different. To thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, the celebration to end all celebrations.

To the church of the firstborn. To the people of the Lord Jesus. To all the people that have gone before whose names are written on the heavenly guest list.

[13 : 25] To the spirits of the righteous made perfect. All those people that we read about in Hebrews 11, who despite failing and struggling, got there.

And the grace of the Lord Jesus was enough to get them in. To the judge of all. And to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant. Not Moses cowering, doing his best to mediate a covenant between God and man as a fallen human being.

But to Jesus, the perfect mediator. And to sprinkle blood. Not the blood of Abel from Genesis 4.

Abel murdered by his brother whose blood cries out from the grave. Vengeance. Justice. Punishment. Not that blood.

But Jesus' blood that speaks a better word. That speaks the best word. Words of forgiveness.

[14 : 27] Words of love. Words of mercy. Words of grace. Words of reconciliation. Words of restoration. Words of welcome. Jesus' blood that speaks a better word.

Words of mercy. And so, whereas the message of Sinai was you're not welcome. The message of Zion is come on up.

And what's the difference? Well, God is the same. We're going to read that at the end of the chapter. He's still awesomely holy. The difference is the Lord Jesus.

That we now have a better mediator. We now have a mediator that's perfectly able to mediate between a holy God and sinful people.

And he did it by the shedding of his own blood. The difference between Sinai and Zion is not that God has lightened up.

[15 : 27] The difference between Sinai and Zion is that Jesus has now suffered and died and bids us come. It is a much better mountain.

It is a far better experience. And now as those welcomed onto the mountain, what is our response? Well, it is to be holy. It is a present reality, see.

Verse 22, but you have come. This is not talking about something future when Jesus comes back or when we die. This is a present reality that is ours. That we can come into God's presence.

We've already seen it. We've already seen that we can boldly approach the throne of grace in Hebrews. That we have a standing before God.

That's exactly what he's saying here. You can come into God's very near presence. Now, because of Jesus. Abel's blood, vengeance, punishment, judgment, justice.

[16 : 33] Jesus' blood, grace, hope, joy. Reconciliation. This week, we've seen an awful lot about the British steel industry. We've seen pictures of these enormous blast furnaces, particularly in Port Talbot in Wales.

These blast furnaces that run at 1,535 degrees. And what is astonishing is that people are working in their near proximity. Why are they working there?

Well, because they've got these amazingly expensive suits that repel all the heat and keep them cool. In a far greater sense, we're welcomed on Mount Zion.

Where the holiness of God burns far hotter than any blast furnace. And our only protection is the asbestos righteousness that is ours in Jesus Christ.

If we try to go up the mountain without Jesus, we are in terrifying trouble. And yet, because of Jesus, we're welcomed. We have come to the city of the living God.

[17 : 43] Whilst God does not change our position, it's utterly transformed by Jesus. A present reality that is ours.

So in a very real sense, the writer to the Hebrews is laying out to his readers the starkness of the choice they face. If you remember, every week in Hebrews, we've seen these people that attempted to go back to Old Testament Judaism.

And you see, when he puts before them the choice of these two mountains, why would you go back? Why would you choose Sinai over Zion? It's a no-brainer in every sense of the word.

Why would you go mountaineering up, terrifying Sinai when you are welcomed on glorious Zion because of the Lord Jesus? And so it's a similar choice for us not to go back to Sinai, but to go back to all the danger and darkness of the world.

Instead of residing forever on this glorious mountain that we're welcomed on. Whether we'll turn to the fleeting pleasures of sin that will last for such a short while and will end in ultimate death.

[18 : 56] Or whether we'll keep on going and ascend this glorious mountain on which we're welcomed because of Jesus. And so do you see in response because we're welcome, the right response is to be holy.

The exhortation is to be holy and the motivation is because you're welcome. Because you're welcome in the presence of a holy God because of the Lord Jesus.

Be holy. The exhortation, why? The motivation, because we've come to a better mountain. A far better mountain.

Second point is this, be listening because we're receiving a permanent kingdom. See verse 25. See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks.

If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? Exhortation.

[20 : 07] Keep listening. Don't refuse him who speaks. To keep on listening and obeying what God is saying to us in Jesus. Warning us from heaven itself.

Listening has been a major theme of Hebrews. The book commences with our God who speaks. Who spoke to our forefathers many times in various ways, but has now spoken fully and finally in his son.

Then the rest of the book exhorts us to keep on listening, to keep on hearing, to keep on obeying. Here in these verses he gives us final motivation to keep on listening.

The exhortation, keep on listening. The motivation comes in the form of a warning. It's an argument from the lesser to the greater.

He states if Old Testament Israel didn't survive when they ignored him who warned from earth, how much less will we escape if we shut our ears to the living God who warns us from heaven?

[21 : 18] If in the Old Testament refusing to hear God's warning resulted in death, how much more terrifying will it be if we stop listening to one who's speaking clearer and more fully in the Lord Jesus from heaven?

If you touch the mountain at Sinai, you would be shot and killed. How much more terrifying will it be if we come to this mountain and don't heed this warning?

The writer to the Hebrews has already stated in Hebrews 10, 31 that it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. And therefore it will be eternally devastating to stumble into God's presence and face God's judgment on account of our sin, having ignored and forgiven our only hope, which is the Lord Jesus.

You don't want to find yourself a Zion without Jesus because it will be more terrifying than it would be on the top of Sinai uninvited. The writer to the Hebrews is right in 927 when he says people are destined to die once and after that to face judgment.

To meet this God, how will you meet him? In all the holiness of Sinai or in all the welcome and joy of Zion.

[22 : 44] Devastating loss and eternal judgment on account of arriving unprepared or eternal hope and life through trusting Jesus, now meaning we escape judgment.

It's the choice we have. Listen and be accepted, refuse and don't escape. And a second motivation comes in the form of a promise.

Look at verse 28. Keep on listening because if you don't, there'll be terrifying consequences. But also keep on listening because we're receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

It comes in the form of a promise, the promise of graciously receiving from God and inhabiting with God an unshakable kingdom. He quotes Haggai 2 verse 6 saying that the God who shook the earth from Sinai will again shake the earth.

And not just the earth, it will be a more profound shaking because he will shake the earth and the heavens in final judgment. He will speak, the earth will shake, and everything that can be shaken, that is, created things will be removed.

[24 : 08] And what cannot be shaken will remain in God's unshakable kingdom. A time when internal reality, a time when the, what we experience by faith on Zion will be the reality for everyone in the world.

A time when eternal reality will come to the fore and the shadowlands of this finite and transitory world will be shaken and destroyed. I don't know about you, but the longer I live, the more shaky this world feels.

It's not quite set on the foundations as it should. It feels like a wobbly world. Fading health. Fluctuating economies.

Fracturing relationships. Fragile jobs. Far-reaching tragedies. It doesn't seem as permanent as we'd like it to be. It's all kind of crumbling.

It's all kind of wobbling, seemingly, on its very foundations. And the reason it is is because it wasn't meant to last. It was always quite shaky and shakable.

[25 : 17] It was tarnished by sin. But Hebrews 12 tells us one day this shaky world will be shaken and destroyed. And what will remain will be that which is unshakable, that that is built on the Lord Jesus Christ.

The full reality of Zion will be here. Sinai will be shaken. Zion will stand. What a glorious promise that we will be welcome in an unshakable kingdom forever because of Jesus if we keep on listening.

The difference between being shaken in judgment and standing firm is listening, trusting and acting upon the warning that God has given us from heaven in his son.

So we will trust Jesus Christ and be unshakably safe when God finally shakes the earth and the heavens in judgment. This is Sabir-Gotken International Airport.

Do you see how there's flying like weaves throughout this summer? This is Sabir-Gotken International Airport. It was completed last year and it is officially the most earthquake-proof structure in the world.

[26 : 34] It will withstand something that is 8.7 on the Richter scale. That if you're in Turkey, the place you want to run to in an earthquake is this, but the terrifying truth is that when God speaks and shakes the world, Sabir-Gotken International Airport will be reduced to rubble and powder.

when the God of the universe shakes the earth in judgment, this structure will be as nothing. The only structure standing will be the church of Jesus Christ and all those that have found refuge and salvation in him.

And so the second exhortation be listening. Why? Because we're receiving an unshakable kingdom and we remain and find refuge in it if we keep on listening to what God is saying in the Lord Jesus.

Lastly, and quickly, verse 28, therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful and so worship, so serve God acceptably with reverence and awe.

For our God is a consuming fire. God has not changed since Sinai. He is still ferociously holy. He is still described as the same consuming fire we find in Exodus 19.

[28 : 02] And yet, two wonderful things happen as we get this. The firstly is we see God as so different to us, so perfect to us, so other than us, that he is truly worth worshipping.

One who is so perfect in every way, who is all of the omnis rolled into one. And as I get that, I realise just how worthy of worship that he is, that I declare that you are worthy.

You are this consuming fire of absolute perfection, of wondrous power. fire. The more I understand how utterly unapproachable God is as a consuming fire, the more I realise and appreciate and cling to the Lord Jesus, who despite my sinfulness, despite my unholiness, despite my worldliness, I can approach that God in all his ferocious holiness because of Jesus Christ.

That is a wonderful reality and as I get how different God is and how welcome I am in Jesus, no wonder I'm thankful.

No wonder I've got the motivation to be thankful. When I realised that I was utterly undeserving, utterly unholy, utterly soiled in my own sin and yet clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, I can come close.

[29 : 34] I don't come to a God who is just a consuming fire. I come to a God who accepts my worship in Jesus.

I come to a God who even through Jesus lets me call him Father. I come to a God who is so worthy of worship and a God I'm able to worship and serve with reverence and awe, understanding who he is, not casually approaching but approaching in and through Jesus Christ who's made a new and living way that we can come close.

And seeing who God is in all his brilliance generates not only heartfelt thankfulness but a new reality in worship. I realise that I cannot come casually or arrogantly.

I understand that I cannot come presumptuously or unpreparedly. I know in the light of who God is, him being a consuming fire is that I can only come through and because of trusting in and clinging to Jesus Christ whose blood speaks a better word that I'm welcome and I'm welcome forever.

Be thankful and worship rightly because our God is a consuming fire. Throughout Hebrews, we've had exultation and we've had motivation. Be holy because we've come to a better mountain.

[31 : 05] Be listening because we're receiving an unshakable kingdom. Be thankful because our God is a consuming fire.

So in closing, we all have a binary decision, a commitment or a recommitment to make. That we all have two choices in all of these things.

Which mountain will be our experience? The terror of Sinai, the exclusion of Sinai, or the joyous welcome of Zion and the difference will be whether we choose Jesus.

We have two kingdoms to choose between. Whether we make this transitory, wobbly world our kingdom with all its consequences of being shaken and destroyed.

Or whether we listen to Jesus and trust him and have the joyous hope that all that God promises will be ours in an unshakable, permanent, joy-filled kingdom with God at the very center, dwelling with his people.

[32 : 15] And we can choose two experiences of God. The warm welcome of a loving, heavenly Father in and through Jesus Christ.

Or the terrifying inferno of judgment as we stand before our holy God who was and is and will forever be a consuming fire.

And so we left to be holy, to be listening, and to be thankful. Let's pray. Father God, when faced with the reality of this passage, how could we choose anything but Jesus?

Father, when seeing the greater reality we have because of him. Father, why would we be ever tempted to descend Mount Zion and pursue other things?

Father, why would we ever be tempted to let our roots go down deep in this transitory kingdom? Father, why would we choose to be anything but thankful because of the way that you bid us welcome in Jesus Christ?

[33 : 43] And so, Lord, I pray for all of us that we would choose the better reality by choosing your son. Father, help us know him, trust him, and help us daily to hear the better word, the best words that are spoken to us from the cross as his blood is poured out for us.

Father, help us hear these things on our hearts, we pray, and give us eyes fixed on you. Father, bless us and help us in Jesus name. Amen.

Amen.