



Sermon-Based Study Guide
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Good Shepherd Church - February 26, 2012

Sermon Title: With an Eye on the Finish

Sermon Text: Hebrews 12.18-24

Related Texts: Exodus 19.10-25
Revelation 5 and 21

I. Start It – Connecting With One Another

When you have had opportunities to travel what were some of your favorite parts of those trips? Did the actual destination match what you imagined it to be like?

II. Introduction

Following Jesus has been described by the Hebrews author as running a race with perseverance, with eyes fixed on Jesus, enduring difficulty and hardship, being cheered on, and avoiding the temptations to give up. The beleaguered Hebrew Christians are encouraged to garner strength from the encouragement of one another, to avoid dissension and bitterness, and to avoid taking the easy way out. Now the author encourages these "runners" by reminding them of the ultimate destination the race of faith leads them to - not Mount Sinai, but Mount Zion, a metaphor for the glories of heaven, the dwelling place of God.

III. Study the Text – Read Through Hebrews 12.18-24

- 1) The passage contains a stark contrast between two mountains. The first one described in verses 18-21 is Mount Sinai.
 - a. Scan Exodus 19.10-25 to get a picture of the things the Hebrews author refers to. How would you describe the approachability of God as the Lord descends to Mount Sinai? Does this seem foreign to your experience of knowing God?
 - b. How would you relate having reverence (fear, awe) of the holiness and "otherness" of God with experiencing a close, friendly, and personal relationship with God? Did the people at the foot of Mount Sinai experience both of these or just the first of these?
 - c. What is the problem with relating to God only out of fear or trembling? What about relating to God as just a "good buddy?"
 - d. Exodus 20 records the commandments God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. Despite the terrifying scene, God speaks and establishes a covenant relationship with the people of Israel. What does this suggest about God's desire for humanity? For you?

Note: Theologians talk about the holiness and "otherness" of God. And rightly so. God is "other." That is, God is not a Being made in our image but is the One who is "other" than we are. God is the divine Creator, the One who needs no other, and who is entirely self-existent. From the standpoint of moral perfection, God is holy - completely set apart

from sin and immorality. More than that, God is revealed to be the foundation or basis for what is moral, right, and just. In a nutshell, God is holy and "wholly other." But, even when this holy otherness is experienced on Mount Sinai, God's commitment to an intimate relationship with human beings is evident. Moses ascends the Mount in awe and terror but descends with the Commandments - the means for people to know and relate to God without terror or fear of annihilation

- 3) From the vision of Mount Sinai the author moves to another Mount - Zion. Mount Zion was the name used for Jerusalem - the place where God dwelled among the people of Israel.
 - a. As you look at verses 22 and 23, how would you describe the differences between this Mount (and the new covenant represented by it) and that of verses 18-21?
 - b. Notice the specific progression of beings the author cites in verses 22 through 24 to whom the Hebrew Christians have come - angels, the firstborn (those raised to life by Christ), God, to those made righteous through Jesus, and finally to Jesus the mediator. Compare this scene to that found in Revelation 5.6-14. In what ways is this a "better word" and a better "new covenant?"
 - c. What is your reaction to this vision of heaven? How does having this vision help you to run the race of faith with perseverance? If this vision represents the "finish line" of the race, how does it motivate you to continue to run the race?

IV. Apply It – Reflect and Respond

- 1) The author has painted a beautiful picture of heaven, "the city of the living God." Reflect on this picture of heaven - of God's dwelling place joining with a redeemed, restored, and transformed world. In what ways does this encourage you? Do you realize that this is the ultimate destination for all who trust in Jesus? Do you live as a "citizen" of heaven (see Philippians 3.20) who longs for this eternal dwelling?
- 2) Revelation 21.1-4 also describes the new heaven and earth. Reflect on these verses and their significance. How do they help you as you consider your mortality? As you run the race of faith with perseverance?
- 3) Please pray for the Good Shepherd (or your own) congregation, asking God to encourage us in our life of faith, to be faithful to our call to make disciples, and to look forward to the future with enthusiasm and confidence.

But the most striking thing about this glorious picture is that, according to verse 22, those who now live by faith and hope have *already*, in a sense, arrived at this heavenly city. They already belong there; in prayer and worship they are already welcome before God's throne. This leads to the obvious question: does your life of prayer and worship... carry the sense of joy and excitement that comes bubbling out of these verses? If not, why not?

N. T. Wright