

“God’s Overpowering Presence”—Hebrews 12:18-24

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “God’s Overpowering Presence” is Hebrews 12:18-24 → *For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” 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, 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, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. This is the text.*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

It seems that on a regular basis we hear of natural disasters affecting people with such force that homes, possessions and sometimes even

lives are completely lost within minutes or even seconds. The media and personal conversations keep us abreast of the latest impact of such disasters happening around the world, usually attributing them to “mother nature.” Mother nature? What happened to attributing them to God as the One in control of all things? Even pagan religions observe the powers displayed in nature and attribute them to some kind of personal higher power. That’s how they determine their gods and worship.

I suppose the more a culture writes God out of the daily lives of its people, while learning more and more about using the powers of nature, it is natural to replace Him with something else. Besides, attributing the powers only to natural and human elements allows for a person to ignore sin along with its guilt and not have to grapple with the difficult questions of faith (i.e. “Why did God allow this to happen to me?”) One of the amazing aspects of God’s grace is that we are experiencing the overpowering presence of God everyday as He continues to do *good by giving us rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying our hearts with food and gladness* (cf. Acts 14:17).

As the writer of the book of Hebrews connected the ceremonial laws and rituals under the old covenant (i.e. Old Testament) to their fulfillment by Jesus under the new covenant, He contrasted experiencing God’s overpowering presence in both covenants. You have the privilege of

experiencing God's overpowering presence today by faith in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ.

Our text begins by reminding us of God's overpowering presence under the old covenant which was given on Mt. Sinai. Exodus 20:18-19 describes the scene when Yahweh gave His Ten Commandments: *When all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die."* It instilled a fear of God in the people which *made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them* (verses 18-19) by God Himself.

Yahweh's overpowering presence produced such a fear in the people that they asked Moses to be their mediator and speak to them on Yahweh's behalf. God's overpowering presence is accompanied by an acute awareness of your sinfulness in the presence of His holiness and the need for forgiveness of sins (cf. Isaiah 6:1-7; Luke 5:8). This type of fear can work positively in **a faith relationship with the LORD** to guard against idolatrous arrogance and sinning in your life. This is the fear to which Jesus referred in Matthew 10:28 → *Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him Who can destroy both soul and body in hell.* Positively this "the fear of the LORD" is a respect of His power and how that power is a blessing in our lives and thus we confess

with the words of the meaning of the 1st Commandment: “We should fear, love and trust in God above all things.” This fear flows from faith.

Unfortunately, many people run away from God, blame Him in unbelief or doubt His love when affected by His overpowering presence in an adverse or unfavorable manner. Catastrophes such as earthquakes, tornados, hailstorms, hurricanes, etc., which society at one time labeled “acts of God,” can leave one helpless, hurt and hindered in life. They can drive one to heed the command of Psalm 50:15 where God says, *call upon Me in the day of trouble* based upon His promise: *I will deliver you*. Once delivered, many don’t observe the rest of the command in that verse: *and you shall glorify Me*. **Guilt and sin which is not dealt with properly will always breed more sin and guilt.**

However, instead of running from Yahweh, blaming Him in unbelief, we can run to Him in faith, seeking a Mediator to represent us sinners before His holiness. The text reassures you that you are not standing at this mountain. He says in verse 22 → *But . . .* While we use this word constantly in our conversations to counter or even discredit what has previously been stated, God uses it to prepare you for His blessing! *But you have come to Mount Zion . . . the city of the living God* and to *the heavenly Jerusalem*. All these descriptions are synonymous to describe the city **of faith** of which you are citizens by virtue of your position before God **through faith** in Jesus Christ alone. As those who live under a *new*

covenant you witness **by faith** the need for God's overpowering presence on Mt. Calvary where Jesus shed His *blood* for you.

You have come to eternal life described as *innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven*. *Firstborn* refers to your position and not your numerical sequence of birth. It is a covenant term used in regard to the fact that heaven is your **inheritance** based upon God's promises **in the death of Christ Jesus** (cf. Romans 8:17; Galatians 3:26-29; 4:7; Ephesians 3:6; Titus 3:4-7).

You have come *to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect* (i.e. those Christians who have gone into heaven before us) (verse 23). In other words, through faith in the Person & Work of Jesus your eternal inheritance in heaven is a present possession as you wait to be perfected in glory on the Last Day. Jesus said it this way in John 5:24 → *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him Who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

All this was made possible because of Jesus and what He accomplished as *the mediator of a new covenant* (verse 24) for you. The old covenant was sealed with sprinkling sacrificial blood on the people by their mediator, Moses (cf. Exodus 24:8). The *new covenant* was sealed by Jesus shedding His blood on the cross through His sacrificial death **for us sinners** (cf. John 19:28-30; Hebrews 9:26-28; 10:1-10; 1 Peter 3:18). This

also was an experience of God's overpowering presence as expressed in Mark 15:37-39 → *Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed His last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing Him, saw that in this way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"*

When you experience the overpowering presence of God's love at the foot of the cross in humble recognition of your sins **it brings you to God** in repentance and faith. You can come to Him by faith in your Mediator, Jesus Christ, Who has opened the way for you to come in fear which respects His love and forgiveness on His terms, not yours. This reality for you was pictured in the symbolism of the curtain to the Holy of Holies in the temple being torn in two at Jesus' crucifixion, opening the way for all people to experience God's overpowering presence eternally through faith in *Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith* (cf. Hebrews 12:2).

In such a relationship with Yahweh through faith in *Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant*, you experience God's overpowering **and empowering** presence through simple things such as His written Word, the water in baptism, bread and wine in the Lord's Supper and the believers in Christ Jesus gathered around these means of grace. Therefore, together with angels and archangels and with all the company

of heaven we get to laud and magnify His glorious name, praising Him
now and eternally! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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