

The Pursuit of Holiness (Part 10)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 April 2011

Preacher: Don Coleman

[0:00] Let's start with verse 18.

For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched, and that burned with fire into blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore.

For they could not endure what was commanded, and if so, so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow. That's a quote directly from Exodus.

And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, I am exceedingly afraid and trembling. And then with verse 22, there's a clear shift there to another mountain.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

[1:27] See that you do not refuse him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from him who speaks from heaven.

Now this, yet once more, indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace by which we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire.

That's a rather long text. And what does it all mean? It's, you know, some of it is pretty clear, I think, and you would need me to understand the point there.

I don't think you really thought about it. Some of it's not so clear. And maybe bears some in-depth study and some clarification, so maybe we'll hope to kind of unlock some of that as we go along the next couple of weeks.

[2:47] But now, it's an interesting passage, but I would also tell you that it's a very challenging passage. Not challenging just in understanding it, but challenging in what it is conveying here, the message here that the passage is giving.

So let's begin with some preliminary observations. Number one, we need to understand that the passage, well, not understand, though, we can see it very clearly. We need to understand, though, that the passage mentions two mountains here.

That's the first thing you ought to notice. If you're going to understand Paul's point here, the message, then you need to first see that there are two mountains mentioned in the text.

What are the two mountains? Well, the first one's not named, but we can pretty much guess which mountain it is by how it is described. And I'll just go ahead and tell you, it's Mount Sinai.

Mount Sinai. The other mountain is mentioned, is named, though it's more in a figurative sense or a symbolic sense or a spiritual sense.

[3:56] But there was a real mountain, and it would be the real mountain we'll focus on tonight. The other mountain is Mount Zion. So you have Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. Two mountains.

Number two, I really believe that the text serves to ask a searching question.

A very searching question that everyone needs to answer. Hopefully, with this group, everyone here has answered the question in the right way. And you don't yet know what the question is.

Well, you do if you've read ahead in your notes there. But it's a very personal question, very spiritual question, very significant question. Here it is. To which mountain have you run for your eternal salvation?

That's an important question. And that's the question I believe this text represents to us. Now, to Paul's original readers, the answer was they had run to the right mountain.

[5:01] But you have run, he said. To where? Mount Zion. And so it's pretty clear, just from an initial reading of the text, pretty clear that the emphasis here in the positive is that second mountain mentioned, which is Mount Zion.

But nevertheless, I want you to understand the question, very key, as we kind of understand Paul's point here. The question is, to which mountain have you run for your eternal salvation?

I don't know about you, but I like mountains. In fact, I have always wanted to live in the mountains, and God has never granted that wish, that desire. Now I've come close, you know, lived, you know, near the Ozark Mountains as I was growing up.

So it wasn't very far to Lake of the Ozarks and the Ozark Mountains. And then my folks moved to Arkansas, you know, and the, it's kind of very mountainous there, Fairfield Bay, and so when we'd go visit, I would enjoy that.

My favorite mountains, I bet you can't guess. Smoky Mountains. Smoky Mountains. Thank you very much. Thank you. Just a guess. Just, you know, just a wild guess.

[6:15] A lot of wild. Smoky Mountains. Now, they're beautiful mountains. I just love them. Now, I've been to the Rockies, and they're awesome. But, there's just something about the Smoky Mountains.

The misty, kind of mystic, kind of mountains. I can almost hear them calling. Come, Don, come. Come on my mountain. And I said, I can't.

I don't have time. And it's too far now, Lord. But, anyway, and I just, I had to insert that. Because this text, it gets me to thinking about mountains.

And, and it mentions two mountains, as I've said. Sinai and Zion. So, that leads me to the third observation that I think we need to consider.

these two mountains that are mentioned here are very different. Very different. In a very significant way. Because, well, I'll just ask you, what two significant events took place on each of these two mountains, respectively?

[7:28] Mount Sinai. What happened there? The Ten Commandments. Alright, so, the Ten Commandments was given. or were given. Anyway.

On Mount Zion, what significant event took place there? That might be a little harder. Say again? The Lord Jesus was crucified.

He was crucified. There. Now, was that Mount Zion? In a, in a sense that Jerusalem went by the name of Zion.

And, is on a mountain. And, now, Jesus was actually technically crucified on top of Mount Moriah. But, but, in the Bible, when Mount Zion, and here in this text, Mount Zion is representative of Jerusalem.

And, really, in this text, is more representative of the New Jerusalem. but, we'll get into that next time. But, the event, the idea here that we need to get is that Mount Zion is a reference to that great event, the cross, and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

[8:46] Alright, so, very different. Now, that is significant when we ask another question, what do these two mountains represent then? Mount Sinai represents what?

The law. See, y'all are such an astute group here. I, you know, don't even, I'm wasting my time. Alright, then I bet you know that Mount Zion represents grace. Grace, without a doubt. So, number four, in our, kind of our initial observations, these two mountains then, as you kind of put all this together, these two mountains represent the two bases upon which God will judge the world. We will either be judged by our own works of righteousness, or how well, how well we did with that, our works of righteousness, that is, Sinai, judged by the law, or we will be judged by the finished work of Jesus Christ.

That's Zion. And so we'll be judged by grace, or judged according to grace. And so we come back to that searching question, and that is, to which mountain have you run?

[10:19] I think this text is, though it's meant and written originally to believers, original recipients of the book of Hebrews, they were believers.

And yet, this text is very evangelistic. And especially if you apply it in this way, you're not changing the meaning of the text, but making the application by asking the question, to which mountain have you run?

That is, what are you trusting? Your own works of righteousness, or the grace of God accomplished through the cross? All right.

Now, then, looking at what Paul says about Sinai, and that's, we have focused tonight, and we'll get to Zion next time, hopefully, that is, if I finish Sinai tonight, but here's point number one.

It goes along with Mount Sinai. The works that fail us. The works that fail us. And that's the idea here, in a nutshell, regarding those who have, who are trusting in Sinai, have run to Sinai.

[11:42] And I want to read again how he described it because it's very graphic. He says, for you have not come. And he's speaking to believers. All right. And so, all believers here, born again believers, I can say to you, like Paul said to his original readers, you did not come to the mountain that may be touched.

That's a physical mountain. Sinai. We know it's Sinai because of what he's going to tell us next. And that burned with fire, and to blackness, and darkness, and tempest.

I mean, it's a frightening description, isn't it? And that's what Sinai is. It's frightening. And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the words should not be spoken to them anymore.

Whose words? God's words. His voice. A little bit later, we'll reference the text in Exodus that this comes from. They really did beg with Moses.

You go speak to him, but don't let him speak to us. You know, we're going to die. So it's very terrifying. And then in parentheses, for they could not endure what was commanded.

[13:00] What was commanded. God gave his ten commandments. They could not endure it. And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.

And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, I am exceedingly afraid and trembling. So, you know, you can't miss the meaning of this description, the flavor of it, the emotion of it.

And this is a terrifying thing, this mountain, Sinai. and it's terrifying because of what it represents.

And that's what we want to consider.

Now, Mount Sinai, then, as I've said, represents the law. It represents, in a sense, in that sense, the old covenant. The old covenant of law.

And why is that? Because that was there, it was there that God established the old covenant with his people. And this old covenant was the covenant of law.

[14:06] And therefore, it was a covenant of judgment. Because nobody could keep it. It was a covenant of judgment that represented judgment. And so, naturally, it was a covenant of fear.

And you read those verses and you get that and you experience that. It was a covenant of fear there at Sinai. Now, I mentioned that this is a reference.

I think it's A on your outline. the reference here is to Exodus 19. Exodus 19 starting with verse 10 and running throughout the end of that chapter.

And I don't want to turn to it and necessarily read it verbatim, but let me just kind of describe it. And I think it would be pretty familiar to you. You've heard it before or read it before.

But, understand, this is three months after Israel was delivered from Egypt. Egypt. And God had brought them out of Egypt and they are headed eventually to the promised land.

[15:07] And they have set up camp at Mount Sinai, at the foot of Mount Sinai. And Moses had gone up into the mountains to speak with God and kind of remember this event.

But not only that, but the presence of God was there around the mountain and it was visible in the sense that God allowed a kind of a physical, a visible manifestation of His presence which took the form of a cloud around the mountain.

A thick cloud. And God said that He did this, He came down and He's present there, quote, that the people may hear when I speak with you, He was speaking to Moses, and believe you forever.

And God gave strict instructions, very strict instructions, very pointed instructions to Moses and the people, that they were to prepare themselves for the receiving of the covenant, entering into the covenant with God, and they were to wash their clothes, and the Bible says there in Exodus 19 that husband and wives were not to have any intimate relations with one another for a time, and they were not to touch them out, and that's the important thing that we remember.

they were not to touch it, the mountain, under penalty of death. They were not to touch that mountain, and either by stoning, the Bible says, or they would be shot through with an arrow or spear, or dart I think is the technical word, whatever it meant, probably more spear.

[16:50] They would be killed, is the idea, and also even the animals were forbidden to touch the mountain. I don't know how they did that. I'm sure the reference there is to domesticated animals, like their livestock and such.

There were other animals living on the mountain. But this is serious, and these were the instructions God gave. In fact, two times God instructed Moses to tell the people that they were not to touch that mountain, not to touch it, lest the Lord break forth upon them.

And that's ominous, isn't it? Frightening. And we don't need to be flipping about it. I'm sorry, sometimes I act like I'm trying to be humorous.

This is serious, very serious. Frightening. And we ought to, when we consider this, immerse ourselves in the lives of the people of that day, and in that event, and kind of experience how terrifying this was for them.

And so, you know, they even set up boundaries around the mountain. I guess roped it off. I'm sure exactly how they did it, just to make sure that no one violated that, no one touched that mountain.

[18:13] And it was to be quote, sanctified, that's what the Bible says, set apart from the people. You see, the thing here is that God was and about to, in a very mighty way, to reveal His power and His glory and His holiness there on that mountain.

And no sinner, and that included everybody there, no sinner could come near to that mountain and live. Or come near to see His holiness and live.

And so, all these different manifestations, these different things that were going on, thunder and lightning and thick clouds and loud trumpet sounds and fire and smoke and earthquakes and all these.

These were simply physical demonstrations or manifestations of God's presence and holiness. And they all pointed to the fact that though God is omnipresent, He's everywhere, but He was especially manifesting His presence.

there on that mountain. And the people got it. They understood that and they were terrified. So that leads to B, on your outline, the purpose then of these signs.

[19:32] All these manifestations, what was the purpose? And all God's instructions on what they were to do and so forth, or not to do. The purpose, number one, to reveal the holiness of God.

to reveal His holiness. That is, His absolute transcendency and unapproachableness. Now, I know that we don't often think of God in those terms.

His absolute holiness and transcendency, far above, unapproachableness. But that's the idea we need to get when we consider what coming to Mount Sinai means.

And number two, then, in stark contrast, to reveal the sinfulness of man. And then third, the idea here is that sinful man cannot approach a holy God and live.

Sinful man, as he is, cannot approach God and live. That's what God has conveyed. Now, that, of course, gripped the people with fear and they were terrified and they trembled.

[20:55] Even Moses trembled. And, you know, he had a special audience with God on a number of occasions. And he trembled.

And the people kept themselves then at a distance while God spoke with Moses there on the mountain and gave him the Ten Commandments. And I referred to this passage a moment ago, but in Exodus 20, 18, all the people saw the thunders and the lightnings and the noise of the trumpet and the mountain smoking.

When the people saw it, they were moved and stood far off. And they said unto Moses, speak thou with us and we will hear, but let not God speak with us lest we die.

And so the fear, the terror, the sheer terror of Mount Sinai. See, then, here's where we start to make the application.

What has all of this to do with us then today? And that original question that I asked, what's simply this? Number one, to stand at the foot of Sinai in the spiritual sense is to place your eternal hope in the terms of the old covenant, the law.

[22:18] And two, it is to believe, like millions have and are today, that your salvation can be merited by personal acts of righteousness and goodness.

where that is by keeping the law. That's what it means when I say, to which mountain have you run?

If you run to Mount Sinai, that means that you are placing your hope in what you can do and in your own righteousness and ability to keep God's law.

God's Now, let me just ask you a question. Do you believe that you're going to heaven because you've always tried to do the right thing? You know, you might say, or you hear somebody say, you know, I live a clean life.

I try to do the right thing. I don't lie and cheat and murder and things like that. I love my fellow man and I always try to help people when they're in need and so forth.

[23 : 29] If so, you've run to the wrong mountain. Anything wrong with doing those things? Not a thing wrong with doing those things. But if you're trusting those things for your eternal hope, your salvation, then you have run to the wrong mountain.

You've run to Mount Sinai. That's the idea here. If someone were to ask you about your salvation experience and why you believed that when you died you were going to go to heaven, what would be your first thought?

Would it first pop into your mind the good things you've done or try to do? And, you know, do you think about your baptism first?

I wish I could tell you how many times I've had people respond to a diagnostic question about where they are spiritually. Are you a Christian? I don't usually ask it that way. I can't tell you how many times I've had people say right off the bat, I was baptized down at such a church.

First thing popping in your mind is your church membership or the money you've given to certain Christian causes. You've been faithful to give. First thing popping in your mind is your service and your faithfulness to the church and so forth.

[24 : 48] Then you've run to the wrong mountain. You've run to Mount Sinai. And I can hear people say, God knows that I've tried to do the right thing. I've heard that said exactly that way.

Well, God knows I've tried to do the right thing to be good. And they really believe that, don't they? They fool themselves into believing it.

Yeah, well, and they're not trying to hoodwink anybody. Now, some are. and maybe deep in their hearts some doubt the correctness of that.

But there are many others who really do believe it. Well, I've tried. I've been sincere. God's going to understand. And nobody's perfect. You know, anybody say that.

You know, nobody's perfect. And besides, I'm a lot better than most people I know. We kind of put, people will put themselves side by side with some terrible sinner.

[25 : 55] Say, well, surely, surely God's going to look favorably upon me. And a host of other ways that it's articulated.

But the bottom line is, people who think in those terms in relation to eternal things and heaven and the afterlife or, you know, salvation, if they put it in those terms, then they have run to the wrong mountain.

And they've run to Sinai. And so, you know, they're in big trouble. Comes down to it, right?

And so, there is this mentality. It's kind of like, I don't know if some of you have ever looked at or maybe even taken evangelism explosion. Anybody here ever done the host of different illustrations are used.

And one of them is the illustration of the scale. And here, though people don't put it in these terms, this is what they're thinking. That in heaven, there's just this big scale up there, you know, figuratively.

[27 : 06] And all the good things I'm doing are put on one side and the sins on the other side. And I'm just hoping that it'll tip my way. I mean, just to say it in that way, I mean, it's right in here we think, how ridiculous to think that.

And yet, many people think that, are believing that, and are trusting that, and have placed their hope in that. And they don't ever think of it in terms of Sinai. And this is how Paul is teaching this truth.

That is what they've done. They are trying to get to heaven based on their own righteousness, their own ability to at least keep as much of a law as they can.

And hope that God will be gracious. Third then, on your outline, to stand at the foot of Mount Sinai is to stand under judgment and doom.

And the reason is because Sinai demands punishment. Punishment for how many infractions of God's law?

[28 : 17] Any and all. You can put any or you can put all. I'll just give you the choice. See, I believe in freedom. Any and all. Sinai demands perfect obedience.

Okay? That's why there's such fear involved here because who can do that? No one. No one can do that.

No one can fulfill that demand. No one then can escape the punishment of God's righteous law. Because at Sinai, remember God was there.

Sinai is where sinful man stands before a holy and perfect and just God. and if you have run to Sinai for your salvation, then you can expect one thing only.

Condemnation. Condemnation and judgment. That's why I say works unto salvation are works that fail. They fail us.

[29 : 25] D, and this is kind of natural flows of thought, D is what good is Mount Sinai? And so someone might ask, you know, it might be entertaining the thought, maybe no one in here, but you might think, well if the covenant given at Sinai is a covenant of judgment and fear, then what good is it?

And why did God do it? Why did God give it? Well, number one, the purpose of Sinai, we first need to understand the purpose of Sinai was not to offer a way of salvation.

It never was a way. It wasn't a way that failed. It never was the way. The law was never the way.

The purpose of Sinai, the giving of the law, was to bring us face to face with our own sinfulness.

The reality of our own sinfulness and lostness and hopelessness to convince us that we're lawbreakers.

Why would God want to do that? Because the law is, I think you could think of it as a plumb line. I added a little illustration there just in case somebody didn't know what a plumb line was or plumbob or whatever other term that we use.

[30 : 49] I didn't draw that. Thank the Lord for the internet and endless supply of pictures. A plumb line. And a plumb line, if you've ever used one, and you see the illustration so you know kind of what they're used for at least in some applications.

A plumb line can only reveal that a wall is crooked. A plumb line cannot make a crooked wall straight.

It has no power to do that. Now it can guide you to make another wall or to correct a wall, but the plumb line itself cannot make anything crooked. And so if the law, or cannot make it straight, if the law is God's plumb line, it's designed then to show people that they're crooked, off balance, out of plumb, or sinful.

That's what God's law does. It was never, just like a plumb line, was never intended to be a tool to fix, actually fix a crooked wall.

God's law was never intended to make us straight, or to make us righteous. You see, this is where people's thinking have gone awry.

[32 : 12] They think, well, if I can just obey all the law, that will make me straight, make me right. To walk that straight and narrow and make sure I cross all my T's and dot all my I's, such as that.

The law was never intended to do that. It does not have any power to do that. In fact, it has the power to do just the opposite, just like a plumb line. It shows us our own sinfulness.

And so, three, it is only when we see our own sinfulness that we're able to see our desperate need for a Savior. this is God's design.

Four, and since the law of God provides no attainable Savior, it doesn't, you know, it provides no Savior, then we must look to God.

See how important the law is? Isaiah 45, 22, I think I put that in your notes. Look unto me.

[33 : 24] I capitalized that, me, that's the emphasis. Look unto me, God says, and be saved all the ends of the earth. Not look to the law, look to me, and be saved.

And yet, we do look into the law in a very important sense because number five, use another metaphor or illustration, the law serves as a mirror.

It serves as a mirror, and so when you look to the law, that is, if you look to it in the right way, then we do not see a Savior. What do we see?

A sinner is what we see. When you look to the law of God, you see a sinner, not a Savior.