

## Heb. 12:18-24 The Kingdom of Christ (part 1)

Let's begin with our context. The author is speaking to Jewish Christians about the superiority of the new covenant over the old. In Gal. 4 Paul uses the picture of two women, Hagar and Sarah, to explain the differences between the old covenant and the new. In our text today, the author uses two mountains, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion, to picture the old and new covenants, with the new covenant being VASTLY superior to the old. And we must admit, the old covenant with Moses at Mt. Sinai was glorious and amazing. Think about it. There, after being miraculously delivered from 400 years of bondage in Egypt, God appears to Moses at Sinai. He speaks with signs and wonders, with awe and fear, with **“blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest”** (v. 18). There, on that mountain, through Moses, God gave them his laws. He set them apart as a nation-church. There, He made his covenant with them. There, he gave them the specifics of divine worship and set them apart as special, chosen, people.

But, with the coming of Jesus, we find a new covenant, a “better” covenant. And if we move over to v. 28, he describes those who are now under this new covenant as those who have also come to a **“KINGDOM that cannot be shaken.”** Such is our case today as Christians! Look at v. 22: **“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . .”** According to this verse, if you are a Christian, if you have believed in Him, if you received Him, you have ALREADY come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. This is why Paul can say to the Ephesians, NOW, **“you are seated with Christ in the heavenly places”** (Eph. 2:6).

Let me also say that there is a city that is to come. From another perspective, there is still a city for which we wait. Look over at 13:14: **“For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.”** There is always a tension between the already and not yet. And there are many places and passages that speak of the city to come. But, today, our text address the HERE and NOW, the city to which we have already come (v. 22), in Christ. With this in mind, I want to consider these verses as speaking to the kingdom we have in Christ. This week and next, I want to answer questions like” *“What kind of kingdom do we serve?”* And *“What is the essence of the kingdom to which we have already come?”* And *“What makes this kingdom better than the old Mosaic “kingdom” or the kingdoms of this world?”* I hope this will be very helpful to us as we live in this world, and ALSO wait for the city that is to come. Today, I have two truths about the Kingdom of Christ. 1) Heavenly Kingdom; 2) Proximate Kingdom

1. The Kingdom of Christ is a heavenly kingdom. In this passage the author compares a kingdom established on an earthly mountain with a kingdom that comes down from heaven. In this way, the kingdom of Christ is from heaven. Look at vv. 22-23: **“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.”** Now, I know language gets difficult when we start speaking about “heaven” and “heavenly” things. But, we cannot get around the fact that the Bible teaches that God is **“in heaven.”** And, how are we to pray? Jesus says, **“Our father . . . who is . . . in . . . heaven.”** God is in “heaven.” There is much meaning here. But, at the least it means that God is ONE. He is not like us. He exists both outside and inside time. He is God . . . we are not! He is the creator . . . we are the creature! In this way, God

is “in heaven.” He is “heavenly.” He is not of the earth, nor is he of the things of this universe. (Quick application: God is separate from his creation. Our Hindu and Buddhist and animist friends may think that God is some kind of “spirit” that dwells in his creation in some type of “symbiotic” relationship like we see with the movie Pocahontas or Avatar (etc.) But, this is NOT what the Bible teaches. Now, He did create the world. But, as Paul says to the Athenians: **“He does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything”** (Acts 17:24-25).)

I realize we cannot explain all these things. Nor, can we understand on this side. But, by faith, we believe this is true. And it is true! For our purpose now, I only want to emphasize that that the kingdom of Christ is not of this earth. It is not on a mountain called Sinai. The Kingdom of Christ that has come to us in the gospel is from God Himself and finds its source in the God who made all things and upholds all things. And this kingdom does come down to us in words as it did on Mt. Sinai. But, the essence of the Kingdom is in God incarnate, who is called the WORD of God, who is none other than the LORD Jesus.

Look at vv. 22-23 again: **“But you have come to Mount Zion . . .”** What kind of place is Mt. Zion? Well, it is not LIKE Mt. Sinai in that it is an earthly mountain. It is a “heavenly” mountain. Look at the next part of the verse. **“and to the city of the living God . . .”** What kind of city is this? Is it physical Jerusalem? The Jews found no greater city on earth. To the Muslim world, Jerusalem is the 2<sup>nd</sup> greatest city. But, the city about which we read here is no earthly city. It is not an “earthly” Jerusalem.

Christ alludes to this truth in John 4. Do you remember what he says to the woman he finds in Samaria? He comes to a well in the middle of the day to find a woman gathering water at a famous well. And they have a spiritual conversation (which we need to be having with those around us often). Jesus points out her sin. And she tries to change the conversation. She tries to move the attention away from her sin to a more general topic (so she thinks) about worship. She says, “Our fathers (Samaritans) worshiped on this mountain, but you (Jews) say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship. Here she speaks about physical mountains. And if Jesus were a good Jewish Pharisee, he would have put her in her place about Mt. Sinai and the giving of the law. But, he says something else. He says to her, **“Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father . . . But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth** (John 4). He is saying to her EXACTLY what the author of Hebrews says in v. 22: **“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . .”**

In this same passage the woman says to Jesus, **“I know the Messiah (God’s messenger) is coming. He will tell us the truth.”** Do you remember what Jesus says to her? The one with whom you speak is Him. This is the best news . . . which is the gospel! The Kingdom of God has come down to us in the Son of God. And he is more than a man! This what the author of Hebrews has been explaining from cp. 1:1-3! Look there with me: **“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he**

**created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.** Jesus says to us: “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father” (John 14:9)

A couple implications: i. Christ came from heaven. And his kingdom is heavenly. – This means he is not merely a perfect man. He can’t merely be a perfect man. He must also be God . . . in the flesh. ii. This kingdom cannot be shaken. Can God be destroyed? Think of the earthly Mountain of Sinai. With earthquakes, floods, dynamite, etc., it can be destroyed. So can this earth! But, what about a heavenly kingdom? This means the Kingdom of Christ cannot be defeated.. The Kingdom of Christ will not be shaken. There is no enemy strong enough to defeat the king nor the kingdom.

2. The Kingdom of Christ is a proximate kingdom. In other words, it is NEAR. It is upon us. As Christians today, it is true for us to say “*it dwells within us.*” The kingdom of Christ is a kingdom where all inhabitants are NEAR to God. In all the nations of the world, with all the peoples and ethnicities and languages and colors and socio-economic places, ALL God’s people have the same proximity to God. In this way, the new covenant in Christ is better than the old. Look at vv. 18-21: “**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.”**” At Mt. Sinai, there was no touching the mountain. It was the opposite! Not even the cattle could go close without dying. The people begged that God NOT speak to them. For they could not endure his holiness and his wrath upon their sins. Even Moses, who was appointed to come to the mountain, said “***I tremble with fear.***”

But, this is not the case in the new covenant. John the Apostle writes: “**That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the live was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it . . . And we write these things so that our joy may be complete**” (1 John 1:1-4). Does this sound like man writing in fear. No! He speaks of hearing, seeing, touching, and still having great joy. This is the incarnation of Christ. This is why He came. He is God with us! And he says to all whosoever will: “**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light**” Matt. 11:28–30). Those who come to Jesus will find a God who is near!

The writer to the Hebrews has already stressed this truth. Heb. 7:19: “(for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.” Heb. 7:25: “Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

In the new covenant, how near are we? In Christ, we are not just outside the mountain area, waiting to for the wrath of God to fall on us. In Christ, we are MORE THAN NEAR. How? By the Spirit. In the old Covenant they looked to the earthly Mt. Sinai where God spoke through his mediator, Moses. They could not draw near! They could not touch it. They were far off. But, in the new covenant, we are “united” to Christ. We are “in” Christ. He is the “*vine*” and we are the “*branches*.” (John 15).

Application: In Christ there is no fear. No thunder and lighting, no awesome darkness, no fearful voice. I think of Jesus in the boat with his disciples. And as he is sleeping, a fierce storm suddenly comes upon them. And they know FOR SURE they will perish. And they wake Jesus up in great fear. And He says to the STORM, “peace be still.” And it happened. Today, we do not have to fear God because we have not lived up to the LAW of Moses with all its commands. Yes, we have broken them! And YES, we deserve the punishments that come from breaking God’s laws! But, on the cross, “**Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us**” (Gal. 3:13). “**For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God** (2 Cor. 5:21). For us this means we do not stand away from a smoking mountain, falling on our faces because of our sins, know we cannot approach such a mountain. But, because of the person and work of Christ, those who were “**far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ**” (Eph. 2:13). This is why Paul says: “**For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”**” (Rom. 8:15).

Application: We approach God with boldness. 2 Cor. 3:12 says: **Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end.**” Which of you parents will refuse your child to come to you in the night when they have just had a nightmare? (The King and I story). Such is the case with all God’s children in the new covenant.

There is much more to say about the comparison between the old covenant and the new. But, we will wait til next week. Let me end with the Lord’s prayer. Jesus says pray like this (KJV) “*Our father who are in heaven. Hallowed by thy name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever.*” This is no smoking mountain where we cannot stand up to the wrath of God’s law as sinners. In Christ, ALL our sins are forgiven and can pray with no fear and great boldness.