

Perfect Faith

Hebrews 12:4-24

Introduction

In *Pilgrim's Progress*, at the beginning of his journey, Christian is carrying a burden on his back that hinders his travels. That burden is sin. Before he gets to the Wicket-gate, he encounters a man named Worldly Wiseman, who tells him that he can get rid of his burden at the house of Legality in the village of Morality. Legality's house is at the top of a mountain, a very steep mountain, so steep that it begins to turn back on itself. It is shrouded in lightning and thunder. Christian freezes in fear until Evangelist comes along and instructs him to go back the way he originally directed him, to the Wicket-gate. After going through the Wicket-gate and receiving some instruction, Christian comes to a small hill with a cross on the top and a sepulcher at the bottom. When he approaches the cross, his burden falls off his back and rolls down the hill into the sepulcher. Christian's journey is a journey of faith. He doesn't know the way, so he must have faith in what other people tell him. What we're calling perfect faith today is the faith that causes this burden of sin to fall away, saving faith. Perfect faith is faith in Jesus alone.

A Tale of Two Mountains

Verses 18 – 23 in our reading in *Hebrews 12* today could be called a "Tale of Two Mountains."

Mt. Sinai

Without naming it, the author describes Mt. Sinai, where Moses received the Law, in **verses 18-21**. It's covered in a *blazing fire, darkness, gloom, and a strong wind (v. 18)*. The command from God is that if even a *beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned (v. 20, cf. Exodus 19:13)*. This is a fearful thing, for this is the mountain on which God gave the Law to his people through Moses. Upon the advice of Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Christian tried to get his burden of sin removed by climbing Mt. Sinai and found that the Law cannot do that. The Law points out our sin and condemns us before the righteous God. It does not free us from our sin.

Mt. Zion

In **verses 22-23**, the writer of *Hebrews* tells us about Mt. Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. To understand this, we look first to the earthly Mt. Zion, which is the highest point in Israel. Jerusalem is built on top of it. This is why we always read about going up to Jerusalem or going down from Jerusalem to anywhere else. Specifically, this mountain was also where the temple was built, the dwelling place of God with His people on earth. Within the Most Holy Place, or the Holy of Holies, was the Ark of the Covenant. The lid of the Ark was called the Mercy Seat because that's where God's earthly presence rested.

Approaching God

Both mountains contained the presence of God. How Did the people approach Him there?

Mt. Sinai

(Read **Exodus 19:21-23**). The people weren't allowed to approach Mt. Sinai. But that was OK with them (Read **Exodus 20:18-19**). Hearing the Law of God is a scary thing. And if it isn't scary for you, you don't have a very good sense of who or what you are, a poor, miserable sinner.

Mt. Zion

The high priest was the only one allowed into the Most Holy Place, and then only once a year, on the Day of Atonement. However, the temple was where the people brought their sacrifices to God. They approached God through the sacrificial system, the blood of bulls and rams. In fact, when the high priest entered the Most Holy Place, it was with the *blood of a bull* (Read **Leviticus 16:2-3, 11-14**). Access to God was still limited.

Calvary – the Gospel

But there is another hill just outside Jerusalem, a hill called Calvary. It was on this hill that Jesus shed His blood for our sin and paid the price of forgiveness with His life. (Read **Hebrews 10:5-10**). Through His death, Christ did away with the whole sacrificial system as His life was the perfect sacrifice. Because of this, we have access to the New Jerusalem, the heavenly Mt. Zion. Today, we approach God through Christ and His blood. This is **PERFECT FAITH**.

Faith in Christ

Christ died for our sin. When we believe that, our sin is taken away, the burden falls off our back, and we can stand upright and walk by faith. But where does that faith come from? It's obviously not the Law. Is it something we can conjure up? Are we persuaded by the evidence to come to the conclusion that this is true?

The Gift of Faith

No. We are *saved by grace, not of ourselves; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast* (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). God gives us faith through His Word at Baptism. If we are baptized as infants. If not baptized as an infant, through His written or spoken Word later in life. By faith, we receive the body and blood of Jesus at the Lord's Table. He gives us forgiveness of sins and strengthens that faith, that perfect faith that saves.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
