

## 2 Different Mountains

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Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn to Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 18. Page 1213, Hebrews 12 and verse 18.

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.

The question I'm going to begin with this evening may sound at first sight strange, but it relates directly to what I have just read in that chapter.

[ 1 : 59 ] The question I'm putting to you tonight is, Do you come from Sinai, or do you come from Zion?

Rather, I should say, Do you belong to Sinai, or do you belong to Zion?

Now, if you want a little help with your decision to that question, then just read the words that I have just given, because even reading, even if you don't understand much of what's going on, you can very clearly get the drift.

And it's perfectly obvious that there is a massive contrast between the two places. Here is a description of Mount Sinai.

Blazing fire. Darkness. Gloom. A tempest. The fearful sound of a trumpet.

[ 3 : 15 ] 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.

Even Moses himself, who knew God face to face, he said, I tremble with fear. That's the description of Mount Sinai.

Do you belong there? Or, do you belong to Mount Zion? Here's the description of Mount Zion.

The city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. And innumerable angels, and 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 righteous, made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.

Let me ask you, even from the description that we have just read, it may not be clear to you where these places are, and what it means to belong to either of them, but I think it's pretty clear that I would rather be in the second place.

[ 4 : 40 ] The scene that's being described in the second place, which is Zion, is one of joy, one of triumph, one of a gathering of people, because they want to be there, they enjoy every moment of it, and there's every reason for them to be there.

They want to see each other, but most of all, they want to be in the presence of God. They love every moment of it. It's a time of, what does it say, festal gathering.

That's the kind of gatherings that would be from time to time in the Old Testament, when people would come together for the Passover, and the Feast of Tabernacles, and when they would have a wonderful time.

And it was made even more wonderful because it was God who commanded them to have a wonderful time. That's the scene that we have at Mount Zion.

The scene of Mount Sinai is one of horror. Can you think back to a moment in your life when you were most afraid? Maybe there is no such moment, but I think for most of us this evening, we can

look back to one, or two, or three occasions when we were, I don't mean just nervous.

[ 6 : 00 ] I don't mean just that we got a fright, but I mean that we were absolutely terrified. So terrified, you didn't know what to think. You couldn't think of anything.

You were riveted to the spot because you were so afraid. Come back with me to the Old Testament then, to Exodus chapter 19.

Let's ask some of the Israelites as they're going through the desert that same question. Is there a moment in your life when you felt so afraid that you thought you were going to die?

Now you might expect them to say something like, well yeah, because when we were, the moment I felt most afraid was just after we'd come out of Egypt, we were heading towards the Red Sea and we discovered that there was nothing in front of us but sea we couldn't cross and then to our utter horror, behind us there was an army of Egyptians coming to us and they were going to kill us.

There was nowhere where we could go. We were riveted to the spot until of course God came to their rescue and opened up the Red Sea and allowed them to go across on dry land.

[ 7 : 13 ] You might expect that that would be the moment of greatest fear within the Israelites. Or when the Amalekites attacked them. You read that in Exodus chapter 17, I think.

When the Amalekites all ambushed them and there was an awful war between the two peoples. But that wasn't the moment when they were most afraid.

The moment when they were most afraid was not when an enemy attacked them but when their own God met with them.

Isn't that extraordinary? That's what we just read in Exodus chapter 19. Now, fear can often depend on our frame of mind.

There are some people who have been trained not to be afraid. Some people, even here tonight, there are people who are more afraid, more prone to fear and there are other people who are less prone to fear.

[ 8 : 13 ] And it can be driven out of a person. If you see people in the army, for example, there's no point in having an army. An effective army can't be shaking in its shoes when it's going out to battle.

You take people in the SAS and their training, I don't know much about it, but I can tell you this, that their training is designed to drive fear out of them so that they're afraid of nothing.

They're not afraid of pain. They're not afraid of torture. They're not afraid of death. They're quite willing to meet death in the eye because they've been conditioned. That's their job.

But I can tell you that even the most hardened soldier would have melted on this occasion. Trust me, no amount of training could prepare you for what it felt like to be in the presence of God.

So Exodus chapter 19 and this chapter, Zinai, is when the people of Israel, they were led by Moses and the first place that God commanded them to come was to this mountain, Zinai, so that he could meet with them.

[ 9 : 31 ] Now you might imagine that meeting with God, if you can imagine what that possibly could be like, where God is going to be the speaker. If you're going to a conference, you're going to hear a speaker.

If you come to church, you hear a preacher. But imagine that there's a whole gathering of people, thousands, and indeed millions of people, and they're gathering on the mountain in order to hear God speaking to them.

You would imagine that there would be curiosity. There would be a sense of wonder. People would be asking, well, what will God's voice be like?

And I wonder how much complacency there was as they all gathered together in the way they were. And slowly but surely, it began to dawn on them that this meeting with God was not going to be as easy or as straightforward as they imagined it would be.

First of all, Moses was given instructions that had to be followed. There had to be a fence all the way around the mountain because God's presence had made the mountain holy. They could not stand on that ground.

[ 10 : 36 ] Then they had to prepare themselves inwardly and outwardly for what was going to happen. But when it happened, instead of this being a festival, when they would silently listen to God, it was the fright of their lives.

It was a nightmare for them. When they saw the clouds. We're not talking about Lewis clouds. Must be the worst clouds in the world.

We're talking about God's clouds. The most fearful cloud in the world. The fire. God's fire.

The thunder. God's thunder. They were so afraid that they begged. That's what we just read. Exodus 20. They begged Moses to ask God to be silent. The worst of all was the voice of God. Now from one point of view, you might think, well, was it not a huge privilege to hear the voice of God?

[ 11 : 44 ] Well, in theory, that's true. But there's a massive difference between the theory and the actual reality of listening to the voice of God.

If you're the kind of person that imagine what God must be like, and you've got your own picture, like so many people in the world have, of what God must be like, and they start their sentence like this, well, I would imagine that God is like this.

God is not concerned about what you would imagine him to be. The important thing is what he really is, which is worlds away from what you imagine him to be.

Because what you imagine him to be is someone nice. Someone who's going to accept anything. Some kind of great-grandfather figure that sits somewhere and smiles at the world.

That's how a lot of people conceive God to be, isn't it? It's just their own imagination. They've created God to be in their image instead of listening to God and realizing what he really is like.

[ 12 : 59 ] You get people saying, well, God is love, isn't he? The Bible says God is love. And by that they mean God just turns a blind eye to anything that goes on in the world. And if I do something wrong, well, it's wrong, but he'll turn a blind eye and one day everything will be okay.

No, it won't. Because God has said it will not be okay. It's a wish. It's an empty dream if you think that you can live any way you want, totally disregarding what God has said.

And then one day when you die, then it'll all be okay at the end. That's not what I read in my Bible at all.

What I read in my Bible is that we must all appear before God's judgment seat to receive of what we have done here in this world.

to what extent we have listened to him and we have believed in his son. So why is it that the people of Israel were so massively afraid?

[ 14 : 16 ] Why was this the one moment in their whole lives that they absolutely trembled with fear? Well, the answer is very simple. They are sinners and God is God and God simply cannot connect with sin.

There is simply no connection. He can't look at sin in another part of the Bible tells us. And whilst you and I are in our sin, then we have a problem when it comes to meeting with God.

And it's when we meet with God, and remember that that's what we're doing this evening, we're meeting with God. When we meet with God, we get to see ourselves as we really are, as God sees us.

And that's not only uncomfortable, it's absolutely terrifying. It ought to be anyway. because we're shown that we're guilty and that we're culpable and that we're answerable and accountable to God. And that ought to be the most fearful truth that you and I can ever lay hold of. But there's another reason why they trembled.

[ 15 : 38 ] Because as they listened to the voice of God telling them the Ten Commandments, with each of these commandments, they knew that they hadn't a hope of keeping them.

You shall not have any other gods except me, said God. You shall not make for yourself an image of anything else in heaven or in earth or the waters under the earth.

You cannot, you must not take the name of God in vain. You must remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. You must honor your father and your mother. You must not kill. You must not steal.

You must not commit adultery. You must not covet and you must not bear false witness against your neighbor. Anyone who really listened to that, they knew that they were guilty on the spot.

Not only of what they had done, but they had no chance of putting into practice God's way of living. So what possible hope was there? Well, in actual fact, there was.

[ 16 : 40 ] If they had really listened to God, then God made provision for the forgiveness of their sin. But that did not change the fact that meeting with God was the most fearful, horrific experience that you could ever, ever imagine.

God and sin, therefore, simply cannot come together. And you can't change things. God cannot modify things so that he takes a different view of sin.

There's no negotiation with him. The Bible tells us the soul that sins, it shall die. And that's where it comes down to where we are. Even hundreds, thousands of years later in the 21st century, you and

I are in the same position as these Israelites were there.

Guilty, culpable, accountable of sin and answerable to God as there. So that was the Israelites. They stood afraid. The message was keep away, keep clear, warning, anyone crossing this fence will die.

Like what you see at a railway station, when you stand at the fence at a railway line, there are signs all over the place saying, do not, under any circumstances start an electricity substation. Do not, do not enter.

[ 17 : 57 ] If you do enter, then you're likely to take a big, massive risk. But of course, with a mountain, with Mount Sinai, it wasn't just a risk, it was a certainty. Anyone who crossed that fence was put to death.

Actually, when you think about it, God was simply preserving the lives of his people. This was a health and safety warning to the people. He said that because he didn't want them to die.

He didn't say that was because he was some unreasonable, capricious tyrant who loves when people die. That's not the kind of God you find in the Bible at all.

That's the kind of God that some people like to portray him as. That's not. He said time and time again, do this so that the people will live. He was protecting them because he loved them.

He actually loved them. But loving someone someone is not changing right and wrong. God can't say to someone, I love you so I'm going to change myself in order for everything to be okay.

[ 19 : 08 ] He can't do that. God loved his people and then he did the most wonderful, wonderful thing in all the universe so that these people could come to know him and come to experience him in joy and in peace and in life and everlasting, everlasting life.

You know, some people ask, well, why does God not take away, make the world a better place?

You've been talking about how God cannot connect with sin.

Why does he not take away the sin in the world? I've asked this before. It's a question that people ask. It's an important question. These questions are important and it's important for you to know the nature of our sinfulness.

Some people think, well, sin isn't a reality. It's just the way we are. But it is a reality. It's something that separates us from God and people say, well, why does he not take away the sin in the world and therefore make the world a better place?

Well, you think about that for a moment because sin is tied up with who we are, isn't it? Sin is all about our lifestyle, our choices, our giving in to temptation.

[ 20 : 29 ] Sin is what we might regard as little sins or big sins or middle-sized sins, but it's all sin to God. It's a whole lifetime of sin. You look back over your own life and you ask yourself, how many days I have spent in deceit and pride and said the wrong thing and things that I know I'm wrong and I've been so much of a cheat in my life in so many different ways.

I've schemed, I've connived, I've murdered people by wishing they weren't around. I've allowed unclean thoughts to come into my head.

All of these things, be honest with yourself. You know that you're tied up. You're in sin. That sin is part, it's an integral part of our lives.

And I'll tell you now why God does not make the world a better place. Because if he was to come to the whole world, imagine this. Imagine he was to gather all the world to him tonight and he was to say, let's have a referendum.

Yes or no? The yes campaign. I will take away sin. I will remove.

[ 21 : 45 ] The badness from the world if you do and live as I say. I have absolutely no doubt in my mind what the answer would be.

And you know what it would be? It would be no. You know how I know that? It's because when God came into this world and did exactly that, you don't get God coming any closer to human beings than him becoming a human being himself.

When he actually came into this world and he began to show people how to live, he began to show by his own example, he began to show how to treat other people and how to worship God and how to listen to God and what God's word meant for them.

He began to explain to them exactly how God wanted them to live. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Blessed are the peacemakers and so on and so forth. He showed people how to live. Do unto others as you would have them. Do unto you. And he showed them what it meant for God to take

away sickness.

[ 22 : 58 ] You would imagine that they would listen to him and that they would gather around him and accept what he says. What happened? They nailed him to a cross. That's what the world thinks of what God wants us to be.

So please don't say why does God not take all the evil in the world? That is a bunch of hypocrisy. The world does not want to live as God wants us.

That's what sin is by nature. So when we say to God we will not have you ruling over us. We want to determine our own destiny. We want to decide our own future.

Leave us alone. And we'll cope with the sickness and the war and the evil. And we'll make sure that our politicians cure all of that and our health services and we'll make sure that we have investment and foreign policy and aid packages.

we'll take care of ourselves. We don't want to recognize that our world is the way it is because we have fallen. We are good in ourselves.

[ 24 : 15 ] All we need to do is become better and we have it within us to become better. That's our answer. And I don't know what it will take for humankind to change its mind.

Well I do know what it will take. The gospel. It's the only hope that we have here in Stornoway or all the way across the world for humankind you and I me and you old and young wherever we come from to change our mind.

So that was Mount Sinai then a place of condemnation where the people shook because God was connecting with them and they couldn't cope with that connection.

Wonderful as it was they simply could not cope with the fear that it produced within them. But look at the other mountain Mount Zion and we won't have as much time to look at this scene but it's an entirely different scene isn't it?

It's one of joy and freedom and peace. One in which there are people gathered there and whilst they are worshipping in awe of God there's always a healthy fear that we ought to have when we're worshipping God by the way.

[ 25 : 42 ] As Christians God has called us his friends he has not called us his buddies. And whilst we can approach him as the God who loves us with an extraordinary love we have no right to lose that sense of awe and wonder when we come into his presence and whether we're praying or reading our Bible or whether we come to church we always must have.

I'm not saying it should be a stiff ultra formal dead experience but I'm saying that like Psalm 100 oh enter then his gates with praise praise Lord and bless his name always for it is seemly so to do.

That's got to be our attitude a mixture of a healthy fear and yet a love that draws us into God's presence to listen and to hear whatever God wants us to say.

Now the description of Mount Zion is a completely description first of all it's a city rather than just a mountain the city of Jerusalem was set on Mount Zion and of course Jerusalem was the city of David but more importantly it was the city of God the city that became the center of the New Testament it was from this it was into the city of Jerusalem that Jesus went and he taught and he explained the gospel and it was in the city of Jerusalem or rather outside it that he was put to death and it was from the city of Jerusalem that the apostles went out after the day of Pentecost and it was in the city of Jerusalem that 3,000 people were saved and the gospel began in the New Testament age it went out to all parts of the world but look at what it says then it goes on to say that you have come not only to the city of God but to innumerable angels in festal gathering again a scene of utter joy unbroken joy and peace and triumph have you ever thought of the connection that there is between us this evening and angels here's a chapter that insists that we are part of a massive body of people that includes

I shouldn't have said people a massive body of beings that includes angels we don't see angels but God has created them they are part of God's created order they are spirits they don't have bodies like you and I they're not human beings and yet tonight they join with us in some way I don't understand it but that's what it says you have come to Mount Zion the city of Jerusalem the heaven of Jerusalem to innumerable we're talking masses millions of angels can you imagine what that scene must be like don't look at the childish books that we've all grown up with but look at what the Bible describes angels are perfect spirits who are gathered together and they love to praise can you imagine what a worship service must be like we're angels but there's a connection between angels and our see we're worshipping imperfectly we're still worshipping

[ 29 : 08 ] God is still accepting our worship tonight the angels are worshipping perfectly and God is accepting their worship but there's a big difference between us and the angels and the difference is not because we're imperfect and they're perfect the difference is because Christ didn't die for them Christ died for us and whatever the angels can sing and say tonight in all their perfection they can't say he loved me and gave himself for me we can I often think of John in the book of Revelation you remember how he was given to see this marvelous scene of heaven that can only explain in limited capacity and there was an angel sent to explain to him what was going on so that angel got to know John and he got to know that angel they became friends very much the same way as we will be friends if we're in heaven

I hope we'll all be in heaven make sure that we'll all be together in heaven but we will be friends not just with each other with people that we've never met before in this world but we will be friends with angels angels I often wonder what kind of conversation John may have had with that angel that explained to him so carefully what was going on remember how he was tempted to bow down to the angel and worship him but the angel said whatever you do don't do that I'm not worthy of you worship we are both servants I'm a servant you're a servant don't worship me worship God as I do and I'm quite sure they would have had the most marvelous conversation but I'm sure that it would have included the difference between the angel and John I'm just speculating at this moment in time but I'm doing it scripturally you see there's some things that the angel could never experience you could never experience what it's like to sin he knew what sin is but he could have said to John the one thing I can't understand is what in the world possesses a person to sin when I think about sin right now it fills me with utter disgust it fills me with horror I can't understand how anyone can act against what God has said because to me life is about what God is that's what makes life what it is and how anybody could do anything differently I cannot understand it then the angel could have said to John very easily the difference between you and I is this I haven't been saved I am what I am I am what I've been created to be I've always been the same but you can say that Jesus loved you with a unique love that he so loved you that he came into the world and gave his life for you so that you would be renewed and so that you could be transformed and so that you could come into heaven so tonight we have come to the heavenly

Jerusalem that's where we are tonight but we're not there unless we're there in our hearts it's not just an outward thing it's not just coming to church it's coming with our hearts to worship God and to lift up the name of Jesus to honour him to thank him to have faith in him and to listen to his word to surrender our hearts our minds our lives to him and to what he wants us to do what else does he say he says you've come to the assembly of the firstborn the firstborn was the special child in the Old Testament he had rights that no other child had he was the heir to the estate the firstborn always got the blessing the estate the I can't remember what the word was the birthright remember how of course Jacob stole his brother's birthright that Esau was supposed to have well it was to do with the firstborn but here in God's kingdom everyone's firstborn

God regards us as his children born again by the Holy Spirit of God and having a right and having an heir to his kingdom we're enrolled in heaven numbers 3 and 40 tells us that the firstborn had to be registered can you imagine right now again time is passing but just a thought we're going to sing in a few moments Psalm 87 that talks about how when a person comes into God's kingdom wherever they've come from when they come to faith in Jesus Christ they're enrolled their names are written in God's the book of life well in actual fact their names have been written before the foundation of the world they're enrolled that's what happens when you go to school isn't it for the first time or even when you're born your birth certificate is an enrollment in which your name is written in the register by the registrar as having been born same as baptism this morning every time a parent takes their child for baptism we have a baptismal role where we record the names and the addresses of the parents and the children and that baptismal role goes all the way back over a hundred years

[ 34 : 49 ] I get people phoning me from America sending me emails from America saying they're researching their family tree they think their grandfather was born in Stornowell their great grandfather was born in Stornowell could I check the baptismal role to see if and what date he was baptized on I can open the book it's there hundred years ago it's fascinating but God's baptism not a baptismal role with the Lord you don't get into God's kingdom by baptism don't trust your baptism trust in Jesus don't trust your church attendance trust in Jesus ask the Lord has my name been written in the role and if you believe in Jesus tonight if you're prepared to come and to surrender

your heart your life to the Lord believing in him following him then your name has been written your name has been written don't ask the question first oh I wonder if I'm elect or if I'm in the in the in the Lamb's book of life the first question you need to ask is what's God telling me to do am I going to do it and he tells you to do this this is the will of God to believe in the one who he has sent the judge of all and yet there's this amazing gathering before the judge they are they are not they don't dread him anymore why do they not dread the judge anymore they fear him with a fear of worship and yet it's it's blended with joy and triumph why well we'll see that in a few moments this is a picture of heaven the spirits of righteous people being made perfect tonight we're joining in heaven

God sees our worship he sees your heart and my heart but he sees the whole of his kingdom and he receives the worship of the whole of his kingdom which includes your worship imperfect as it is tonight and mine together with those who have already died in Christ and they are in heaven their bodies have been buried in the ground waiting for the resurrection but they tonight are joining with us that doesn't mean to say that they see into our living rooms doesn't mean to say that they know what we're doing and yet in some strange inexplicable way they are worshiping God and God is accepting the worship of his entire kingdom the kingdom the heavenly Jerusalem and one day you and I will worship God in perfection the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness they do immediately pass into glory and their bodies still united to Christ to rest in the grave until the resurrection these are the two mountains

I'm asking again is it Zinai do you wish that God would just go away and leave you without terrifying you or do you love God do you love being amongst his people the more you see the more you discover the more you want the more you live the more you realize what he's preparing for you which is it Zinai or Zion what makes the difference very quickly verse 24 makes the difference Jesus the mediator the sprink and the sprinkled blood Jesus the mediator and the sprinkled blood in the Old Testament going back all the way to Exodus chapter 19

Moses was the mediator that's why the writer of the Hebrews is actually using this term he's talking about Moses comparing the New Testament with the Old Testament and Moses he was the mediator the mediator was a middle man mediator was someone who stood on behalf of the children of Israel as he spoke to God he represented them and he listened to the words of God and he brought the words of God and announced them to the people of Israel but the mediator had something else to do you find that you can read it when you go home Exodus chapter 24 he had to ratify God's covenant God's covenant was the promise was the written signed if you like promise of God's love and his relationship to his people and the way in which they would do that it was always done with blood Exodus chapter 24 you'll read it Moses took blood and he sprinkled the people of Israel with the blood that sprinkling of blood was the seal it was the sign and the seal of God's love for his people and his pledge to be with his people forever more no matter what Jesus is the mediator the man who stands and who stood on our behalf as he represented us before us to God and his blood was the blood that was shed as the sacrifice for our sin that sacrifice had to be complete it was absolutely necessary because the Bible says that the wages of sin is death and in order for us to live in order for us to be released from the power and from the guilt of sin and given a new life in Jesus Christ there had to be that death it could not happen any other way and his death secured once and for all

[ 40 : 55 ] God see for me tonight my salvation is not some kind of wishful thought if I was to ask you tonight is your salvation certain are you sure you might say to me well I'm just hoping that one day everything will be alright well please don't hope anymore please put your trust in the one certain way in which tonight you can know let me tell you something it is possible for right now for you to know that you are saved for you to go out that door a different person and the difference is Jesus when you stop looking to yourself and stop hoping wildly that everything will be okay and when you put your trust completely in Jesus when you say like the man of old said to

Jesus I believe help my unbelief when you listen to the voice of Jesus saying as he said to Zacchaeus come down from the tree I must stay at your house today when you do when you put your trust in Jesus your life will change you will be purchased for God he went all the way to take away what separated us from God to reconcile us to God he paid it all every last drop was shed for our sin and now instead of living in dread of God we can come confidently joyfully joyfully near to God by the way that he has created in Christ Jesus which mountain tonight are you at Zinai where you dread God you're afraid of him you wish he wasn't there or Zion where you love him you can't

get close enough you can't get enough of him and when he means the world to you because of what he did at Calvary let's pray father in heaven bless these thoughts to us pray that your word will continue with us will lay hold upon us and that you will bless it to us and speak continue to speak to us in such a way that will radically change us from the heart outwards in Jesus name amen