

Sermon Series
The Superiority of Jesus Christ
September 4, 2022

Title: The Sound and Fury of the Law

Subject: Sinai, The Law, Moses, Righteousness, Holiness, The word of the Lord, Judgment, Jesus Christ, Mediator, Access to God, Salvation, Acceptance by God,

Theme Text: Hebrews 12:18-21 (ESV) ¹⁸ For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. ²⁰ For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” ²¹ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”

Theme Illustration: If Moses trembled with fear before God and His Law, shouldn't the unrepentant sinner also? The sight of the Lord's giving of the law to Moses at Sinai was meant to strike fear, dread, and a foreboding in the minds of Israel gathered at the foot of the mountain. This is not a God who plays games with our mistakes and transgressions. Saints we can make real mistakes in life, but we need to call sin what it is, a transgression against a holy, righteous, and judging God. Sin is not an innocent mistake.

So, do any of us here think we can stand before this God in our righteousness? This is precisely the point the Apostle is trying to make. Do these suffering Jewish believers really want to leave the eternal safety of Christ and go back to the Law? Do they really want to trade in Mount Zion for Mt Sinai? Is there someone here today that thinks that you can meet God's righteous and holy demands by your works of the Law? This scene is meant to forever divest anyone who may think that way. You are not a good person in God's eyes. Sinai is the way of condemnation, death, and judgment.

Read: Hebrews 12:18-21

Introduction: The Holy Spirit's design in Hebrews 12:18 – 24, as well as in this letter, is to present a final argument that contrasts Judaism and Christianity, proving the superiority of Christianity over Judaism, grace over law, and the new covenant over the old. We must keep this in mind as we study this text, or we will be lost in the trees while trying to find our way.

I am convinced that the inspired writer is the Apostle Paul. This contrast is virtually parallel with the contrast in Galatians 4, as Paul presents the same case using the figures of Sarah and Hagar as representing the two divergent mountains, Sinai and Zion.

In like manner, the inspired writer directs our attention to that seen in the giving of the law. That scene was not being used by God to win the hearts and affections of Israel, but to scare the living daylights out of them by filling them with dread and terror scaring them into obedience.

A further revelation of God awaited a future day in which the law awakened guilty sinners, lawbreakers, to their need for delivering, atoning, grace-filled Savior.

Transition: Having warned the wavering Jews of backsliding back into Judaism by using the example of Esau in forfeiting his spiritual inheritance, they hope to warn these wavering Jews to the same destiny. We are in this sermon beginning the contrast between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion by first describing what these Christian Jews have not come to, what they have left. And verse 22, describes what they have come to. The Holy Spirit reminds them of what they have rejected and what they have received. What they left was:

1. A Foreboding Mountain: Hebrews 12:18-19 (ESV) ¹⁸ For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose

words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.

The message here is addressed to two groups. The first group is those Jews who are pondering whether to return to Judaism. The message is this, is this mountain the one you desire to return to? The second group is those who claim to be Christian, who believe they can approach a holy God by their works or law-keeping or stand before God on their righteousness. These so-called believers have no idea of what they are asking. Is this how you want to approach God? The scene at Sinai is like the mountain of doom in the Lord of the rings. I believe Tolkien's description comes right out of Exodus. The Jews are being reminded that in Christ they are freed from Sinai.

The whole of the Sinai theophany was designed to instill dread and terror. There is not a hint in God's display of mercy. He reveals Himself to be an absolute sovereign and judge. There was no hint in this display of a merciful and gracious father. Thunders, voices, and earthquakes speak of judgment. In disobedience, each sinner was being forced by conscience to greed to their condemnation as just for themselves. There was no hint of any means of a second opportunity.

The contrast at Sinai is stunning. God, in His infinite holiness, justice, severity, and majesty while we find the man at the bottom in their condition of sin, misery, guilt, and death. Yet no doubt, at the foot of that mountain, some are justified by faith in the promises of God. They were few, they were the remnant. As sinners, they received the law already under its sentence, hoping in the promises of God to send a deliverer.

The opening phrase reminds us and reminded them that the new mountain cannot be touched as could Sinai. The mountain they have come to in the gospel is spiritual and can only be obtained by faith. We need to remember the words of Jesus to the woman at the well, **John 4:21-23 (ESV)** ²¹ **Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father."** ²² **You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation**

is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

Christ has opened the way to a superior mountain. These words speak of access, not exclusion. Mount Sinai was a physical thing, comprehended with the physical eyes. Whereas those things brought in by Christ are wholly spiritual, invisible, and celestial.

Remember, Elijah in the cave at Sinai and the same display we find in first Kings 19? Elijah hid from that display anticipating judgment. He came to the opening of the cave upon hearing the still small voice of God's grace.

Transition: The contrast between Sinai and Zion continues in the character of the words. At cyanide the Jews had:

2. A Foreboding Word: Hebrews 12:20 (ESV) ²⁰ For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned."

The divine law, the substance of it, was written on the hearts of mankind when God made Adam in His image. The fall corrupted this and largely silenced its voice in our souls. However, the laws and changing demand and its penalty were secured within our consciences. There is not one human being that can avoid its power. The law to the unbeliever continually witnesses to their pending judgment. In the lawgiving at Sinai to God's chosen, God took them into a covenantal relationship and in that relationship restored to them the law and all of its majesty and terror. The law was a guide unto complete righteousness and to restrain sin and God's people.

Sinai was surrounded by barren wilderness where there was neither food nor water. This accurately depicts the unregenerate state of man. There is no fruit acceptable to God produced by fallen man. God appeared to them atop a high mountain with the people far below Him God was on his throne and

they were on earth. As they looked up, all they saw was fire, and smoke, while the ground was shaking beneath their feet.

What a foreboding site coupled with foreboding words Sinai was the people begged Moses that God should not speak to them directly. So also did this site, a view of God as a judge, represent represented in fire and blackness fill their souls with dread. Today, when by grace God brings a soul to Sinai are they not filled with terror at their impending judgment? Russian Mark when God has His sights set on the sinner, He first brings them to face the just demands of the law. Christ is then presented to them as the only way out through faith in Him. It is there that the person finds that the fig leaves of Genesis 3 provide no cover.

When the Holy Spirit applies the law in power, the sinners' conscience must concede to our guilt. To increase the terror of the law, even beasts were not allowed on the mountain while God was on his throne. No one was allowed to touch the mountain. Why? **Proverbs 15:8 (ESV) ⁸ The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.**

Transition: So, do you want Sinai? Sinai is what every unbeliever who has ever lived will get. Even Moses was stunned by such a sight of:

3. A Foreboding God: Hebrews 12:21 (ESV) ²¹ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”

The Scriptures tell us that Moses was the most humble man who ever live. If he was so overcome with dread, how severe is the curse of the divine law? I must remind all of us that Moses was no stranger to the Lord. Moses received direct divine revelations and previously witnessed a theophany at the burning bush. What more proof must we have that even the best of men cannot stand before a holy God on their righteousness? How arrogant and vain are we to think we can meet God's demands in the law on our own, **John 9:28 (ESV) ²⁸ And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. No, Moses is not your friend John 5:45**

(ESV) ⁴⁵ Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. It is Moses that accuses you before God.

Conclusion: The people were fenced off from the mountain and by this were declared that under Judaism they had no way to approach this God and no access into His presence. Moses' response in the presence of God was further proof that he was not the ultimate perfect mediator between God and man. This was a signal to them that someone permanent and greater was coming. This someone will lead God's delivered people into His presence by faith and his atoning work. We know who that perfect mediator is and how he gets us into God's presence. By his perfect righteousness and obedience to the father even death on the cross this mediator gives us His righteousness, **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV) ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. No one will be justified by works of the law, Romans 3:20 (ESV) ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.** This is the good news, **Romans 5:1 (ESV) ¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.** Sinai has its place in the declaration of the gospel. Its place is to bring the sinner into acute awareness of his sin and lack of standing before God and his coming judgment. This should prepare the heart of the sinner to receive the message of God's grace through the atoning work of our great high priest and Savior Jesus Christ. Have you received him? Have you been to Sinai? Have you been to Calvary?