

**PROPER 16C****“Not a Scary Sight But Home in a Heavenly Height”****Hebrews 12:18-24**

This is the third of four weekends that our New Testament reading comes from the letter to Hebrews. The unknown author of this book is trying to keep his 1<sup>st</sup> century Christian readers from returning to Judaism. This inspired writer does so by emphasizing how Jesus is God’s promised Messiah, the Christ of the covenant given to Moses. Also, Christian teaching fulfills the promises God made through His ancient prophets. All that God gave to His people of old was good, but what Jesus Christ has come to do for us and give to us is better.

This section of Hebrews is perhaps the most dramatic in the whole book. It contrasts two ways of salvation. There is the hard way of obeying God’s old covenant law given to His people through Moses on Mt. Sinai. It is the way motivated by fear of punishment. The other is the way of God’s new covenant gospel given to His people through Jesus on Mt. Calvary, by His blood shed for us on the cross. It is the way motivated by faith in God’s gracious forgiveness of our sins. We are God’s people of this new covenant, the way of salvation won for us by His Son Jesus.

**I. Our Fear Is of God’s Power**

This text reminds us of the time shortly after God led the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt. God revealed Himself to them as they were camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai. The signs of God’s presence then were tremendous acts of power: clouds, thunder, lightning, fire, smoke, the ground shaking. The message was, “God has come to test you. Your fear of God will keep you from disobeying His will.” But those freed former slaves sinned anyway, very quickly, very severely and very foolishly. Fearing God’s power does not mean loving God’s presence.

God has almighty power. But knowing and seeing that power of God does not make us love Him, just leads us to be afraid of Him. We may fear God because we think that He is out to get us for no good reason. We are good people. We haven't done anything wrong. We believe that God wants to take our fun away. We see God as being all about rules and regulations that make our lives miserable.

Or we may be afraid of God because we know that we have given Him many good reasons to be angry with us. Again and again, in this way and that, we have rejected God's holy will and His good ways for our lives. We don't want God to show up in our lives because it only will be for the punishment that we deserve. We are children of a heavenly Father who hope to avoid the deserved discipline that our behavior has earned us.

## II. Our Rescue Is in God's Presence

The contrast in our text is sharp and striking highlighted by that key law and gospel word in the Bible, "but." Everything that comes after this word changes everything that was before it. Our fear of God's power and punishment now is overcome by our joy in God's presence. Mt. Sinai is replaced by Mt. Zion, the highest point in the city of Jerusalem, the place where God's temple stood in Jesus' day.

The Bible uses the earthly Jerusalem as a preview of the eternal home of all God's people and the countless number of angels who serve Him, the living God. This is the church of the firstborn. The New Testament uses "firstborn" to refer to Jesus. As the firstborn He lays claim to His Father's inheritance. We are that inheritance whose baptized names are written in heaven's roll call.

Our God is the judge of all people. But with the righteousness of our Savior Jesus covering us, the judgment is that we are innocent and holy in God's sight. In this heavenly home we are the righteous spirits

made perfect. Not that we are perfect, far from it, but Jesus is perfect for us. Jesus is our mediator who has won this new covenant for us by His perfect life lived according to His Father's law. This covenant is not written by the hand of God upon tablets of stone but with the blood of Christ shed for us on His wooden cross.

This blood of Jesus speaks a better word than the blood of Abel, the first human to die, killed by his jealous brother Cain. Abel's blood cried out from the ground for revenge against his murderer. Jesus' blood shed on the cross cries out for mercy upon us who sent Him to that cross and for forgiveness of us whose sins caused His innocent death.

We already take part in this joyful assembly whenever we gather with the church of the firstborn in Christian worship. Together here on earth we also stand in the heavenly presence of our Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, along with the worshipping angels and sainted believers who have gone before us. By His Word proclaimed and His sacraments shared Jesus is with us by faith so that we can live with Him by sight.

### Conclusion

Trying to earn salvation by what we do only makes us fear the power of God and punishment from God. Jesus gives to us the salvation He won for us by the blood He shed in His death on the cross in our place. Jesus lives, risen from the dead. In our holy baptism He has given us life in His church on earth. He also has reserved a place for us by name to live with His angels and fellow believers now in heaven. Amen.