

32. Awesome and Consuming God

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About 3 or 4 years ago, I was asked a series of questions by a Christian who started to dabble into the Jewish dietary law and the Sabbath law. In his mind, we should honor the Sabbath and worship the Lord on Saturday. I told him that if he wanted to worship the Lord Saturday instead of Sunday, the Lord would not care. But at the same time, he didn't realize that Jesus or none of the apostles taught us that we, the Gentiles should obey the dietary law or Sabbath law. Because they all knew that those laws were for the Jews only.

I am so grateful to the Lord that He allowed me to live under the grace of God in the 21st century instead of under all the sacrificial laws that they had to follow.

This morning we are going to see a stark contrast between Mount Sinai that represented the Law with all its requirements and Mount Zion that represents the grace of God, but more importantly, we are going to see a tiny portion of the awesomeness of our consuming God.

A. MOUNTAIN SINAI – THE LAW

Hebrews 12:18-21 For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, 19 and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. 20 (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow." 21 And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.")

The full description of this can be found in Exodus chapter 19. Thunder, lightning, thick cloud of smoke, fire, the sound of a trumpet, the mountain shaking, and the loud voice of God. Hollywood couldn't pull this off in real life. In a way, it is understandable that many people have the impression that the OT God was unapproachable, mean, and angry all the time.

Then, a question would come up:

Why did the Lord start to impress the Israelis in this way? He did this to show them the seriousness of His law as we all have done with our own children. This was the infancy of the nation and the children of Israel had to understand the reward and punishment according to His Law.

There is a tremendous difference between holy fear and just being fearful. These Israelis at the foot of Mountain Sinai were in sheer fear, not in holy fear. Their fear did not prompt holiness among them. It did not change their carnal mind to the heart for their God. The evidence could be found 40 days later. While Moses was up on the mountain, they worshiped a golden calf and proclaimed that it was the god that brought them out of Egypt.

When a person has a holy fear of God, he acknowledges two things clearly: first, God is an awesome holy and righteous God, full of beauty, majesty, dominion, and power; second, he also acknowledges that he is a mere man full of the sinful nature, but accepted by God in His grace, mercy, and love.

Out of his holy fear of God, he loves his God with all of his heart, mind, soul, and body; out of his holy fear of God, he serves the Lord with diligence and integrity in everything he does; out of his holy fear of God, he speaks and behaves carefully that he would not disgrace the name of his God.

B. MOUNT ZION – GRACE

Hebrews 12:22-24 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

Of course, the scene described here is the New Jerusalem in heaven before it comes down in Revelation 21:

Revelation 21:2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Who are the people who are going to be in this New Jerusalem? All human kind? Nope. Only those who have accepted and will accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

Listen, heaven is a lot like an exclusive club. Though it is open to the public to join, but to be a member, you have to meet one critical criteria that is set by the owner – getting an endorsement from the Son of the club owner. Without it, you ain't gonna be a part of it. Jesus made it plain and simple in one of His parables in Matthew 22:

Matthew 22:10-14 So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. 11 But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. 12 So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 For many are called, but few are chosen."

In v23, it says "firstborn." Does it mean that if you were the last one in your family or middle child, you cannot go to heaven? Again, the English word doesn't have the deeper meaning like the Greek word "prototokos" and its definition in context is a title of dignity or rank. The same word appeared in Colossians 1:15 which was often misused by the followers of the Jehovah's Witness to legitimize their heresy that Jesus was a mere creature, not God:

Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

This Greek word "prototokos" here in the Book of Colossians does not refer to time, but to place or status. The firstborn of all Creation means "Headship of all Creation." His headship of all creation does not mean that He was born first. Solomon was certainly not born first of all of David's sons, yet he was named the firstborn. Jesus Christ is not a created being, He is eternal God.

Let's go back to v24:

Hebrews 12:24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

If you are not careful to read this in context, you might be confused. The first portion of this verse is talking about the blood of Jesus Christ who is our Mediator between God and mankind, then the author mentioned Abel. The first thing comes to the average mind of born-again believers is Abel who was murdered by his brother in Genesis 4. So it is easy to think that Abel's blood here was about his blood that spilled on the ground as he was killed. That would be a misconception. The blood here points to the blood of the animal that was sacrificed by Abel which was the first recorded sacrifice given by human to the Lord.

Since we learned about these two Mounts – Sinai and Zion, we can make a few comparisons of our own:

- Mount Sinai was marked by fear and terror.
Mount Zion is a place of love and forgiveness.
- Mount Sinai is in the desert on earth.
Mount Zion is the city of the Living God in heaven.
- Mount Sinai spoke of earthly things.
Mount Zion speaks of heavenly things.
- At Mount Sinai, only Moses was allowed to draw near to God.
At Mount Zion, an innumerable company, a general assembly is invited to draw near to the Throne of Grace.
- Mount Sinai was characterized by guilty men in fear.
Mount Zion features just men made perfect through the blood of Jesus.
- At Mount Sinai, Moses was the mediator.
At Mount Zion, Jesus is the Mediator.
- Mount Sinai brings an Old Covenant, which was ratified by the blood of animals.
Mount Zion brings a New Covenant, which is ratified by the blood of God's precious Son.
- Mount Sinai was all about exclusion, keeping people away from the mountain.
Mount Zion is all about invitation, but not a blanket inclusion.
- Mount Sinai is all about the Law.
Mount Zion is all about grace.

C. A STERN WARNING THAT WE MUST HEED

Hebrews 12:25-29 See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, 26 whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." 27 Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is a consuming fire.

When the Israelis rebelled against the Lord, there were severe consequences for them. There will be even greater consequences for rebelling against the Lord after He has done everything divinely possible at Mount Zion. We should not remain ignorant of the consequences and pretending that we don't know or have never heard about it.

Whether people would like to admit it or not, their conscience originally points to God. That is how we were made by Him. But many people decide to ignore that still and quiet voice and start to pursue their own carnal desires. Pretty soon the loud

and demanding carnal voice within is drowning the still and quiet voice of the conscience to the point that the conscience no longer exists and it becomes an advocate of one's carnal desires.

We read that the Lord shook Mountain Sinai as He descended upon it in fire. But what does it mean in v26 that He will shake heaven and the earth? During the Great Tribulation, when the Lord Jesus, in heaven, opens the sixth seal of the scroll, everything comes apart on the earth as well as the stars of heaven. Can you imagine the utter chaos during that time? We see this in the Book of Revelation:

Revelation 6:12-16 I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. 13 And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. 14 Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. 15 And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, 16 and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!"

But a Christian can be confident, because he shall receive an unshakable kingdom, not by his own merit, but by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus our Lord. I like what Charles Spurgeon, the great British preacher of yesteryear said, "No power in the world, and no power in hell, can shake the kingdom which the Lord has given to his saints. For the Lord has established this kingdom upon the Rock, and it cannot be moved or removed."

Grant that the New Covenant based on the grace of God is far better than the Old Covenant "Obey-or-be-punished". But it doesn't mean that grace gives an unlimited license to do whatever believers want to do. A true believer in Christ understands that grace gives us reverence and holy fear. Maybe anyone who thinks that grace gives him a license to sin as he wants is not walking in grace and is not in the Lord at all.

The fact that our God is a consuming fire should comfort us, the believers. Because God the Father poured out His consuming fire of judgment on the God the Son on the cross in our place so that we may be cleared to enter into His grace without a blemish. The penalty of our sins was consumed in Jesus at the cross. To God be the glory, amen?

D. APPLICATIONS

1) Receive God's grace each day and do not take it for granted. It cost the life of Jesus for you and me.

2) Do not be distracted by the tremendous evil things around you. Keep on running the race with endurance and fix your eyes on our Lord Jesus Christ.

Draw near to Him, He will draw near to you. Our God is an Awesome God.