

The Throne of Grace (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Fear and Trembling before the Mountain of God

A deathly silence fell upon the people. Fear, thick as a fog, swept over the congregation. No one spoke; no one could. Knees knocked; palms sweat; everyone held their breath in terrified anticipation. Three days earlier, Moses had come down from the mountain with these instructions: “Consecrate yourselves, this day and the next. Wash your garments, and prepare yourselves. For on the third day the LORD will come down from the mountain, and you will meet your God.” Then Moses commanded that they should set boundaries all around the foot of Sinai, and he warned the people, “Whoever touches this mountain shall surely die! Whether beast or man, he shall not live” (Ex 19:10-15).

For two days there was silence on the mountain. But on the third day, when morning broke, the mountain began to rumble. A thick cloud enveloped its peaks; lightning flashed across its face. Suddenly, the air was pierced with the blast of a trumpet. Inside the camp the people shuddered in fear that shook them to their soul. It was time to meet the LORD (Ex 19:16-17).

As they stood in silence at the foot of Sinai, the ground beneath their feet began to shake as the mountain trembled violently. Then it appeared. Fire descended from heaven and rested upon the top of the mountain, and the trumpet blast grew louder and louder. The LORD had arrived. Then Moses spoke, and God answered with thunder, summoning Moses up to the summit. When Moses ascended the mountain, the LORD again warned him that if any of the people drew near they would die, for the wrath of God would break forth against them. So Moses again went down and warned the people not to approach the mountain of God (Ex 19:18-20).

The LORD then addressed the people of Israel from the top of the mountain, issuing to them ten commandments, the terms of the covenant, the law of their God (Ex 20:1-17). When He had thundered the last commandment, all the people trembled and shrank back in fear. They pleaded with Moses, “You speak to us, Moses, and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die!” (Ex 20:18-21). Israel had cause to be afraid. This was not a God to be trifled with. This was not a God to be touched. This was a God to be feared. So from that point forth, Moses mediated between God and the people, representing God before the congregation of Israel, and representing the congregation of Israel before God.

A Change of Tone

The God who thundered from Sinai still speaks. His voice of warning can still be heard, even in the pages of the New Testament. For instance, in the previous chapter of Hebrews:

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

*“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
on the day of testing in the wilderness,
where your fathers put me to the test
and saw my works for forty years.
Therefore I was provoked with that generation,
and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart;
they have not known my ways.’
As I swore in my wrath,
‘They shall not enter my rest.’”*

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. (3:7-12)

Though this is a quotation from Psalm 95, written centuries before the book of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit still says this (λέγει τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον). God is still provoked by unbelief and evil. He still has wrath for those who refuse to trust Him, for those who put Him to the test. He still rumbles from Sinai against evil, unbelieving hearts that fall away from the living God (Heb 3:12). Nothing has changed in terms of God’s disposition towards faithless sinners, even those who outwardly belong to His covenant people, the church.

But now God speaks from another mountain to those who believe, not with the thunder and lightning of Sinai, but with the welcoming voice of Zion. And what comes from Zion are not ominous words of warning, but comforting words of grace. “Come near to My throne of grace with confidence! Receive mercy and find grace to help in your time of need!” (Heb 4:16).

What accounts for such a change of tone? What has turned the warning and threat of death to anyone who came close into an invitation for His people to draw near? It is the same LORD who speaks both words; the unchanging God has not somehow evolved in His essential nature to become a kinder, gentler version of Himself, a sort of God 2.0 for the New Testament. No, something immense, something historic, something cosmic has taken place that has reconciled this God to believing sinners. As we will see this morning, that immense, historic, cosmic event was the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus the Son of God, who is our great high priest of the new and better covenant.

The structure of this passage is quite simple, and we will take it as it comes in the text. Let's read it first:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (4:14-16)

Two statements of truth are each followed by an exhortation. The first truth is that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God. *Therefore* (οὖν) let us hold fast our confession (4:14). The second truth is that our great high priest is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, for he was tempted in every respect as we are, yet was without sin (4:15). *Therefore* (οὖν) let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace (4:16a). And finally, to those who hold fast their confession and with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, there is a promise of mercy and grace to help in time of need (4:16b).

We Have a Great High Priest Who Has Passed through the Heavens

The first truth the author highlights is that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens. Access to the presence of God was strictly and severely limited for the people of Israel, a point made abundantly clear in the passage from Exodus 19 that I alluded to in the introduction. God repeatedly warned the people not to approach him lest His anger burst forth and they die. When the holiness of God meets the sin of man apart from the mediation of

Christ, the result is all-consuming wrath. Even the high priest, the one appointed by God to represent the people before God, was allowed into God's presence only once a year, on the Day of Atonement. Only then could the high priest pass within the veil and enter the inner sanctum, the holy of holies, the earthly throne room of God. And he could not remain there, for he was not holy.

But not Jesus. The supremacy of Jesus the Son of God, our great high priest, is displayed in the fact that He has "passed through the heavens," entering not merely into the earthly tabernacle made with hands, but ascending into the heavenly sanctuary, where He dwells permanently in the presence of God, interceding continually on our behalf. The author will expound upon this further in chapter nine, stating,

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent [tabernacle] (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. (9:11-12)

In the old covenant, the high priest performed two primary tasks on behalf of his people. First, he offered sacrifice on behalf of the people. The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23); thus, from the fall of man down to today, no one may draw near to God apart from the shedding of blood in atonement for sin (Lv 17:11; Heb 9:22). Then, only on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would take the blood of the sacrifice within the veil, within the holy of holies, and with it he would sprinkle the mercy seat, the throne of grace, thus making intercession for the people, reconciling God to man in the person of a mediator and through the blood of a sacrifice. But, as we mentioned before, and as the author of Hebrews makes clear in the coming chapters, the high priest of Israel could not stay in the presence of God, and therefore, such reconciliation did not last. Everything about the old covenant system was typological and temporary, just a shadow of the reality to come (10:1). The blood was but that of an animal, and could not atone for sin (10:1-4). The high priest was himself a sinner, and thus had to offer sacrifice for himself before he was qualified to offer sacrifice for the people (7:26-28). The high priest could not remain within the inner sanctum of the holy of holies, for he was a deficient mediator offering deficient blood.

Neither could he continue in his office, for he was mortal and thus prevented by death from continuing (7:23-25). But Jesus fulfills and perfects both functions. He was Himself perfect, righteous, without sin.

He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.
(7:27)

Jesus brought no sin within the throne of God, only spotless, divine righteousness. The sacrifice He offered was not that of bulls and goats, but His own body and blood.

And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. (10:9-14)

And when Christ ascended through the heavens, He entered into the heavenly tabernacle, and presented Himself before the very throne of God.

For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. (9:24-26)

And there he remains, by virtue of His perfect person, His perfect sacrifice, and His indestructible life.

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (7:23-25)

This is the grounds of the offer of mercy and grace offered to you this morning. You can receive mercy by virtue of the perfect sacrifice of Christ. You can receive grace to help in time of need by virtue of the endless intercession of Christ. We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God.

Therefore, Hold Fast Your Confession

Therefore, let us hold fast our confession.

Since [because] then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (4:14)

Why is the author urging us to hold fast our “confession,” a word which has specific reference to our words and our speech (ὁμολογίας – lit. “the same word”). Coming out of the last two chapters, this is not really the exhortation we might expect. We expect to find something like “let us hold fast our confidence” (3:6), or “let us hold fast our assurance” (3:14). Since it was unbelief that caused the Israelites to forfeit God’s promised rest (3:19), and since it is by faith that we may enter into His rest (4:3), what we expect to find is another exhortation to believe, to hold fast our hope, our assurance, our confidence in Christ. But that is not what we find. We find an exhortation to hold fast our “confession.”

But there is a reason why the author uses the word “confession.” The outward confession of our faith in Jesus the Son of God is the necessary fruit of genuine saving faith. The connection between the faith that saves and the outward profession of that faith is so close that, in New Testament terms, you cannot have the one without the other; in fact, one is often used as shorthand for the other. Let me take you to two passages that bear this out.

The first is found in Romans 10:9-10.

... because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. (Rom 10:9-10)

Paul is not advocating for a two-step process of conversion, as if first someone believes in his heart and is justified, and then confesses with his mouth and is saved. Rather, Paul is using faith and confession as virtual synonyms, just as he is using “justified” and “saved” synonymously. The two phrases of v. 10 are in parallel with one another. Just as there is no essential difference in the way Paul is using justification and salvation, so there is no essential difference in the way he is using belief and confession. One ancient theologian described confession as “faith present in the mouth.”¹

The second passage is Matthew 10:32-33.

“So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. (Mt 10:32-33)

Jesus is clear that those who openly and unashamedly confess Christ will be saved, and those who deny Christ in the face of persecution, trial, tribulation (which is the context of Matthew 10), will be condemned. But we know from throughout the New Testament, not to mention the immediately preceding passage in Hebrews 4:1-13, that it is faith alone that saves. Faith is the dividing line between those who enter God’s rest and receive His blessing, and those who perish in the wilderness under God’s curse. But faith is not a static thing. Faith confesses; faith perseveres; faith holds fast (κρατῶμεν). So the only way to rightly interpret Jesus’ words in Matthew 10 is to conclude that confession is faith spoken out, faith professed, the “faith of the mouth,” and that there is such a close connection between faith and confession that you simply cannot have one without the other. Faith without open confession, even in the face of persecution, *especially* in the face of persecution, is not true faith and will not save.

¹ Peter Lombard, as cited in Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 171.

And that is precisely why the author is urging us to “hold fast our confession.” The congregation to which he wrote had suffered persecution. It wasn’t terribly severe – they had suffered public reproach, some of them had their property seized (10:33-34), perhaps even a few had been imprisoned (13:4) – and they had endured such hostilities joyfully. But they had “not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood” (12:4), which means that they had not yet been tested as severely as they soon would be. In fact, if our educated guess as to the date of this letter (early 60s AD) and the location of the church (Rome) are correct, they were about to enter into the fires of persecution such as the church had never before been seen. Nero was about to unleash the full fury of his insanity upon the Roman church. Some of them would even be doused in oil and burned as human torches lighting the streets of Rome; others would be clothed in animals skins and thrown to the wild beasts. *That* is why the author urges them repeatedly to hold fast their confession. *That* is why he concludes his letter with this charge:

So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. (13:12-14)

He is saying that Rome will not last; its glory will fade; its empire will fall. But we are looking for a city with everlasting foundations, a city whose glory shines forever. We are looking for a kingdom that cannot be shaken and will never fall. And only those who hold fast their confession of Christ, bearing His reproach, will enter that city and inherit that kingdom. Faith alone saves; but a faith that does not confess is not saving faith. This is an exhortation to persevere in our faith through trials and tribulations, through temptations and persecutions, through whatever suffering God in His wise and holy providence sends upon us.

And what is the grounds of this exhortation? Why must we hold fast our confession? Because we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God. There is no other sacrifice sufficient to atone for sins once for all. There is no other high priest worthy to enter into God’s presence... *and stay there forever*. There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven by which men must be saved (Acts 4:12). And He saves only those who trust Him with a faith that confesses Him openly, that walks before Him faithfully, and that perseveres to the very end.

We Have a Sinless and Sympathetic High Priest

In v. 15, the author states a second foundational gospel truth.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (4:15)

Here is the picture the author is painting. As the Son of God, Jesus is the great high priest who alone is qualified to pass through the heavens, enter within the veil, and sit down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. And as the Son of Man, who is familiar with our weaknesses, who knows the human condition because of His incarnation, who knows what it is to be tempted because of his own temptations, Jesus is a merciful and sympathetic high priest, who from His position at the right hand of the Father invites us to come within the veil, as it were, to receive mercy to cover all our sins, and grace to help us endure through all our temptations. It is His full deity and His full humanity, combined with his perfect sacrifice and perfect intercession, that makes Jesus our great high priest.

Verse 15 raises an important question. How can the author possibly state that Jesus was “tempted in all things as we are?” How could Jesus possibly know the temptations unique to marriage or to parenting, the temptations unique to women, or the temptations unique to those living in a modern, technological age?² How could Jesus know what it is like to be tempted to cheat on your Algebra test, or to access pornography on your iPhone? How could He know what it is like to be tempted to despair when the market crashes and your 401(k) loses half its value, or when your job gets outsourced, or your company gets sold, and you’re handed a pink slip? And since Jesus never experienced such things, how can He sympathize with you in your temptation?

Jesus was tempted in every respect that we are because all temptation, no matter what form it takes, no matter what age in which it occurs, has at its root a battle between the will of the flesh and the will of God. At the core of every temptation is the question of whether I will indulge the desire of my flesh, or submit my will to the will of God expressed in His Word? And Jesus knows all about that battle. He knows it by starved, exhausted, agonized, “sweat drops of blood” experience. He knows it from the wilderness, where Satan came to Him after forty days

² Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 95.

of fasting and tempted Him to turn the stones into bread that He may satisfy His hunger, rather than satisfying the hunger of His soul on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Have you ever felt the intense, gnawing hunger of forty days without food? Neither have I. This was a battle between the will of the flesh, which longed for bread, and the will of God, a battle with which we are familiar, but to a degree we cannot possibly fathom.

Jesus knows temptation from the garden, where His flesh raged against the impending ordeal He was called to face. In the garden, Jesus contemplated all that lay ahead of Him – the beating, the scourging, the humiliation, the crown of thorns, the cross, the nails... And infinitely worse than the excruciating pain that awaited Him was the knowledge of what was about to take place in the atonement. The innocent, holy Son of God, who had enjoyed eternal and unbroken fellowship with the Father, would assume in His own soul all of the vile wickedness of the sins of the world (2 Cor 5:21), He would be utterly forsaken by His Father as He absorbed in Himself the unveiled fury of God's wrath and judgment against sin. As Jesus prayed in the garden, He contemplated the hell He was about to endure, and His flesh cried out for escape. *"My Father, remove this cup from me!"* And in that moment, Jesus endured a battle between the flesh and the will of God to a degree that you and I will never know. But He overcame. He won victory over temptation, saying, *"Yet not My will, but Yours be done."*

I do not have to have experienced the exact temptation you have to know by painful experience the essence of temptation, and to be able to sympathize with you. But as you and I are beset by sinful natures that give in all too easily to the lusts of our heart, we never experience the full weight of temptation. There is a weight at which we eventually yield. But not Jesus, who, having no sin nature in Himself withstood the full weight of temptation from the very hand of Satan himself, and yet did not yield. There is a guy at gym who is often there when I work out. When he benches, he warms up at 315. *Warms up*. I've never seen him max out, but I have no doubt that he is at 405 or higher. He's a beast. If I were to get under a 315-pound bench, I would fail. When he gets under 315, he benches it 10 times with ease. Let me ask you a question... who has felt more force pushing down on him – that guy, or me? I can tell you, it's not me. I have no idea what it feels like to have 315 pounds pushing down on me; I've never attempted anything close. But he does. Even though he succeeds, he knows more resistance than I've ever known. Now take that principle and apply it to Christ. You do not have to succumb to the temptation in order to understand its force. And Jesus has withstood a force of temptation we cannot possibly

fathom. So can he sympathize with me in my temptation to anger, or greed, or pride, or lust? Whether considering temptation in its essence (all temptation stems from a choice of “not Thy will, but My will be done” or “not My will, but Thy will be done”), or temptation in its full force (having never succumbed, Jesus is more familiar with temptation than we will ever be), Jesus is familiar with our temptations and is sympathetic to our weakness.

Therefore, Let Us With Confidence Draw Near to the Throne of Grace

That is why we are exhorted to draw near to the throne of grace. We need mercy for our sins, and we need grace for our temptations. And Jesus stands ready and willing to supply both.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (4:15-16)

Because we have a sinless yet sympathetic high priest, we should not fear to come to the throne of grace, for He will see to it that we receive mercy and grace in our time of need.

Jesus knows what it is to be tempted, and He overcame. Jesus has offered the perfect sacrifice, offering His body unto death in atonement for our sins, and He overcame. And now He sits, risen, ascended, exalted to the right hand of the Father. And this saving work of our great high priest has made possible our entrance into the holy place as well. In chapter ten, the author of Hebrews will restate this same passage, complete with the same two truths, the same two exhortations, and the same two promises:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast our confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. (10:19-22)

You don't have to stay away from the mountain; you don't have to hide from God in the trees of the garden. You can draw near; you will not die. The people of Israel could not approach God, for they did not have a great high priest. But we do. And that is why you can come near; indeed, you *must*. You can come to God, who sits upon His throne of grace. You do not need to come trembling, fearful, terrified that fire will burst forth from the arc of the covenant and consume you in His fierce wrath. No, you can come with absolute confidence, not in yourself, but in Jesus Christ the great high priest who has taken the precious, all-sufficient blood of the new covenant, and has sprinkled it upon the mercy seat, making it absolutely safe for you to enter. His blood has turned the throne of God's judgment into the throne of God's grace.

Mercy and Grace from the Throne of God

And the promise to those who hold fast their confession and draw near to the throne of grace is that they will receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. I do not know the condition of every soul present this morning, but I am quite certain that everyone here stands in need of one or both of these blessings. But before I address you, let me speak to a third group represented among us. Some of you came here in a state of enmity with God, in rebellion against Him, resisting His sovereign rule over your life, living by your own authority, according to your own standard of right and wrong, good and evil. Your lips may confess that Jesus is Lord, but your life betrays that confession and your heart is far from Him. You need mercy, and you don't even realize it. To you, I give you no offer of mercy, only a warning, of which the book of Hebrews is full.

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (10:26-31)

To those of you whose hearts are hard, whose ears are deaf, whose eyes are blind, know this morning that you must approach God as He thunders from Sinai with the terrors of the law. If you have no interest in Christ, then you will face God without a mediator, and you will be consumed in the fire of His wrath. You have been warned.

But to the rest of us, let me extend to you the sweet invitation of Zion. If you find yourself this morning burdened by sin, weighed down by guilt, covered in the cloak of shame, come. Draw near to the throne of grace, which is sprinkled in the atoning blood of Christ, beside which sits our great high priest to intercede for you and to plead His blood and righteousness on your behalf. Do not stay away, for you are invited to draw near. And there is mercy – deep, flowing, abundant mercy. Christ’s blood answers the just demands of the law that pronounces the curse of God’s wrath against your sin; Christ’s righteousness satisfies the righteous requirement of the law that you might inherit the everlasting blessing. Listen, sinner... I don’t care who you are, what you’ve done, or how unworthy and ashamed you feel. If you will come humbly and empty-handed to Christ, not bringing your own merits, your own righteousness, or your own right to right to rule your life, you are welcome at the throne of grace. Draw near, and receive the mercy that Christ offers you freely by grace through faith.

If you find yourself this morning overwhelmed by the trials and temptations you face, feeling as though you might drown beneath the relentless waves of sin and suffering that wash over you again and again, draw near to the throne of grace, beside which sits your great high priest who is more than able and more than willing to sympathize with you in your weakness, in your grief, in your temptation, in your suffering. He will give you the grace you need, you have only to ask and believe. Remember that you have a sympathetic high priest who knows what it is to be under the tremendous pressure of suffering and to want with every fiber of his being to say, “Not Thy will, but My will be done,” yet overcame so as to say, “Not My will, but Thy will be done.” He is ready to give you grace to do the same in your present suffering, in your present trial, in your present temptation, in your present wilderness, in your present Gethsemane. So draw near, and find grace to help in time of need.

Don’t Approach the Wrong Mountain

What an astounding change of tone from the smoke and rumbles of Sinai. Everything about that scene screamed, “Do not dare approach Me! Do not dare come near!” Even in the

construction of the tabernacle, and eventually the temple, everything was designed to separate the people from the presence of their God – thick veils, thick walls, terrible threats. That was Sinai, the mountain of the old covenant.

But Sinai is *not* your mountain.

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. (12:18-24)

These two mountains – Sinai of the old covenant, Zion of the new covenant; Sinai, where the law thunders forth, or Zion, where the gospel calls out – these two mountains represent two ways of approach to God. Make sure you do not approach Him at the wrong mountain. Make sure you do not approach Him by means of the law. Make sure you do not approach Him by means of your works, even your good works, for “all of our righteousness is as filthy rags” (Is 64:6). If you approach God with your own works in hand, you will hear nothing but thunder, darkness, gloom, the trumpet of war, and a blazing fire that consumes God’s adversaries.

*We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. (Is 64:6)*

We are so depraved to the core of our beings that our works can do nothing but call forth the consuming wrath of God upon us. So what do we do?

Nothing either great or small –
Nothing, sinner, no;
Jesus did it, did it all,
Long, long ago.

When He, from His lofty throne,
Stooped to do and die,
Everything was fully done;
Hearken to His cry.

Weary, working, burdened one,
Wherefore toil you so?
Cease your doing; all was done
Long, long ago.

Till to Jesus' work you cling
By a simple faith
“Doing” is a deadly thing –
“Doing” ends in death.

Cast your deadly “doing” down –
Down at Jesus' feet;
Stand in Him, in Him alone,
Gloriously complete.³

That is the call of this text. The Lord still thunders from Sinai whenever His law is read, warning against the sin of unbelief and its fruit, disobedience. But this morning, I plead with you to hear the call of Zion, bidding us to enter by faith that we might find rest and peace, mercy and grace, and fellowship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. Hold fast your confession, beloved, for the cowardly and unbelieving will not enter into God's rest (Rv 21:8). Only those who believe and confess will enter therein. And draw near to the throne of grace, for your great high priest, Jesus the Son of God, has passed through the heavens, entered within the veil, sprinkled the blood of the covenant, and prepared the way for you to enter. And now He sits at the right hand of God, full of sympathy, full of mercy, full of grace, interceding for you, willing and able to help you in your time of need. So come to Him with your sin; He has mercy and pardon. Come to Him with your temptation; He has grace and strength to endure and overcome. Come to the throne of grace. Come with confidence, for you shall not die. In fact, you will die if you do not come near. So come... and live.

³ James Proctor (1826-1860), “Nothing Either Great or Small.”