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There's one show on PBS that I really enjoy watching. It's called "Rick Steves Europe". He's documented his travels all over Europe. If you want to see Europe without buying a plane ticket, that's the show to watch. I've watched episodes about Italy, Germany, Paris, Normandy... oh, the list goes on and on. He's a great ambassador for travel, encouraging everyone to get out there and see the world. His tag line that he ends each show with is "keep on traveling."

Today we sit back and listen another episode of God's series in the life of a believer. And, to use Rick Steves tagline, God is encouraging us to "**KEEP ON TRAVELING.**" Just remember where you started and remember where you're going.

So, on to this week's episode found in the book to the Hebrews.

Part One: Remember where you started

This letter of encouragement was written to Jewish Christians. They were struggling in their faith. People who didn't believe in God were persecuting them in many ways. Their Jewish friends were giving them a hard time because they followed Christ. Life as a Christian wasn't easy, and they were tempted to go back to the Jewish religion. That's what they grew up with. That's what their friends believed. It would be so easy to slide back into that kind of life, where you just followed rules. It was familiar. It was comfortable. It would be a mistake.

Do you really want to go back to the rules and regulations of the Old Testament? The picture that the writer presents to them today is one with which they were very familiar. Remember Mt. Sinai? ***"You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; ¹⁹ to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, ²⁰ because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." ²¹ The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."***

Mount Sinai is a perfect picture of God's justice. He laid out His demand that people be perfect. He showed His holiness and people were terrified. They knew they had no chance at all of keeping God's commands perfectly. They knew that God was a just God and would punish anyone who sinned against Him. No wonder Mt. Sinai was a place of fire, of darkness, gloom and storm. It is the place where every human being starts on their spiritual journey, a place where God lays out for us the facts of life. The soul that sins shall surely die. It is the place of rules and regulations, emphasizing this depressing fact.

What is true of those Old Testament believers is also true of us. Mount Sinai is where we start on our spiritual journey. God uses His Law to wake us up to the fact that we are sinners. We deserve His anger and judgment, for there is no one that can live a perfect life. Every single one of us breaks God's commands every single day. On Mount Sinai the message is clear. If you want to earn your way into heaven, you've got to be perfect. Follow every command. Never do anything that God commands us not to do. If we live our lives under the threat of the Law, life isn't so good, is it? Am I doing the right thing? Am I doing enough to please God and avert His punishment for sin? Kinda depressing, if you ask me, living our lives where we started, on Mt. Sinai.

Are you ever tempted to stay on the mountain of rules and regulations? In a way, it seems easier. God, just tell me how often I have to go to church. Tell me how often I have to forgive my brother. Tell me what to do, what to think, what to say. Give me the rules and then I don't have to think about it. Just do it. Oh, and if you could give me the minimum I have to do to be saved, I'd appreciate that, too. Life would be so much easier for me that way. Don't think. Just do. Or, so we're tempted to believe.

Remember your grade school days? The teacher told you exactly what to do and when to do it. Homework was detailed for you and notes were sent home to your parents. You knew exactly what was expected of you. Life was easy then, wasn't it? But then you went to high school and eventually to college. In college, you were given the syllabus and expected to schedule yourself. You had to decide what to do and when to do it. It took a lot more out of you than grade school, and maybe you had a moment or two when you thought "I wish I was back in grade school. Life was so much easier then." Grade school was where you started, but not where you wanted to stay, no matter how easy it seemed to you.

Remember where you started, but don't stay there. Living under the Law of God alone leads to one of two results. The first one is despair. If we focus just on our sins and God's justice, we can so easily give

up. There's no way I can do what God wants me to do, so why not give up? The second result is self-righteousness. You decide which rules to follow and ignore the rest. You focus on just a few commands, ignore the sins of thought and word, and convince yourself that you're doing enough to earn your way to heaven. But it doesn't work that way. If we want to stay on Mount Sinai and base our hope for heaven on what we do, we will fail.

Listen to the Lord. He has moved us to another mountain. ²² ***But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.***

Part Two: Remember where you're heading

It's always a good thing to know where you are going, isn't it? It keeps us focused on the end result. It makes it easier to endure the bad times in life if we know why we're doing what we're doing. Jeff and Susan were a married couple living in New York City. They both had high paying jobs, and were saving furiously so that they could move back home to the U.P. They endured crowded subways, rude people, endless concrete and way too much overtime for a few years. Why? Because they knew where they were going. Back home to the U.P., a place where you could enjoy nature, slow down and actually get to know your neighbors and spend time with your family. It's easier to endure the tough times when you know what's waiting for you in the future.

Here's a pleasant thought for us in this sinful, hurtful world. We already have a home in heaven. Did you catch that? ***"You have come to Mount Zion."*** Jesus has purchased a plot for you in paradise by dying for your sins. He has earned a spot for you by living a perfect life, the one demanded by God on Mount Sinai. He has given you a saving faith by the working of the Holy Spirit. He has made it possible for you to travel from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion, and is the one giving you the strength to do so.

Just look at what's waiting for us there. ***"You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."*** Can you picture that in your mind? Can you hear the angels praising God with songs of joy? Do you see yourself as perfect because of the sprinkled blood of Jesus? This is God's new covenant. Whoever believes in Jesus, has eternal life! Whoever believes in Jesus has this glorious place as their eternally permanent address! That's home. That's where God is moving us to.

We know where we are going, but we're still traveling. Right now we're traveling through the valley of the shadow of death - this sinful world. It's as if we've got one foot on Mount Sinai and one foot on Mount Zion. We need reassurance and encouragement as we travel, don't we? We endure the fire of persecution, the darkness and gloom of hurtful words and actions from others. We endure the storms of anger and hatred between individuals, nations and political parties. We even endure troubles in our own hearts. As we try to live in a way that pleases God, our sinful nature and the pressures of traveling through this sinful world make it difficult to attend worship, or hold regular devotions with our families, or to let go of grudges. Arguments over the littlest of things seem to pop up with the regularity of a summer storm. Oh, we're traveling alright. And it's not always a pleasant trip.

Would you take some time today to reflect on your travel as a believer in Jesus? He's placed you on this path from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion, and wants you to complete your journey. Look ahead and continue to travel. Don't be like "Baltimore Jack" who traveled with no clear purpose in mind. "Baltimore Jack" is a nickname given to Adam Tarlin, a man who basically made his home on the Appalachian trail. He had a wife and daughter, a job and a house to live in. He gave it all up to walk the Appalachian trail for 21 years. Why? Even he didn't know. He died in 2016 and left nothing behind. You might say he lived a purposeless life, because he didn't know where he was going.

You know where you're going. ***"You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."*** You're headed home.

Keep on traveling.

AMEN