

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

As we survey the mountain range of the Lord's glory, which mountain do you think is mentioned the most in the Bible? Calvary or Golgotha, the mountain where Jesus was crucified was arguably the most important mountain of all, yet it is only mentioned four times in Scripture. The Mount of Olives is where Jesus often went with His disciples. That is where He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane and where He ascended into heaven. The Mount of Olives is only mentioned eleven times in the Bible. Mount Sinai was very important as the place where God gave the ten commandments? Searching both names, Sinai and Horeb it is mentioned in 55 verses. But the mountain that is mentioned by far the most in the Bible is one that we perhaps think about the least. It is Mt. Zion. The mountain that Jerusalem is built on. Mt. Zion is mentioned in 160 verses of Scripture, nearly three times more than Mt. Sinai. That's not because it is such an impressive mountain. We wouldn't even call it a mountain. It's just a little hill. But it has great significance in Scripture.

King David made Jerusalem on Mt. Zion the Capital city of all Israel and built his palace there to rule the nation. Later, his son Solomon built the Temple of the LORD on the eastern peak of Mount Zion. The Temple dominated the skyline capturing your attention with its gold glistening in the sun.

Do you remember how that location was chosen for the building of the Temple? It has an interesting history recorded in 1 Chron. 24. David was an old man and he called Joab, the commander of his army and said to him, "Now go throughout all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and count the people, that I may know the number of the people." vs. 2. Joab knew this was not a good idea. It was a sign that David was taking pride in the size of his army and trusting more in that than trusting in the Lord. So Joab said to David, "May the Lord make His people a hundred times more than they are. But, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? Why then does my lord require this thing? Why should he be a cause of guilt in Israel?" But David insisted so Joab did as he was commanded. He came back and reported over one and a half million men who drew the sword. And that didn't include the tribe of Levi or Benjamin. Then we read, "God was displeased with this thing; therefore He struck Israel. So David said to God, 'I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing; but now, I pray, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.'" vs. 7-8 God gave David a choice, "either three years of famine, or three months to be defeated by your foes with the sword of your enemies overtaking you, or else for three days the sword of the Lord—the plague in the land, with the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the territory of Israel." vs. 12

David said, "I am in great distress. Please let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are very great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man." vs. 13 "So the Lord sent a plague upon Israel, and seventy thousand men of Israel fell. And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it. As he was destroying, the Lord looked and relented of the disaster, and said to the angel who was destroying, 'It is enough; now restrain your hand.'" And the angel of the Lord stood by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite." vs. 14-15. David actually saw the Angel of the Lord standing above the threshing floor and

he repented to God of his sin.

Then God told David to build an altar there on the threshing floor or Ornan. So David bought the threshing floor from Ornan and built an altar and offered Burnt offerings and Peace offerings and called on the Lord. Then we read, “and He [God] answered him from heaven by fire on the altar of burnt offering.” Just like Elijah on Mt. Carmel, God sent fire from heaven to consume his offering. At that point “the Lord commanded the angel, and he returned his sword to its sheath.” In other words the plague ended as quickly as it started. That is when David said, “Here shall be the house of the LORD God and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel.” 22:1

A few years later Solomon built the Temple of the Lord on that spot on the top of Mount Zion. The Temple was the place where all of Israel came to offer sacrifices to the LORD. That is where God was present with His people and where they could come to receive mercy and forgiveness.

Now in Scripture, Mt. Zion has become synonymous with God’s Church. It is where He dwells with His people in Grace and rules over them with His mercy. Mt. Zion is where we now can dwell with God and He with us. It is no longer any specific place or physical location. After Peter confessed that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus said, “You are Peter and on this rock I will build My Church and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it.” Matt. 16:18 The rock upon which Jesus builds His Church is the solid rock of his confession that Jesus is the Christ. Mt. Zion is where His Word is taught and believed. So today we consider

Mount Zion: Where the LORD Builds His Church.”

Our text describes for us just how glorious Mount Zion is. Let us rise as God describes our Mt. Zion in Hebrews 12:22-24.

“22 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.”

“You HAVE come to Mount Zion.” You don’t have to travel halfway around the world. It would be wonderful to travel to the Holy Land and see the place where Jesus was born, where He taught and worked miracles and where He died. But that is not how we come to Mt. Zion. We are on the top of Mt. Zion here this morning and the view is glorious. Just take in the view and let your heart sing.

“You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” God is clearly not talking about the physical Mt. Zion in the land of Israel where the city of Jerusalem is built. We have come to the “city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” We are here where God dwells among His people. Jesus promised us, “Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Matt. 18:20 By faith in Christ we are already citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. This is the true Mt. Zion which the Old Testament city and mountain only foreshadowed.

What else do we see from this mountain? God says we have come to “an innumerable

company of angels.” All the holy Angels dwell in the heavenly Jerusalem. But remember God says you HAVE come to this Mount Zion, this heavenly Jerusalem. That means that all His Holy angels are with us here. They are all around us, watching over us to protect us.

Then in verse 23 God adds, you have come “to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven.” This is what we call the Holy Christian Church. The Bible speaks of it in other ways. It is the Body of Christ. We are all different parts of His body that work together to carry out the wishes of our Head. We are also called the Bride of Christ, who is anxiously waiting for our Bridegroom to come for our wedding day. Our text calls it the “Church of the firstborn.” I used to think that was a reference to Jesus. Paul calls Him “the firstborn over all creation.” Col. 1:15 and “the firstborn from the dead.” Col. 1:18. But here it is plural, it refers to every believer. We are all adopted into God’s family but He gives us all the rights and privileges of the Firstborn. Therefore we are “registered in heaven.” Our names are already written in God’s book. You are registered as a firstborn child of God and your inheritance awaits you.

You have also come “to God the Judge of all.” That might sound like a frightening thing to come to God the judge of all mankind. But remember, He is the One who has invited us here. He is the One who has made it possible for us to live with God on Mt. Zion. We are already living with the One who will judge all people, so we don’t need to fear the final day of judgment.

The next phrase truly gives us a beautiful view from Mt. Zion. We have come “to the spirits of just men made perfect.” The just men are not people who are honest and fair, they are “the righteous,” those who have been justified and cleansed of all their sins through faith in Christ for His forgiveness. They are made perfect and holy by faith, but that’s not what this is saying. The word translated “made perfect” is actually the same word Jesus spoke from the cross. *Tetelestai* – it is Finished. Jesus had finished, completed the work He came to do. In our text the word is passive, they have been made complete or perfect. It could be translated you have come to the righteous who have been brought to their final goal. These are the saints in heaven. The fact that it is their spirits that we come to emphasizes that. Here on Mt. Zion we are united together with all the saints who have passed away and their spirits are with God in heaven. We are united here with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We are one with King David, Elijah, Jeremiah, Martin Luther. Here in God’s Church we are united with our parents and grandparents who died in the faith.

Then we get to the reason we can be here on Mt. Zion together with all believers past and present. It is because we have come “to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.” You remember when Cain killed his brother Abel, God came to him and said, “The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength.” Gen. 4:10-12. Abel’s blood cried out to God to avenge his death by punishing Cain. As a result the ground would not produce its abundance for him. But the Blood of Jesus “speaks better

things than Abel's." Jesus' blood doesn't cry out for vengeance on those who crucified Him, otherwise we would all be condemned. No Jesus' blood calls for God's mercy and forgiveness. As we sing in Hymn 158, "*Glory be to Jesus, who in bitter pains, poured for me the lifeblood from His sacred veins.*" Then verse 4 says, "*Abel's blood for vengeance pleaded to the skies; but the blood of Jesus for our pardon cries.*"

Jesus' blood is also described as "the blood of sprinkling." This book of Hebrews explains the significance of that in chapter 9. 19 "For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, 20 saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you." 21 Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. 22 And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission." "11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, ... 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death." We have been sprinkled with the blood of Christ by faith in Him and cleansed of our sin so that we can live with God on Mt. Zion.

Ancient Israel had to travel to Mt. Zion to worship three times a year. It was a joyful time, but then they left and went home. We live here with God and all the angels on Mt. Zion. We live together with all believers of the past and the present. We are all one in Christ. Even if there are only two or three of us together physically, we are united with all the rest. That is why Mt. Zion is mentioned so much in Scripture, it is precious to God to dwell with His people. And it should be truly precious to us to dwell with Him.

Remember Jesus promise, "Upon this rock I will build my Church and he gates of Hades shall NOT prevail against it." Or as we read in preparation for worship this morning in Psalm 125:1-2 "Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore."

Amen