

The Goal of Faith

by A.B. Simpson

The goal of faith is to be under the mercy and grace of God, and to be established in the things which cannot be shaken.

Scripture: Hebrews 12:18

Topics: "Faith", "Grace"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the transformative journey of faith, contrasting the fear and judgment of the Old Testament with the grace and mercy found in the New Covenant through Jesus Christ. He highlights that believers have come to Mount Sion, the city of the living God, and are part of a heavenly assembly, enjoying the privileges of being children of God. Simpson encourages the congregation to embrace their identity in Christ, recognizing the importance of faith and the grace that sustains them. He warns against neglecting the call of the Gospel, reminding them of the responsibility that comes with such grace. Ultimately, he points to the eternal hope and unshakeable kingdom that faith leads us to.

Transcript

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness and darkness, and tempest,

"And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more:

"(For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart:

"And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)

"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

"To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.

"And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:18-24).

We have seen in our former studies in the epistle of Hebrews, the Captain of our salvation bringing many sons unto glory along the pathway of faith; and now in this sublime passage we have presented to us the final goal to which He is bringing them. The figure is a strong antithesis, presenting in striking contrast the difference between the Old Testament and the New. The whole epistle has been richly laden with Old Testament allusions and quotations. The writer has taken us back to Abel and Enoch, Noah and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Melchisedek and Joseph, Moses and Joshua, Gideon and Barak, Samuel and David, the Old Testament prophets, and the ancient High Priest. The Tabernacle in the Wilderness and its imposing ritual, and indeed all the ordinances and types of the ancient Scriptures, have been laid under contribution to unfold the richness of Jesus Christ in whom they are all fulfilled. Now he gathers up the substance of all these ancient types and figures in one magnificent contrast between the Law and the Gospel, the Old Testament and the New.

He had already told us in the close of the eleventh chapter that God had "provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." In the present passage he shows us by this striking antithesis how much better the thing that He has provided is, and how lofty and sublime are the immunities and privileges to which we have been introduced by the Gospel and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. HE TELLS US THAT WE ARE "NOT COME UNTO THE MOUNT THAT MIGHT BE TOUCHED, AND THAT BURNED WITH FIRE, NOR UNTO BLACKNESS, AND DARKNESS, AND TEMPEST"

All this is descriptive of the terrors of the ancient Law. This was the dispensation of judgment. We are not under it now. We have been delivered from it, and there is "now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Not by the sanctions of fear and the threatenings of judgment, but by the gentle constraint of love are we held to our sacred obligations. Let us not get under the Law or back to bondage, but "stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free." We are under the law of faith and not of works, and the law of faith is the law of love, and the reign of grace.

II. "WE ARE COME UNTO MOUNT SION"

Mount Sion is the antithesis of Mount Sinai. It is the mount of mercy as the other was of judgment. Therefore the ark of God was set up on Mount Sion and the symbol of God's covenant and mercy was established there and it became significant of divine grace. The ark and the tabernacle were symbols of God's mercy and types of Jesus Christ, who came to fulfill the Law and deliver us from its curse and condemnation, therefore Mount Sion stands for the grace of God in contrast with the terrors of Sinai. Let us ever remember this and dwell in the light of its mercy and so "keep ourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

III. WE ARE COME UNTO "THE CITY OF THE LIVING GOD, THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM"

The earthly Jerusalem was the center of God's earthly people; the heavenly Jerusalem is the home of God's spiritual people. It is a city which He is preparing out of spiritual realities, and of which His holy people are the materials and elements which He is building together, and which shall one day be seen descending from heaven as a vision of transcendent glory, more radiant than the rainbow, more precious than all the gems of earth. We are come to this city now. We are members of its glorious society. "Our citizenship is in heaven," and our names are written in its civic records. Faith claims our high position even here,

And hope foredates the joyful day

When these old skies shall cease to sunder

The one dear love-linked family.

IV. WE ARE COME "TO AN INNUMERABLE COMPANY OF ANGELS"

These celestial beings are also inhabitants of the city of God and attendants upon the heirs of salvation. Already we are compassed about with them as ministering spirits, and although we see them not yet, doubtless their interposing love often rescues us from hidden dangers and snares. Undoubtedly they are the spectators of our earthly course, and are watching with intensest interest our conflicts and our victories. We are to them object lessons of the government of God and the wonders of redeeming love, and they are doubtless our protectors and guardians and often the unseen messengers of answered prayer and divine blessing. Let us realize the honor of our glorious associations and walk worthy of such high companionship.

V. WE ARE COME "TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND CHURCH OF THE FIRSTBORN, WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN HEAVEN"

Literally this means, "the first born ones." This description includes the whole company of the redeemed, the great assembly of the saints of God from every age and clime. They are all called firstborn ones; that is, they share the inheritance of the firstborn, and they stand in exactly the same position as Christ, the only begotten Son of God, and the Elder Brother in the divine family. Our inheritance as God's children is not that of a younger son, but is the same as the Elder Brother's. Jesus, the firstborn, shares with us all His privileges, and reminds us that God is "his Father and our Father; his God and our God." In what sense are we come to this general assembly and heavenly Church? Our names are written there. We are recognized already as if we also were there. We are counted one with the ransomed saints above.

One family we dwell in Him,

One Church above, beneath;

Though now divided by the stream,

The narrow stream of death.

One army of the living God

At His command we bow,

Part of the host have passed the flood,

And part are crossing now.

VI. WE ARE COME TO "GOD THE JUDGE OF ALL"

The idea of this reference seems to be that through the redemption of Jesus Christ we have been brought back to the Father, and have been restored to our original place as His children. "Christ also hath once suffered for sins," we are told, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." We were "without God in the world"; we were strangers and enemies to God; we were far away from God; but Christ has brought us home, and now we are back in the Father's house. He came from God to seek us and to bring

us the message of His love. He went back to God as our High Priest to present His offering and sacrifice for our salvation, and now He has taken us back to God with Him, and so once more it is true that God is our home and our dwelling place, and we are restored to that place for which He interceded in His last prayer by Kidron's brook, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." Union with God in the blessed beatific fellowship of His eternal love; this is the goal of faith and the consummation of redemption.

VII. WE ARE COME "TO THE SPIRITS OF JUST MEN MADE PERFECT"

This is almost synonymous with the previous statement that we are come "to the general assembly and church of the firstborn." But it seems to refer to the individual spirits of the glorified, rather than to the collective body of the whole general assembly and Church above. Perhaps it suggests the precious hope and consoling thought that we are standing in close fellowship with the glorified dead whom we have known and loved on earth. Is there not back of the lie of Spiritualism a truth somewhere, perhaps but dimly revealed, but not forbidden to our clinging, longing hearts, that those who have left us are not, perhaps, so far away as we sometimes deem? And although they cannot speak to us and we must not attempt by the arts of sorcery to open communications with the world beyond through them, yet through Him in whose presence they dwell, and to whom we may freely come in prayer, they have a very close connection with our earthly life. It may be that they are conversant with our struggles, joys, and triumphs. Perhaps they are permitted in some sense to minister to us still, and are undoubtedly allowed to keep alive the love that still binds our hearts together, and are waiting with joyful expectation for the time when we shall meet them again at His glorious coming. How much there may be hidden behind those gentle words of Christ, "If it were not so, I would have told you."

VIII. WE ARE COME "TO JESUS THE MEDIATOR OF THE NEW COVENANT"

Perhaps this was inserted here to keep us from thinking for a moment that our beloved dead could in any sense be mediators between us and God. There is but one Mediator, and that is Jesus Christ. Through Him alone we have access to the eternal world, and through Him all our interests and relationships are maintained. We are come to Him, but in coming to Him He brings us to all that He represents on the heaven side. He brings us to the Father and to the family. He secures for us the help and strength we need from moment to moment. He keeps open to us all the resources of divine sufficiency. He presents our prayers before the throne and sends the answer from above. He represents us continually to the Father, and through Him we are accepted every moment even as He. And by and by, should His public advent be delayed, He will be the Mediator through whom our spirit will pass from the earthly to the eternal world and we be translated, in the arms of His love, into that heavenly city and society, for He says: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

IX. WE ARE COME "TO THE BLOOD OF SPRINKLING, THAT SPEAKETH BETTER THINGS THAN THAT OF ABEL"

The blood of sprinkling refers to the constant provision of Christ's Priesthood for our acceptance and full salvation. The blood shed was the figure of Christ's life offered to atone for our sins, but the blood sprinkled refers to the constant application of Christ's grace to our souls in sanctifying and keeping us from the power of sin. It speaketh better things than that of Abel inasmuch as Abel's blood cried out for judgment against his murderer, but Christ's blood cries out for pardon even for His murderers and

enemies. Perhaps also the better things may refer to the fact that while Abel's blood availed for justification, Christ's blood avails for sanctification, cleansing us both from the guilt and power of sin.

X. "SEE THAT YE REFUSE NOT HIM THAT SPEAKETH"

On account of these high and glorious dignities and distinctions that belong to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and our standing in Him, there arises a corresponding responsibility on our part, much greater than even under the ancient Law. Therefore the apostle adds, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven." Let us not imagine that because the spirit of the Gospel is more beneficent than that of the Law, our transgression against its grace and love will be suffered with impunity. The very gentleness of that grace will but aggravate our guilt and increase our punishment. He who can despise such mercy and trifle with such love can only look for the severest punishment. The God of the New Testament not less than the Old is a consuming fire. Only the fire seeks now to consume the sin rather than the sinner, but if the sinner refuses to part with the sin it must consume him too.

XI. "WHOSE VOICE THEN SHOOK THE EARTH"

But the goal of faith will not be fully reached until the coming of that more glorious day of which this passage speaks in the concluding verses when Christ shall come in all His glorious power. "Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." That is to say, in a little while this dispensation is to reach its close in a grand upheaval and convulsion of both earth and heaven, and in a tragedy more tremendous than Mount Sinai ever saw. Then everything that is shakeable shall be shaken to pieces and disappear with the dissolving world. And so God is testing us now that He may shake out of us the things that are transient and temporal, and that we may be established in the things which cannot be shaken and which shall remain. This is the meaning of all the tests and trials of life. Christ the Author and Finisher of our faith is searching and proving our faith, and bringing to light every weakness and defect so that we may be established, and settled and prepared for the testing day. Whatever is subject to change, let it change and pass away. Let us not fear the fire. Let us not shrink from the sifting and shaking process. Let us be thankful that we have One who loves us with such inexorable love that He will not let us go into judgment unprepared, but is giving us armor proved and tried before that testing day. Let us welcome the ordeal and echo the prayer:

Burn on, O fire of God, burn on,

Till all my dross is burned away,

Burn up the dregs of self and sin,

Prepare me for the testing day.

XII. "WHEREFORE WE, RECEIVING A KINGDOM WHICH CANNOT BE MOVED, LET US HAVE GRACE, WHEREBY WE MAY SERVE GOD ACCEPTABLY WITH REVERENCE AND GODLY FEAR"

Let faith claim her kingdom in all its fullness and glory, and let her also claim the grace and power to be worthy of it. It is all grace from first to last, and the grace that prepared the kingdom can prepare us for it and keep us true to it until the final consummation. Glory be to God, and thanks and praise for the riches

of grace and the possibilities of faith!

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