

Not Shaken, Not Stirred *Hebrews 12:18-29*

Introduction

In 1859 Charles Dickens published a historical novel that became one of the best-selling novels of all time. Set in Paris and London before and during the French Revolution, the novel tells the story of French Doctor Manette, his 18 year imprisonment in the Bastille and his release to live in London with his daughter Lucie whom he had never met.

If you know this novel, that description probably tipped you off as to its title. If not, the opening line of that novel might be enough to trigger your memory:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.

The novel: *A Tale of Two Cities*.

In our Hebrews text today, the writer tells us another tale. Not of two cities, but of two mountains.

- One mountain played an important part in the history of the Jewish people (the Hebrews to whom the book was written)
- The other mountain plays an important part in the present and future of these same people – and for every person who walks by faith with Jesus.

MOUNTAIN #1: MT. SINAI

Mt. Sinai was a terrifying memory for the children of Israel. In our Hebrews text the writer describes it like this:

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm... (Hebrews 12:18)

The ancestors of the readers of this text encountered that first mountain on their release from Egypt.

- You may recall they were captives in Egypt for 430 years.
- After crossing the Red Sea and escaping the army of the Pharaoh, they walked for three months until they arrived at the base of this mountain.
- God spoke to them from this mountain, and gave the Law which shaped their lives and their theology to this very day.

But this mountain was scary.

- Even though God made it clear to them that He was their God and they were His children, this mountain was not a happy place.

They were not allowed to come near it:

Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not approach the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the



mountain is to be put to death. They are to be stoned or shot with arrows...
(Exodus 19:12-13)

I think of all those times my dad made it clear that I was not to touch anything in the china department when mom was shopping. He made that possibility sound terrifying enough. Imagine if he would have said "If you touch anything you will be stoned or shot with arrows!!!" Wow.

Because of that, the people grew to fear God.

We will die if we hear the voice of the Lord our God ... (Deuteronomy 5:25)

Even Moses was afraid:

The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." (Hebrews 12:21)

The children of Israel had no doubts that their God was powerful and awesome. They had seen the ten plagues in Egypt. They watched the waters part in the Red Sea. They saw the army of Pharaoh swallowed up when the sea closed. But that was all they saw.

Mt. Sinai taught them three things about their God:

1. He was awesome and powerful
 - Not even the greatest army on earth could stand against Him
2. He was unapproachable
 - Except for an exemption granted to Moses, no one could come near to God, and those who tried ... died
3. He was someone to be feared.
 - Not a hint of love was part of that experience. Just fear.

Many people today carry around that same sense of God. You will hear them say "He is a God of judgment and vengeance."

But the writer of Hebrews moves us away from Mt. Sinai and brings us to the base of the second mountain.

MOUNTAIN #2: MOUNT ZION

Mt. Sinai is a reminder of everything that was true under the old covenant (the Law); Mt. Zion points you to what those who believe in Jesus can expect under the new covenant (the Gospel).

Look at verse 22:

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. (Hebrews 12:22)

Mount Zion is a literal mountain in the sense that it is the nickname of the heavenly city where God dwells. Because of that, Zion or Mount Zion is one of the most loved city names in the Bible, and it has become a name for countless churches. Just here in Springfield we have:

- Zion Lutheran Church (1800 Broadway)
- Mt. Zion Baptist Church (1171 S. Yellow Springs)
- Zion Hill Baptist Church (1010 Dibert Avenue)

In my former denomination, the conference (synod) that I served was composed of three smaller conferences that merged. Each one of the three had a Zion and a Mount Zion, so my territory had six churches with that name.

There are a few churches with "Sinai" in the name scattered across the country – one in Dayton, one in Columbus – but the Zions outnumber them by far. Why? Zion evokes positive thoughts about our God, not scary ones.

Three times this passage uses the phrase "You have come."

- Verse 22a:

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. (Hebrews 12:22a)

- Verse 22b - 23:

You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. (Hebrews 12:22b-23)

- Verse 23-24:

You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:23-24)

Mount Zion tells us of a city where

- God Himself welcomes us to our new heavenly home
- To a place where the angels are in constant celebration because of the names – the names of all who believe – are written in the Book of Life
- To a place made possible because the blood shed by Jesus brought a new covenant
 - Not one built on fear and distance
 - But built on love and relationship

A tale of two mountains. Sinai and Zion. And our life of faith is a journey between the two. From Sinai to Zion. That would be a great title for your autobiography.

I love catchy titles of autobiographies.

- Nelson Mandela: *Long Walk to Freedom*
- Broadway Joe Namath: *I Can't Wait Until Tomorrow Cause I Get Better Looking Every Day*
- Gene Simmons: *Kiss and Make Up*

And yours. From Sinai to Zion.

But there is a lot of life that happens between Sinai and Zion. This isn't only a tale of two mountains. It's the tale of the transformation that happens in between those two mountains.

When the children of Israel were at Mt. Sinai, the earth shook with the majesty and power of God. And the shaking isn't over. The text tells us:

At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." (Hebrews 12:26)

This new round of shaking isn't designed to scare us away. No, it will make us holy and righteous. God is going to shake away all the junk that isn't pleasing to Him – in our world and in our lives individually. Verse 27 makes that clear:

The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. (Hebrews 12:27)

Jerry Lee Lewis used to sing "There's a whole lotta shakin' going on." I don't think he was talking about Hebrews 12, but he was stating a theological fact nonetheless.

- Look around at our world. There's a whole lotta shakin' going on.
- If you are faithfully trying to walk with Jesus, you might see it too. There's a whole lotta shakin' going on.

APPLICATION

If we didn't know what God was doing, we just might be afraid. Like the children of Israel at Mt. Sinai, the unclear activity of God just might cause to run and hide.

But we do know what's going on. God is moving us toward Mt. Zion. He is moving our world closer to the end of time. There's a whole lotta shakin' going on, and God is behind it.

And we don't need to fear it. While the rest of the world wrings its hands and cries out in fear, we recall the truth of the Gospel and we respond with the writer of this epistle:

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. (Hebrews 12:27)

I can't close this sermon without at least one reference to James Bond 007. As you know, he preferred his martinis "shaken, not stirred."

- Sorry James, but when we get to heaven, there will be no shaking and no stirring.

We are on our way to Mt. Zion where God's kingdom will never be shaken.

Amen.