

Hebrews 12:18-24 “How Have We Changed because of Christ?” Pentecost 14 /21/2016

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Grace and peace are yours even when you don't feel it. They are yours in Christ, your Lord and Savior. Today we'll learn from Jewish picture language written in Hebrews 12:18-24 These are Your words heavenly Father so that we believe we are who you say we are. Your Word is truth!

Dear Christian Friends,

How do people view change? If change means lower expenses for gas or food, they will accept change. If change means improving health or wealth or family, they're happy for that. But, if change means losing what is important or adding something not good, they want nothing to do with it. As we look at our lives as Christians, what would we say regarding the spiritual changes?

How have we changed because of Christ?

If we focus on ourselves, the change is minimal. Like the Apostle Paul, we say, *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.”* (Romans 7:18) As Christians, we have good intentions to honor God and to stop doing sinful things. But our sinful nature fights us every step of the way. In church we gladly receive Christ's forgiveness, but have we forgiven others or do we harbor sinful thoughts against them? At times, we like to think that we are making progress against certain sins, but then we relapse or do worse sins. Due to our sinful pride we may think that because we keep certain laws that it makes us good in God's eyes. We need Isaiah's warning, *“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags....”* (Isaiah 64:6) This does not give us an excuse to sin. We should continually seek to be godly and stop sinning. Yet we can't depend on our good works to make us right with God.

The Christian Jews who received this letter understood that the Old Testament laws and promises were given so that when Jesus came they would gladly welcome Him and believe in Him. They had done so, but later they were tempted to return to Jewish laws to win God's favor or at least to compromise the truth of being saved by God's grace through faith in Christ alone!

The author to the Hebrews reminds us of the value of staying with Christ. Because of our sinfulness, we daily need God's promise that He forgives sinners and that those who humbly come to Him, He will never turn away. We need to call on His name during our times of struggle. God is there to help us, if we will only turn from our self-righteousness, look beyond ourselves, and trust God's Word.

God's message for us is to believe in how God views us in Christ The Jews used images to describe things. Psalm 23 doesn't just say “God cares for us.” It states: the Lord is our shepherd, leading us to green pastures and quiet waters; defending us with rod and staff. Psalms don't just say that God protects us. They state: God is our solid Rock in a flood when everything else is washing away or He is a fortress on a mountain for us when we feel attacked. Hebrews also used images of Mt Sinai and Mt Zion.

It states of Sinai. *“You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; 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”* (v.18-19) Even though Mt Sinai had the honor of being the place where God gave the law, it was a frightful place! It was covered with fire, dark clouds, lightning, violent winds, and a voice so loud that it shook the earth! Hebrews states that even Moses was afraid. Mt Sinai pictured people who wanted to be saved by the law. They serve God out of fear or guilt, but not in faith. When God gave His laws at Mt Sinai, He called the people of Israel into a unique relationship

with Him to prepare all nations for the coming Savior. Mt Sinai was to help God's people realize their need for this Savior. Through His law God still calls us to repent, to be sorry for our sins and turn away from them. That is the purpose of the law. But we can't stop there like the unbelieving Jews wanted to do.

First, it states, "*You have come to Mount Zion.*" (v.22) Mt Zion was in Jerusalem. It was a symbol for the place where God would live in peace with His people. The Jews returned there each year for blessing. For us believers, he is saying, we have peace with God through Jesus as our Savior. Today, we would call Mt. Zion the Holy Christian Church, where our gracious God comes to us with His Word and showers His forgiveness on us in Christ.

Second, Hebrews states that we have come "*to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.*" (v.22) Mt. Sinai was in the desert. The Israelites left there as quickly as possible. Without Christ, a place worse than Mt. Sinai would have been our end. Hell is a place of darkness and unquenchable fire for evil! Though that is what we deserve as sinners, through Christ our citizenship is in heaven. Although we haven't arrived, God sees us connected to Christ who is there for us.

The third point, "*You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly.*" (v.22) Angels were at Mt. Sinai. God used them to show His mighty power and judgment. Before having Christ as our Savior, the only angels waiting for us were demons. At our death, they would have come to separate us from God forever. Instead through Christ our Savior, God's angels are sent to protect us by their mighty power. They rejoiced the day we were brought to faith in Christ. They are charged to escort our souls home to heaven the moment we die. Going from the hands of demons to angels is a dramatic change for good!

Fourth, you have come "*to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.*" (v.23) We are firstborn heirs! It was not by God's law that we have such blessings. Without Christ as our Savior, we were spiritual orphans and homeless. Now in Christ, God sees us as His children. When God looks at us as we live by faith in Jesus, all He sees is Jesus! God credits to us all that Christ has done: giving His perfect life to pay for our sins. Our change is like night to day with Christ!

Fifth, "*you have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect.*" (v.23) At Mt Sinai God frightened everyone. Anyone touching the mountain was to die. The judgment of death loomed over rebellious people now and forever in hell. Yet, Hebrews states that it is good that God is our judge. In the name of Christ, our Judge is our heavenly Father. We call on His name in faith and God will defend us from evil and separate us from it in heaven.

Sixth, you have come "*to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*" (v.24) Cain murdered his brother Abel. The Lord said that Abel's blood cried out so that God cursed Cain. But we have Jesus' blood crying out for us. He took the curse for our sins on Himself and shed His blood to win our forgiveness. His death put into effect a new covenant with God, based on Christ's sacrifice once for all!

What a dramatic change for us! We were sinners, but in Christ God saw us as sinless. We were enemies of God, but now we are His children. We were on our way to eternal suffering, but now we are heirs of heaven. We earned none of these blessings by our good works. They are God's gracious gift in Christ alone. This is a change we can never give up. This is a change that is worth more to us than life itself. Trust God's words of promise in Christ for an eternal change and let the world know this good news. Amen.