

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 17 July 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **We're Marching to Zion**

### **Hebrews 12:18-24**

This morning we sang the hymn “When the Roll Is Called up Yonder.” This hymn was written in the late 1800’s by a man named **James Black**, who was very active in the ministry of his church. I’d like to take a moment to tell the story behind the writing of this song. Black himself wrote the following account of how he came up with the idea for this song. He said:

“While [I was] a teacher in the Sunday School...I one day met a girl, 14 years old, poorly clad, and a child of a drunkard. She accepted my invitation to attend the Sunday School... One evening at a ....meeting, when members answered the roll call by repeating Scripture texts, she failed to respond.”

As Black soon found out, the girl was absent because she had become sick with pneumonia; and, sadly, she died ten days later. In his memoir, Black recorded what he said to the Sunday School attendees that evening, after he had found out that the girl was absent. He said:

“I spoke of what a sad thing it would be when our names are called from the Lamb’s Book of Life, if one of us should be absent. When I reached my home, ...I was deeply troubled. Then the words in the first stanza came to me in full. In fifteen minutes more, I had composed the other two verses.”

To this day, Christians around the world are still singing those famous words: “When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall be no more, and the morning breaks eternal bright and fair; when the saved of earth shall gather over on the other shore, and the roll is called up yonder, I’ll be there!” Someday, all who are “in Christ” (both living and dead) will hear that “trumpet of the Lord,” and will be resurrected, and will meet the Lord in the air! The “trumpet call” of Christ is the hope of every New Testament believer!

Now, as we will see this morning, there was a “trumpet call” for *Old Testament* believers, as well! However, *that* trumpet call had a very different purpose. This morning, we will be learning about these **two trumpet calls** (the Old Testament trumpet call, and the New Testament trumpet call); and we will also learn about **the two “mountains”** that are associated with these two trumpet calls. As we study these trumpets and these mountains, we will need to remember the *Jewish audience* to whom Paul wrote this letter. The Jews to whom Paul was writing were *professing* Christians; but not all of them were *true* Christians. Throughout the letter, Paul has repeatedly warned those who were *not* truly saved, and who were on the verge of abandoning Christianity, and going back to Judaism, that they needed to repent and believe on Jesus while they still had the chance. But now, **Paul is addressing the true Christians again**. As the letter is drawing to a close, Paul is summing up everything that he has told them thus far: and he is giving Christians the “bottom line.” The “bottom line” is that they needed to make a clean break from the *Old Testament* system, and fully embrace the New Testament.

Now, in order to explain *why* they needed to make a clean break from the Old Testament system, Paul gives his readers a powerful illustration. He compares the **Old Covenant** (which brought *curses* upon sinners) to **Mount Sinai**; and he compares the **New Covenant** (which brings *grace* to sinners) to **Mount**

**Zion.** He reminded his Jewish brethren that they needed to be patient, and to keep moving forward toward the heavenly Mount Zion, and to keep “looking unto Jesus,” because there is nothing to which they could turn back! (As Peter said, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”*) Christians should be listening for the “*last trump*,” and looking to the *heavenly Mount Zion*, and waiting for *Jesus*. The Old Testament is *not* our hope. Mount Sinai is not our Hope. Moses is not our hope. Rather, Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant, is our Hope! The title of this message is *“We’re Marching to Zion.”*

**Read Hebrews 12:18-21.**

In these verses, Paul describes two trumpet calls—the *first* trumpet, and the *last* trumpet.

### **I. The *first* trumpet call**

In these verses, Paul reminds His Jewish brethren of the day, 1,400 years earlier, when God appeared to the children of Israel on Mount Sinai, and delivered the Law to the children of Israel, through Moses. The Hebrews knew all about that day. The story been burned into their minds from earliest childhood. The account had been rehearsed to them again and again. It is important that we, too, have a vivid mental picture of that awesome, fearful day, because it will help us to understand the point that Paul is making. Let’s turn to **Exodus 19**.

**Read Exodus 19:9-25 and 20:18-21.**

Try to imagine this, folks! The whole top of Mount Sinai was burning with a supernatural fire. There was fierce lightning; there were loud, fierce crashes of thunder; and there was a great earthquake. The whole sky was black with smoke; and there was a great “tempest,” or storm. Then came the most frightening thing of all—the *voice of God Himself!* And notice what this voice resembled. In **Exodus 19:19**, we are told that the voice of God sounded like a very loud, eerie *trumpet sound*, growing louder and louder!

Think of that! The “trump of God” is not an actual trumpet: it is the voice of God Himself! Throughout the Bible, God’s voice is compared to a trumpet blast. For example, when Jesus appeared to John on the isle of Patmos, and spoke to him, John reports that he heard *“a great voice, as of a trumpet.”* A short while later, John *“heard as it were a trumpet talking”* with him, and saying, *“Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.”* Each time Jesus spoke to John, His voice sounded like a trumpet. Why? Because *Jesus is God!*

With this in mind, let’s return to that day when God appeared on Mount Sinai. What did the people *do* when they heard God’s trumpet-like voice? Did they *assemble* around the mountain? That’s what they *should* have done. In **Numbers 10:2**, God commanded Moses to make two silver trumpets to be blown in the camp whenever any assembly was to be called. The trumpet call meant, “Assemble!” Yet, when the children of Israel heard the Trump of God on Mount Sinai, they didn’t *assemble* around the mountain: *they retreated* from it! They were afraid; and they had good reason to be afraid, because they were in the presence of the holy God. In fact, God Himself allowed them to assemble only so close. God commanded Moses to erect barriers around the base of the mountain. No man or beast was allowed to pass those barriers, on pain of death. The people didn’t have any trouble obeying *that* command, because they were completely freaked out. Not only did they not cross that barrier, but they

*retreated* far back from it! Even *Moses* was quaking with fear as he beheld the manifestations of God's presence on Mount Sinai!

The children of Israel had good reason to be fearful. It wasn't merely the awesome physical display of fire, lightning, and tempest that struck them with fear: they were struck with the realisation of the *holiness of God!* God was illustrating to them that they, on account of their sin, could not even approach Him!

Now, why did the LORD put on this fearful display? Did He want them to despair of even *trying* to keep His Law? Did He want them to view the Law as something so frightening, that they wanted nothing to do with it? No! The point of the Law was, first of all, to reveal God's will for mankind (to show us how He expects us to live). Secondly, the point of the Law was to teach us that the penalty for sin is death. Thirdly, the point of the Law was to teach us that since we *cannot* keep God's Law perfectly, we therefore need God's grace and mercy. In short, the purpose of the Law was to point Israel to their coming Saviour, Jesus Christ!

**Read Galatians 3:13, 19-24.**

Do you see why Paul reminded the Hebrew Christians of that awesome, fearful day when God appeared on Mount Sinai? Paul's point is this: "If the persecution that you are going through is causing you to think of returning to Judaism, you'd better think again! There is nothing to which you can return! The reason why God made that frightful appearance on Mount Sinai was to make you realise your sinfulness, and your need of a Saviour! **Just as no one was able to set foot on Mount Sinai without dying, so no one is able to earn salvation by keeping the Law without perishing eternally.** You *cannot* keep the Law. The Law *condemns* you, and *curses* you! You must embrace Jesus as your Substitute. He paid your death penalty for you! He is the only Man who is able to ascend that mountain, as your Representative, and plead to the Father on your behalf! You who have truly trusted Jesus as your Saviour are already saved: so *don't ever look back to the Law as your means of salvation!*"

For the Jewish people, the issue was very clear-cut. On the one hand, there was the empty shell of Judaism, which rejected Jesus, and taught that salvation is by our good works, and keeping of the Law. On the other hand, there is the Lord Jesus Christ, who offers salvation through *His grace and mercy alone*. False professors could not abide in the Christian camp very long, because works-salvation and grace-salvation cannot mix. You must choose one or the other. You must choose whether to trust in your own good works, or to trust in Christ alone, and His grace.

Today, there are *hundreds* of false "Christian" religions, which offer many different brands of works-based salvation. Many people are confused and bewildered as they look around at all these different "salvation plans." Yet, despite all the confusion that Satan has created, Paul's message to Christians is just as clear to us today as it was to Christians who lived in the first century. The message is: "*Do not look back to a works-based salvation!*" If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ alone to save you, then do not allow doubts to enter your mind about how your salvation is kept. Your salvation is kept the same way it was given in the first place—by the saving grace and power of Christ alone! **Second Timothy 1:12** says, "***For I know whom I have believed, and persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.***"

### Read 1 Peter 1:3-5.

For the people to whom Paul was writing this letter, there were two options--Judaism, or Christianity; and those who had never truly been saved were seriously considering going back to Judaism. You know what, though? You don't have to consider converting to Judaism to be guilty of "looking back to Sinai." When a Christian begins to think, "Surely I must continue to do good works in order to stay saved," then he is looking back to Sinai. He is forgetting that Christ paid for his salvation in full. Christian, if you couldn't set foot on Mount Sinai on the day you were saved, how could you do so now?

Perhaps you have *never* stopped trying to climb Mount Sinai. Perhaps you have *always* been trying to keep the Law in order to be saved, even though you *profess* that you are trusting in Christ. If that be the case, then you are still lost, and without Christ. Salvation is *not* through "Christ plus your good works." It is through Christ alone! You must let go of your attempts to keep the Law, and ask Him to save you today!

Now, in Paul's illustration, there are *two* "trumpets"—the first trumpet (at Mount Sinai), and the last trumpet (at Mount Zion). I don't think it a coincidence that God commanded for Moses to make *two* trumpets....of *silver*. Let's look at that Scripture.

### Read Numbers 10:1-2.

Throughout Scripture, God required a minimum of two witnesses for anything to be established. It is also well-understood, throughout Scripture, that silver is a symbol of *redemption*. It would seem, then, that in the first "trumpet call" at Sinai, God was establishing a *testimony* concerning the *redemption* that He provides. At Sinai, God's testimony was, "***The soul that sinneth, it shall die.***" When the first trump of God sounded at Sinai, God's was telling us, "***Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.***" God made this pronouncement in **Deuteronomy 27:26**; and Paul reminds us of this pronouncement in **Galatians 3**.

### Read Galatians 3:10.

No one can be saved until he first understands that his sin has earned him *death*, that that he therefore *needs to be redeemed*! Though God *expects* us to keep the Law, the reality is that we *can't* keep the Law, because we are sinners! The Law condemns every one of us.

With this in mind, let's examine the "mountain" to which we *should* be looking, and the "trumpet call" that will signal God's people to assemble there!

## II. The last trumpet call

Let us now read the rest of our passage from **Hebrews 12**.

### Read Hebrews 12:22-24.

The “Mount Zion” that Paul is talking about in these verses is not the physical Mount Zion here on earth: rather, it is the *New Jerusalem*—the city of Heaven, where God dwells.

**Revelation chapters 21 and 22** describe that beautiful city in just enough detail to fill our hearts with wonder. **However, the important question is: “How can a person be admitted into that city?”**

To answer that question, let’s take a closer look at **verse 22**. When Paul says, “***But ye are come unto mount Sion,***” he is using the Greek perfect indicative tense. What does that mean? It means that this is a *past* action, which has a *continuing effect in the present*. In other words, Paul is saying, “You have *already* come to Mount Zion, and you are *still* at Mount Zion!”

Christian, this is your position in Christ! As far as God is concerned, you are as good as assembled in the heavenly Mount Zion already! How’s *that* for eternal security? **Philippians 3:20** says, “***For our conversation [or, our “citizenship”] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.***” If you are saved, you are *already* a citizen of Heaven, as surely as if you were already there! In **Ephesians 2:4-6**, we are told that Christians are already sitting “***together in heavenly places in Christ.***” In God’s eyes, we are already as good as there!

This is a blessed truth, is it not? Yet, Paul isn’t done yet. There’s more. Paul now gives us a list of those who are assembled at Mount Zion. Let’s see who’s on this list! (**Read Hebrews 12:22-24 again.**)

First, Paul says that “***an innumerable company of angels***” is assembled in Mount Zion. At this very moment, Heaven is filled with the righteous spirits whom the Bible calls “angels” (or “ministers”). An untold number of angels is on *earth* right now, helping and protecting God’s people, and doing God’s bidding; and an untold multitude is in Heaven, serving and praising the Lord, in His presence. However, someday, when earth’s history is completed, *all* the angels will be assembled in Mount Zion, and gathered around the throne.

Secondly, Paul says that “***the general assembly and church of the firstborn***” is assembled in Heaven. Paul isn’t talking about some huge “universal church,” made up of all believers in earth and Heaven. When the Lord talks about “the church,” He is speaking of the local assembly; and the “local assembly” is located on *earth*, not in Heaven. *This* assembly right here in this room is “the church of the living God.” Good News Baptist Church in Mullingar is “the church of the living God.” Gospel Baptist Church in Lucan is the “church of the living God.” Every true, Gospel-preaching church is “the church of the living God” in its locale.

Yet, if the church is located on earth, and not in Heaven, then why does Paul call it “***the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven***”? It’s simple: Paul says that they are “***written***” in Heaven. The saints in Christ’s churches are not physically in Heaven yet; but their *names* are on the “roll call” in Heaven, just as surely as if they were there in the flesh!

**Read Luke 10:20.**

Now, who else is on this list of people (or things) that are in Heaven? Paul says that “***The spirits of just men made perfect***” are in Heaven. Who are these people? These are saved people (from both the Old Testament and New Testament ages) who are already in Heaven.

By the way, you'll notice that it is their *spirits* that are in Heaven. At present, these saints have not yet been re-united with their *bodies*, because the Resurrection Day has not come yet. However, someday, these "*spirits of just men made perfect*" will be reunited with their resurrected bodies. **First Thessalonians 5:23** says, "*And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

With all this in mind, we now come to the most important citizen of Heaven. In fact, He is the King of Heaven! Paul says that "*God the Judge of all,*" and "*Jesus the mediator of the new covenant,*" are in Heaven. The heavenly Mount Zion is the place where God the Father sits upon His throne! It is the place where Jesus, the Mediator between God and man, sits upon that same throne! The whole reason that we are able to approach the Father's throne is that Jesus, our Mediator, has paid the debt for our sin, has risen from the grave, has ascended Mount Zion, and is now seated on the Father's throne! Christ came down from Heaven, and became a member of the human race, so that He might die on the cross for our sins, and rise again to seal our resurrection, and our justification. Because Jesus has paid for our salvation in full, and is now seated on the very throne of God, we are able to approach that throne without fear, because we know that we are accepted with Him!

Now, there is one more thing that Paul lists as being in Heaven: namely, "*the blood of sprinkling.*" What does the "*blood of sprinkling*" mean? It means just what it sounds like it means! On the first day of the week, shortly after Christ's resurrection, Christ ascended to Heaven, and literally sprinkled some of His own blood upon the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant in Heaven (just as the Old Testament high priests sprinkled the blood of bulls and goats on the mercy seat of the earthly Ark). Christ's blood on that mercy seat in Heaven is the eternal token that our sins are paid for in full!

Now, look at what Paul says about Christ's blood. He contrasts Christ's blood to the blood of Abel. He says that the "*blood of sprinkling*" (Christ's blood) "*speaketh better things than that of Abel.*" What did *Abel's* blood say? And why does Christ's blood say "better" things than Abel's blood did? Let's go back to the book of **Genesis**, and find out.

### **Read Genesis 4:8-12.**

Do you see what the blood of Abel "said"? The blood of Abel "cried out" for vengeance! The blood of Abel cried for "cursing" upon the offender, Cain. In contrast, the blood of Jesus Christ cries for *mercy* upon the offenders. (That's us!) The blood of Jesus Christ cries for *forgiveness* to be bestowed upon all who will place their trust in Jesus Christ! **First John 1:7** says that "*the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*"

What can be better than this? Because Jesus Christ has shed His precious blood for us, and because we who are saved have placed our faith in His blood, we are, in God's eyes, already assembled at Mount Zion! Why, then, would we even *think* of looking back to Mount Sinai—that place where the Law pronounced a *curse* upon us all? Why would we even think of going back to the system that we laboured under before we were saved—the system of trying to get to God on our own merits? The God who *couldn't* be approached on *Mount Sinai* is available and approachable at *Mount Zion*, through the blood of Jesus Christ!

Now, there is one more question that remains. We've talked about Mount Sinai; and we've talked about the "trumpet" that was heard at Mount Sinai. We've also talked about Mount Zion. However, we haven't yet talked about the "*trumpet*" that is associated with Mount Zion. Is there a "trumpet voice" of God that calls people to Mount Zion? And if so, what does God testify in *that* trumpet call? And *when* will it be heard?

Well, the answer is: Yes, there *is* a second Trumpet Call of God! However, it hasn't happened yet. When will it happen? It will happen at the Rapture—the Resurrection Day, at the end of this church age! Let's look at a couple Scriptures.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 .**

On the Resurrection Day, there will be a great "*shout*" from the Lord Himself. The voice of the archangel, Michael, will be heard, as well. (Michael will probably be commanding the angels, who will be accompanying Christ from Heaven.) But notice what else Paul says. He says that the "*trump of God*" will also be heard. We've already seen that "the trump of God" is the voice of God Himself, which sounds like a trumpet. Whether this "trumpet voice of God" is the voice of God the Father, or of God the Son, it will, either way, be the voice of God. Let's look at one more Scripture about the "*trump of God.*"

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-57.**

There you have it, folks! The **first trump** called God's people to Mount Sinai, to receive the Law; and the Law promised cursing and death to those who would not keep it. However, someday, **the last trump** will call God's people to the heavenly Mount Zion, where they will receive the *riches of God's grace*, the resurrection of their bodies, and the completion of their salvation. By the way, if you think that the first trumpet was *bad*, you misunderstand its purpose. *Both* these trumpets are good! The *Law* is good, and just, and holy; but the problem is that we can't keep it. That is why we need God's grace. Both these trumpets, with their messages, are needed in order for us to receive salvation. The first trumpet, with all its curses, was needed in order for us *to see our need* of redemption through God's grace. The second trumpet will testify to God's grace, and the completion of our salvation!

By the way, the Scripture doesn't tell us exactly what words will be uttered by the trump of God on the Resurrection Day; but I believe that it will be the words that John heard when he heard a voice like a "trumpet" talking with him: "***Come up hither!***" When the Lord cries "***Come up hither,***" He will be testifying to His acceptance of His people—that He is now "receiving them unto Himself," just as He promised to do when He appears for us in the clouds. **What a wonderful day that will be!**

**Conclusion:** We've visited two "mountains" today. The first mountain is Mount Sinai—the mount of cursing. Have you been to *that* mountain? What I'm asking is, "Do you realise that you are a sinner, and that your sin has earned you eternal death in hell?" You must first realise that your sin has condemned you before you can realise that you need to be saved! Secondly, I would ask: "Have you been to Mount Zion?" Perhaps you realise that you have a sin problem, but you haven't yet gone to Jesus for salvation. If so, I urge you to run to Jesus today! He is the Mediator of the New Covenant; and He is seated in Heaven, where He is now calling to you. Run to Him, and rest your soul, for time and eternity, in his saving grace! **Don't try to climb Mount Sinai.** Don't try to get to Heaven by "being a good person."

You *can't* climb the mountain. If you do, you will die! You must place your faith in the Mediator between God and Man, Jesus Christ. He is the only one who was ever able to climb that mountain of God's holiness. Please put your complete trust in Him today! If you but ask in faith, He will receive you.

If you already have placed your faith in Christ, I pray that your soul will be drawn closer to Him today, as you think on the incredible riches of His grace! Let His grace transform you more into His image!