

Hebrews 12 Manuscript – Consider Him Who Endured

Slide 1 (Title Slide)

One of the most tragic realities in modern Christianity is that many do not truly understand the Old Testament. Too often, it gets neglected and treated as an optional preamble to the New Testament. However, this collection of books, written over centuries and centuries, informed not only Jewish belief and practice but also pointed to the coming Messiah. These scriptures provided the foundation from which Jesus taught and the Apostles drew extensively. One of the core problems, I think, is that we fail to see the Old Testament narrative as our story. The people seem so distant and different from us, the circumstances almost alien, and the stories and characters confusing.

We can, sadly, sometimes be a people with amnesia. An individual who can't access their memories changes; their personality and moods often aren't what they once were. Similarly, our biblical amnesia can mean that we start to change; our spiritual personality is off-center.

Slide 2 – Sandra Richter Quote

Sandra Richter, an Old Testament scholar, puts it this way when addressing the consequences of us not understanding this part of Scripture. “The first, and to me most heartbreaking, [problem] is that most Christians have not been taught that the Old Testament is their story.” This has the consequence that, “The Church does not know who she is, because she does not know who she was.”

I bring this up because this twelfth chapter of Hebrews contains some important, but often difficult, applications. If we don't understand where the author is coming from, we can misunderstand and misapply the principles this chapter gives us. So, I think it would be good to take stock of where we've come from. While we walk through Hebrews 12 together, please keep this in the back of your mind; you are in this story too.

Slide 3 – Hebrews Main Arguments

To make sure that we are grounded and ready for the applications this passage has in store for us, we need to do some review. Hebrews was originally written as a letter, potentially as a transcription of a sermon, to Jewish Christians in the middle of the 1st century. It was written primarily to show four things:

- Jesus is preeminent above all things
- Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises
- Jesus established a new and better covenant
- Offer a warning against falling away from Jesus

Slide 4 – Hebrews Main Arguments 2

Said a different way:

- Jesus is better than anything, because He is God
- Therefore, Jesus could fulfill all of God's promises
- Therefore, Jesus satisfied the old covenant and made a better one
- Therefore, we should cling to Jesus because He is our only hope

Remember how this letter opens. It starts by pointing to just how much better Jesus is.

Slide 5 – Heb 1:1-3a Passage

^{1:1}Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power.” (Heb 1:1-3a)

Ultimately, Jesus is better than everything else because He is God. He radiates God’s glory and is the exact imprint of His nature. The universe was created through Him and is upheld by Him.

The letter then goes on to unpack how Jesus is better than anything else the Hebrew people have encountered as the chosen people of God. We’re going to fly through this, but please refer back to Shaun’s sermons if you’d like to dive deeper into any of these.

Slide 6 – List of things Jesus is better than

According to the text, Jesus is better than:

- The prophets (1:1-3)
- The angels (1:4-14; 2:5-9)
- Moses (3:1-6)
- The Land of Promise and Joshua (4:1-8)
- The Sabbath Rest (4:8-13)
- The Levitical Priesthood (4:14-5:6; 7)
- The Old Covenant (8:1-13)
- The Tabernacle and Temple (9:1-10)
- The Sacrificial System (9:11-10:18)

That’s quite a list! And I want us to pause and recognize how revolutionary this was for the people of the time. This would be similar to somebody coming into our church and saying, “I’m better than Calvin or Luther. In fact, I’m greater than Paul, John, Matthew, and the rest of the apostles. I am better than a church service. Even more, I’m elevated above baptism and the Lord’s Supper.” I know Wyomingites can be a reserved bunch, but I’m pretty sure there would be a riot. When Jesus stepped into history, was born of a virgin, died a criminal’s death, and then rose in grand victory, He defied all 1st-century Jewish expectations of the Messiah and, indeed, the entire notion of what it meant to be God’s people.

But it goes even further! The author of Hebrews not only gives us this grand language about Jesus being really awesome (that’s a technical theological word, by the way), but also explains how Jesus fulfills God’s promises made in prophecy. No other New Testament book has a higher density of Old Testament quotations than Hebrews. The author constantly points back to the prophets who promised a Messiah to save both Israel and the world.

Slide 7 – Promises Jesus Fulfilled

We see that Jesus would:

- Become incarnate as a human (2:5-8)
- Be a priest outside of the Levitical priesthood (5:6)
- **Establish a new covenant (8:6-12)**
- Do away with the sacrificial system (10:5-7)

- Die on a cross (12:2)

These are just a few examples, but they get us to the heart of the matter. The author is trying to get his audience to see that Jesus is the one they've been waiting for, the one of promise. He lived the perfect and sinless life that they could not, and yet died the death that they deserved. Put in more personal terms, Jesus lived the perfect and sinless life that I cannot, and yet He died the death that I deserve.

This gave Him the ability to satisfy the Old Covenant on our behalf, pay our penalty, and then rise to new life, conquer death, and make a way for us to enter again into the presence of God. Hebrews tells us of this new covenant.

Slide 8 – Hebrews 8 Verses

⁶ But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. ⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

...

¹² For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,
and I will remember their sins no more."

¹³ In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. **(8:6-7, 12-13)**

Brothers and sisters, there could be no better news than this. Because of Jesus, our sins are no longer remembered, and we receive God's mercy. We no longer stand condemned by the Law, but have been restored to a relationship with the living God. Remember, this is the story of all God's people. Try as we might to live up to the Law, we cannot. But Jesus did. And then He ushered in a new covenant.

But we must be careful, however. The author also has warnings for us. You can hear this writer's pleading to his readers in the opening of the second chapter.

Slide 9- Hebrews 2 Verses

^{2:1} Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (Heb 2:1-4)

"Pay attention!" the author is shouting. Don't drift away! Look at what happened in Israel's past when they walked away from God and tried to forge their own path. Remember the golden calf. Remember the exile in Babylon. Jesus rose and spoke to us! Hear how many people testified about what they saw. Remember the miracles. We have a better covenant now! Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Consider what happened to those who ignored the old covenant. What will happen to us now if we neglect the better covenant? We still hear the author's plea nearly 2,000 years later. Don't let go. Whatever you do, don't let go of Jesus.

Slide 10 – Order of Through

You can write this progression of thought as a formula. Remember it; I promise it will be important later on.

Jesus is better → Jesus Fulfilled God's Promises → Jesus Established a New Covenant → Cling to Jesus

In light of all this, Hebrews turns to application. What does this look like? Rather than starting a list of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" commands, the text instead lists people who lived by faith. The ultimate response of the believer is to cling to Jesus in faith, which then leads to action. Look at the pattern in a sample of believers from chapter 11.

Slide 11 – Images of Hall of Faith

In faith, Abraham left his homeland and went to a land he didn't know. In faith, the people marched through the Red Sea. In faith, Rahab put her own life, and likely the lives of her family, at risk to protect the spies. As Scripture so often does, it uses a narrative, the story, to bring forth truth. However, we shouldn't just stop at the story. These narratives are more than things we read. They represent a reality that God is calling us into, a story we are expected to be a part of. Don't believe me? Look at our opening verse today.

Slide 12 – Heb 12:1

^{12:1} Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...
(Heb 12:1)

This verse points back to the preceding chapter. A simple Bible-reading trick is to stop every time you see the word "therefore" and ask yourself what that "therefore" is there for. In this case, it is referring back to the Old Testament believers who exemplified biblical faith. In chapter 11, the author invited us to consider individual believers. But notice the verbiage here. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. What is a cloud made of? Many, many, many droplets of water, right? You can't see the individual droplets, but they are there. In fact, one of those nice, fluffy white clouds that look like cotton balls can weigh a million pounds or more! Though the author starts with individuals, he zooms out toward the end of the chapter. We start by looking at a drop and then look at the whole cloud.

Slide 13 – Heb 11:32-34

³² And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. (Heb 11:32-34)

It is not one or two, or even a hundred believers who surround us. It is an uncountable multitude, as many as the grains of sand on the seashore and all of the nations; that was the promise to Abraham. It is not just the names we see in chapter 11, or even just those listed in the Bible, who bear witness. It is all those who have gone before us and all who are with us today. Think about those who came before you. Some may be family. Some may be friends. Some may have been or still are mentors to you. I was fortunate to hear hymns sung and prayers offered before I was born, thanks to some members of this multitude. As many of you know, there have been a lot of families with newborns in our congregation

recently, and even more are on the way! To me, one of the most incredible things about unborn children is that they can sense and hear what is going on in the world around them. Just like John the Baptist, your children get to experience Jesus, albeit in a different way. Because you brought them to church, they get to hear the songs being sung and the prayers offered. Fathers and mothers, you are doing important, loving, and noble work. Keep it up.

But I want everyone to pause and look around you now. You are standing in the cloud. Together we read of the giants of our faith, and together we are encouraged by their stories. We strive to live life well together and are encouraged by the witness of each believer alive today and those we remember. Christian, you are not alone. Brothers and sisters, you are not alone. You are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. This is your story.

Slide 14 – Heb 12:1

^{12:1} Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...
(Heb 12:1)

The author presses on. We aren't just meant to gaze at clouds. There is a race to run, and this isn't just any race. It's an endurance race. We had best be prepared, the author warns. Let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely. "Let us also," this is your story too, brother and sister. Notice that we aren't just supposed to lay aside every sin, but every weight.

What weighs you down? Think about the weight that Noah carried, mocked by all who saw him building. Think about Joseph, weighed down by being first sold by his own family and then falsely accused and imprisoned. Brother and sister, what is weighing you down? Is it past failure? Is it chasing that next promotion or that magic dollar amount in your 401k, never feeling like it's enough? Is it what others have said about you? There are weights that we carry, but we don't need to. Jesus welcomes us to lay them down.

There are other types of weights as well. Think about what you watch and what you read. Is what you consume making you feel burdened, tired, and angry? I want to pause on this one. Unfortunately, media today is frequently used to divide. So often, the news that fills the channels isn't news at all, just people talking about how great their side is and how evil the other side is. Think about what happens when we consume this stuff. Our blood boils, arguments happen more often, and maybe we turn to social media. You know what's funny about this? I don't think anybody has ever been convinced they were wrong because of a Facebook comment. Worse still, we can air out our grievances on secondary or even tertiary issues with other believers on these platforms. How does this make the Church and Jesus look to an unbelieving world? Does it build unity within the Church or destroy it?

We should all take stock of our lives. What are we setting our minds and our affections on? Scripture calls us not just to set aside sin that entangles, but to lay down the weights. Are the things that you are doing freeing you to run, or are they slowing you down?

We need to hear this, brothers and sisters. We are called to more than a minimum standard. This is for everyone, but especially for those of you who are younger; please hear this message. You are not meant to simply get by. You are meant to run. What you do with your life matters. Don't ask only if you are staying away from sin. Ask yourself if what you are doing is preparing you to run your race better. Look at

the lives of the believers we heard Shaun preach about last week. They didn't seek some minimum standards. Remember the passage: ³³Through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight (Heb 11:33,34).

Do the hard things and prepare yourself to run well. In the words of John Piper, "Don't waste your life!" You didn't earn your life; God gave it to you. If we have been bought by the blood of Christ, our lives are not ours to waste!

Don't just lay down the sin. Lay down the weights.

12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Slide 15 – Heb 12:2-4

² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. (Heb 12:1-4)

Slide 16 – Jesus is Better

Remember the structure that we laid out at the beginning. Jesus is the better everything. Well, guess what. Jesus is better at enduring than we are, and He proved it by the life he lived and his death on the cross. His pain was both real and difficult. We are told earlier in Hebrews that:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Heb 4:15)

Jesus lived as one of us. He loved and experienced loss. He laughed, and He wept. He witnessed the pain of having people close to Him die. He reached out and touched the sick. He was rejected and mocked. He knows what it is like to suffer. Christian, it is okay to hurt. Reach for Jesus. He will meet you there, because He has been in that place. There have been some really difficult things that some people here are walking through: medical diagnoses, loved ones sick, people we love passing away, anxiety, marriages that are strained, and much, much more.

This passage implores us to look to Jesus. In fact, He told His followers to come to Him. He is our great high priest, but he's also our comforter.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Mt 11:28)

When we look to Jesus, we see not only the one who founded our faith, but the one who perfected it. Brothers and sisters, we do not have to be strong enough. In fact, we can't be strong enough. That's why we need a Savior. He endured the cross. He despised the shame. Unfortunately, something gets lost in translation here. This word in Greek is καταφρονέω, and it means to think little of or nothing of. Because

of the joy set before Him, Jesus thought little or nothing of the cross in comparison. As was promised beforehand, Jesus went to a cross and was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. He had a promise to fulfill, and because of the joy set before Him, He despised the cross.

Slide 17 – Jesus is Better & Fulfilled Promises

Think about that for a second. The cross was one of the cruelest forms of torture and execution ever devised by depraved humanity. It was a symbol of oppression that the Roman government used not just to torture and kill, but also to humiliate. Yet Jesus, through what He did, took this symbol of evil, treated it as nothing, and now it has become the ultimate symbol of mercy, grace, love, good triumphing over evil, and forgiveness. Imagine now what the founder and perfecter of our faith can do with the weights you are carrying. Come to Jesus as you are and lay down your weights. The Savior has a race for you to run.

Slides 18 & 19 – Heb 12:3-11

^{12:3} Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.

⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”

⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Heb 12:3-11)

Hebrews tells us to look to Jesus so that we won't grow weary or fainthearted. Now, for those of you who have been around me a bit, know that I love endurance sports. One of the best strategies when you feel like quitting and throwing in the towel is to pick a marker and set it as your goal. This helps shift the focus away from the painful predicament you've put yourself in by choosing, for some crazy reason, to run a marathon or bike 100 miles. The author tells us to do the same thing. Jesus looked to the joy set before Him, not the cross. We consider Jesus, rather than our predicament. Set your eyes on Jesus and run. Even if it means shedding your own blood. Run the race.

Now, we all know that discipline isn't fun. We didn't really need Scripture to tell us this. Unfortunately, our modern culture, with its emphasis on comfort and feeling good, often treats discipline as bad. But look at the first part of this passage.

Slide 20 – Heb 3:6

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.

⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,

and chastises every son whom he receives.” (Heb 12:5b-6)

God disciplines the one He loves, and when He gives this discipline, it is because we are being treated as sons. Now, ladies, this does not preclude you. Don’t tune out and think this is only for the brothers in the house. The Greek word for son (υἱός), when used in the plural, can mean those who hold God in reverence and worship Him, male and female.

Unfortunately, some have a bad association with the word discipline because of how this word was used to justify abuse against them. I plead with you: if this applies to you, please try to approach this text the way it was written. I think it can help to view this in the context of the race that we have been talking about.

Slide 21 - Discipline

This Greek word does not mean something bad. Instead, it most often means the following:

- The whole training and education of children
- The training and care of the body
- Whatever in adults also cultivates the soul, esp. by correcting mistakes and curbing passions.
- Instruction which aims at increasing virtue
- Chastisement, chastening (we’ll get to this one in just a minute)

Consider an athlete. To become a better athlete, in whatever sport you choose, wouldn’t you agree that it takes discipline? That is, it takes cultivating and caring for the body. The coach’s job is to provide instruction to help the athlete improve. Doesn’t this make the passage take on a vastly different tone than we could otherwise interpret it? But also notice something what our culture has done to the concept of discipline. No longer is it something we seek, esteem in others, and strive to emulate. In some cases, the term is used to abuse others. On the opposite end of the spectrum, it is viewed as a violation of personal liberty. But a life of discipline and a willingness to be instructed, trained, and cultivated is what Scripture calls us to.

Slide 22 – Heb 12:7-11

⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Heb 12:7-11)

Notice what the text says here. Why do we endure? Is it to get material wealth? Is it to obtain political power? Is it to be comfortable? No, we endure for discipline. We endure because we are being trained. We are being prepared. God’s Spirit is conforming us to the image of Christ.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Rom 8:29)

God is telling us that if He didn’t discipline us, it would mean that we would not be His sons and daughters. He disciplines us for our good. The goal is for us to share in His holiness. As Paul put it in

Romans, we are being conformed to the image of Jesus. It takes training. Sometimes training can be tough. The Bible also uses the word discipline to mean chastisement. The best way to understand this word is to correct or train someone through trials or painful experiences with the loving goal of moral and spiritual improvement. God can, and does, take believers through difficult experiences in order to form them. Again, to fall back on the example of the race used earlier in the chapter, I'll use an illustration.

In high school, when I was running track and cross country, our team got in trouble for something. I have been trying to remember what it was, but I for the life of me can't. Our coach found out, because even when high schoolers think they're being sneaky, they are about as obvious as an elephant in a herd of sheep. Want to guess what happened during the next practice? We paid for our crimes by running my least favorite speed drill, 1000m repeats. And we ran 50% more than we were scheduled to. Then we had to go to class because we did speed workouts in the morning. Want to guess what we didn't do again? Whatever dumb thing it was that we had done. Our coach took us through a difficult experience with the loving goal of moral improvement.

Ultimately, all of this discipline has a goal. Remember what Jesus did. He endured the cross because of the joy set before Him. He didn't endure the cross to prove He could do it or just because He was supposed to. He looked at the goal, the joy set before Him. In light of that joy, He despised the cross; he thought little of it when comparing it to the joy set before Him. We also have something set before us.

Slide 23 – Heb 12:11

¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Heb 12:11)

As God trains us, we receive fruit. That fruit is righteousness. We become conformed to the image of the Son. Going through the hard things is worth it. Consider how difficult it was for Moses to know that the people could not enter the Promised Land yet after rejecting God. Consider the danger Rahab faced when she protected the spies in Jericho after hearing what God was doing. Think about her sadness about knowing what was about to happen to her city, yet knowing the right thing to do was to follow God. The hard things that God calls us into are worth it. Pain, even great pain, can be used by God if we will give it to Him in faith.

I want us to consider what people look like sometimes when they are disciplined. Shoulders hunched, eyes to the floor, maybe there are some grumbles. This is because discipline can feel painful in the moment. But the author calls us to keep our focus on Jesus and the righteousness cultivated by discipline. Our posture, our demeanor should be different. We have the Spirit of the Living God living within us. Just as Jesus set his eyes on Jerusalem and did not waver, even though his path led to the cross, so we too are called to stand tall, come whatever may.

Slide 24 – Heb 12:12-17

¹² Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. ¹⁴ Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; ¹⁶ that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single

meal. ¹⁷ For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. (Heb 12:12-17)

Think again about the running metaphor the author used. What happens when you run with drooping hands and weak knees? Not only will you be extremely inefficient, but you will also hurt yourself. Now carry this forward and apply it to our spiritual discipline. If I walk around all mopey, constantly thinking, “Oh, woe is me,” I won’t be very teachable, will I? I will walk through my Christian life with God desperately trying to teach me lessons that I refuse to learn. You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.

Slide 25 – River vs Path

But even more than that, we should make our paths straight. They shouldn’t meander. A river can meander. A person shouldn’t. We’ve all probably been there. We wake up; we don’t have much of an aim for what we want to do. We kind of want to grow in our faith or reach that goal we’ve been thinking of. But then we just kind of... meander. Don’t add unnecessary distance to your race, brothers and sisters! Keep your eyes on Jesus. Make your path straight! Too many people in the faith assume they can put off discipline and training and save it for another day. But that leads to wandering. Wandering leads us to take our eyes off of Jesus. Don’t make more miles for yourself that you’ll have to run later on. Moreover, don’t assume that you will have tomorrow to make it up. Life is fleeting, and history is all too full of people who said they would get right with God when they were older and then never had the chance.

Esau is listed here for a reason. Remember the story? Esau came in from the field and was famished. His brother, Jacob, had been making a lentil stew. Esau claimed that he was going to die and begged for food. Jacob said that he would trade for Esau’s birthright, which was a big deal in this culture. Afterward, when he wanted his blessing again, he was turned away. Think on this for a minute. Esau is given as an example because he traded away long-term benefits and glory for short-term gain. Remember, this story is your story. Don’t walk down the road that Esau did. Make your path straight, Christian. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Don’t let your path meander. Keep your eyes on Jesus and make your path straight!

But what is the ultimate outcome of all of this? Where does this lead? The author has our answers for us.

Slides 26 & 27 – Heb 12:18-24

¹⁸ For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest

¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. ²⁰ For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” ²¹ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”

²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³ and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Heb 12:18-24)

We could spend an entire sermon unpacking this comparison between Mount Sinai, the mountain where God’s presence descended, and Mount Zion. This passage can seem really confusing. The key to

unlocking the mystery is the covenant. Moses and the Israelites had just entered into a covenant with God. This refers to the Old Covenant. Despite this covenant, God drew a clear boundary that no person or beast could cross. Initially, only Moses was the exception. The people were terrified. Even the covenant's mediator, Moses, trembled with fear. This is because God could not be approached in any state of impurity. The people knew the consequences of crossing that line.

However, look to Mount Zion, the new Jerusalem. Jesus is our mediator. Remember our earlier discussion: Jesus is better than Moses. Here in the new Jerusalem, angels gather. But not just them; the assembly- this word in Greek is literally the Church- of the firstborn, that is, Jesus, is there as well. This, brothers and sisters, is the final outcome. This is what we are striving for at the end of the race. Jesus is the mediator of a new and better covenant, one in which our stains are washed clean and we can enter God's presence again. We don't have to stand away from the mountain; we can approach it and reside upon it. Look at the pattern again!

Slide 28 – Jesus is Better

And what is more, death here is conquered. When Abel's blood was spilled, he remained dead. He was the first to die, and every one of us was to follow in his footsteps. Death reigned. However, the blood of Jesus speaks a better word.

Slide 29 – Rom 5:17

¹⁷For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. (Rom 5:17)

Whereas Abel died and remained dead, Jesus died and three days later was raised to new life. Death will no longer reign for the believer; instead, life through Jesus will.

Brothers and sisters, this brings us to the close of the chapter.

Slide 30 – Heb 12:25-29

²⁵See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. ²⁶At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." ²⁷This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹for our God is a consuming fire. (Heb 12:25-29)

Slide 31 – Jesus is Better

Because Jesus is the better everything, He was able to satisfy the Law. He was able to fulfill all of God's promises. God promised in Genesis 3 that the snake would be crushed. Jesus fulfilled that promise. Because He satisfied the old covenant, He was able to make a new one. This new covenant rests not on our own ability to keep the Law or our own righteousness, but on the righteousness of Jesus. Because of who He is, His kingdom can never, ever be shaken. Remember the saints who have gone before.

Remember the races they have run as they pursued their Savior. Christian, run your race well. Lay down every weight and every sin that entangles. And whatever you do, do not let go of Jesus.