

Motivation

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Date: 30 June 2024

Preacher: Stephen Murray

- [0 : 0 0] If you've got a Bible, you can turn to the New Testament, to the book of Hebrews. Hebrews chapter 12 is where we're going to be this morning.
- So as many of you know and are aware, because many of you greeted me this morning, I have not been around for the last two and a half weeks or so.
- I've been in the U.S. traveling as part of the fundraising work related to our denomination, the Presbyterian and Reformed Church of South Africa, our small little denomination.
- And so I just want to thank you all for the prayers that many of you put up while we were there. My wife is still traveling back right now, Robin. She is somewhere over the Atlantic right now on a Delta flight, watching bad movies, hoping to get back to South Africa.
- And it was just a real, real joy. We had a whirlwind trip in lots of places, five different cities, three different states, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina. I was in Charlotte, for those of you guys from Charlotte.
- [1 : 2 5] I was there for a couple of days, seeing some people there that you probably know. And it was just a fantastic time. I was able to attend the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, which is always great for kind of like a theological nerd like me.
- You get all to see these famous Presbyterians walking around. Robin's kind of looking at me like you're in your element now, aren't you? And I'm like, yeah, this is real fun. The rest of you probably go there and think this is the most boring thing I've ever been to.
- But it was a fantastic trip. And most importantly, in terms of our purposes for going, was we were able to connect with several churches in the PCA regarding partnering with our ongoing church planting work here in South Africa and in Zimbabwe and in Malawi.
- And so we've got one new church that we've just begun a relationship with in Charlottesville, Virginia. And then a church that we've just kind of really cemented a relationship with in Greenville, South Carolina as well, that are both kind of, both of them are new to the partnership.
- So right now we have about six churches that are the anchor churches of what we call the Southern African Reform Mission, which is an organization that raises funds for church planting, theological education, and campus ministry in the Southern Africa region.
- [2 : 4 0] And we're trying to get that up to 15 churches over the next few months. And so it's just been a fantastic time of opening up new opportunities and building new relationships.
- And it's been fantastic being able to go and share the story of what's been happening here in South Africa. So I've done a bajillion PowerPoint presentations in so many different places, preached in several churches there.
- And so I tell the story over and over and over again. And so I kind of get a little bit bored of hearing the story over and over again. But I'm always struck by how people are encouraged by the story.
- One of the presentations I have has a slide right at the end. And the slide has a looking back, looking forward. As we think about just not, so this is not even the work in Zimbabwe and Malawi, which is encouraging as well, but just in our work here in South Africa.

The slide starts January 2018. What the picture was in January 2018 and what the picture will be, Lord willing, at the end of this year, December 2024.

[3 : 45] And so this is what I always tell the folk, is that in January 2018, we had two churches in South Africa in this denomination. You say, well, that's not really a denomination. It's two churches, like, hanging out with each other.

We had two churches. We had two teaching elders, ministers, ordained ministers. We had zero people on track to be ordained for the ministry. We had zero church plants in the pipeline that we knew of at that point.

And we had zero student workers working on campus in this country. At the end of this year, we will have eight churches worshipping in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban.

We will have five teaching elders in our denomination. We will have seven guys on track for ordination. Three church plants in the pipeline. And on that slide, I put a little question mark to that because we actually might have more than three church plants in the pipeline if some things come together.

And nine student workers working on campus in our country. And it's in such a short space of time, from 2018 to the end of this year, 2024.

[4 : 53] And so I just praise God for his kindness to us. And it was so exciting to see people's eyes light up as they see this work that is happening here. And so as I was coming back to you guys, I was thinking, well, I'm not going to carry on my series and acts when I get back into the pulpit because I'm going to be suffering with severe jet lag, which I have been this week.

And so I thought, well, what could I talk to you guys about this morning? And I thought, I get to go out and go overseas and see everything that's happening. I get to go to all the churches around the country and recruit church planters.

And you don't always get to see all of that. Some of the guys come and preach here, like McDonald preached here last week. And you see something of it, but you're not up to your eyeballs in it all week long. And I just want to encourage you and motivate you to say the Lord in his providence has put the Union Chapel, this church, in a really kind of key role in the growing of this denomination.

We've been able to provide a base for fundraising, for recruiting, for training of church planters, for establishing the first student ministry out of our little denomination. And so we have a key, key role to play in all of this.

And I want to motivate you to see yourselves as part of that. To say, I get to be part of that. Even if I'm not a church planter or a student worker myself, I get to be a part of that by just being a really engaged participant here at the Union Chapel.

[6 : 15] And so I thought what I'd do this morning then is I would preach about motivation. Motivation to just go deeper and deeper and deeper into your own faith and your engagement with church.

And so we're going to read from Hebrews chapter 12, verse 18 to 29. The author of the book of Hebrews writes and he says, 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 because they could not bear what was commanded.

If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death. The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, I am trembling with fear. But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.

You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven. 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.

See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?

[7 : 42] 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. The words once more indicate that the removing of what can be shaken, that is created things, so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. This is the word of the Lord.

Let's pray, let's ask for God's help as we study together. Our gracious God, I want to thank you for your ongoing kindness to us as a church, for the way you have built this church, the way you've established things like student ministry, the way you've allowed us to plant churches from this place, to send out people in church plants, Lord.

We thank you for the many partners we have in the PCA, and their kindness and their generosity, their hospitality and warmth towards us, Lord. Thank you for that fellowship and that relationship.

Lord, we pray that in all of this, in all the excitement of what's happening, we might continue to keep our eyes fixed upon what is most important, and that is your gospel as it comes to us in your word.

[9 : 00] And so now as we open the scriptures, Lord, teach us, let us see clearly what is in the pages of scripture. Let us be changed by what we see. Let us be made more like your son Jesus. Let your spirit work in us, Lord, we pray and we ask this for Christ's sake and for his glory.

Amen. In 1941, a really famous Christian speaker and author, C.S. Lewis, preached a very famous sermon called The Weight of Glory.

You can go online, you can actually download the whole sermon, you can read it. One of the chief concerns that he has in this particular sermon is to point out that the Christian life and practicing what he calls the Christian virtue of love, it needs sufficient motivation.

If you're going to do it, it needs sufficient motivation. And often we have, he would say, we have insufficient motivation and that's why we don't do particularly well at practicing the Christian virtue of love. And he has this really, really famous section in his introduction.

So you might have heard these words before, but he says, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak.

[10 : 13] We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

We're far too easily pleased. Now he's using that word desires there, not in the kind of the general sense of desires that we normally have, but as almost a synonym for the very things that motivate us and drive us in life.

And his point is pretty simple. If you don't have motivation that is big enough and grand enough and glorious enough, then you ought to be pitied. Like that boy who is making mud pies in the slum.

And you haven't even begun to conceive of the true motivations that you actually have available to you in the gospel. And so that's what I want to speak about this morning, that motivation that we have in the gospel that keeps us going.

It keeps us going in the Christian life and not just going in terms of kind of limping along, but really thriving and delighting in our calling to follow Jesus Christ and to then engage in his mission that he has for us in this world.

[11 : 23] You see, the Christian's on a journey. Every single Christian. You are on a journey if you're a believer. You're on a journey really towards holiness, towards seeing God face to face. It's a hard journey.

There's a whole lot of struggles and difficulties along the way, particularly of all the struggles, the struggle against sin. And so if we don't at the core then have the right motivation, we're really going to battle.

Maybe even come up short on that destination. That's essentially actually the plot line of the entire chapter here, Hebrews chapter 12. And throughout the book, the author has been, if you know the book well, he's calling on his readers to persevere in faith, to struggle against sin, fight against it, endure hardship, he would say.

Don't give up on Jesus Christ and return to some sort of old covenant worship that they were all engaged in before. Don't do that. Keep going. And so here in chapter 12, what he does is he pulls back the curtain on the glory that awaits them to give them the motivation that they need to keep going.

And he sets motivation before them. Three things I want you to see this morning. Number one, or two motivations and one response. So the Christian is motivated by glory. The Christian is motivated by judgment.

[12 : 39] And then the Christian responds with reverence and awe. Glory, judgment, reverence and awe. Here's the first one. The Christian is motivated by glory. The first thing the author does is he draws a comparison between two mountains.

You would have seen there. Look at verse 18. He says, You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire to darkness and 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 because they could not bear what was commanded.

And there's the command. If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death. The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, I'm trembling with fear. So you haven't come to that mountain, but verse 22, You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.

You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly to the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven. 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.

So a comparison between two mountains, between what is obviously, I think, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. So let's think about these mountains quickly. Sinai, first of all, verse 18 to 21 there, you've got the summary of what it would have been like to, as a kind of cowering Israelite, stand at the base of Mount Sinai as Moses goes up the mountain to go and receive the law of God.

[14 : 12] So you can read about this in Exodus chapter 19 and 20. You can go back there and see what it was like. But the mountain is, is this visual spectacle. So it's covered in smoke. It rumbles and it grumbles, kind of like a volcano and an earthquake all wrapped up into one.

You don't dare go near of it or touch it for fear of dropping down dead by virtue of just coming near this present manifestation of the, the kind of otherness and the holiness of God.

And then, on top of all of that, if that's not scary enough, the voice of the Lord booms out. And the text is just terrifying. Just, just as an aside, I find some Christians sometimes speak very nonchalantly about the Lord speaking to them.

So like, I'll, I'll be on social media somewhere and I'll see a little video and a guy says, well like, I was brushing my teeth the other day and the Lord said to me, and before he's like, even finish that sentence, in my mind, I'm thinking like, have you even read Exodus chapter 19 and 20?

Like when the Lord spoke to you and you were brushing your teeth, do you carry on brushing your teeth at that point? Or do you lie on the floor prostrate with your face on the ground and not move for the next couple of seconds? You go back and you read that encounter in Exodus, you see the people actually come to Moses, they plead with Moses and they say, Moses, rather you speak to us on behalf of God because we're, we're actually too afraid to hear him speak directly to us.

[15 : 39] And verse 21 and in Hebrews 12, even Moses is trembling. Now what's this picture of? What is, what is the significance of recounting Sinai? It's clear this is an allusion to old covenant worship, worship under the law that existed before Christ came and in reference to the nature of that worship.

The original readers of the book of Hebrews are being tempted to go back to that sort of Old Testament worship. So the author says to his Christian readers, you're not there anymore. You are not there anymore.

The old covenant worship was marked by all this multi-sensory awe, the presence, the holiness of God. So beautiful in one sense, strangely beautiful in one sense, but in another sense there was, there was separation.

You couldn't go near the mountain. You couldn't go near the holiness. The gap between humanity and God was kind of etched into your mind through standing there and experiencing that multi-sensory experience, the foot of the mountain.

The separation. But the author comes and he says, you haven't come to that mountain. You've come to another mountain. And then he describes Zion.

[17 : 02] Now Zion, the word Zion is used in a bunch of different ways in the Bible depending on where you are in the Bible. Zion was actually originally the name of one of the hills in the ancient city of Jerusalem.

Over time it became synonymous kind of with the temple and with the presence of God. But by the time you get to the New Testament, Mount Zion is represented not so much as an earthly city but as a future heavenly city.

Almost like the capital of the new creation, if you like. That's, I think, the Zion that's being referred to here. It's a picture of the end. The end of human history. And it's glorious.

It's a beautiful picture. Now again, he describes what, if you're standing there, what must be a mind-blowing kind of multi-sensory experience. He describes innumerable angels in joyful assembly.

They're all singing the praises of God in this beautiful assembly. And in this great assembly is the church. All God's redeemed people.

[18 : 02] They're all standing there. In the midst of them is God. So no longer the separation. Now God's there in the midst. And God is a judge, which is interesting.

He's a judge, but instead of fearing his condemnation for our sin, he judges us to be righteous. It makes us perfect. And if you're sitting there and you're standing there and going, well, how did this happen?

How did this strange set of events come about? How did we go from being sinners standing under the just condemnation of God to being righteous, being made perfect? Well, if you're wondering how that happened, you look around and there in the assembly you see somebody else.

You see Jesus, our mediator, whose sprinkled blood has spoken on behalf of us in the law court of God, in front of the judge, and declared us forgiven, justified, righteous.

See, that's how sinful you and I are made perfect. Author of Hebrews says to Christian readers, he says to you and me this morning as we read this text, he says, those of you who would cling to Jesus Christ, you believe the gospel, that's the mountain you've come to.

[19 : 22] That's the mountain you're at. And so there's the motivation. That is it. That is the motivation. You've got to be motivated by the glorious gospel end to which you are heading.

You are not at Sinai anymore. That separation is gone. Now one of the rhetorical effects of this passage is to try and stun us.

Is to try and kind of shock us. Hit us hard. Just stun us with the glory of God and the gospel so that we will be moved and be motivated to endure in faith.

To keep going. He's trying to use all of this super rich imagery to say, hey, if you're a Christian, you're not playing with mud pies in the slum anymore. You're en route.

You're en route to that holiday at the seaside. You're not in the slum. There's no mud. You're en route to the sea. See, here's the glory of all of this. Here is the glorious picture.

[20 : 18] We know deep down in our bones, if we're honest, as we come into this place this morning, we know deep down in our bones, if we're honest about our lives, if we're honest about our actions, if we're honest about our inaction or our thoughts or our attitudes or the motives of our heart, if we examine those things with any level of depth, then we know we really actually don't deserve to be heading towards Zion.

We're sinners. And we deserve to still be at the foot of Sinai, cowering before God's holiness and condemned under His law. If you try going near Him, you're dead.

we know that's where we should be. We know that the awesome face of God should condemn us and not smile upon us as His beloved.

And yet, here we find ourselves this morning, en route to glory. How is it that the face of God is smiling on us and not judging us?

C.S. Lewis explains this glorious mystery in that sermon in the weight of glory. This is really important to be clear on this. He says, in the end, that face, which is the delight or the terror of the universe, must be turned upon each of us, either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised.

[21 : 48] He goes on and he says, I read in a periodical the other day that the fundamental thing is how we think of God. By God Himself, it is not.

How God thinks of us is not only more important, but infinitely more important. Indeed, how we think of God is of no importance except insofar as it is related to how He thinks of us.

It is written that we shall stand before Him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ that some of us, that any of us who really chooses shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God.

It's only the work of Christ our mediator. It's only because of His sprinkled blood that we are not stranded at Sinai, but are in fact on the way to Zion.

My friends, did you see the glory of that this morning? The wonder of that salvation, of that grace? Does it take your breath away?

[23 : 00] I have easily one of the most visually stunning morning school runs and drives to work in the world, and it's not like hyperbole or exaggeration, it just is.

So I drop my kids off in Pinelands, which is alright for those of you who live in Pinelands, sorry about that. But then I turn around and I come out of Pinelands after a long period of time because the traffic's really bad there, and once I get out of Pinelands, I obviously come up onto Philip Krasana Drive, driving high above the city, looking over the city every single weekday.

That's my morning commute to work. So, especially now in winter, you have the sun rising in the east over the mountains in the distance, lighting up the glass and the buildings in the city center as you drive in.

You can see everything. You can see all the way up the west coast. You can look back over the northern suburbs over Tigerburg Hill. At this time of the year, there are pockets of mist that will kind of settle, and so the taller buildings stick out of the mist.

It is truly an exquisite drive. One of the most scenic drives in the world, and even though I do it every single week, it never ceases to take my breath away, as I think, this is where I live.

[24 : 20] This is what I get to see all the time. It's a glorious vision. Now think about this. Zion is infinitely more glorious than that.

Infinitely. The fact that we will be there in the midst of that assembly is an infinitely more glorious thought. There we will be.

We will be standing, declared righteous, made perfect through the sprinkled blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Friends, that is breathtaking. That is what is breathtaking. If that glorious gospel work of Jesus is not your motivation in life, well then you're still making mud pies in the slum.

You're still in the slum. You've got to be motivated by that glorious gospel. Now secondly, you need to be motivated by judgment.

Have a look at verse 25. The writer says, See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?

[25 : 35] 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. The words once more indicate the removing of what can be shaken, that is created things, so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

A kind of common but erroneous view of the Bible looks at the Old Testament and the New Testament and says, you know what, God in the Old Testament is kind of really stern and ruthless and full of judgment but in the New Testament because of Jesus he's really gracious and loving and forgiving.

If you think something along those lines I would want to say that you're probably not reading your Old Testament and your New Testament very, very closely because on the one hand what you're failing to do is you're failing to see that the Old Testament is actually full of grace.

God dishes out an absolute ton of grace and forgiveness in the Old Testament. He is patient and long-suffering with the nation of Israel beyond what is reasonable. On the other hand I think you're also failing to see how severe God's judgment is in the New Testament and a passage like this makes that exact point because the author is basically saying if you thought judgment at Sinai was rough well then to quote the song you ain't seen nothing yet but baby you just ain't seen nothing yet.

If anything the judgment of God is even more severe in the New Testament. It involves the entire shaking of the earth verse 26 in fact not just the earth but the entire cosmos that's pretty comprehensive and if you look at verse 26 and verse 27 it's clear that the shaking that the author is speaking about there is a purging a ruthless purging of all evil and sin from this universe.

[27 : 20] The only thing that's going to be left the only thing that's going to be standing is that which is going to be untouched by sin and by evil. Everything else is going to be stripped away it's going to be gone taken away and if you refuse he says if you refuse him who speaks this gospel word from heaven well then you're going to be part of that which is stripped away.

Now friends that's a bit scarier than Sinai. This is a sustained theme in the book of Hebrews there is from the very start this repeated call not to ignore the voice of God.

God is spoken decisively by his son that's how the book of Hebrews opens up Hebrews chapter 1 verses 1 and 2 to ignore that gospel word is to put yourself in peril. Now listen you can certainly certainly overdo the concept of final judgment as a motivation in the Christian life you're probably familiar with versions of Christianity that only ever trumpet one message kind of turn or burn you're going to go to hell if you don't believe in Jesus and you just hear that every single Sunday every single week and if that's the only message you ever hear well then that's kind of a church is going to be a church that produces people who relate to God exclusively on the basis of fear we will create a fear based religion so there certainly are excesses and I'm aware of the excesses and maybe you grew up in an environment where you experience those excesses but in our attempts to address the excesses we must not pretend that the Bible both Old Testament and New Testament doesn't often put forward final judgment as motivation for following Christ and living Christ's way only ever kind of thinking of God as this warm cuddly loving grandfather is not going to be sufficient motivation for you you need to be driven by the reality that our gracious and forgiving God is also the God who will shake the heavens and the earth and remove all sin once and for all he's the perfect judge now here's why you need this balance as you think about your faith and this balance motivation if you are not driven by this earth shaking image of God then you can very very easily end up spending your life giving your very best time giving your very very best energy to shakable things rather than the unshakable kingdom and that'll be a tragedy you would have spent your life in pursuit of things that will ultimately be purged this is a key element in

Jesus' teaching sermon on the mount Matthew chapter 6 Jesus says do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moths and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moths and vermin do not destroy where thieves do not break in and steal for where your treasure is there your heart will be also let me get a little bit more personal here the older I get and I am slowly getting older my hair is not becoming blonde but the older I'm getting the less and less I want to mess around with life the less and less I want to be giving too much attention to shakable things to things that moth and rust are going to destroy see each day I'm getting a little bit closer to Zion and I know that before we enter Zion there is going to be this great purging that's going to take place and so each day it is that little bit more desirable to me to have my time and my energy and my focus consumed with unshakable things to plagiarize from gladiator with things that will echo on into eternity

I just don't want to mess around anymore and I don't think you should want to mess around anymore and if I don't keep my eyes on that coming day of judgment that great and terrible day when the cosmos will be shaken if I don't keep looking there if I don't keep that as my motivation then I fear I'll just keep messing around in the present building mud pies of inconsequence and I don't want that and I hope that you don't want that and so if you don't want that well then don't shun final judgment as one of your main motivations in life it's because of the gospel here's the good news because of the gospel we who have believed are part of that which is unshakable because Christ was nailed to a cross of wood you and I are nailed down to that that won't be shaken in the final judgment that is our hope that's our glorious hope so let us not despise then that glorious hope that has been earned for us at such amazing cost let us not despise that by then filling our lives up and our aspirations with the shakable parts of this world let us be consumed with the unshakable now you say well Stephen what exactly does that mean what does it mean to be consumed with the unshakable how do you fill your life up with it how do you give your best energy and attention to it well it's it's simple really it's not easy but it's simple that which is unshakable is the things of God to love the

[33 : 01] Lord your God with all your heart soul mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself to give to put this even more concretely and practically to give yourself to the unshakable is to give yourself to worship to meeting with God's people to personal devotion to prayer to studying the scriptures it's to give yourself to evangelizing the lost to sharing the gospel with unbelieving friends and colleagues and family to bearing witness to God's grace in your life in whatever situation the Lord has placed you it's to give yourself to giving to give of your material wealth your time your energy to serving the mission of God in the church it's to give yourself to loving your neighbor to caring for the poor the marginalized the outcast the oppressed fighting against injustice fighting against corruption conducting yourself with honesty and fairness and generosity and humility in public in your workplace in the home in your engagement with the civic realm so giving yourself to building stable loving families and communities and that goes for you whether you are married or single or with kids or without kids it's to give yourself to being a godly and sacrificial father a loving and nurturing mother a committed brother or a sister and friend it's to take really all of the ethical and moral demands of scripture and to go into this broken world and practice them holiness in action and so I ask a simple question what are you doing with your life right now is

God and his agenda kind of a sideshow while you get on with what you really want to do in life build a career build a family experience pleasure whatever it is is he a sideshow while you're actually doing all that sort of stuff maybe he just gives you a little bit of a pep talk every now and again when things are rough on this side is he the sideshow or is he the main event are you consumed with the shakable or are you deeply vested in the unshakable kingdom that God is building friends let the judgment of God sober you up this morning and set your priorities straight sit read that passage again when you go home meditate on it until it shakes you out of complacency now finally the response look at verse 28 and 29 therefore since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken let us be thankful and so worship God acceptably with reverence and all for our God is a consuming fire when you know that that unshakable kingdom is coming when you know that you will be a part of that kingdom because of what Jesus has done then the only appropriate response is gratitude thankfulness but you'll see that it's not any type of thankfulness here it's thankfulness accompanied by reverence and all and why well because we know who

God truly is he's a consuming fire the text says now in some ways you might read that and think it's a bit of a strange way for the author to end this section he just says we haven't come to Sinai where there's cowering and there's trembling instead we've come to this glorious Zion but then he ends and he says oh by the way God is a consuming fire and you say well that sounds a little bit more like Sinai than it does like Zion but here's the reality the more you come near to God through the grace of the gospel the more intimate you get with him the more you will start to see that he is holy holy holy he consumes everything that is impure to use a metaphor that the Bible often actually uses he takes the gold and he purifies it by extreme fire removing the dross removing all the impurities so only the very purest gold then remains at the end of the process the more you get to know God through the gospel the closer you get to him the more that will be your experience that he is a consuming fire

Ligon Duncan puts it this way he says oftentimes today we speak of intimacy with God as if it could be a casual relationship but I want to remind you that in both the Old Testament and the New Testament those who commune with God always wind up in the fetal position it is an awesome thing to commune with God and those who know him best wind up on their faces before him not cringing like slaves but awed at the God into whose fellowship and family they have been called by grace you see that intimacy it's got to produce that awe and that reverence that intimacy with the God who is a consuming fire has to motivate you to a life of deep gratitude with awe and reverence if you're a believer you're not consumed by that fire because Christ's purifying blood has done its work in you in Zion you will be made perfect you will be that gold without a hint of impurity and until that day your task is to submit yourself to intimacy with God through the gospel and have his purifying fire remove the impurities that still linger in you there's a prayer in the valley of vision collections of prayer called purification it goes like this it says oh God the eternal all help me to know that all things are shadows but thou art substance all things are quicksands but thou art mountain all things are shifting but thou art anchor all things are ignorance but thou art wisdom if my life is to be a crucible amid burning heat so be it but do thou sit at the furnace mouth to watch the all that nothing be lost if

I sin willfully grievously tormentedly in grace take away my mourning and give me music remove my sackcloth and clothe me with beauty still my sighs and fill my mouth with song and then give me summer weather as a Christian is that your prayer you want the consuming God to come in and do the work that he needs to do it's the glory of the gospel and the hope of Zion your motivation it's the judgment of the God who is building an unshakable kingdom your motivation it's God producing the God who's a consuming fire is producing reverence and awe in you let me close with this I'm excited I'm not a massively excitable person so you can maybe tell but I'm excited by the prospect of the type of people we can become in the face of this beautiful yet broken country and city that we live in if we will be motivated by these great gospel truths no government no NGO no person armed with a kind of deep desire to do good and to make the world a better place will be able to compete with the generosity the sacrifice the care the compassion and the love that we will show if we allow ourselves to be driven by these biblical motivations

[40 : 41] God God is building an unshakable kingdom let's show the world that this is true let's pray together our gracious King and our Savior when we consider our own sin we wonder how it is that we're able to have a relationship with you and so this morning we thank you for that glorious picture of Zion where we are in the assembly singing with the angels counted righteous in front of our judge because of the saving work of our mediator the Lord Jesus Christ I thank you for this gospel truth Lord and I want to pray for anyone who's sitting here this morning Lord who's never trusted in Jesus that you and your mercy would bring them to faith that they would see the love that Christ has for them and they would repent of their sin and trust in him for the rest of us Lord remind us of this final day when the entire cosmos will be shaken this glorious day where evil and sin will be gone forever remind us that we have work to do in light of that we have lives to live that point to the final salvation help us to live those lives now Lord in reverence and awe for our God who is a consuming fire we ask for this now for Christ's sake in his glory

Amen