

***Before the* THRONE**

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“Grand Slamming the 14ers” (The Four Mountains of Redemption)

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The State of Colorado has an amazing number of mountain peaks over 14,000 feet high – fifty-four in all! When a hiker has accomplished attaining every peak’s summit he is said to have “Grand Slammed the 14ers!”

The Essence – To experience the fullness of the Christian life, the believer is obliged to climb four mountains. Mt. Sinai, where the Law was given showing mankind its utter and complete moral depravity before a righteous God. Mount Calvary where the Lord Jesus Christ paid the penalty of the broken law thus redeeming man back to God. The third mountain being the Mount of Olives where Christ ascended into heaven and will return. This hope envisions the believer to live godly in this present life. The final mountain is Mount Zion; the gathering of the people of God where we find our place of service and ministry.

“I look up to the mountains – does my help come from there? My help comes from the LORD, who made the heavens and the earth!” Psalm 121:1-2

The High Places

Often in the pages of the Old Testament we read of the various kings and people who would worship the Lord in the high places. While often these places were dedicated to the worship of Yahweh, such worship was not held in the designated city of God – Jerusalem. Nor were they lead by His anointed and appointed leaders. These centers of worship, if the truth were told, were only centers of humanistic religious endeavor. They were then and still are today, man’s attempt to worship, not to please God, but to please as man. All such worship that begins with man’s initiative will always end twisted and fouled in deception! Subsequently, worship that was offered from these high places of man’s making always deteriorates into the worship of idols and self, having mixed the worship of Yahweh with the ideas and foolishness of men.

Such syncretism always brings the Lord’s

Judgment and curse! Is this possible? Terrifyingly, yes! “They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations” (2 Kings 17:33)

Men may be sincere in their desire to worship the Living God, but to come any other way than how He has prescribed will always denote deception or fraud on some level. “I assure you, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber!” (John 10:1 NL) Any attempt to gain entrance to the presence of God apart from His approved means only reveals the

rebellious heart of man. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

And what of Christians today? Don't we often, flaunt our liberty in Christ and worship in the high places? We choose to worship on our terms not God's. We dictate the terms, we supply the methods, and unfortunately we reap the powerless and lifeless form of such religion. "They will act as if they are religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. You must stay away from people like that." (2 Timothy 3:5NL) The King James Version says it this way, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof..."

Our seeing must go beyond the natural if we are to understand the Lord's working in our lives and benefit from it. There are certain "mountains" necessary to our leading a rich and full life. There are four notable mountains that arise above the plains of our daily living, beckoning us to climb them if we are to fully realize the redemptive plan of God for our lives. Can we make an honest attempt to "grand slam" these peaks to the end that we will be satisfied in pleasing the Lord and in living out our destiny in God's kingdom?

Beginning Our First Ascent – Mt. Sinai

The first mountain that must be visited on our spiritual pilgrimage is the mountain called Sinai. This is the mountain where Yahweh gave the children of Israel the Law after they had been delivered from their slavery in Egypt. Without the giving of the Law we would never have understood our need for a Saviour. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, makes the Lord's case concerning the giving of the Law. "Yes, you know what He wants; you know right from wrong because you have been taught His law." (Romans 2:18NL) The Law produces in mankind an understanding of God's moral and righteous standard. The Law is designed to strip us of our pride and arrogance that believes somehow we can obtain Heaven by our own ethical goodness. The Law brings the sin that is hidden within our hearts "alive" and confronts us with our own inability to satisfy its just demands! "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin." (Romans 3:20 NIV) Thus the Law has given us its instruction and has taught us that we are unable, in our own abilities, to honor its precepts and therefore all that remains for us is God's certain fiery judgments. Left to our own means, we are utter and completely unable to satisfy God's holy demands. In this then is the purpose of the Law revealed – "Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith." (Galatians 3:24 NASB) The whole purpose of the Law is to reveal to us our need of a Saviour!

Many Christians, ignorant of the need and necessity of the Law, refuse to use the Law or even acknowledge their need for the Law. Many actually rebel against the Law saying, "Christ has freed me from the law." No friend, He has freed you from the effects of your rebellion against the Law! Because of these false notions within the Church as a whole, we have an anemic and sickly Church, whose converts mostly worship in the high places!

Paul once again sheds light on the necessity of the Law. “But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully,” (1 Timothy 1:8 NASB). The Law is good *if* it is used lawfully. The Christian is still bound to live by the moral law and Jesus actually raises the standard! Adultery is now not just an act it is a thought! Murder is no longer an act, but an attitude of heart! (see Matthew 5, 6, and 7). The argument is that grace has replaced Law and therefore “I don’t need to serve or to give or to do – I can just “be” the person whom God loves.” Maybe. The apostle Paul once again answers such foolishness by stating clearly, that the grace of God working in your life will cause you to labour even more abundantly! (1 Corinthians 15:10) The proof of God’s grace working in the believer’s life is his or her willingness to go the extra mile in living righteously and doing righteously before God and men. Grace does more, serves more, loves more and gives more!

As the Law offers us our first real instruction in right and wrong – not from a humanistic or cultural perspective, but from a Kingdom perspective, so it is that out of the Law the Holy Spirit instructs us, convicts us and ultimately points us to our need of Jesus Christ – God’s Messiah and our Redeemer! It is from the Law that we see our complete and total moral depravity. We see that it is impossible to keep the law of God, no matter how many “fences”¹ we place around them to keep us from violating them!

And so, after the Law has been used legally it has brought us to the place where we are in despair of ever attaining God’s favor. When we are aware that we have failed to keep the law and that even our inner nature and desires cannot and most often do not want to keep God’s law – it is in this predicament that we are exactly where God has intended us to be – flat on our backs, hopeless and helpless!

The Pinnacle of Eternity – Mount Calvary

It is at this turning point of seeing our utter and complete moral failure that we are ready to climb another mountain – Mount Calvary! It is here, upon Golgotha that Jesus Christ offered Himself as our sacrifice for sin as the Lamb of God! “For while we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly... But God commends His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:6,8). This is a lonely ascent – for you must scale this mountain alone. A spouse or parent, a friend or priest cannot make this climb in your stead! But having made the climb you will face the very pinnacle of eternity! It is from this perspective we begin to distinguish and discern the unsearchable love and riches of God! “I pray that from His glorious, unlimited resources He will give you mighty inner strength through His Holy Spirit. And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in Him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God’s marvelous love. And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep

¹ “Fencing” is the Jewish practice of placing man’s rules and regulations around the Law thus supposedly guarding the people from violating the Law. An example of this might be the demand of the Rabbi’s that a Jewish family keep two kitchens to maintain the Kosher and dietary laws. Another example would be the tradition of writing the name of God as G-d so as not to take the name of the Lord is vain.

His love really is. May you experience the love of Christ; though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God.” (Ephesians 3:16-19)

Now you can see it! Without coming first to Sinai, the work of Jesus at Calvary means paltry little. The Christian faith, without a clear and profound understanding of why Jesus died at Calvary, is really nothing more than a current “help yourself article” found in the news racks of the local grocery store. Indeed, the Cross of Calvary is cheapened by a partial preaching of the gospel that lets men off the hook before they are even aware of God’s displeasure with the sin and rebellion in their lives. Having seen then the depths of our depravity and vileness before the Holy, Pure, and Righteous Creator, we see His gift of Jesus Christ through His eyes of mercy and the wondrous kindness that sought us out even when we were sinners and enemies of God! “You may be saying, "What terrible people you have been talking about!" But you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you do these very same things. And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. Do you think that God will judge and condemn others for doing them and not judge you when you do them, too? Don't you realize how kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Or don't you care? Can't you see how kind he has been in giving you time to turn from your sin? But no, you won't listen. So you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself because of your stubbornness in refusing to turn from your sin. For there is going to come a day of judgment when God, the just judge of all the world, will judge all people according to what they have done.” (Romans 2:1-6 NL)

If my belief is that God must somehow save me because He is love, without someone having to pay the price for my sin, then I have then cheapened the work of Calvary. I have turned it into a contemptible theatrical sideshow where a cruel and hateful god has taken vicarious enjoyment from seeing his own righteous son suffer at the hands of egomaniacs rather than the supreme and caring act that it is!

Of course, it was God’s love that sent Jesus Christ to earth. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him.” (John 3:16-17 NASB) Isn’t it becoming plain now? It was God’s righteous judgment that demanded a price for sin. Sin’s rebellion and man’s shared hatred of God must be paid for – love alone will not, and indeed, cannot pay for the price of our sin apart from a just payment being made for sin. The triumphant and redeeming love of the Saviour was willing to offer Himself for our sin. It was His unfathomable love that kept Him upon the cross when He could have called legions of angels to instantly judge the earth and it’s inhabitants, freeing Him from the grasp of Roman and Jew, death and hell! It was the love of the Saviour that saved you from the judgment of Divine wrath. Imagine, God choosing you over His own life. Yet, that’s what Jesus did. His love acted. His love required Him to offer Himself as the substitute for the sin of the world – for your sin! (1 John 2:2) He chose you over His own life. He laid down His life as a payment – a sacrifice – for your sin – to the end that you might

know the Father's goodness and His holiness, just as Jesus knew those exquisite joys from eons past!

Now the outlook from Mt. Calvary is of the highest value to us, especially as we have seen the depth of our sin and rebellion having first visited Mt. Sinai. Our eyes having been opened to our sin at Mt Sinai, have now at the Mountain called Calvary seen a new and wondrous thing... "That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:15)

Jesus paid it all.
All to Him I owe.
Sin had left a crimson stain
He washed, it white as snow.

The Third Mountain – The Mount of Olives

But it is time to scale another mountain if we are to succeed in reaching our goal of the "grand slam". From the slopes of Mount Calvary, the view is marvelous, but once you descend the mountain in order to live out the daily Christian life you find yourself overwhelmed with the task at hand – living like Jesus lived! The Christian life cannot be lived out in human strength alone, but only by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Even the Master Himself lived in this world, not in His own strength, but by the Father's indwelling Spirit! "Jesus replied, "I assure you, the Son can do nothing by Himself. He does only what He sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. (John 5:19 NL) If Jesus didn't live without the Spirit's help, what of us? Without the constant assistance of the Holy Helper, our lives will fail miserably in the attempt to live or be like Jesus. Yet even with the Holy Spirit's inner help, we must be able to maintain a vision for living or soon we forget our struggle and find ourselves living like we did before we were Christians. Fortunately we may climb to the summit of another mountain that offers a view of living that is both motivating and sustaining in our day-to-day living situations. It is from this next mountaintop that we are called to live out our daily Christian experience! We need never return to the smog-invested air of the valley. This mountain peak is where the believer is entitled to live. The Spirit invites us to live with Him in this rarified air, living in a holy and altogether pleasing way to the Father. It is when we make an unnecessary descent that we catch ourselves falling into the traps and sins of the world, the flesh and the devil. But what is this mountain and how can we attain its summit?

The third mountain we have set our gaze upon is the mountain called the Mount of Olives or Mount Olivet. "And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away." (Acts 1:9-12)

You see friend, Jesus will return to the earth in the same manner that He left it. Not only will He return, but He will also return to the exact spot from which He left – the Mount of Olives! Now the question is an honest one, how will climbing this mountain help me live out a godly, holy and victorious Christian life? How can the belief that Jesus is one day returning to a mountain in Israel help me to live a successful Christian life in the here and now? It's all in perspective isn't it? A man, who loses his dream, his vision, or his goals in life, will soon after also lose his passion to succeed as well as his zest for life! We must sustain a strong vision and purpose if we are to achieve in any level or part of life – whether it is business, family or church life, “without a vision the people perish.” (Proverb 28:19)

It is the holding of this blessed hope of Jesus' soon return closely to our hearts that assists us in maintaining a vibrant Christian life. “For the grace of God that brings salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:13.) There it is! As we face our tomorrows with the strong hope and vision of Jesus' imminent return we tend to walk a little more uprightly. We conduct our lives a little more diligently. Holy living takes on an ease that is laced with joyous expectancy rather than the drudgery of legalistic attempts at being pious. If we expect Him to return at any moment it changes our lives! Banks are not typically robbed when they are well guarded. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifies himself, even as He is pure.” (1 John 3:2-3)

The Final Ascent – Mount Zion

Of the fifty-four fourteen thousand foot peaks in Colorado, there are two that often fall into debate. Are these two mountains only one mountain with two peaks or are they two separate mountains? Subsequently our climb up the next mountain peak in our Christian living presents a similar question, is it a peak in its own right, meriting the effort of the ascent or can we choose not to make the ascent and still claim we have made our “grand slam”?

Upon this peak we find mutual encouragement and strength for living out our daily lives. It, like our twin peaks in Colorado, is closely associated with our third peak, the Mount of Olives. “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the Day (of His return) approaching.” (Hebrews 10:24-25.)

And how will we recognize the path to this mountain, and what is its name? It is on this peak that you will come to the gathering of the saints! You will hear their call ever

higher and ever upward. You'll hear the cry, "further up and further in!"² You'll experience common vision, common goals, and common purpose as with one voice and one heart Jesus is honored and glorified in your midst! Here you will weep with those who weep and celebrate with those who rejoice. It is here that life is lived out to its fullest. The Master, in His last words commanded that you invite others to this mountaintop. "Go ye therefore into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature... "

Here is the summit of Mount Zion – the city of God, the Mount of God, where we are called into "koinonia" – a living fellowship – with the collective peoples of God! It is here that you specifically find your place in the purposes and counsels of God. "Now you are members of the body of Christ, and members in particular." (1 Corinthians 12:27.) "You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to thousands of angels in joyful assembly. You have come to the assembly of God's firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God Himself, who is the judge of all people. And you have come to the spirits of the redeemed in heaven who have now been made perfect. You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which graciously forgives instead of crying out for vengeance as the blood of Abel did." (Hebrews 12:22-24)

The Christian life was never intended by God to be lived out alone. "We, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." Romans 12:5 "The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up only one body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into Christ's body by one Spirit, and we have all received the same Spirit... So God has put the body together in such a way that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other equally. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. Now all of you together are Christ's body, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it." (1 Corinthians 12:12- 27) As hiking or climbing in the wilderness is a dangerous proposition so is living out this life without friends and companions in the faith. The Christian life lived out in "Zion", in the midst of the brethren is both practical and needful, not to mention both commanded and blessed of God. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." (Psalm 133) We've accomplished a great deal and yet... yet there is another mountain in the distance.

² C.S. Lewis; The Last Battle

The Mountain in the Distance!

“And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.” (1 Corinthians 10:4) Having now visited these four mountains of the Kingdom, there arises a mountain in the distance that overshadows them all, and that Mountain is Christ Himself! He is the sum total of all the glory and majesty of God, Himself the express image and likeness of God. “For in Christ the fullness of God lives in a human body, and you are complete through your union with Christ. He is the Lord over every ruler and authority in the universe.” (Colossians 2:9-10) He is the sustainer and supply of all the workings of the Kingdom; His is the first and final word on every subject and decree. “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 2:2-3)

And so our grand slam comes to a finish! As any avid hiker or climber will attest, mountains of such splendor and magnificence must be climbed more than once. Though we've attained our goal of a grand slam, these mountains of the Christian faith must be visited and revisited, time and time again, always remembering that our Lord Jesus Christ is to be our ultimate and final pursuit and passion!

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