

The Grace of the Gospel

Hebrews 12:22-24

Contrast is a great thing. Color contrasts make for beautiful rainbows and sunsets. Some of you are old enough to remember the contrast button on a black and white TV. You could adjust the contrast between black and white, otherwise the picture would fade, and all you would see was a polar bear eating marshmallows in a snowstorm!

One of Satan's tactics always has been to erase the contrasts between God's people and people of the world. We see that in the OT where Satan over and over tried to get the Israelites to intermarry with the nations around them, and mix in their idolatry with the worship of Jehovah. We see this in the NT when Jesus told the church at Laodicea that they were "lukewarm", neither hot nor cold (Rev. 3:15-16), and this condition (no contrast) was repulsive to Him.

Our world does not like contrasts when it comes to spiritual and moral matters. If you hold to a scripturally accurate theology, you are a bigot. If you hold to biblical morality, you are narrow minded and divisive. This attitude is expressed in I Peter 4:1-4—don't expect the unsaved to understand why you will not party with them. They don't mind you calling yourself a Christian, but don't live any differently than they do. Don't make them feel uncomfortable by living godly, holy lives. They not only practice sin, they "approve those who practice these things" (Romans 1:32).

God believes in contrasts. In Hebrews 12:18-24, He details one of the great contrasts of all time. The contrast between salvation by man's efforts and salvation by grace. "You have not come" (vs. 18), but "you have come" (vs. 22).

This was the contrast Paul had to reinforce in the letter to the Galatians. They were being told they needed to erase the contrast, mix in some of the provisions of the law with their faith, etc...

The first church council in Jerusalem dealt with this issue. Do Gentiles have to be circumcised in order to be saved? Their answer was a resounding “no”.

Satan continues his attempts to wipe out this contrast today. Much of the preaching in churches today presents a salvation that includes some work, some effort, some contribution by man.

Last week, we looked at that frightful scene at Mt. Sinai. Today we look at the wonderful and blessed scene at Mt. Zion.

Ever since David had conquered the Jebusites and had placed the ark on Mt. Zion, this mountain had been considered the special earthly dwelling place of God. Psalm 132:13-14 *“For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for His dwelling place: This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.”* Before long, Zion became synonymous with Jerusalem, and Jerusalem was therefore the city of God and the place of sacrifices.

Whereas Sinai was forbidding and terrifying, Zion is inviting and gracious. Sinai is closed to all, because no one is able to please God on Sinai’s terms—perfect fulfillment of the law.

In other word, the experience there was one of fearful divine holiness without a mediator and with a voice so terrible that the people begged that the voice would stop.

Hebrews 12:20—What was so frightening about this command? The reality behind this command is the holiness of God. Apart from His provision in Jesus Christ, He is unapproachable by sinful man. He is so holy that even animals cannot get too close or they would die. What does that imply for sinful man?

But, Zion is open to all, because Jesus Christ has met all God’s requirements and will stand in the place of anyone who comes to God through Him. Zion symbolizes the approachable God.

The mountain of the New Covenant is Mt. Zion, representing the heavenly Jerusalem. The opposite of Sinai, it is not touchable, but it is approachable. Sinai symbolizes law, and Zion symbolizes grace. No one can be saved by the law, but anyone can be saved by grace.

The law confronts us with commandments, judgment and condemnation. Grace presents us with forgiveness, atonement, and salvation. The great contrast.

Let's examine the 8 things that our writer uses to describe becoming a Christian. You have come to:

I. Mount Zion – vs. 22

A. The language indicates conversion

1. He is clearly addressing those who have trusted Christ for salvation
2. The language (perfect tense verb) indicates a permanent status resulting from a past event = conversion.
3. Some of you folks have “come to” American citizenship—that is, gained permanent status now based on your past action.

B. But why “Mount Zion”?

1. This is the name given by God to His earthly dwelling place in the OT—Jerusalem
Ps 78:68-69 “But chose the tribe of Judah, mount Zion which He loved. And He built His sanctuary like the heights, like the earth which He has established forever.”
2. First, in the tabernacle, God dwelt there and then in the Temple.
3. So, Mt. Zion comes to represent the place of God's dwelling.

II. The City of the Living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem

A. This is heaven.

1. The writer makes it clear he is not talking about the earthly Jerusalem that was still there.
2. Coming to Christ is coming to heaven, the only way to come to heaven

3. When we come to Mt. Zion, we come to the city Abraham looked for—Hebrews 11:10 *“for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”*
 4. From the moment of our salvation, heaven is our spiritual home—Phil. 3:20 *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,”*
 5. That is where our treasure is, our inheritance, our hope, our Father, and our Savior!
- B. We are not there yet.
1. Until the Lord takes us home to be with Himself, we cannot enjoy its full citizenship.
 2. For now, we are ambassadors on earth.
 3. As ambassadors, we have full citizenship in our home country, but we are away from it for a while and cannot enjoy its full blessings
 4. In the meanwhile, we are to be faithful emissaries of our Savior and our heavenly Father, reflecting their nature before a world that does not know them.
 5. Paul uses Sinai and the heavenly Jerusalem (Zion) as symbols of the old and new covenants—Gal. 4:22-26.
 6. Sinai is the mountain of bondage.
 7. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, is the mountain of freedom.
 8. You can read a description of that city in Rev. 21-22.
 9. Note Hebrews 13:13-14—our reason for living separated, holy lives, suffering for Christ is

necessary is because we are living for that city in heaven!

III. Myriads of Angels in Festal Gathering—vs. 22-23

- A. This is the literal rendering of these phrases.
 - 1. “General assembly” is a “festal gathering” and should describe the angels.
 - 2. The point is, when we come in Jesus Christ to Mt. Zion, we come to a gathering of celebrating angels with whom we join in praising God.
 - 3. How many angels? I don’t know—Rev. 5:11 puts it this way-- *“Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands,”*
 - 4. According to Gal. 3:19 there were angels present at Mt. Sinai, but there they were unapproachable.
- B. Angels are not to be worshipped!
 - 1. Some groups incorrectly teach this.
 - 2. No, we are to join them in worshipping God alone.
 - 3. In Rev. 19:10 John the Apostle fell at the feet of an angel and would have worshipped him, and the angel forbid him saying, *“Do not do that, I am your fellow servant... Worship God.”*

IV. The Church of the Firstborn Who Are Registered in Heaven—vs. 23

- A. This is the body of Christ
 - 1. When you trust Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are united together with all true believers.
 - 2. Remember what Jesus reminded His apostles about in Luke 10:20? *“Nevertheless do not*

rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

3. Over and over in Revelation, we have references to names "*written in the Lamb's Book of Life*".

4. If you are a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ, your name is recorded in heaven.

B. The "firstborn" were the ones who received the inheritance.

1. Romans 8:17 tells us believers are "*heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ.*"

2. Thus, all believers are "firstborn" as far as God is concerned.

V. To God the Judge of All—vs. 23

A. At Sinai the presence of God spelled judgment and death.

1. Hebrews 12:20—even for an animal

2. Why? Because of His holiness and our sinfulness.

B. At Zion to come into His presence is to live.

1. Rev. 21:3 "*And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."*

2. This is because at Jesus' crucifixion the veil of the temple was torn in two and the way into God's presence was made forever open to those who trust in the atoning work of that crucifixion.

3. Rom. 8:1a "*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,*"

4. If you come to Mt. Sinai—I'm going to work and earn my way to heaven, you will face God as the Judge and you will die.
5. If you come to Mt. Zion (Jesus Christ)—I'm going to trust in Jesus Christ alone for my salvation, you get to live in the house of the Judge forever!

VI. The Spirits of Just Men Made Perfect—vs. 23

- A. This is a reference to OT saints
 1. Like those in Heb. 11:40
 2. They had to wait for their final perfection until Jesus' death and resurrection.
 3. Remember, they were "justified by faith" that looked forward to Jesus' sacrifice.
- B. When we get to heaven we shall join them
 1. Matt. 8:11 *"And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."*
 2. We will all be equal in righteousness because our only righteousness will be our Savior's righteousness.

VII. To Jesus, The Mediator of the New Covenant—vs. 24

- A. "Jesus" is His redemptive name
 1. Given to Him to describe His mission.
 2. Matt. 1:21 *"And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."*
- B. Moses was the mediator of the covenant at Sinai.
 1. Jesus is the only mediator today.
 2. I Tim. 2:5 *"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,"*

3. When we come to Mt. Zion, we come to our Savior, our Redeemer, our one and only Mediator with the Father.
4. The ultimate outcome of the truth—I John 3:2 *“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”*
5. And the application—I John 3:3 *“And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”*

VIII. The Blood of Sprinkling That Speaks Better Things Than That of Abel—vs. 24

- A. To come to Christianity is to come to the shed blood of Christ.
 1. It is through that blood we have redemption—Eph. 1:7 *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”*
 2. By it we are brought near—Eph. 2:13 *“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”*
- B. The sprinkled blood of Jesus far surpasses the blood of Abel.
 1. Abel’s blood spoke of vindication and justice for murder—Gen. 4:10 *“And He said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground.”*
 2. Jesus’ blood speaks of forgiveness, cleansing from sin, peace with God, etc...
 3. We’ll have more to say about this another time.

The application—vs. 25—Do not refuse the message of salvation. If you do, there is no hope for you. Vs. 26—God shook the earth

at Mt. Sinai. Vs. 26b-27—He will shake the creation once more so that all material things will be removed. Only what is real—spiritual and eternal—will remain. So, we better be a part of that spiritual kingdom by faith in Jesus Christ.