

The Scandal of Grace – Summary Sheet

Hebrews 9:1-14

Hebrews is a difficult book to understand. You might not get every detail, but there are some powerful truths in this letter. The writer of Hebrews likes to make a lot of comparisons, especially to Judaism. Remember, his audience is Jewish. One of the reasons we struggle to understand all the details of Hebrews is simply because we're not Jewish and we're not so familiar with all their traditions.

He introduced the new covenant last week. A covenant is simply 'an agreement between two parties. 'There are two types of covenants: conditional and unconditional. Covenants in the bible are all about God being in relationship with man. The bible speaks of 7 different covenants but we are going to focus on just two. And the writer of Hebrews calls them the old and the new. The old covenant is referring to the covenant he made when he gave the law to Moses. This was of course conditional. If Israel were obedient, God would bless them, but if they were disobedient, then God would punish them.

Salvation has always been by God's grace and through faith. But just like today if we don't follow God's commands we will forfeit his blessing, so it was with the law in the Old Testament.

He shows them that the old covenant needs to pass away because the new one has arrived and it's way better! The old was great in its day, but now it's redundant! He spends 9:1-10 showing that all the ceremonial law, the temple, the animal sacrifice, the priests, all of it was good for a time but it was meant to be a picture, a shadow of what was coming.

God instituted the old covenant. The sanctuary was a picture of Christ: The brazen altar is a perfect picture of Jesus Christ, the one who was a sacrifice for sin. Next, the 'laver,' or washbasin was where the priests washed their hands after they'd slaughtered the animals. This is a really cool picture of Jesus Christ, who not only provides forgiveness through his spotless blood but then also cleanses us. The table of showbread symbolizes that Jesus is our sustenance. Then we come to the altar of incense: the sacrificial coals from the altar outside are placed there, and the incense smoke rises. This represents Jesus interceding on our behalf. He is doing this now. Finally the Holy place was where only the High Priest could go once a year. Jesus has torn down that curtain and not only went in for us once for all time but takes us in himself into God's presence.

The first covenant served its purpose but it couldn't set things straight. Its services were meaningful. But it was inadequate. The new covenant is completely unconditional: we can receive his salvation as a free gift. We get to share in the inheritance of Christ and enjoy a permanent, unbroken relationship with God. We accept this salvation is a gift and we receive it with joy! Jesus paid it all. We contribute nothing! Grace is an offence! It's scandalous. We must utterly despair of our own ability before we are prepared to receive the grace of Christ.