



Joshua 24 Receiving God's Grace

As we come to the final chapter in the book of Joshua, we find Joshua the man, the leader of the nation, gathering the people together for a final speech. They've been through a lot together, following God out of the desert and into the Promised Land, they've fought together, suffered together, and worshipped together. And now, as a dying man, Joshua wants to remind the people one last time of who they are, who God is, and what He has done, and then, to call people to make a commitment in response to God.

Joshua 24:1 Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and called for the elders of Israel, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God. **2** And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Your fathers, *including* Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods. **3** Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac. **4** To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. To Esau I gave the mountains of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. **5** Also I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagues Egypt, according to what I did among them. Afterward I brought you out.

God, speaking through Joshua, is reminding the people who He is and what He has done for them. The word "I" occurs 17 times in the passage as God reaches back several generations in history to show the people these people – they are who they are and where they are because of what God began doing many, many years ago through men like Abraham and Moses.

If you know much about the Bible, you know that those are big names. But the point God is stressing is that it was never about them. It was about what He did through them.

In fact, we're told something very interesting here; God interrupted Abraham's life while he was serving other gods. He wasn't seeking the Lord, he didn't come from a Christian family, but God chose Him, and blessed him and we're never given a WHY. For whatever reason, he's just where God choose to start. And I think that's important, because it shows us that God doesn't just call or use people with particular qualifications or experience – He can, and does, call anyone He wants.

The same thing is true with Moses – Moses was not expecting, or maneuvering for the position of leader of the nation. But God grabbed Him, hijacked the direction of his life, and used in him in crazy ways because God can and does call anyone He wants. No one is beyond God's ability to use. Both Abraham and Moses, and by extension, all of Israel were

recipients of unexpected, undeserved, unimaginable, unanticipated, unexplainable, grace. And so are we.

This observation is not unique to me, Christians have made it throughout the years, but think, about the people God chooses to use.

He chooses people who have been failures and fugitives:

Noah had a drinking problem
Abraham had a child out of wedlock
Moses was a murderer
David was an adulterer
Job lost his temper
Saul lost his sanity
Peter denied Jesus
Thomas doubted Jesus
The disciples abandoned Jesus
Paul tortured those who followed Jesus

God chooses to use people with messed up backgrounds:

Joseph was abused by his brothers
Rabab was a prostitute
Job had a troubled marriage
Daniel was a refugee
Esther was an orphan
Ruth was widow
Hosea had a cheating wife
David suffered the death of a child
The Samaritan woman was divorced 5 times
Mary Magdalene was demon possessed

God chooses people with weaknesses

Moses had a speech impediment
Miriam was a complainer
Aaron was a people--pleaser
Eli was a passive dad
Rebekah was a manipulative mom
Elijah struggled with depression
Jacob was a liar
Martha was a workaholic

God chooses people facing big problems

Noah faced a flood
Moses faced the Red Sea
Joshua faced the walls of Jericho
David faced the giant Goliath
Daniel faced the hungry lions

Esther faced execution
Elizabeth couldn't have kids
Timothy had an ulcer
Paul had a thorn
Lazarus was DEAD

And yet, these are the big names of the Bible. These are the ones we tell children stories about. These are the people that God used in mighty ways. Just like Abraham whose family served other gods when God called him.

Now, why is all of this such a big deal? Because it means that God can grab any of us and do something with us. You don't have to be in good shape spiritually to come to God or respond to God – you can be a hot mess, you can be a real piece of work. And He'll take you that way. He won't let you stay that way, but He'll take you that way. Don't assume that just because some part of your life is a wreck that God can't be calling out to you.

Listen to what Paul writes to Christians living in the first century:

Eph 2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

We, you and me, can be as dead as a doornail spiritually, and God can still breathe spiritual life into us through Christ – not because we've done great things on our own, not because we deserve it, but because of His grace. And when He does, we become His workmanship, He's the craftsman, and we're His project – daily being shaped into the thing He wants us to be.

The Scripture says God has thought of good things for us to be a part of, like a screenwriter drafting the script for the actors – He's designed our roles in His story. Just like He did with Abraham – calling Him while his family served other gods, making big promises to him, and then using him in big ways.

And now God is speaking to the direct descendants of Abraham reminding them of the events they've experienced in their own lives – they know what God did in the life of their ancestor, but do they remember what God has done for them?

6 'Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; and the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. 7 So they cried out to the LORD; and He put darkness between you and the Egyptians,

brought the sea upon them, and covered them. And your eyes saw what I did in Egypt. Then you dwelt in the wilderness a long time. 8 And I brought you into the land of the Amorites, who dwelt on the other side of the Jordan, and they fought with you. But I gave them into your hand, that you might possess their land, and I destroyed them from before you. 9 Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose to make war against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you. 10 But I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he continued to bless you. So I delivered you out of his hand. 11 Then you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho. And the men of Jericho fought against you—*also* the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. But I delivered them into your hand. 12 I sent the hornet before you which drove them out from before you, *also* the two kings of the Amorites, *but* not with your sword or with your bow. 13 I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them; you eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.'

The leaders of the people that are hearing all of this, the older generation of the crowd, they went through many of these things personally. They were born in Egypt, they were young kids when God sent the plagues, they remember walking through the Red Sea, they remember God speaking at Mount Sinai, they remember eating manna and forty years of wandering in the desert. They remember Moses' funeral and Joshua's inauguration. They marched around Jericho, they fought the battles of the Promised Land, and now, they're living here, settling into the cities that God promised their ancestors.

Joshua is appealing to their memory of things they did together, things they experienced first hand. And those who went through all of this learned at least two things.

First, that God's presence and blessing is there even in times of crisis.

Look at the events that Joshua describes: the time they were pursued by the Egyptian Army and afraid for their lives; the time they had to live in the desert and had no way to provide for themselves – no fields to plant, no place to get water, no stores to shop at; the time a sorcerer tried to cast spells on them; the multiple times when enemy nations tried to gang up on them. Look, he's not describing an awesome vacation full of rainbows and unicorns.

They've been through some rough times, *even though God was leading them*. In fact, we might say they went through these rough times *because* God was leading. Crisis in our lives is no guarantee that we're outside of God's will. In fact, crisis may be proof that we're squarely in the middle of it. But God led them through the crises, He revealed more of Himself to them through the crises, and ultimately, He gave them victory.

Could the same be true of you? Is there some crisis in your life right now?

If so, may I ask: is it possible that sometime in the future, what you're going through right now will be added to the list of the big things God has done in your life?

Go back and review the list here in Joshua – God doesn't say these are all the things that I saved you from, He says these are the things that I walked you through. When there is a crisis in your life, look for where Christ is in your life. Is He walking you through these things?

If so, look at what is on the other side of the crisis: [a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them; you eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.](#)'

There is a bountiful blessing in store for those who follow God. He's not leading you into perpetual harm. There may be times of crisis, times of difficulty, times of suffering and persecution, but He really is leading you toward blessing. How much you taste of it on this earth is uncertain, but your ultimate destiny is secure – He brought Israel to the Promised Land, He's bringing you to His Eternal Kingdom where you will enjoy peace with God forever. It's a fact.

So, how should we respond to all of this? That's the big question. And Joshua gives the hard answer.

[Joshua 23:14 "Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! 15 And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."](#)

Joshua draws this famous line in the sand. You've probably heard this verse before, but now you see the big picture behind it all.

Joshua says you have a choice: you can worship these other gods or you can worship the LORD. And he gives them alternatives within that – they can serve the Mesopotamian gods Abraham's family served, the ones God called him away from, or they can worship the Canaanite gods of the people they just conquered. We could add a third option – they could worship the gods of Egypt, the ones God embarrassed with the plagues – or they could worship Yahweh, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the one, true, living God who has proven His power over all the other so-called gods.

He says, "you can worship the gods we've left, the gods we conquered, or you can worship the God who has proven Himself to you, in time and history over and over again."

It seems like a pretty easy choice, right? But is it?

Is it easy for us to worship God today? Or, are we ever distracted by the things people worship around us? You see, we still have other gods, other spirits, other religions, especially living in a big city like DC – we have mosques and temples for all kinds of groups. But we also have less obvious gods – how many people worship their career? How many

people worship their lifestyle? No one calls the thing they center their whole life on an idol, but that doesn't mean it isn't one.

So, what is the really big thing in your life? Is it God, the God who has called you, the God who wants to love you and lead you, the God who wants to establish you and bless you, or is it something else? When Joshua draws the line in the sand, which side are you on?

16 So the people answered and said: "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; 17 for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed. 18 And the LORD drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God."

The people recognize that God has done all these things for them, and they say, "Yes, we will serve the Lord, He is our God!" Well, that's a bit of a no brainer when you put it this way, right? Who wouldn't want to serve a God who gives people great stuff?

That's the question Satan asked with Job. Satan told God, "The only reason Job serves you is because you've blessed him, you've given him all kinds of stuff. Let me take that stuff away and he'll curse you to your face." So God said, "OK, test him - you can make his life miserable, but you can't kill him." And how did Job respond? Did he pass the test? When all the good stuff was stripped out of his life, did he really curse God? Was he just in it for the benefits? No. He didn't understand what was going on, or why, but He never cursed God. That's the great point of Job's life. He shows us what it's like to worship under any and all circumstances.

It's the same lesson Paul claimed to have learned when he told the Philippians, 'I have learned how to be abased (that is, to have nothing and to suffer) and I've learned how to abound (that is, to have everything and have it easy), "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13).

And it's the lesson the rich young ruler failed – you remember that this well off young man came to Jesus one day and asked: what do I have to do to inherit eternal life? Now, that's an interesting question, because the man is described as young and rich. It's quite likely that he has already inherited a lot of money, he's financially well off – but he recognizes that something is still missing; he's seeking spiritual stability as well. And Jesus gives him a list of good things to do. Good morals to hold. And he says, I've done all of that. So Jesus says, "Good, then sell all that you have, give to the poor, and follow Me and you'll have treasure in Heaven."

And the young man went away sad and depressed because he owned a lot of land. In other words, though he would have never called his financial portfolio an idol – that's exactly what it was. It was the thing he was really prioritizing, the thing everything else in his life needed to bend around.

When Jesus drew the line in the sand, like Joshua had done, this young man found himself on the wrong side of the line. What he really loved was made obvious.

Joshua wants to make sure that's not the case with the children of Israel, so he pushes back on their profession:

19 But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. 20 If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good."

Joshua isn't looking for easy commitments. Maybe you've been in a setting where a pastor or evangelist, or musician was doing some sort of an altar call and they asked for every head bowed and every eye closed and then told people to slip their hand up if they wanted to follow Christ – the idea was that they could do it with no one else knowing.

That's not the kind of call Joshua is making here. He's trying to talk people out of saying they'll follow God.

Would that work with you? Could someone talk you out of serving God? Can a friend, or a professor, or a boss, or a politician? Friends, it's a real question you need to ask. Can someone tell you, you can't serve God? Or, has He so radically smashed into your soul that you're so certain of who He is and who you are that there's no way you could ever deny Him or turn away from Him?

And do you understand the reality of who He is? Joshua stresses the fact that we're not playing games here spiritually. He says, "You can't just be kind of interested in God. You can't say you worship Him, you can't say you serve Him, you can't say you pray to Him, and worship other things. He is a holy and jealous God. Listen to these words again: "If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good."

It's a very sober warning, a very serious commitment he is setting before them. And they respond back forcefully:

21 And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD!"

They're all in.

22 So Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD for yourselves, to serve Him."

And they said, "We are witnesses!"

23 "Now therefore," he said, "put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD God of Israel."

24 And the people said to Joshua, “The LORD our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!”

25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

The covenant they make – the agreement between God and the people – is renewed in the same place where God made a covenant 600 years earlier with Abraham (Genesis 12:7). Shechem is also the place where Jacob called his family to put away the foreign gods that were among them – they buried them under an oak tree in Shechem (Gen 35:4).

In other words, this is a significant place for this significant event. It reminds everyone not only of who God is, but also who they are as descendants of Abraham and Jacob - yet another reminder that this is all part of God’s ultimate plan. He has been shaping their family tree just so He could bring them to this moment. That’s the kind of God He is.

And now we end the book with a bit of an epilogue, a bit of ‘what happened next’ to wrap up the loose ends:

26 Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak that *was* by the sanctuary of the LORD. 27 And Joshua said to all the people, “Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD which He spoke to us. It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God.” 28 So Joshua let the people depart, each to his own inheritance.

29 Now it came to pass after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, *being* one hundred and ten years old. 30 And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Serah, which *is* in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash.

31 Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the LORD which He had done for Israel.

32 The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried at Shechem, in the plot of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of silver, and which had become an inheritance of the children of Joseph.

33 And Eleazar the son of Aaron died. They buried him in a hill *belonging to* Phinehas his son, which was given to him in the mountains of Ephraim.

So, this is the book of Joshua. The story of how God called a man, turned his descendants into a nation, and then began blessing them – not because they were special in and of themselves, but because He was gracious and wanted to use them for His purposes – the ultimate purpose was to set the stage for His Son, Jesus Christ, to be born in the nation of Israel, to a young Israeli girl and then go on to become the substitutionary sacrifice for the

sins of all mankind – whether Israeli, or Chinese, or Kenyan, or American, whosoever will confess and repent of their sins shall be forgiven.

And now the Scriptures call you and me to a similar response to God’s grace.

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service*. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*.

God is calling us to obey Him and worship Him, He’s calling us to follow Him and serve Him. It’s not an easy call – you can’t do it – unless you’re sure of it – that God is real, and He is calling you, then you can’t help but do it. Like the people of Israel, you’ll say, “No, but I will serve the LORD!”

You’ll fall, you’ll fail, you’ll go through some crises, but you’ll also learn, and come to know with certainty that He is there. You’ll know with confidence that He has done amazing things, and you will be able to say, with Joshua, that as for you and your house, you will serve the Lord.

Let’s pray.