

Remember God's Amazing Grace
 Joshua 24:1-13
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In chapter 23, Joshua gave a charge to the leaders of Israel. Now in chapter 24, Joshua re-emphasized his charge, but this time he called the whole nation together in a corporate gathering to remember the grace of God that was given to them. Look at v. 1 again:

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders,
 the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves
 before God.

It might be tempting to simply treat v. 1 as a transition verse. However, in this verse this picture of the corporate gathering of God's people is a clear reminder of the importance of the gathering together of God's people to remember the grace of God. There is nothing like it.

Scripture stresses the importance of the corporate gathering of God's people. In the corporate gathering, there is a special means of grace that comes to God's people. It is encouraging grace that builds up the individual and the congregation. It is sanctifying grace that convicts the individual and the congregation of sin. It is persevering grace that sustains the saint and the congregation during seasons of suffering. It is unifying grace that builds up and strengthens the community of faith as they hear the word of God read, prayed, sung, and preached as a body of believers together. It is powerful and life-changing to gather, week in and week out, with the body of Christ to remember the grace of God given to us in the Lord Jesus Christ because remembering the grace of God together is experiencing the grace of God together.

This is the main point of the sermon: Remembering God's amazing grace together is experiencing God's amazing grace together. This is why we need to gather together every Sunday because remembering God's amazing grace together is experiencing God's grace together.

In Joshua 24:2-13, are four important truths that remind us of the importance of remembering God's amazing grace together. We should remember God's grace to us as strangers; remember God's grace to us as slaves; remembering God's grace stuns us; finally, we need to remember it is God's grace to us that saves us.

I. Remember God's Grace to us as Strangers (vv. 2-4)

In vv. 1-28, Joshua is preaching his last sermon. The introduction of the sermon in vv. 2-13 is what theologians call salvation history. It is Joshua retelling the story of Yahweh's faithfulness and how He saved His people. Telling and retelling the story of Israel's salvation is critical to understanding the Old Testament. Salvation history is like the center of a concentric circles diagram wherein the Old Testament is centered around salvation and how you live, how you worship, who you worship, and how you treat your neighbor flows out of this experience of salvation described in salvation history. It is the nucleus of the Old Testament atom because it was and is where God's power is displayed.

When Joshua retold the story of their salvation history, he began when Abraham lived with his father, Terah, and his brother, Nahor. What is interesting about Joshua's retelling of salvation history is that he began when Abraham didn't know God. When Abraham lived with his family in Ur, he was worshipping false gods. Abraham didn't know who Yahweh was until Yahweh revealed Himself. Look at vv. 2-4 one more time:

² And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. ³ Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac. ⁴ And to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. And I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt.

His point is to show that Yahweh initiated His saving work with Abraham while he was a stranger to God and did not love God. Even though Abraham was separated from God and worshipping false gods, Yahweh called Abraham into a relationship with Him.

Then we see God’s faithfulness because Yahweh made a promise to Abraham and Yahweh kept it. God kept His promises to Abraham by giving him children and the land of Canaan. These are promises of grace that were made to Abraham and have been fulfilled to Abraham’s offspring, Israel.

Joshua wants the congregation to understand that God’s grace is amazing to them. God made promises to them; then God kept His promises. Now Joshua is charging the nation to remember God’s amazing grace that is seen in God’s fulfilled promises.

Friends, hear the good news! God is still calling people who are separated from Him to Himself. He is still promising the blessings of His presence and salvation through a better covenant made by the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here is what this means, if you are a Christian, then you were like Abraham. You were separated from God by your sin, worshipping yourself or anything or anyone that you thought would give you purpose, hope, satisfaction, or meaning in life. You probably poured out your heart to your small “g” false god that you had created in your heart, only to realize that this substitute savior was a really no savior at all. It could not provide salvation nor make good on its promises.

Then an amazing thing happened. The true God broke into your world, and He called you out of your darkness into His marvelous light. Then you were able to turn from your sin and to Jesus, the One who is the “YES” to all of God’s promises, and now the True Savior fills your heart with joy. You realized you are no longer a stranger to God, but now you are His eternal possession.

Listen to your salvation history in 1 Peter 2:9-10:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Brother and sister in Christ, your story of salvation and mine are the same: God took those who were strangers to Him, alienated from Him, far off from Him, His enemies, and children of wrath and brought us into the New Covenant Promises of God made in Christ. Yes, we may have had different contemporary experiences and lived different kinds of lives prior to being saved. Still, our basic condition prior to salvation was the same—we were separated from God by our sin, and the Son of God came and gave His life for us on the cross and redeemed us. He was buried and rose again on the third day. Then God saves us by calling us to Himself. He causes us to be born again, and then we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The One who saved us.

If you have never trusted Jesus, why don't you stop your search for meaning, purpose, hope, happiness, and satisfaction in the darkness of this world and let Jesus bring you into the marvelous light of the glory of God? You see, God's amazing grace is for those who are separated from God by their sin.

II. Remember God's Grace to us as Slaves (vv. 5-7)

Next, Joshua moves to the Exodus and reminds the people of Israel how God delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery. Look in vv. 5-7:

⁵ And I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in the midst of it, and afterward I brought you out. "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 And when they cried to the Lord, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did in Egypt. And you lived in the wilderness a long time.

Notice how Joshua frames this story of salvation history. First, Israel was helpless to free themselves from their slavery in Egypt. Then God delivered them.

Next, after they had been delivered from slavery, He led them to the Red Sea, where they were trapped between the sea and the world's superpower at the time, the massive Egyptian army coming to massacre them. It was out of the frying pan and into the fire. They were helpless! They had just been delivered from slavery, and now they were going to be massacred on the banks of the Red Sea.

I like what Dr. Dale Ralph Davis says about this story. He says it seems like the LORD delivered Israel and then left them as sitting ducks at the Red Sea—why would He do that?

I love his answer because I think it is so true. He says, "God will sometimes box us up in our own helplessness in order to show us we are not delivered by our own cleverness, insight, manipulation, or anxiety, but by Yahweh 'who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters (Isa. 43:16).'"¹ Wow! Have you ever been there? I have.

Has God ever boxed you up? Has He ever brought you to a place of helplessness so that you will learn that salvation is of the Lord and not of your own effort, cleverness, insight, doubling-down hard work, manipulation, and worry that centers on your own efforts?

We may not say it, but when we get in those situations, we often silently think, "I got this." Or we will say, "If it is to be, then it is up to me." You know what I mean. We have all said these things to ourselves.

Let me make two applications here:

First, if you are not a Christian, please hear the good news! You cannot save yourself. Why don't you give up your mythic quest to manufacture your own salvation from your slavery to sin? You are facing the sea of the wrath of God with the destruction of God's wrath at your back. You are boxed in by your sin. You see, the misery in your life right now is not simply a result of bad choices but the result of being separated from God by your sin. You have no hope but to trust in the One who paid for your sin on the cross by receiving God's wrath that was reserved for you. All of God's wrath was poured out on Him so that you may live a glorious life in Him.

Second, brother and sister in Christ, the fact is, even after we are delivered from sin, God will at times box us into an impossible situation to remind us that salvation is of the Lord. It is in these times we need to

¹ Dale Ralph Davis, *Focus on the Bible: Joshua: No Falling Words*, 200.

take heart. God often reminds us of our helplessness in life. He will use those times to remind us that His grace is sufficient. He will use those times to remind us that He is faithful and His promises are sure and grounded in the blood of Christ's death and resurrection. He will use those times to continue to free us from the sin that seeks to enslave us. He will use those times to recalibrate our lives so that we will fix our eyes on Jesus, who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross so that we will not grow weary in our struggle against sin.

III. Remembering God's Grace Stuns Us (vv. 8-10)

Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived on the other side of the Jordan. They fought with you, and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you. ⁹ Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel. And he sent and invited Balaam the son of Beor to curse you, ¹⁰ but I would not listen to Balaam. Indeed, he blessed you. So I delivered you out of his hand.

So, what is going on in this text? Israel had heard the promise of Yahweh to deliver them when they went into the Promised Land. They had been told that the LORD would fight for them when they faced the Amorites and other Canaanite tribes.

It is like this. The story of Balak and Balaam is found in Numbers 22-24. Balak, the King of Moab, paid the prophet Balaam to curse Israel as they journeyed in the wilderness to the Promised Land. Balaam tried to curse Israel, but every time he prophesied to curse them, God caused him to always blessed Israel. Balak's plan backfired. Yahweh would not allow Balaam to curse Israel.

Now think about this story. Israel didn't know the story of Balak and Balaam until after the fact. It was not like there was some reporter with Balak and Balaam giving them updates on what was going on and how God was working for them.

Yet, somehow and sometime later, Yahweh made sure they learned the story of His amazing grace toward them even when they did not know it. He wanted them to be stunned that they were being covered by His amazing grace even when they were not aware of His grace.

Here is how we know God was stunning them with grace. The construction of the Hebrew sentence, "Indeed, he blessed you." This sentence is constructed in such a way to communicate stunning surprise.

When Joshua said this to them, they were to feel stunned and surprised by God's grace. There were to be utterly shocked that God had been kind toward them when they were completely unaware of His grace.

The grace of God works this way. It reverses the consequences of sin's curse that has been made on us even when we did not know we were cursed. The New Testament tells us of the same stunning grace that was given to us when we were still sinners.

Romans 5:8 says:

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

In Ephesians 2:1-6, the Apostle Paul unpacks the stunning grace of God even more:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and

the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Finally, in Galatians 3:13-14, the Apostle Paul says:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” — ¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

It is in Christ that God has reversed the curse of sin. Every human being that has been born has been born under the curse of sin. We were not born Christians. We were not born saved. You may have been born in a Christian family, but all that means is that you had a family that brought you to church so you could hear the gospel. That is a blessing, but that is not salvation.

The fact is, we were all born separated from God under the curse of sin. When Jesus died to pay our debt of sin, the curse was broken, and the curse of sin was taken from us and put on Christ. Jesus reversed the curse.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, until you understand that prior to becoming a Christian, you were under the curse, you will never be stunned by the amazing grace of God. You will be arrogant and think you deserve God’s grace or somehow earned it.

Friend, you need to know that Christ has died for sinners to break the curse of sin over you. He died on the cross and rose from the dead 2000 years ago, but the blessing of the breaking of sin’s curse is not applied to you until you repent of your sin and confess your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

The stunning grace of God is that Christ died for you when you were a sinner. He died for you when you did not even know you needed a Savior. It is the stunning grace of God that leads you to faith and repentance in the Lord Jesus Christ. This grace is given to you as a gift because, in your helpless condition, there is no possible way you can be saved. This leads us to our last point.

IV. Remember God’s Grace to Us that Saved Us (vv. 11-13)

And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, and the leaders of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And I gave them into your hand. ¹² And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow. ¹³ I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant.’

There is a shift in the language in vv. 11-13. In these verses, Joshua moves from talking about salvation past to the salvation the people have experienced. Prior to these verses, Joshua spoke as if these people were actually there with Abraham, Moses, the Exodus and knew about Balaam, but they weren’t.

So, when Joshua retold their story of salvation and used Yahweh's language where Yahweh said: I took Abraham, I gave you the land, I brought you, and I destroyed the people of Israel believed God's word as if they were there. They believed the story of salvation that God had provided by faith in God's word.

However, in vv. 11-13, Joshua is telling them of their experience. When Joshua said that Yahweh said, I gave, and I sent, they knew this story from the first-hand experience. It was their salvation story. It was first-hand faith. Now they were hearing their part in the story of their salvation.

Here is what was going on in this gathering of the congregation. They remembered the amazing grace of God together, and through that remembering, they were experiencing the amazing grace of God.

I want to close with a question: How does remembering the past amazing grace of God in our lives affect the present work of God in our lives?

First, when we remember God's amazing grace given to us in the past, it reminds us that God is the primary initiator of salvation. As we remember God's past grace, we are humbled because we are reminded we did not initiate our salvation—God did.

Second, when we remember God's amazing grace given to us in the past, we are stunned by God's grace. Not only does it humble us, but it drives us to our knees in worship. We marvel at His grace given to us even when we were sinners.

Third, when we remember God's amazing grace toward us in the past, we find new strength to persevere and face our present and future struggles. We realize that God may have boxed us in a situation to remind us that salvation belongs to Him. Through this experience, He deepens our trust and love for Jesus. He strengthens our weak knees and our feeble muscle of faith so that we grow stronger in Christ.

Finally, when we remember God's amazing grace together, we are renewed to fix our eyes on Jesus. We remember that we are not alone in our journey to the Promised Land.