

This morning I am in the ninth week of a sermon series I am doing on the Old Testament book of Joshua, the sixth book of the Bible. If you're unfamiliar with this book of the Bible, the historical context is that the Israelites, who were enslaved in Egypt, have been set free by God, using a man named Moses, with the plan of bringing them to the land of Canaan, a land which God had promised to their ancestor Abraham 600 years earlier. After the Israelites wander in the wilderness for 40 years as a result of their disobedience, Joshua leads the Israelites across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land, where they fight many battles and drive out the wicked inhabitants of the land. This morning we are in chapters 22-23. The tribes of Israel have settled in their individual territories, and Joshua is going to be giving a couple closing addresses to the people. I'm not going to be addressing chapter 22, in which a couple of Israelite tribes set up an altar to remember God by that causes some misunderstanding among the tribes. We'll look mainly at chapter 23 this week and the final chapter, chapter 24, next week.

There are three movements to this passage, two that are similar to our experience today and one that is different, and they have a lot to teach us about the gospel and what it means to know God.

### 1) Our victories and blessings are the undeserved grace of God

*After a long time had passed and **the LORD had given** Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then old and well advanced in years, <sup>2</sup> summoned all Israel-- their elders, leaders, judges and officials-- and said to them: "I am old and well advanced in years. <sup>3</sup> You yourselves have seen **everything the LORD your God has done** to all these nations for your sake; it was **the LORD your God who fought for you**. <sup>4</sup> Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain-- the nations I conquered-- between the Jordan and the Great Sea in the west. <sup>5</sup> **The LORD your God himself will drive them out** of your way. **He will push them out before you**, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you.*

Joshua's focus in these verses is not on what the Israelites have done, or even on what he has done, but on what God has done for them. God has given you rest. God has done this to the nations. God has fought for you. God will drive them out. God will do all He has promised. In fact, in v. 10 he says:

<sup>10</sup> *One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised.*

One of you routs a thousand! Is he saying this to praise the people for how mighty they are? No! It's to remind them that the victories they achieved were completely due to God's grace, for God fighting for them. They are not resting in their own land because of their strength and effort, but because of God's undeserved grace, that He has given them something that they did not earn and did nothing to deserve.

Joshua wants to make sure the Israelites recognize the grace of God in their life. He wants them to recognize that everything that is good in their life, every victory, is by the hand of God. What would it look like for you to believe that today? To believe that any good health you have, any relational blessings, anything you possess, is an undeserved gift by an unobligated giver, something that is a free and unmerited gift of God? How would that change your outlook on life? Sure, God worked with you in tandem. You needed to partner with Him by faith. But you could not do it on your own. Why is this important? Why does it matter that we see our accomplishments and blessings as evidence of God's undeserved grace and not simply the product of our own strength and efforts?

Think about it. If your accomplishments are all a product of your strength and effort, then what are the two natural responses? Pride or despair. Either you see yourself as awesome and look down on others who have not accomplished what you have, or, if you have not accomplished much, you look down on yourself in comparison to others. But if your eyes are on the grace of God, if you see the good in your life as a gift from God, then what does it lead to? What if you believe this:

*James 1:17 - Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*

Well, what does it do when another person gives you an undeserved gift? When you have cheated and deserve punishment, but instead are given grace and love and a clean slate? When you have hurt another person and you are forgiven?

Grace leads to humility, to confidence, to gratitude, to joy. Look at what God has done for me! I have received more than I deserve. The truth is that anything bad is deserved, because they are simply the product of living as a sinner in a world that is in rebellion against God; but anything good is grace, an undeserved gift given by one who owes me nothing good. What if, instead of expecting everything to go well all the time, we recognize that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.

**Romans 6:23** - *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

I deserve death, but I have been given life by a gracious God.

What do you think of this outlook on life? Do you think this approach demeans us? Does it not give us enough credit? Will it harm our self-esteem to attribute our success and victories to the grace of God instead of to our own strength and effort? I would argue that no, rather than demeaning us or destroying our self-esteem, it gives us a much more unshakeable foundation, and much more honest and rock-solid esteem. Recognizing what we deserve and the grace of God that has been given to us instead gives us a humble confidence. We are humbled because we know that we deserved death, but have given life. We can't look down on anyone else, because we know that anything good in our lives is a gift of God, and nothing that we can boast in. But we are also confident. It does not destroy our self-esteem, because we know that despite our sins and failures, we are loved by the God of the universe. We know that God is full of grace. And we know that love and grace will not change depending upon our performance. We know we are loved, we know that it's not because of how awesome we are but because of how gracious God is, and we know that nothing can take that away.

So let me encourage you as Joshua encouraged the Israelites, to recognize in your victories and in your blessings the undeserved grace of God.

## 2) The more we understand His grace, the more we will respond in heartfelt obedience

<sup>6</sup> *"Be very strong; be careful to **obey** all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. <sup>7</sup> Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. <sup>8</sup> But you are to **hold fast to the LORD** your God, as you have until now. <sup>9</sup> "The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. <sup>10</sup> One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised. <sup>11</sup> So be very careful **to love** the LORD your God.*

Look at the words Joshua uses: Obey. Hold fast. Love. He is encouraging them to be holy – set apart for God. To be devoted to Him completely and supremely. He tells them to not associate with the pagan nations and their gods, who will lead them astray.

Please notice the order here. This is not obey first, and then you will receive God's grace, favor and love. This is grace first, followed by obedience. Why should they obey, hold fast, and love? In order to earn God's favor? No! They should obey, hold fast to God, and love Him because of the grace of God, because God has shown them undeserved favor and love, given them blessing and victory! In other words, why would you turn to other gods when your God has been so gracious to you? Why would you look to others for satisfaction or joy or salvation when your God has been so good to you and given you such victory and blessing? Love Him not because you need to earn anything, but because He first loved you!

**1 John 4:18-19** - *There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.* <sup>19</sup> **We love because he** first loved us.

If you look closely, this is the pattern of Scripture. First they are rescued from Egypt. Then they are given the law. First they are given the Promised Land. Then they are asked to obey. The grace, the undeserved gift of God, comes first, followed by the call to obedience. Think of the woman caught in adultery.

**John 8:10-11** - *Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" <sup>11</sup> "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."*

First comes the grace, then comes the obedience. You have experienced the undeserved love and favor of God. Why cast that aside to go after lesser gods, lesser loves? Why trade in the best for fleeting pleasure?

**John 10:10** - *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

This may seem risky to you on God's part, giving out the grace before the obedience. It's like a teacher promising an A before the test comes. If you already have the A, why would you study? For the love of learning. Because you want to learn for learning's sake! Why obey when you are already perfect in God's sight? Out of love for God.

In God's kingdom, grace comes first, and then the call to obey. But do not just think of it as rules to follow. Think of it this way: when you marry someone, you quickly realize there are rules to the relationship, things that you should do or not

do in order to please the other person. But if you love the person, you want to learn those rules and do them in order to make the other person happy and create a rewarding relationship. You obey, so to speak, because you love. The grace came first, and then the obedience. It is similar with God. As you come to understand the love and grace of God, it transforms your heart so that you trust Him and want to love Him and honor Him. And so you obey, not because you have to, not because you are afraid of judgment, but because you love Him, because you trust Him.

### 3) The imperfect old covenant points us to the and better covenant

*<sup>12</sup> "But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, <sup>13</sup> then you may be sure that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the LORD your God has given you. <sup>14</sup> "Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your **God gave you has failed**. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. <sup>15</sup> But just as every good promise of the LORD your God has come true, *so the LORD will bring on you all the evil he has threatened, until he has destroyed you from this good land he has given you. <sup>16</sup> If you violate the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the LORD's anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you."**

Joshua's address ends with this warning: do not disobey, because if you do, there will be consequences. Maybe this sounds harsh to you, and contrary to the grace I spoke about earlier. After all, it's great that God gave us this land, but if we can lose it when we disobey it's probably only a matter of time. But the reason for this warning is that the Israelites are living under the old covenant made at Mt. Sinai know as the Mosaic covenant. A covenant is like a contract but much more intimate. At Sinai, God told the Israelites, I will be your God, and you will be my people. Here are the stipulations of the covenant, the commands that are part of this covenant. If you obey, good things will happen – prosperity, health, peace, and safety. And if you disobey, bad things will happen – famine, disease, war, and strife, etc.

The problem, of course, is that the Israelites would eventually disobey. They would turn to the gods of other nations. They would violate the covenant. Because as much as they tried, they just couldn't measure up to the demands of the Mosaic

covenant. And God would, after many warnings, eventually remove them from the land by using Babylon as an instrument of judgment on them. But in the midst of the judgment, God would give promises that a new and better covenant, a better relationship, was coming:

**Jeremiah 31:31-34** - *"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. <sup>32</sup> It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup> "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and **they will be my people.** <sup>34</sup> No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

Now, the old covenant is gone

What do we learn about this better covenant from Jeremiah 31:31-34?

### 1) **God's law will be written on our hearts**

In other words, God will live in us by His Holy Spirit.

**Ezekiel 36:26-27** - *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*

God will give us His Holy Spirit, replacing our stony heart that is obstinate and can not respond to Him or obey Him with the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, so that we will have the ability to keep His laws. God's law, His old covenant, has always been good, but it had two weaknesses: it did not give anyone the power to keep the law, nor was it able to remove our sin.

**Romans 7:12,14-18,24-25** - *So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. <sup>13</sup> Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become*

utterly sinful. <sup>14</sup> We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. <sup>15</sup> I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. <sup>16</sup> And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup> As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it **is sin living in me**. <sup>18</sup> I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out... What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord!

The law was good, and the old covenant was good, but it had two weaknesses: it did not give anyone the power to keep the law, nor did it save anyone from their sins. We needed a better way to overcome our sin and get back to God.

**Romans 3:19-24** - Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup> Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. <sup>21</sup> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

When we come to faith in Jesus, we are not just forgiven, but our desires and affections change, because He has given us a new heart and put His Holy Spirit in us. We begin to love God and see His commands as good and life-giving. We still struggle to follow them because the flesh still wars against the Spirit within us, as we read in Romans 7. But there is a new heart in us, and a newfound ability to follow God. This means that if you see no change in your desires, you probably do not know Him. His Spirit is not in you. Pray that He would give you His Holy Spirit.

## 2) We will know God

His Holy Spirit brings us into an intimate relationship with God, as we are adopted into His family as His beloved child.

**Romans 8:15-16** - For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

What is the new and better covenant? It involves receiving a new heart, and His Holy Spirit, so that we can follow Him. It involves knowing Him. He is no longer some being in the sky, but is now our loving Father.

### 3) Our sins are forgiven

Under the old covenant, your sins could be set aside for another year on the Day of Atonement. But your sins could not be dealt with once and for all. But Jesus' death changed all of that:

*Hebrews 10:11-14* - Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. <sup>12</sup> But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he **sat down** at the **right hand** of God. <sup>13</sup> Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, <sup>14</sup> because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

*Hebrews 9:15* - For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance-- now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

*Hebrews 8:6-7,13* - But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the **covenant** of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on **better** promises. <sup>7</sup> For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another... <sup>13</sup> By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

Jesus paid the penalty for the sins committed under the old covenant, and has offered us a new covenant, a new relationship.

*1 Corinthians 11:25* - In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

This new covenant not only means that we have his Holy Spirit, a new heart. It not only means that we can know God as we are adopted into His family. But finally, it

means that our sins have been forgiven. We are perfect in the sight of God. The Holy Spirit in us guarantees we will have eternal life.

***Ephesians 1:13-14*** - *And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a **deposit** guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.*

The imperfect covenant that Joshua spoke of in Joshua 23, the warning that if they disobeyed, they would lose the land, is no longer the agreement God offers to us. We have been offered a new covenant, a better relationship. When you put your faith in Jesus, you receive His Holy Spirit, a new heart with new desires, that wants to know and honor and follow God. You come into a relationship with Him where you are a beloved son to the Father. And you are completely forgiven, past, present, and future, so that there is no guilt, no shame, no condemnation, and nothing that can ever separate you from His love

***Romans 8:38-39*** - *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Come to the God of grace today.