



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

A History of Grace

November 14, 2021

Joshua 24:1-14

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**24** 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> "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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> but I would not listen to Balaam. Indeed, he blessed you. So I delivered you out of his hand. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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.' <sup>14</sup> "Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.

*(Pastor prays)*

We have come to a solemn occasion in the life of God's people. All the important people are there in verse 1, the elders, judges and officers. And they present themselves before God

because a seismic shift is at hand. And in our passage, their leader Joshua walks them through their remarkable history of grace. There's a shift happening here starting with the age of the patriarchs over Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. They all talk about the same amount of time and then you get up to the Promised Land. The book of Joshua takes over. They walk into the Promised Land and Joshua is gonna die. There's a shift. So what does Joshua do? He reverses the history. He started out in verses 1-4 and talks about all of the patriarchs. And then in verses 5-7, he condenses down the 12 chapters of Exodus. In verses 8-10 he starts to talk about the victories. Then in verses 11, 12 and 13, he moves their attention to the last conquest.

Now they've settled in and Joshua puts their eyes on the future. With each step along the way Joshua, seems to be reminding the people of what God has brought them through. There is an impulse here for the people who catch their breath and collect themselves like some of you need to do. Right now, you need to remember God's good grace.

Thursday we celebrated Veteran's Day so the church offices were closed. Our school was closed and there was nothing going on here. So on Thursday afternoon I came to my office for a while and started going through my prayer journals. I reach back to my own life for 25, almost 30 years. As I was reading those journals, I was reminded of God's provision throughout my own personal history. I was reminded of the times where God walked me through very difficult situations. There were times when Connie and I didn't know if we could make ends meet and I was reminded how God provides.

That's what Joshua is doing here with the people. He's stopping to remind the people to look and see how God has provided. Here, as Joshua speaks in 13 versus, 21 times you have a description of God acting on half of His people. This reminds us of what God said to the apostle Paul when he suffered so badly. God said to him, "My grace is sufficient." So, for just for a few moments I want to take this passage and I want to ask God to fill your minds with thoughts of God's grace because...

### **A Mind Filled with Grace Will Be Occupied with God**

Let's do what we always do. Let's walk through the passage and see what we can find. Here's the first thing we know about God's grace.

## Grace demolishes a bad past

That's enough to be thankful for that right there. So we get past verse 1. We know the elders and the leaders are standing there and the speech begins in verse 2. Look how he starts out. The first person Joshua starts talking about is a man named Abraham. He is the Jewish hero who has been idolized. We even have a song that reaches down to this day, where children sing of Abraham. And this is what Joshua says in this passage. <sup>2</sup> *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.*

So you look and Abraham like you ought to be like him. Because the Bible says that Abraham believed God and it was credited him as righteousness. But before that, he was practicing divination, necromancy, and worshipping idols. There's no telling the terrible things in Abraham's past. Do you have anything like that in your past? Have you been drunk, cheat, have lust, lie? Do you cuss or have you watched pornography?

I asked these questions in the earlier service and, because of COVID, there is a family watching at home. And on the way back to this third service the Dad is texting me. He texted and said that "My son asked, 'What does cuss mean?'" And the Dad said, "it means to say a bad word." And the little boys responds, "Oh, I heard Mom do a cuss." Well, that's some conviction right there.

So whatever the most embarrassing thing is that you might have in your life, there's something hidden away that you don't want to talk about. Whatever that is, now read verse 3. Abraham was a Pagan. <sup>3</sup> *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.* Verse 3, keep looking at the words of God. *I took.* That *I led* literally reads, "I caused him to go." *I did* it. Not Abraham.

Abraham was a Pagan. This is the Gospel of Grace. You see, the Gospel of Grace demolishes whatever is back there in your past. Just come up with your very worst, whatever is back there, God demolishes it. This is a movement of grace and what we believe as Christians. We don't believe that we need to start doing things *hoping* God will love us. We understand that we are sinners under the wrath of God. And the Gospel says God, in grace, sent Jesus, His son. Jesus, who is fully God and fully man, lived perfectly, goes to the cross where there is the judgment of

God. He takes the wrath for our sin and we receive grace and forgiveness and love. Grace demolishes your past.

### **Grace defies logic**

Let's read verse 4 carefully. Remember Jacob and Esau. Let me show you how grace works. It defies logic. Think about those two men, Jacob and Esau. Verse 4 makes no sense to me. <sup>4</sup>*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.* Two brothers, Jacob and Esau. Esau got the hill country but Jacob, the chosen one, Jacob would be sent to Egypt, into slavery. That doesn't make any sense to me, especially when you read in the light of Romans when Paul quotes the prophet and what he says about Jacob and Esau. Jacob I love and it's Esau I hate. Here are these brothers, one is good and one is bad. One drives his parents crazy. He brings terrible girls home, he's rash and makes bad decisions. He is not a good guy, but it's Esau who gets the blessing. And Jacob, the chosen one, goes down to slavery. That doesn't make sense to us. We believe you are to work hard for a good day's wage. Then you ought to treat people like you want to be treated. We believe in fair play and justice. And grace has nothing to do with that. Grace is the product of God's wrath and His love meeting at the cross. We want equity. I've been a good person. I have been nice. Why are things not working out like I want them to? We want things to make sense so it's good that we are reminded that grace doesn't make sense. That's why it is grace. It's mystifying.

I'll be preaching through the Book of Hebrews starting in January 2022. By October we will be in Hebrews 11. It's the chapter where we have all the great players of faith. It starts out talking about all the victories that God gave. Through faith, the people believed and they won victory. At the end of Hebrews 11, people believed and they were martyred. Read the Book of Acts. Peter and James are put in jail. James is martyred. Go all the way back in the Bible to Genesis 4 where there are Cain and Abel. Cain is bad, Abel is good and the bad one kills the good one. It's an absolute painful mystery of how it works. Grace must overcome the bitterness and questions and be okay with God doing this. Grace defies logic.

### **Grace dwells on deliverance**

Let's read the 5<sup>th</sup> verse and listen to the verbs and who's doing them. Let's look at what God is doing. <sup>5</sup> *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.* Verse 5 is a summary of Exodus 1-12. Joshua talks about the plagues in Egypt and the Exodus. But look how it is expressed. I *sent*. I *plagued*. I *brought you out*. It reminds me of Julius Caesar: I came. I saw. I conquered. This is God-centered. It's God acting. It's God saving. It's God-focused. Here is the model of what God did for us in Christ. Here's the framework of the Gospel . Here is us coming to God with nothing to offer and Him loving us through Christ. Here is the cross. This is not just the framework of the brothers and sisters in Christ, no, this is the framework for believers. This is your own sanctification. There's a reason you're going through what you're going through. It's that God will deliver. God put Jacob in Egypt, and this gives us a picture of God saving people. God will deliver people. God will forgive. Look, we have baptism as a tangible picture of what God does. God will wash you. Maybe you've been through some sort of abuse, physical or emotional. God will restore you. God will use you.

Too often you fill your mind with so many other things, but a mind filled with the good grace of God becomes a mind occupied with God. Grace deals with the past. Grace defies logic. Grace dwells on deliverance. This is what God does.

There is something else that Grace does.

### **Grace determines responsibility**

Listen to the shift in pronouns. In verses 1-4 it was "your fathers." Now let's read verses 5-7. <sup>5</sup> *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.*

<sup>6</sup> *"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. <sup>7</sup> 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.*

The primary audience now is those who made it through the wilderness. They are too young to be punished for the wrong things that the adults did. They are the next generation that is now set up to take responsibility. They have grown into adulthood. Ages 25, 26, 29, 30. You are now the responsible ones in the congregation. You are responsible to lead in worship. To be disciplined to and to disciple. You are responsible to give and be an ongoing part of our missions and disciplines. Last week was HGBC's 66<sup>th</sup> birthday. We are presently having about one funeral a week. And then we have the new members class that the torch will be passed on to. Those are the ones who will take over the responsibility. God's grace as a father has made us responsible as His children.

### **Grace doesn't waste the wilderness**

*<sup>7</sup> 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.* Look at the end of that verse. And you lived in the wilderness a long time. While they were in the wilderness, God provided. There was refining and healing. There were readjustments and a learning of dependence in God. It's a time to take joy in God or have the joy of the Lord restored this day! Let's close a chapter and let's open another. God didn't waste what you have been through. He wastes nothing. And by grace you can move forward.

### **Grace deflects evil and turns it to good**

Let's look at verses 8-10. *<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> but I would not listen to Balaam. Indeed, he blessed you. So I delivered you out of his hand.*

When you read verse 8, it is all about protection and then in verses 9-10 God is reminding them of the story found in Numbers 21. There was a king named Balak. He was the king of Moab. He hires a false prophet named Balaam who was hired to say terrible things about God's people. And here's what God is saying: Look, Balaam tried to say terrible things about you and

what I did was I took it and turned it into blessings. Isn't that what Joseph says to his brothers. *You meant it for evil but God turned it to good.* Isn't that what Romans 8:28 is actually there for? <sup>28</sup> *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

Yesterday I stood out there at the abortion clinic. We had about a 40-minute service with worship and testimony. One of the ladies stood up to talk about how she came to the clinic to have an abortion but heard the Gospel and had read one of the tracts given to her. She was convicted by the Gospel and didn't do it. She gave her life to Christ. It was a wonderful testimony of God's work. Some of the testimonies, though, were from women who actually had an abortion but were giving their testimony of being convicted, repenting of their sin and putting their faith in the wonder of forgiveness in Christ.

What is your very worst day? Can you get in your mind the scene of your worst day being the backdrop of God's most amazing work in your life? We go to the cross of Jesus, and there the worst day in the universe, God's wrath fell on the son of God for your sins. And this becomes the very best day for us when we are adopted as sons and daughters through the grace given to us at the cross.

I want to fill your mind with grace. Because a mind filled with grace is occupied with God. Grace demolishes bad past. Grace defies logic. Grace dwells on deliverance. Grace determines responsibility. Grace doesn't waste the wilderness. Grace defeats evil and turns it to good.

### **Grace defines the future**

The future. Not what you've been through; not the terrible pain. That is not allowed to define your future. It is grace. You are a trophy, not of your sin. You are a trophy of remarkable grace. In verse 11, there's an impressive list of enemies. In verse 12, it's a great verse where God says: I sent the hornet to chase out the enemies before you. It's a wonderful picture too honestly. It's a terror. Anybody who has ever run over a yellow jackets nest with a lawnmower, you know what this looks like: people running. And then you get to verse 13 and the Lord sits them down and says, "Don't forget that you are living in a land which you didn't labor in to get. You are eating fruit you didn't plant." What you have here is a reminder of what God has done. But it's also an invitation. Could you trust Him for the future? Look, you have been brought this far.

Now, by God's grace, let's move into tomorrow and trust that a mind filled with grace will be occupied with God.

With that in mind this morning, I want you to think about a few questions.

What are you preoccupied with? What hurt needs healing? What sin needs forgiving? What practice needs ending? What discipline needs restoring? What steps need taking?

Come to Christ this morning.

*(Pastor prays)*