Meditations on the Book of Joshua

Joshua 24

Grace in Contrast to Law

H. L. Rossier

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GRACE IN CONTRAST TO LAW

In this chapter, God, by the mouth of His servant, recapitulates all His ways of grace towards Israel, from the call of Abraham until the full possession of Canaan. Had the people been wise, touched by the untiring mercy of God, and mistrustful of themselves, they would have asked Jehovah that His grace, and that alone, might continue to keep and to lead them. But in their folly they cling to the principles of the law, and trusting to themselves, they say: "We will serve the Lord."

The fact that God closes this history by the manifestation of His grace, has also its importance for us. Brought into the enjoyment of heavenly places, it is of His grace that God speaks to us, and by it establishes our hearts. But in order really to enter into this we must have our own state fully revealed to us. Such are God's ways, for it was not till Israel reached Canaan that the idolatry of their fathers, the utter ruin of the root from which they sprang, and their terrible distance from God, were made known to them. So it is with us. We only realise the total ruin of the first man when we know full deliverance. Few Christians enter into this, because so few are in the enjoyment of the blessings of Canaan, their glorious position in Christ. The prodigal son had learnt many things when he set out to return to his father: his sin, his state of misery, were by no means unknown to him; but on his introduction into the father's house, he hears for the first time these words: "This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." In the same way, it is after our introduction into spiritual blessings that the Epistle to the Ephesians says to us: "You who were dead in trespasses and in sins."

The early part of our chapter, as I have said, is entirely taken up with God's ways in grace towards His earthly people. In Abraham (v. 3) we find election, calling, faith, and the promises which are centered in Isaac. In Jacob and Esau (v. 4) we have the free choice of grace. In Egypt (v. 5) Israel learn forgiveness; at the Red Sea (v. 6) deliverance. In the desert (v. 7) it is grace again which sustains them and brings them across the Jordan (v. 11) to introduce them into Canaan. (v. 13)

Are there enemies — they do but set in stronger relief the almighty grace of God acting in favour of His people. The Egyptian who had kept them in bondage is judged, overtaken by destruction in the Red Sea in the act of opposing their deliverance. The Amorite who dwelt outside the limits of the Jordan, and sought to hinder their passage, is conquered. Balak, the subtle enemy, who by means of Balaam, seeks to induce God to turn away His face from His people, is brought to confusion, and forced to hear blessings pouring forth from the life of him whom he had called to

curse. Finally, all the nations flee before Israel, pursued by hornets, without the aid of sword or bow.

Surely grace such as this might have drawn the nation after Jehovah. And we, have not we been made the recipients of a grace still richer? "God made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel." Did He reveal His counsels to them? No, that was reserved for us. God has let us share in His most hidden purposes, His eternal counsels with regard to Christ, He has made us His confidants. What grace!

But Israel did not lose confidence in themselves. "We will serve him," said they. And yet their own history lay before them for their instruction. "Put away," said Joshua, "the gods which your fathers served the other side of the flood and in Egypt" (v. 14); these gods were still in their midst. Then as to Canaan, he adds: "If ye forsake the Lord and serve strange gods" (v. 20); they did not put away these gods, and their history is a record of idolatry from cover to cover. God gives them up, and their ruin becomes complete. Grace was their only resource, and they would not have it, and a great stone, image of the law, remains morally set up, in testimony and judgment against them, until Israel become once more an object of grace.

God indeed does not conclude with judgment. His ways in retribution will pass away; each tale of responsibility will come to an end, but one thing abideth ever — grace; grace by which we are foreknown, called, justified and glorified.

—H. L. Rossier.