

Careful Love

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Past Grace

Herodotus once said, “We never step in the same river twice.” Time flows like a river, each moment unrepeatable, unique. If that’s true, how do we get the most out of each step? Our passage shows us by drawing attention to past grace, loud voice, careful love. Past grace, water that’s passed by. Chapter opens with, A long time afterward and Joshua advanced in age, signaling we’re in the same timeframe as the last couple of chapters, where we find Joshua *reflecting*, tidying up things with Israel, before he dies. But reflection isn’t something he does just at the end of his life. Along the way we see him slowing down to erect memorials, listen to God, read Scripture publically, participate in assemblies. It’s not all war and productivity. He gathers with God’s people, looks back and says, *you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the LORD your God who has fought for you* (23:3). What have they seen? A raging river part before their eyes, city walls fall down without lifting a finger, insurmountable military odds inexplicably overcome. Isn’t this what God promised in the beginning? Be strong and courageous, trust me boldly and I will do it; I will give you the land. Here they are, seven years later, *living on God’s well-kept promises: a land to call their own, freedom from enemies, cities of refuge, inheritance for all. But do they see it?* See what? *For it is the LORD your God who has fought for you.* He repeats it several times (5, 9, 10, 15): *One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the Lord your God who fights for you, just as he promised you* (10). God is faithful. God is powerful. God is for you. Do *you* recognize where God’s working in *your* life? It wasn’t you that got that job/house; it wasn’t you that created the miracle of life in your womb; it wasn’t you that endured that difficult season; it wasn’t you that escaped sin, death, and hell. It was THE LORD your GOD. But how do we know it was God? People say, All things happen for a reason, as if its some cosmic principle, as if electrons have a mind, matter an intention. *Impossible*. But there is a personal God at work. A personal God *imparts* intention, intelligence, and will. A Creator grants capacity to create, bear children. A Redeemer overcomes the odds *for you*. But he does so, not so we can number off all the good things in our life to conclude he is good. If that were the case, the we could number the difficult things and conclude he is bad. The point is *to see what is most good*—God himself—God at work in joy and sorrow to give us *himself*. Knowing we were dead in our sins and transgressions, God being rich in mercy made us alive together with Christ. How? By doing the work, *suffering a billion deaths to give us life*. But do you see it? Do you recognize God at work in your past? I struggle to see him at work. It can seem like life just keeps flowing by. Wake, work, eat, sleep, repeat. Why don’t we see him? *We’re so consumed with the present that we fail to reflect on the past*. I recently slowed down to spent several days in Rome. I saw the pantheon, the coliseum, and the Vatican. As I toured the Vatican, I entered room after room, hall after hall filled with fine art and ancient sculptures. After a couple hours I hit fine art fatigue. I couldn’t absorb the glory, the beauty, the history, the significance of it all. But I kept going, great accomplishments bouncing off my eyeballs. Many of us move through life like this—money in the bank, friends who care, providential sorrow, Scripture after scripture, *unaware of the greatness of the moment*, unable to see what the Lord has done. What’s he doing? The next day I toured the coliseum *differently*. I walked the circumference inside and out, stopping to marvel along the way. I

found a café directly across the street, with a view of the coliseum, and contemplated the architectural feat, a prototype for modern stadiums, considered the way the Games created a pipeline for Roman soldiers, and sat stunned at the sacrifice of early Christians who suffered to the death, refusing to recant, so the gospel would reach me. The day before I had been too busy to recognize what God had done. But coliseum day, I was moved to worship. The difference? Reflecting on the past, looking for where the Lord fights for me. *How has the Lord fought for you?* This Memorial weekend great time to explore that ?.

Loud Voice

But *why* embrace the unproductive rhythm of reflecting on past grace? **Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them"** (6-7). Why reflect? *To send us boldly into the present.* To be *very strong* to do God's will. The language is an intensification of Joshua 1:7, be strong and courageous. Be *very strong*...be strenuously obedient. Sweat at it. At what? To keep God's word, not turning to the right or to the left *of the word*. This is the person not easily swayed but *centered* on the voice of God, familiar with his voice, a voice they welcome, seek out, contemplate, and obey. It's the loudest voice, most revered, more than any other voice. As a result, the Word-centered person has depth, roots, like the Psalm 1 tree: **blest is the man who delights in the law of the Lord...he is like a tree, planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in season and its leaf does not wither** (3). I think of the people who often have a fresh promise from Scripture they are trusting in. You know because it comes out in their prayer, their counsel, their texts. These people are not up and down. They are sturdy. Difficulty doesn't blow them over. They don't drift in a difficult season; they lean in, coming through with leaves intact, fruit growing. Joshua is saying those who reflect on past grace put present faith in the voice of God. Why bother? He goes on to say be careful what you listen to, the voices you entertain, the gods you heed. If we're not heeding his voice, we're heeding another. Only one voice can win. Some of us hear a *condemning voice* that says you're not good enough, you're not worthy of love, you can't do it. And that voice is not the voice of God. Do know why? It's all about you. *You aren't good enough. You will fail. Only one voice is strong enough to strip that voice of its condemning power.* The peerless voice of Christ who says, You weren't worthy but I made you worthy; you weren't good enough but I made you good enough. You were dead but I made you alive. His voice confronts the little Me and comforts with his promises. Others hear a *flattering voice* not only are you good enough; your better than that guy. Rarely does it come out like that. It starts as I'm glad I didn't make that decision. I can't believe she did that. When we welcome that voice, we are become impatient with people who don't keep up. They're dead weight, weighing us down. You're the lone tree, living off the stream of self-sufficiency, in love with the sound of your own voice. Jesus confronts the big Me, trims the branches, throws away the fruit. Sure it looks shiny on the outside, but once you get past the skin its rotten with pride. Jesus confronts the big Me and the little Me, by urging us to put roots down, not in the soil of Self, but the streams of his living Word. Are you working to hear *his* voice?

Careful Love

Joshua summarizes all this by saying, “[Be careful to love the Lord your God](#)” (11). Be careful, pay attention, slow down, reflect on what you love. We’re all careful, attentive, deliberate about what we love. If you love your wife, you’ll think about her and tell her what you appreciate about her. If you love a band, you’ll move things around in your schedule to see them play. If you love a movie, you’ll read the reviews, track the showings, buy in advance. If your true love is the sound of your own voice, then doing what God loves will be unappealing, distasteful: obedience, service to others, Sunday gatherings, city groups, fight clubs, holiness, discipleship, evangelism all become negotiable. Because they have to contend to the voice of the Inner Me. So if weather is bad, if there’s traffic, if you just don’t feel like it, you won’t expend the energy necessary to join the church in worship and be shaped by God’s word. Instead, you’re shaped by your own inner words, your rationalizations. If its been a long day, and the kids have been trying, then you won’t thank God before you to sleep, listen to his words to find rest, you’ll hear the words, I need Netflix. You’ll be carelessly shaped by the sound of your own voice, inattentive to the needs of others. And Joshua says, do this and you will be blinded by your own idolatry, a thorn in the eye. You’ll become someone you despise. But if you love God, you’ll read his words, listen to his voice, allow them to shape you and your decisions *more than anything else*. His voice will speak loudest. Let’s be careful to make every step count: past, present, future. “[not one word has failed of all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed](#)” (14).