



Joshua 8:30-35

³⁰ Now Joshua built an altar to the LORD God of Israel in Mount Ebal, ³¹ as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: "an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron *tool*." And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings. ³² And there, in the presence of the children of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. ³³ Then all Israel, with their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger as well as he who was born among them. Half of them *were* in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel. ³⁴ And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. ³⁵ There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them. *ESV*

Please read Joshua 8. Do Not Fear. What you fear, you serve. God's wrath for the greed and conceit of Achan was subsided. They need no longer live in fear of God's punishment. **Fear and faith cannot live together.**

Obedience ought not be driven by fear but by faith. Fear is not the pathway to victory. Joshua led the people in defeat of the city of Ai in a routing victory fueled by the confidence that they were faithfully following God's instructions.

Following the victory, Israel divided up their tribes on the summit of two opposing mountains, Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim overlooking a small valley about 1,000 feet below. Joshua was careful to follow God's instructions to the "t." He built an altar according to the instructions. No hand-made tools. Roughhewn stone to symbolize that this altar was all of God's doing. There the priests offered two sacrifices, a burnt offering sacrifice as a sin offering and a fellowship offering as a praise offering testifying of the peace that they had with God and with one another. This area formed a natural amphitheater. And instead of the altar being built in the valley (Shechem) between the two mountains of blessings and cursings...to further reinforce the truth the altar was only built on the top of one of the two mountains—Mount Ebal (the cursings).

Sinners would need the sacrifice not the righteous or "blessed." Christ declares, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Luke 5:32) This was Christ's way of repeating the theme of the Scriptures that no one who considers themselves as righteous will receive the gift of eternal life. **It is only those who by faith repent in their broken-ness in sinfulness that will receive the gift of God's gracious pardon.**

They had been commanded by Moses in Deut. 27:12-13 to meet at this exact location to rehearse the covenant. As Moses instructed, Joshua read the "words of the law, the blessings and the cursings." (v. 34) This was to serve as a reminder, a kind of sermon, to set their minds on the commands of God so that they would not soon turn their hearts away from Him. As Joshua read the Law, standing in the midst of every Israelite, the people listened intently to every word. Their failure to follow God's instruction had led to a deadly defeat at Ai. These words of the Law meant life and death to them. Together they would hear of the blessings of the covenant and the cursing they would bring upon themselves if they were to disobey. *Remember that foreigners (including Rahab and her kin, v. 35) who had become part of the Covenant people now also joined in these ceremonies in union under the Covenant.*

The sacrifices whose smoke was ascending to the heavens could be seen by all, preaching that when the Law was broken a sacrifice would be required to make atonement for the sin. In the smoke from the altar on the mountain of “cursings,” Israel could see that there was the promise of pardon for them if they in disobedience fell under the curse.

If Israel would not obey they would not possess the Promised Land and God’s blessings would be withheld. The withdrawal of blessings is a curse in itself. How often do we live in the barrenness of life defying God and not experiencing His blessings, living in a curse in our barrenness while He holds back the full force of cursing of disobedience?

This pattern of the tribes of Israel rehearsing the Covenant is very important for us to observe. This assembling of God’s people to rehearse the Covenant is part of worship and ministry to one another. **Every believer should crave to be where the Covenant is being rehearsed and God’s mercy and grace are being exalted among the brethren.** In Bible-believing churches the Gospel of Christ should be sung, prayed, preached and lived out in a covenant community of grace. **The promise of the pardon of sin through faith in Jesus Christ ought to be perpetually rehearsed as it produces both joyful humility and confident victory for everyone who has entered into the New Covenant that is in Jesus Christ.**

Nothing in my hand I bring,

Simply to the cross I cling;

Naked, come to Thee for dress;

Helpless look to Thee for grace;

Foul, I to the fountain fly;

Wash me, Savior, or I die.

Rock of Ages cleft for me

Let me hide myself in thee.

--“Rock of Ages,” by Augustus Toplady

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

1. Why is breaking the Law of God so devastating?
2. Why are there blessings found in obedience to God?
3. What was the significance of the location of the altar on Mt. Ebal?
4. What did Christ mean by saying that He was not calling the righteous to repentance?
5. Why is the withdrawal of God’s blessing a curse in itself?
6. Why is a sacrifice required to make atonement for sin?
7. Why is it important to rehearse the mercy and grace of God within the gathering of God’s people?
8. Who has the exclusive rights to pardon the breaking of God’s Law? What qualifies Him for such significant power?
9. Have you ever learned that without the pardon through faith in Christ alone that you dwell underneath the curse and absence of God’s richest blessings of eternal life? What have you learned today that will challenge your beliefs about God?

If you have any questions or want to discuss anything in these weekly lessons, please be sure to contact me! Brad.Jury@Capitol.Com.org

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