

JOSHUA 8:30-35
BLESSING & CURSING!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to Joshua chapter 8 as we continue our study through this book and, as we have seen, our focus is victorious Christian living or living that Spirit-filled life.

And, specifically, in Joshua chapters 6 through 21 the focus is the conquest of the land or how to win the battles! Obviously, that is very important.

Think about the football season and what teams do to prepare for games. It is more than just going out there and playing the game!

They study films of the opponents they are playing. They have a coach and really coaches that come up with a game plan. And as they prepare for the game, they are now ready to play!

If you think about it, the same is true for us as Christians. We don't just get up and get in the game of life you might say, at least we shouldn't.

We should look at the playbook, study the playbook – ***THE BIBLE!***

And we need to consult the coach, you might say, the Lord so that He can instruct us in what we are to do!

Now let me give you a little introduction to what we will be looking at this morning. It will help put things into perspective for you as we look at ***BLESSING AND CURSING?***

We have seen over the last several weeks the children of Israel being victorious over the city of Jericho and then their defeat at Ai, with some thirty-six soldiers from the children of Israel being killed in that battle.

Keep in mind that Jericho was bigger and stronger and not one soldier from the children of Israel lost their lives in that battle.

What was the difference?

They had brought sin into the camp of Israel through one man, Achan. And that sin brought the judgment of God upon the children of Israel and they lost their battle against Ai!

And Joshua was not happy with God and the Lord did rebuke him for his behavior and explained to Joshua the reason for the defeat.

You see, I don't think they sought the Lord in this battle against Ai. If they did, the Lord would have shown them that there was sin in the camp!

And once the sin was exposed, once Joshua and the children of Israel saw that Achan had brought the accursed things, he brought sin into the camp, he was put to death!

Once they had removed the sin from the camp, they sought the Lord and the Lord gave them instructions on how to defeat the people of Ai!

Now why do we see Jericho as their first battle and now Ai, what was so important about these two cities?

The Lord knew what He was doing here. You see, for the children of Israel to conquer Canaan, they had to conquer and control this area.

You see, Jericho controlled the approach from the east, from the lower area of the Jordan River.

Then there was Ai, and that controlled the higher western end.

So, from a human perspective, it was time to go in and take the land that God had given them.

They have secured these strategic areas and now it was time to go and defeat these enemies!

Let me ask you this question. When you read the Scriptures do you ever see God in a hurry?

“Oh my, we need to hurry up or you are going to be in trouble! What are you waiting for?”

You really don't see God ever in a hurry. Why is that? Because God is in complete control of every situation! Thus, there is no need for God to hurry or rush into a situation, His timing is perfect!

Let me show you how we are so fast paced that we are in haste or in a hurry to get things done and we get so frustrated when we have to wait! Let me show you what I mean. We are told,

A common complaint that non-Western cultures voice about Americans is that, if they want to make plans with us, they have to schedule everything two weeks in advance.

With pressing work schedules, short vacations, a plethora of extracurricular activities, and the overriding sense of urgency, our lives leave no room for the lingering moment.

We value the short, quick, and expedient. Sound-bytes dominate the airwaves, offering less and less while stealing more and more time, and the world moves at a dizzying pace.

Thomas L. Friedman's latest book, *Thank You for Being Late*, describes this hustle: “We are living at one of the greatest inflection points in history . . . The three largest forces on the planet - technology, globalization, and climate change - are all accelerating at once.”

While most people are “overwhelmed by it all,” Friedman argues, “in such a time, opting to pause and reflect, rather than panic or withdraw, is a necessity.” If he's right, the only way to survive the pace is to buck the trend and . . . pause. . . .

Christ's followers ought to lead the way in slowing down; Jesus never lived in a hurry, never let the expedient dictate, and never neglected the important for the urgent.

Even when urgent news reached His ears (as in John 11, when He heard about Lazarus's illness), He waited on the Father's timing, rather than respond even to His friend's need.

He often took time to be by Himself, and it may be that the incredible power of His ministry bubbled up from the depths of intimacy enjoyed in solitary time with His Father. If Jesus, who had the most important ministry in all of history, saw pausing and reflecting as essential, how much more should His followers adopt His example?

Learning to wait upon God daily (Proverbs 8:34) [**Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at the posts of my doors.**] has helped me to develop the discipline of listening to God and to keep on growing in grace.

Pausing and waiting on God has produced reflection and renewal to survive and even thrive in the pace of these days. How will you build the habit of listening to God and reflecting on Him as life accelerates around you?

- <http://bit.ly/2VYxJM8>

I can't tell you how important this is, waiting upon God so that you can renew your strength. You see, as we go and do things on our own, we are fighting against God and we are without strength in the end!

I like what Robert Murray McCheyne wrote, "When Christ delays to help His saints now, you think this is a great mystery, you cannot explain it; but Jesus sees the end from the beginning. Be still, and know that Christ is God."

And William Penn put it like this, “In the rush and noise of life, as you have intervals, step home within yourselves and be still. Wait upon God, and feel His good presence; this will carry you evenly through your day’s business.”

Now you may be thinking, “What in the world does this even have to do with what we are talking about here in Joshua? Where in the world is he going with this?”

What we will see here in Joshua chapter 8 is that instead of taking the children of Israel to their next battle, he takes them on a detour. And not a little one to say the least.

This detour was some twenty-five miles to the north and a few miles to the west and He is leading them into a valley that was situated between two mountains. This valley is called the valley of Shechem and it is one of the most beautiful places in Israel!

Today, this area of Shechem including Jericho is known as the West Bank and has been given over to the Palestinians.

Now you may still be wondering about this but maybe when I share with you the mountains that were located on either side of this valley, it may bring to remembrance why they are here!

One of the mountains was Mount Ebal. And Mount Ebal was a rugged, rocky and barren mountain.

Then, on the other side of the valley was Mount Gerizim. And Mount Gerizim was full of trees and it was very beautiful!

These two mountains, one stood about 1000 feet above the valley and the other a little over 3000 feet above the valley, so not that high but enough for what they were going to do here.

We need to understand that this location, with mountains on either side and this valley in the middle, formed an amazing natural amphitheater.

F. B. Meyer describes it like this, *“A place where the mountains are hollowed out and the limestone stratum is broken into a succession of ledges so as to present the appearance of a series of regular benches. It is a natural amphitheater capable of containing a vast audience of people.”*

Why is this so important? Because of the amazing acoustical properties. What I mean by that is that you can have one person standing on Mount Gerizim and the other on Mount Ebal and you can carry on a conversation with each other even though you are two miles apart. You would not even have to raise your voice and, without sound systems back in those days, this was going to be very helpful!

Also, if you were in the valley below you could hear perfectly what was being said from either mountain!

But why here? I get the acoustic capabilities, but why this spot?

Before they even entered the land of Canaan, the Promise Land, the Lord instructed Moses with the following words, and this is from Deuteronomy 11:26-32, and we are told, **“Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known. Now it shall be, when the Lord your God has brought you into the land which you go to possess, that you shall put the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. Are they not on the other side of the Jordan, toward the setting sun, in the land of the Canaanites who dwell in the plain opposite Gilgal, beside the terebinth trees of Moreh? For you will cross over the Jordan and go in to possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and you will possess it and dwell in it. And you shall be careful to observe all the statutes and judgments which I set before you today.”**

Keep in mind that they had in their minds that defeat at Ai, it was fresh in their minds. And the Lord leads them here to remind them of His Law and to reinforce in their minds that there are blessings for obedience and there are curses for disobedience! Victory and defeat but the choice was theirs and God is going to remind them of that here in the Valley of Shechem.

In these verses there are three main points that emerge and are helpful in our walk with the Lord. They are:

THE WORSHIP OF GOD – JOSHUA 8:30-32

THE WORK FOR GOD – JOSHUA 8:30-32

THE WALK WITH GOD – JOSHUA 8:33-35

So, that is our introduction to what we will be looking at here in Joshua 8:30-35 in a study called – ***BLESSING AND CURSING!***

Let's begin reading in Joshua chapter 8 beginning in verse 30 and see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

JOSHUA 8

VERSES 30-32

In these three verses emerge our first two points. One is obvious and the other is born out of the first point!

Let's deal with the first point – ***THE WORSHIP OF GOD!***

First of all, let's look at what they are doing here and then we will dig into what worship is all about.

They were to build an altar here and what is interesting to me about this altar is that it was not to be ornate, but just whole stones. And, upon the altar the sacrifices would be made.

Why is that? Because God does not want the children of Israel to focus on the altar or even the one who built the altar. He wants them to focus upon the sacrifice.

Today, once again we see ornate churches where you tend to focus on the beauty of the altar you might say or the picturesque view instead of the sacrifice, instead of Jesus Christ!

Or even the person doing the teaching or the leader of a church or organization. They, in a sense, become the one who is worshiped. The best example today is that of the Pope, people worship a man instead of the God who created the man!

Now what was done upon this altar?

The burnt offering was given, and this is spoken of in Leviticus chapter 1, which speaks of dedication.

We might think of it as our consecration before God, it was a form of worship!

Now think about this. This altar was placed on Mount Ebal where the cursing's were spoken. It is here the altar is at, the sacrifice made, the shedding of the blood.

For us, as we apply the blood of Christ to our lives by faith, we then dedicate our lives to Him and out of this we have peace with God, there is great joy, a great celebration, at least there should be!

And let's apply this to our lives. Here, with the burnt offering, just as the sacrifice was totally consumed in the fire before the Lord and it was well pleasing to Him, our lives need to be laid upon the altar of sacrifice, totally given over to Him and as we do, it too is well pleasing to Him.

Paul put it like this in Romans 12:1-2, **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”**

And keep in mind that this was a free will offering. They were not forced to do this just as we are not forced to consecrate our lives before the Lord. We do it willingly, out of love for Him and God will accept it then and only then, as it is done with a right heart, right motives!

As we consecrate our lives to the Lord, as our lives are lived as worship unto God, He gets the glory!

And let me explain worship like this. True, biblical worship, as defined by A. W. Pink in his exposition of the gospel of John, puts it like this, “It is a redeemed heart, occupied with God, expressing itself in adoration and thanksgiving.”

And then we see A. W. Tozer explain worship like this, “True worship is to be so personally and hopelessly in love with God, that the idea of a transfer of affection never even remotely exists.”

If that doesn't help, let me put it like this,

By definition, worship is ascribing worth to something or someone. But true worship is also a matter of the heart. It must be felt. It can't be ritualistic. It can't be just an external going through the motions.

True worship is a heartfelt expression of love, adoration, admiration, fascination, wonder, and celebration. It's something that happens in your heart and soul when you begin to praise God for who He is and thank Him for what He has done.

There is nothing difficult about worship. Christian or non-Christian, pagan or holy, every human being was designed to worship, and does worship - something. Consider a group of sports fans watching and talking about a game. They worship. Consider a group of teenagers at a concert. They worship.

We readily worship food, sports, arts, and music. We worship comfort, control, power, achievement, work, money, and relationships, but God calls us to worship Him. He commands it, He desires it, He pursues it, He deserves it, and He will reward it. For God bestows His provision, grace, sovereignty, and power on those who worship Him in spirit and in truth.

But if you choose not to worship God, you need to understand that you are worshipping something else. And whether you worship a job, achievement, money, or a person, you are doing so to your detriment. At some point, the object of your worship will fail to come through for you.

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Genuine worship isn't just singing songs and getting a good feeling in your heart.

Genuine worship is seeing God for who He really is - His power, His greatness, His holiness, His sovereignty, His love, and His compassion - and then giving Him what He's worth - the best of your time, your talents, your thoughts, your words, and your deeds.

True worship is seeing afresh the tremendous worth of God and, in response, giving Him the best of everything you have.

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Remember when Jesus met with the woman at the well in Samaria. And in John chapter 4 they were talking about true worship and she missed the point. And Jesus explains to her what true worship is all about.

Jesus tells her in John 4:24, "**God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.**"

First of all, if you are going to worship God you must be saved, you must be redeemed. I hope that makes sense to you. You see, why would you worship God if you did not believe in Him? You wouldn't.

And, even if you wanted to worship Him, if you are not saved, then your sins have separated you from God. You can't worship Him because He does not know you, you are not a child of God!

And yet, today we see churches and Christians who feel they can worship God any way they want. That is very wrong! listen carefully,

“If it feels good, do it!”

This has been one of the mottos of our culture since the 1960’s. Now it seems that the American church has adopted a similar pragmatic motto: “If it makes people feel good, we should use it.” Today we see church leaders of every persuasion trying all kinds of new things. Even in corporate worship. If it works in drawing more people into services then it “works” and must be stamped with the very approval of God Himself.

It appears that many church leaders are acting under the premise that we can worship God anyway we want to, as long as it is in spirit and truth. This is often just a code word for “Our way of worshipping God is acceptable to Him. It must be, we love it and so do all the unbelievers who come and enjoy it.”

But are they right? Can we worship God anyway that WE want to? Is there any possibility, at all, that the way we worship Him could be unacceptable to *HIM*?

One of the things we should remind ourselves . . . is that God gave *VERY* specific directions to his people regarding how he was to be worshipped. He gave Israel precise details on what they should do and not do, when and where they were to worship Him and how they were to worship Him. It seems that God unequivocally knows how He wants to be worshipped and cared enough about it to give his people the details.

A re-occurring theme in the Old Testament is that the people of Israel continually got this worship thing wrong and fell into idolatry. God demanded that they worship Him alone, but they almost always came up short! God summarized their condition in the following verse:

“My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” Jer.2:13 NIV

Notice the two aspects of Israel’s guilt: First, they abandoned or forsook the true and living God. Secondly, they did their own thing and worshipped in their own way. The cisterns are a vivid illustration of Israel’s love for worthless gods. They dug their own i.e. they worshipped other gods of their choosing, and they were broken i.e. they were worthless gods who could do nothing. They were no gods at all.

What I find instructive is that they did not think they were doing anything wrong. In other words they didn’t think they had abandoned God. You see, **they simply added** these idolatrous practices to their temple worship.

They continued to go to the temple and worship God there, but they also did the other stuff. Read through the Books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and you will discover the people were very religious. They worshipped God the way they thought they were supposed to and they also took things into their own hands.

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You see, we are not only to worship God in Spirit, we must be saved, but we must also worship God according to truth and not just any way we want!

Worship today seems to be about us instead of God. “Worship was so awesome; did you feel it?”

Did I feel it? I came to worship the One who created me, and it does not matter what I feel, am I honoring the One I came to worship, that is the real issue!

But instead of honoring the Lord we have worship with smoke machines, light shows, we crank the music up loud, we focus the songs upon us and yet we say we are worshiping the Lord!

Our worship of God, our lives are lived unto Him and not to us! We are His servants and our love for Him should be to Him and not upon us!

Now, why did God tell them not to use any tools to make the altar? So we would not focus on the altar.

Think about that one. That should tell us that we are not to focus on the worship team, the light show, the smoke show, this and that but the worship team is a vehicle drawing us to God as we sing unto Him!

And it is not only singing songs, like I have said, it is living out your life. Your life is a spiritual worship unto the Lord.

Thus, are you living your life to honor yourself or the Lord? That is an important question that each of us will have to look at and decide for ourselves!

THE WORSHIP OF GOD!

Now, it is out of our worship of God that we do the ***WORK FOR GOD!***

What do I mean by that?

If you have not given your life completely to the Lord, then, as you serve Him and things don't go as you planned, you end up dropping out, stopping the work, and we will talk about that again in a few minutes because this is so important for us to understand. If your service for the Lord is not based on your love for Him, your worship of Him, it is going to be tough, and chances are, you won't be serving very long!

Let's take a look at what is going on here and look at the work for God.

Back in Deuteronomy we see that they were to write the Law on these stones. Listen to what the Lord told them in Deuteronomy 27:1-8, **“Now Moses, with the elders of Israel, commanded the people, saying: ‘Keep all the commandments which I command you today. And it shall be, on the day when you cross over the Jordan to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, that you shall set up for yourselves large stones, and whitewash them with lime. You shall write on them all the words of this law, when you have crossed over, that you may enter the land which the Lord your God is giving you, “a land flowing with milk and honey,” just as the Lord God of your fathers promised you. Therefore it shall be, when you have crossed over the Jordan, that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones, which I command you today, and you shall whitewash them with lime. And there you shall build an altar to the Lord your God, an altar of stones; you shall not use an iron tool on them. You shall build with whole stones the altar of the Lord your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to the Lord your God. You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there, and rejoice before the Lord your God. And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law.”**

Here we see Moses instructing them to take some large stones and whitewash them and then write the words of the Law on them.

Now some say it is speaking of a summation of all that Moses said here in Deuteronomy, but I tend to think it is all He said in this book or at least Deuteronomy chapters 5 through 26 were placed on these stones. They were large stones!

When we think about this, we tend to not believe they could do that, but there is historical evidence that tablets had a large amount of writing on them.

Archeologists have discovered similar pillars with inscriptions or stelae six to eight feet long in the Middle East.

And the Behistun Inscription in Iran they have one that is three times the length of Deuteronomy.

So I don't believe it is just the Ten Commandments, but the words that Moses wrote, the book of Deuteronomy that were written on these stones.

And you can try to do this apart from the worship of God, but, in the end, it won't work. If your worship of God, if your love for God is not the driving force in your life, then the work for God will wax and wane!

And what I mean by that is that as soon as something bothers you, someone doesn't thank you or praise you for the work you did, as soon as someone rubs you the wrong way, as soon as things don't go as you planned them, then you stop doing the work.

And I have seen this over and over in the twenty-four years I have been up here.

Let me say this. If I served the Lord based on outward feelings, how people treat me, what I get out of it, I would have been gone long ago!

I know, some of you are thinking, "Wow, I didn't see that coming!"

Folk's, it is just the reality!

Then why am I still here?

Because of my love for the Lord and thus, no matter what comes my way, no matter what people may say of me, and they have said a lot over the years, none of those things are going to move me from the work that the Lord has called me to do!

As I place my life on the altar of sacrifice, as I worship the Lord, as I draw close to Him, I can't help but serve Him! And in that service to the Lord, I serve the people of God!

I am not saying it is not easy. If it was easy, I would not need the Lord. I would just suck it up, and work hard, and do my best.

But that is not what I do. I do rely on the Lord and as hard as it may get, I trust in Him and my love for Him compels me to continue on in the work until I am called home or the Lord comes for His Bride, the Church in the Rapture!

Now, as a servant, as an instrument that God uses, the servant or the instrument does not get the glory, God does!

And that is also important for us to understand.

You see, too often, we, as servants of God, as the instruments that God uses, want the glory, we want the attention!

But think about it, when the meal is prepared by the slave, the slave does not get the glory, the attention you might say, but the master does.

When a surgeon finishes up a very difficult surgery, the scalpel does not get the glory, it does not get the attention, but the surgeon does.

And yet, we seem to want that glory, we want that attention today!

Let me show you what I mean. We are told,

In the past people wanted to be famous for *doing* something. Now, *celebrity* has become an end in itself. It has attained god-like characteristics. Not only do people want to be famous, they idolize those who have achieved celebrity status. This widespread interest in famous individuals has been described as ‘the cult of celebrity’. It is a prominent social phenomenon of Western popular culture.

Fame to the ambitious is like salt water to the thirsty. The more they get, the more they want. Madonna, who at one stage was probably the most famous woman on the planet, said, 'I won't be happy until I am as famous as God.'

Celebrity, fame and glory are often thought to be synonymous. However, celebrity and fame are only a pale reflection of true glory. 'Glory' is used in the Bible to denote the manifestation of God's presence. Glory is one of the most common words in the Bible. God's 'glory' means his importance, reputation, majesty and honour.

Perhaps it is not surprising that as society moves away from worshipping *the glory of God*, it turns towards the worship of the 'glory' of celebrity and fame. We are called to worship God's glory and reflect it, however imperfectly, in our lives.

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And if you don't think this is a problem today, then why are so many people interested in how many "*likes*" they get on Facebook for a post they made? Because they want the attention, they want the glory!

And if you don't think it is a problem, look at some of the posts where there is a crime being committed, someone is being beat up and people are taking pictures of what is happening and many times, they don't even call 911!

How come? Because they have to load it up onto Facebook or YouTube so they can get all kinds of praise and worship for what they have done. Numbers count! At least in their mind!

And we do see this in the Christian realm as well. Think about the "rock star" pastor's that are out there! Think about how we see people go to concerts fired up, jumping up and down at these musicians, and then, when they come to church, they fall asleep.

I thought we are to worship the Lord! I thought the Lord was to get the glory! But, again, we love to praise people instead of the One who has not only created them but gifted them!

And we all need to be careful here because the praise of man can cause us to think more highly of ourselves than we should.

Remember what brought Lucifer down, it was pride, it was that he wanted the attention, he wanted the glory from God! Be careful!

So, what I want you to see here, and this is so important, is that our work for God flows out of our worship of God because service is nothing more than a fruit of our relationship with God.

In other words, no instrument could take credit for the work that God does through them and therefore take glory away from God Himself.

It is as Paul said in I Corinthians 1:26-31, **“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God - and righteousness and sanctification and redemption - that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.’”**

God wants His servants’ lives and ministries for Him to be as *simple* and *discreet* as the altars he mentions here in Joshua chapter 8.

If we are truly worshiping the Lord, if we have placed our lives on the altar of sacrifice, then ***THE WORSHIP OF GOD*** will cause us ***TO WORK FOR GOD!***

And that leads us to our last point here, and that is ***THE WALK WITH GOD*** found in Joshua 8:33-35. Let’s begin reading and look at this last point!

VERSES 33-35

Let me share with you what is going on here first, and then we will look at the application.

Keep in mind that Mount Gerizim was lush, it was fertile; it had springs and was filled with life, with color. This is where the blessings flowed for obedience.

On the other side was Mount Ebal, which was barren, rocky, no life on it. This is where the cursing's flowed for disobedience.

These two mountains, if you can call them mountains, one rose only some 1,000 feet and the other only some 3,000 in feet in the air.

And like I have said, right between them was this valley, and this is where the Levites, the priests were located as six of the twelve tribes were stationed by Mount Gerizim and six by Mount Ebal.

The Tribe of Levi was located on Mount Gerizim, but again, the priests were in the middle.

And this area is like a natural amphitheater, sound traveled far and as the priests called out the cursing's, those on Mount Ebal would shout, "***Amen!***"

And then, as the blessings were called out, the people on Mount Gerizim would shout, "***Amen!***"

Now this is what I want to focus on, what we are told in Joshua 8:34-35.

You see, as the nation stood in the middle part of the Promise Land, Joshua read to them the Words of God from the book of Deuteronomy.

Why did Joshua do that? Yes, because God instructed Joshua that when they are in the land this is what they were to do.

But I also see that Joshua wanted them to hear God's Word so they may walk accordingly.

That is what the Lord told Joshua back in Joshua 1:8-9, "**This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.**" And now Joshua wanted the children of Israel to also understand this!

Now, let's deal with this issue of, *THE WALK WITH GOD!*

What does that mean?

Think about that for a minute. What do you think you have to do to walk with God?

It is pretty simple. If you are walking with God that means you are following God, you are going where He is leading!

How do we do that?

Think about what is taking place here. We are told, "**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. 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.**" Joshua 8:34-35.

The Word of God is what guides us; it helps us to walk with God. You see, when it comes to our walk with God nothing is more essential than the Word of God and continued obedience to all that God has said in His Word

Now look at this contrast once again. There from Mount Ebal were the cursing's and on Mount Gerizim were the blessings. What was the picture that God was painting for them?

First of all, we need to remember their defeat at Ai was fresh in their minds. So they saw what happened when they were disobedient to the Lord, the cursing's that came upon them.

And I think that is what God was showing them here. He is basically telling them, ***“You have a choice to make. And that choice is where do you want to live? What do you want to do? Do you want to be blessed and be fruitful by obeying me? Or, do you want to be barren, do you want to be fruitless and cursed for your disobedience? The choice is yours!”***

Now, please hear me out on this. Yes, we, as individuals are responsible for our growth, our reading and applying the Word of God to our lives.

But, and this is not being done many times today, the ministry of the church is to equip the saints to walk with God!

But how is that done?

Like it was done here in Joshua. By teaching them the Word of God and reminding them of the blessings for obedience and the cursing's for their disobedience. Then it is up to them to decide where they want to live, what they want to do!

Remember what Paul said in Ephesians 4:11-16, **“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ - from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”**

You equip saints by teaching them the Word of God and showing them how to apply it to their lives. And when you do, one of the benefits is that these saints won't be tossed to and fro by the winds of doctrine that blow through the church. And believe me, they will blow through the church!

Sound doctrine, healthy doctrine is what needs to be spoken in the church today. It is kind of funny because I have had someone put me down for this, “All you do is teach!” Yes, that is what I am called to do.

And I will guarantee you this, when I go before the Lord one day, He is not going to say, “Hey Joe, all that teaching, what was up with that? Book by book, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, that was a little too much!”

No, the Lord is not going to say that. And yet today, the teaching of God's Word is put down, mocked, downplayed and what we see happening is that people are no longer following God, there is no real walk with God because they are not following God according to His Word but they are following man and his wisdom, his philosophies, his ideas!

Make no mistake about it, one of the things that God wanted to drive home by going on this detour to this place was that nobody violates the Word of God with impunity, nobody violates God's Law without paying the consequences, you don't break God's Law, God's Law breaks you.

But what about those who are walking with God. Look at what happens when we do *WALK WITH GOD*, as Paul continues on in Ephesians 4:17-31, **“This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another. ‘Be angry, and do not sin’: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your**

mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

Do you see the fruit that is born in your life when you are walking with God? I hope so. But there is that choice for us. We can either walk with God or apart from God but if we don't follow the Lord according to His Word, then there are consequences to our actions, there will be cursing's in our life instead of blessings! But it is our choice!

And I realize that many times we don't understand why God is calling us to do something or not do something, but you need to understand that He knows all things and He has what is best for our lives. Thus, look at the big picture from Genesis to Revelation and you will see God's amazing story of love for us which should causes us to:

WORSHIP GOD

WORK FOR GOD

WALK WITH GOD

Let me close with this. We are told,

In her book *Mystery on the Desert*, Maria Reiche describes a series of strange lines made by the Nazca in the plains of Peru, some of them covering many square miles. For years people assumed these lines were the remnants of ancient irrigation ditches.

Then in 1939 Dr. Paul Kosok of Long Island University discovered that their true meaning could only be seen from high in the air. When viewed from an airplane, these seemingly random lines form enormous drawings of birds, insects, and animals.

In a similar way, people often think of the Bible as a series of individual, unconnected stories. But if we survey the Scriptures as a whole, we discover that they form one great story of redemption - from the opening scenes of Genesis to the final chapter of Revelation.

Weaving through all the diverse strands of the Bible is a divine story line, the overarching story of what God has been up to in the rescue and restoration of fallen human beings, from the first nanosecond of creation through the final cry of victory at the end of time.

- More Perfect Illustrations for Every Topic and Occasion

May we worship the One who created us and loves us.

May we work for God, not out of obligation, but out of love for Him.

And, may we walk with God all the days of our life!

You see, before we go back out to battle, we need to pause as they did and reflect on what God is teaching us here about our worship of Him, our work for Him, and our walk with Him.