

The Typology of Judgment & Gospel, part 2

Joshua 8:30-32

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, May 28th 2023

I. Introduction

We have come to the last section of chapter 8. And I'll actually take two Sundays to look at this. But let's read all of verses 30-35.

Josh. 8:30 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.

A. The inconvenience of going north to Shechem before continuing their southern campaign

This passage tells us that immediately after the battle, Joshua and the army collected approximately 2-6 million men, women, and children, as well as all their animals, and traveled 20 miles straight north of Ai to the valley of Shechem, between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. Now it would have made sense to take the *army* up there if they were going to engage in war because this would be taking them deep into enemy territory surrounded by hostile peoples. But that was not the purpose. God does not guide them to go into the northern campaign until much later. This long trip is not for conquest. In fact, they are now going in exactly the opposite direction of where their next battle is supposed to be. Their next battle is going to be seven miles *south* of Ai, and 27 miles south of where they are now camped.

Why? Why is Joshua doing this? It makes no military sense whatsoever from a man-centered perspective. You'd think that with momentum on their side, this would have been an opportune time to push the conquest and attack more cities in the southern confederation before the Canaanites there have time to regroup. But Joshua stops everyone

in their tracks, leaves the scene of the southern campaign and has God's people spend several days covenanting with God, worshiping God, and praying.

And I hope that seeing what an inconvenience this was helps you to appreciate how important our relationship to God is when it comes to spiritual warfare. From a human standpoint, this is not a very productive use of time. In fact, if you look at the first verse of chapter 9 you will see that this pause actually gave the Canaanites plenty of time to consolidate their power and to gather their forces. That's what most generals would have worried about. But Israel's relationship to God was more important than any other advantage. God wants them to have a chance to renew their identity as a people, to covenant with Him, to express their hearts and their wills verbally, to pray, to affirm as a nation their commitment to God's law. God was making it visually clear that this was essential to conquest. And Lord willing, next week we will see that this is essential to the building of a Christian civilization. Too many times Christian nations make shortcuts. And too many books on Christian Civilization opt for natural law, not Biblical law. That's what happened in America. Our national covenant removed God's law, removed any mention of dependence upon God's grace, and almost turned the federal government into a secular government. They included enough lip service to God and law in to satisfy most people, but it was a shortcut that fell far short of the Christian character of most of the states of that time. But that's for next week.

Today I just want to apply this to church - which was one of the four governments entering into covenant with God - self-government, family government, church government, and state government. But the first three verses especially focus on the church. In the twentieth century we see a church that is active and busy and madly pursuing every imaginable strategy of church growth and missions, but is having less positive impact upon America and the world than ever. And the absence of the things in this paragraph may be one reason why. Just as one example, the church of our day has been engaging in battle without a commitment to God's law. That is suicidal. The church has not taken the time to slow down and study God's Word as Israel does here. What would we do if God converted America overnight and threw Christians into leadership positions in government? The church wouldn't know what to do since it has not studied God's blueprints. Oh, there are a few who have. Joe Boot is doing a phenomenal job in Canada. Rushdoony, Bahnsen, North, and others contributed hugely here in America. And there are a few others in America who have had a comprehensive Biblical worldview. But how deeply do people even *listen* to those scholars or read their stuff? Thankfully there is an increasing number, but it is still a tiny minority. Israel spent several days going over every word of Deuteronomy in a massive church conference. We are not told exactly how long it took, but they had plenty of time to study it - and some people think they even studied the first five books of the Bible.

B. The topography of Ebal, Gerizim, and Shechem

I should probably talk a little bit about the topography of this place as well, because you might have doubts as to whether this many people could hear the Scriptures being read. Down through the years there have been many people who have traveled to the valley of Shechem between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim to test out the acoustics in order to see how easy it would be to hear. For example, I read the testimony of three baptist

missionaries in 1879 - before large buildings began to dampen the acoustic effect. McGarvey showed how even with his soft voice his friends on either mountain were able to clearly hear what he said down in the valley. But Deuteronomy 27:14 indicates that Levites were stationed strategically to repeat each phrase that Joshua would say, which would make this even easier. But the acoustics are amazing. It's almost like God designed these mountains specifically for this event.

At their peaks these two mountains are one and a half miles apart, but at their base, they are only five hundred yards apart. The peak of Gerizim is 2,895 feet above sea level and the peak of Ebal is 3,077 feet. So they are pretty similar in height, with the mountain of law being only 182 feet higher. And we will get to the reason for the higher prominence of Ebal in this and in other ways as well. But from the top of those two mountains you get a beautiful view of the promised land. God is giving them a view of what they are about to conquer. In any case, many people who have tested their voices there have said that all 2-6 million people could have heard every word that was said without any amplification at all. So with that as a background, let's dig into the passage.

II. The Gospel and the law (vv. 30-31)

A. The God-centeredness of the altar (Gospel) (v. 30a)

And we will start with verse 30. It says, "Now Joshua built an altar to the LORD God of Israel in Mount Ebal..."

Notice first that this altar was built *to the Lord*. What did pagan kings tend to do after an amazing conquest? If you've read much Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian or other middle eastern history, you discover that it was almost an expected thing that the leader would built a monument to himself to commemorate his great triumphs. Right? Man is always engaged in self-worship *until* God's grace conquers his heart. And then it is different. All of a sudden our perspective in all of life revolves around God and not around us. We see that here. Joshua gives glory to the Lord. Scripture says, "Let him who glories, glory in the Lord." Where the temptation might be to feel good about himself and pat himself on the back, Joshua makes sure that everyone knows that it is God who deserves the credit for their two recent victories.

And this is such an important principle of life to learn. When you find pride welling up in your heart over something God's grace has enabled you to do, put it to death by worshiping God and thanking Him for what He has done through you. Don't preen and stroke your pride. Put it to death by publicly giving God the glory. Put it to death by affirming your dependence upon the Lord. Put it to death by covenanting once again with the Lord as these Israelites did. And resist every impulse of your heart to build an altar to yourself. "Now Joshua built an altar to the LORD (that's Jehovah - to Jehovah) God of Israel." Jehovah is His covenant name and they are about to renew covenant with God.

B. The Gospel (altar) is set up on the mount of cursing (Ebal) (v. 30)

And notice *where* verse 30 says it was built. On Mount Ebal. The altar was not on Mount Gerizim. And this is hugely significant. God was setting up a big object lesson so that no one could miss it, and so that they would remember it for years to come. Let me just try to help you to visualize what was going on. Look at the picture in your outlines, and just imagine 2-6 million people congregated on those two mountains. I keep saying 2-6 million people because even though at one point there were six million, there were a lot that died off in judgments, and some scholars think the figures were as low as 2 million. But there were a lot of babies born too in the past forty years too, so who knows? Either way, it is still a lot of people congregated on those two mountains.

Half of the tribes were on Mount Ebal and half on Mount Gerizim. Let me read you Deuteronomy's instructions of what they were to do when they arrived at these two mountains. It says, "And 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." When the curses were read on Mount Ebal for failure to obey the law the people on Mount Gerizim would answer: "Amen" which means, "We agree; so be it." Just to give you a couple samples, Deuteronomy 27 instructed them to say,

Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt. And all the people shall say, "Amen." Cursed is the one who moves his neighbor's landmark. And all the people shall say "Amen!" etc., etc.

And then when the blessings were read, they were read from the opposite mount, mount Gerizim, the people on the opposite side would say Amen. And in between, down in the valley, the Levites and priests surrounded the ark of the covenant, which symbolized God's throne. And they read the law of God from the valley so that those up on the mountain sides could hear it. So the law of God in the middle can have one of two results: it can lead to the incredible blessings of Deuteronomy 28 or the incredible cursings of Deuteronomy 27 through to the first half of 28.

So this was a symbol of what it means to have God's presence in our midst. Do you want God's presence? Keep in mind that the altar is called His throne, so His presence means lordship. And His throne is surrounded by His angels who carry out His will, so when you come into His presence, you are coming into the presence of His angels as well. There are angels right here in our midst either happy with your attitudes or upset with your attitudes. And the presence of the angels was symbolized by the Cherubim or warrior angels that were fashioned on top of the ark. So they are gathered with God in their midst sitting on His throne. But that's where the law was read as well. And the meaning is clear. God alone is the one who enables His blessings and His law to coexist in one people. How did He do it? It was only by grace - a grace pictured by the blood sprinkled on the ark and all of the sacrifices performed at the altar on Mount Ebal. Mount Ebal has the law and the cursings read. But that is the mount where the sacrifice is made. Jesus bore the curse for His people. That's what the sacrifices symbolized. And if Jesus bears the curse, God's people can say "Amen" to any curses of the law without fear, and they can say "Amen" to the blessings of the law without fear of losing them. Mount Ebal was the key. It's where law and

grace meet together in Jesus, who was pictured by the sacrifices made on the massive altar on Mount Ebal - and I have also give you a drawing that shows the reconstruction of that altar, as well as a picture of the remains of the altar as it it seen on Mount Ebal today.

Now here is an interesting point that Christ makes in John 4 when He talked to the Samaritan woman. She contrasted her worship with the worship of the Jews. She said,

Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship. Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.

He rejected their worship and their law keeping because it was a worship without sacrifice. It was an attempt to have the blessings of Mount Gerizim while ignoring the issues of Mount Ebal. And in doing so, they had to change the laws which were read from the valley on this day. There is no way any human can keep God’s law in his or her own human effort. So the Samaritans made the law easier. They had to. All legalists have to. They can’t perfectly keep the law as written, but without grace you have to. So legalists inevitably reduce the standards of God’s law to something keepable.

Whenever you ignore grace, you automatically have a distortion of the law. God’s presence and His blessing can only be achieved as law and grace are kept together. You don’t need grace if there is no law to condemn you. And grace loses its purpose if there is no law to bless you. So it really is a marvelous object lesson. You only have God’s presence in your midst where there is grace and law present. And God’s grace only could come as Christ bore the curse and gave us the blessing. In the last message we looked at how Christ became a curse for us. Unlike the king of Ai who bore the curse for himself, Christ bore the curse for His people.

Now just as a side note, if the law was read by the Levites from the valley, and that was where the ark of the covenant was (symbolizing God’s presence), what does it say about a church that hates God’s law? Think about it. I think the object lesson is self-explanatory. God’s presence was at the heart of where the reading and exposition of God’s law was at. And we should value the law and live out the law by God’s grace.

Let’s move on to verse 31:

C. Man’s works are excluded (v. 31b)

Josh. 8:31 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.

Joshua is very careful to follow the Law’s instructions on how to build this altar. Deuteronomy 27:5 instructed him that he was not to use any iron tools on the stones. They were not to be cut and chiseled. They were supposed to pick them out of the field and use them as they found them. Archaeologists have found parts of Joshua’s altar, and I included a

drawing of what it appears to have looked like. But the symbolism is clear: God did not want any human work or ingenuity associated with the altar to make sinners realize that *their* efforts cannot contribute to their salvation in any way. This altar of unhewn stones symbolized salvation by grace apart from our works.

But it goes beyond that and indicates that just as these simple stones are not decorated by human creativity or ingenuity, so too we must not add to the worship of God things from our own imagination. It says that he built the altar “as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the children of Israel...” It’s the regulative principle of worship. The regulative principle of worship says that we may not bring anything into worship that is not explicitly commanded in God’s Word.

D. Burnt offering precedes peace offering (v. 31c)

Notice also that there were two kinds of sacrifices. They both represent the work of Christ in our salvation, but they focus on the two sides of that work. The burnt offerings were first. Leviticus 6:30 makes it clear that the burnt offering was not to be eaten. Every part of the animal was to be consumed by the fire on the altar. It represented God’s wrath being poured out on Christ. He was our propitiation. Propitiation means that which takes away wrath. He bore God’s wrath and removed God’s wrath from us.

But with God’s wrath having been dealt with via the burnt offering (totally consumed and not eaten), the second sacrifice of peace offerings now has a place. The peace offerings were what was eaten by the people. That was the Lord’s Supper that ushered them into communion and fellowship with God.

These two offerings show us how Jesus Christ brings us into friendship, peace, and fellowship with God. The peace offerings were always eaten by the people as a communion meal and symbolized God’s commitment to them and their commitment to Him. So before we even get to the law, God has already provided the means of dealing with our sins and bringing us into communion with Him. We keep the law, not under guilt but from a motivation of love. We keep the law not out of fear of a judge but in family relationship with the Father. That’s what the peace offerings means. We keep the law after we come to peace with God. Justification must be distinguished from sanctification. Once we are at peace with God in justification, we can work out the part of salvation known as sanctification - and we do so as secure sons and daughters. We don’t get sanctified to earn God’s favor. We work on our sanctification out of love for God because we have His favor and as sons and daughters desire further blessings and the extension of His kingdom. Let’s move on to verse 32:

III. The law and the Gospel (v. 32)

Josh. 8:32 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.

A. The law was written on the stones of grace

There is debate on what portion of the law Joshua copied. Let me read you *Moses'* instructions for this event. This is the first few verses of Deuteronomy 27.

Deut. 27:1 Now Moses, with the elders of Israel, commanded the people, saying: "Keep all the commandments which I command you today. 2 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. 3 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. 4 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. 5 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. 6 You shall build with whole stones the altar of the LORD your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God. 7 You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God. 8 And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law."

There are differences of opinion among commentators on what was written on the stones. Some say it was the ten commandments. Others say that it was the curses and the blessings of Deuteronomy 27-28. Others say that it was the law Moses had just given to them in Deuteronomy 5-26. In one sense it doesn't matter. The key point is that the stones represent God's grace - *and the law was written onto the stones of grace*. That means that grace does not do away with the law. Not at all. Rather, as Romans 3:31 says, it *establishes* the law. It is grace that enables us to keep God's law without fear of condemnation. It enables us to have the power to keep it, and the relationship to keep the law out of love, and the security to keep God's law out of joy. It is grace that turns the law from a task master into what James describes as the perfect law of liberty. For sons and daughters the law of God written on the stones of grace brings liberty and fulfillment. It's wonderful. No wonder David said, "Oh, how I love Your law. It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97).

Some people have questioned whether you could fit all the words of Deuteronomy 5-26 on the stones. But archeologists have discovered similar inscribed pillars or stelae six to eight feet long. One of these, the Behistun Inscription, has three times as much material as you find in Deuteronomy written onto that one stone - and they had a whole bunch of stones. Now granted, these words were written large enough so that all could see them. But there is actually no reason at all why all of Deuteronomy could not have been written there. I take it as the words from Deuteronomy - that it was the whole law which by grace they were committing their lives to follow. And in the next sermon on this section we will see how absolutely essential this is to any Christian civilization.

B. God's achievements are highlighted, not the army's (v. 32)

But there's another lesson here. Again we have a word picture to humble the pride of man. The words I just read from Deuteronomy instructed them to write these words plainly for all to see. They were like a big billboard. We have many examples of such billboards in archeology, but every one of the ones that have been discovered amounts to a brag sheet of a human general or a human king. They brag about how many other nations, cities or kings they have killed, how much plunder they took, etc. So if the Canaanites happened to be looking on at these Israelites whitewashing these stones and beginning to write, they would no doubt be thinking, "I've seen this before. I know exactly what they are doing." But as the writing progressed, to their surprise, instead of seeing a brag sheet on man, they would read a brag sheet on God. They would see that the heart of this army's genius was not human pride, but its opposite: humility; submission to God's law. That's the genius of Israel's success - humility - submission to God's law. God wanted his law to be the envy of the nations. He wanted it to be on a big posterboard to be plainly read by all.

How public are you about God's law? Are you embarrassed by aspects of God's law, or is it something you would like to see prominently displayed? Do you apologize for it or do you glory in it? In Deuteronomy 4:6-8 God says of His law,

"this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgements as are in all this law which I set before you this day?"

This was to be a testimony; a billboard for the world to see in years to come that they came not in their own might, but in the power and blessing of the Lord. And it wouldn't surprise me if a lot of Canaanites were able to hear this massive crowd affirming their commitment to God's laws. God wanted the nations to be jealous of these laws. Contrast that with the way our constitution was framed and you will see that our nation fell far below God's standards. Many of the colonies approximated God's standards, but not the Federal Government. Lord willing, we will look at that next week.

But I will end today's message by stating that in verses 33-35 God shows that the gospel and law was designed to bring entire nations (as nations) into covenant with God. All four governments of a Christian civilization (self-government, family government, church government, and state government) must be in covenant with God. Redemption is not just about individuals and how to get to heaven; it is about establishing Christian civilization on *earth* in every level of society. And I was going to preach on all of that today, but I realized that I would not be able to keep the sermon short enough and do justice to the next three verses. So I will preach on verses 33-35 next week or possibly the week after. But for today, let us be joyful that in Jesus we have a lawful grace and a gracious law. Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim can only be knit together in the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't separate what God has joined together in Jesus. Amen. Let's pray.