

Joshua 8:30-35; Dt. 27:1-8; The Dividing Line Drawn I. Blessings for Obedience II. Curses for Disobedience III. Participants of this Ceremony

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have all seen this scene in the movies- where there is a line drawn in the sand. This line represents the edge- the dividing line between what is acceptable and what is not. On one side of this line, you can expect peace- but on the other side of this line there is trouble. Well, today we are going to find a diving line drawn between two mountains. But this is not just some arbitrary line between what is acceptable and what is not- this is a perfect line drawn between blessings and curses. Which side of the line will Israel stand? As we return to Joshua 8, we remember where we are in redemptive history. We were there when Rahab escaped destruction and found peace within the camp of God. We also saw both Achan and the city of Ai destroyed- cursed as they were burned with fire and buried under rocks. And after this justice was poured out, we saw the spoils of war given to Israel as a picture of future blessings. So after this initial victory, defeat and then victory again we come to Joshua 8:30. Israel had broken the covenant- now it was time for Covenant Renewal. Now this gathering of the Israelites is a direct fulfillment of what we read back in Dt. 27. As Moses instructed Joshua, so now Israel is gathered in the valley between two mountains. The nation of Israel is divided into 2 groups- 6 tribes in each group. Half of them make their way towards Mt. Ebal while the other half make their way to Mt. Gerizim. With these two mountains at their back, the words of the Law are read and recorded- the words of blessings and curses are recited- and the people give their assent by saying- Amen- so shall it be. So as we open this chapter together this evening we consider this theme: Jesus Christ pronounces blessings and curses as a promise to those who gather before Him.

I. Blessings for Obedience

In our first point we consider the promise of blessings extended to those who obey. But as we dive into Joshua 8, we can only understand what is going on if we read these words in the context of Dt. 27 and 28. So what is taking place here at the command of Joshua is in obedience to the command of Moses given

back in Dt. 27. And even before we come to the reciting of the words of blessing, we see a very significant action of Joshua in v. 30 and 31. So before the blessings we find an altar and sacrifices. So Joshua builds this altar made of uncut stones- and upon it he offers a burn offering and peace offering. So there is a picture of ransom- atonement secured by way of blood being shed. And there is picture of fellowship- union between God and man is secured by way of this sacrifice. Note also where this altar was built- it was built on Mt. Ebal. Now which mountain was Mt. Ebal- was it the place of blessing or the place of curse? Well, Ebal was where the curses were directed. So what we see here is that an altar is built and blood is shed on the mountain of curse before the pronouncement of peace can take place! Added to this fact, we find that Ark of the Covenant in v. 33. The Mercy Seat- the footstool of God- the place where heaven and earth met- was here present. In fact, the Ark of the Covenant forms the center line. It is the Ark that marks the way- making it clear where the divide between blessings and curses is to be found. So we could say that the judgement seat of God is what determines where the lines are to be drawn between life and death- blessings and curses. To say this another way, it makes all the difference in the world which side of the ark you are standing! What is your relationship to the King who is sitting on His throne- do you come to Him in humility or pride? Submission or rebellion? As you can see, this passage is rich with Christological implications! The shedding of blood- securing peace- and the dividing line of justice drawn by the Ark- are all pointing us to the Savior and His work. So even before we can get to the pronouncing of blessings, we see the obedience of Joshua in his sacrificing to atone for sins. In other words, there is no way to blessings apart from the shed blood! There is no way for Israel- or us- to secure these blessings on our own! To say this another way, the first act of obedience for all of God's people is to repent and believe! Faith in the Messiah- looking to the sacrifice comes first. This is followed by the recording of the Law in v. 31. Joshua recites and records the Law for all of Israel to hear and see. In this the people of God would be reminded who they are as well as how they are to live. And after these sacrifices, Joshua reads from Dt. 27 and 28 in v. 34. Joshua recites as

Moses had commanded- the blessings. So lets summarize what the blessings of Dt. 28 are. If you obey the LORD'S voice and heed His commands, you will be blessed. Faith followed by obedience- means that it will go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. Specifically, for the Israelites, this means that they will be blessed in the city, in the field and in the home. Their children will increase, their animals and their grain will increase. They will get the rain they need- and the ground will be fruitful. Next, their enemies will be defeated. Their foes will be routed in battle- and Israel will be delivered from them. And third, the nation of Israel will be set apart as holy. They will commune with God- and His presence will remain with them. Basically, they will prosper in all they do- in work and worship- blessed wherever they go! They will have peace with God and man. Now this was a specific promise to a specific people at a specific time. Israel would experience this in part during the reign of King David and Solomon. But what are we supposed to learn from this? Well, we see two things. First of all, Israel never enjoyed the full measure of these blessings because her kings led her astray- and the people failed to believe and obey as they ought. In other words, we see that impossibility of mankind to live up to what is necessary. We are all sinners- we all fall short- and the only way we can be blessed by God is if Jesus secures these blessings for us! The second thing we learn is that these blessings are pointing to a future that is coming! In the new heaven and new earth, there will be a better- a greater blessing than even Israel could dream of! Eternal peace between God and man- the defeat of our enemies and the wedding feast- the Supper of the Lamb which we will enjoy for all eternity! It will be true then that God will open His good treasury- the heavens will rain blessing upon us as here foretold. And the only way we can have access to these blessings is through the perfect obedience of our King, Jesus! He alone kept God's Law- obeying all contained within!

II. Curses for Disobedience

But there was another mountain that we must consider- not only blessing from Gerizim but curses pronounced from Mt. Ebal. As we have seen with the expelling of Achan and the destruction of Ai,

those who refuse to believe and obey are met with swift destruction. So as we read from Dt. 28:15- if you do not obey the voice of God and do not carefully obey His commandments, then you will be cursed at home, in the city and in the field. You will have no rain, no children, no animals and no crops. You will be cursed wherever you go. It will not go well with you- rather you will have sickness and pestilence- a wasting disease will stalk you. Your enemies will defeat you- you will be scattered from before them. Your bodies will be given as food to the birds of the air- and you will flee from your enemies until you are consumed. Now we understand what happened to Israel at the first battle against Ai- it is starting to make sense! As Dt. 28 continues- the plagues of Egypt will come upon you- and you will be consumed. This is exactly what happened to the Israelites during the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles. Because of their wicked kings and rebellious ways- the nations chased them out of the promised land. In this pronouncement of curses, we find a picture of future destruction that the wicked will experience. Living in a dry and weary land- where there is no rest and no peace! Being cast into the lake of fire- where there is endless weeping and gnashing of teeth. Torment of body and soul while you experience only God's anger and wrath. This is what will happen to those who make themselves enemies of God by refusing to listen to His word! They will be destroyed and cast out of the promised land. This warning not only applies to those out there- the residents of Ai- it also applies to the rebels who sneak in here! The Achans who think they can deceive God by playing games. God knows your heart. Faith followed by obedience is the mark of all God's true people.

III. Participants of this Ceremony

Now that we have considered both the blessings and the curses, what remains is for us to consider who participates in this covenant renewal ceremony. As Joshua 8:33 reveals, all Israel was present and engaged in this solemn act of worship. Those who were born a Hebrew- and those who were later grafted in. Sojourners like Rahab- and those who followed the Israelites from Egypt as well. So this was a mixed multitude. Elders and the officials- the leaders and powerful ones were present. As well as the

common folk. Priests and judges- and those of lowly birth. As v. 35 continues- everyone- all of the assembly. The young and the old, male and female, and even the little ones. They were all present. Now one lesson we can learn from this is that covenant worship services are designed for everyone- of whatever age, stage and station. You are never too important or too lowly to not be welcomed here. The need for pardon is shared by us all. The reading of the Law applied to us all! The prayer of confession and the commitment to a holy life of gratitude- this is for us all! Every individual has a personal responsibility to hear and respond to the Word of God proclaimed- to be obedient in the context of the covenant. All of the blessing that Christ has earned for us are to move us to loyalty and obedience! Faith followed by walking in the way of His Law. Jesus not only died to secure our pardon; He also sends His Spirit to sanctify our lives! As Psalm 1 puts it, blessed is the man who does not walk in the way of the wicked- rather His delight is in the Law of the Lord by day and night! That truly is the blessed way- the way in which Jesus lived and the way of gratitude we are now called to follow. We do not obey the Lord to earn covenantal blessings- it is because these blessings are already ours that we now seek to obey and follow His commands.

To conclude, Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim stand in stark contrast. Mt. Ebal is rocky and barren- Mt. Gerizim is wooded and lush. Both stand out as signpost- choose which Mt. you want to dwell on! The line is drawn down the middle- a divide between the two ways. One of blessing- another of curses. Blessing and curses have been set before you this day- choose you this day which way you will go! The narrow path or the wide, easy one. Will you follow the way of the world- continuing to rebel and do what is right in your own eyes. Then I promise you curses from God's hand. Will you submit by humbling yourself to God- trusting in His Son for salvation and dedicating yourself to a holy life of gratitude? Then I can promise you blessings- eternal and everlasting blessings from God's hand! Jesus Christ pronounces blessings and curses as a promise to those who gather before Him. As Psalm 1 concludes, for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish!