

“Worship and Word in a Window Washer’s Life –
An Everyday Relationship with God.”

Joshua 8:30-35

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Do you know what is the best way to detect counterfeit currency?
Know the real thing!

There are many competing philosophies of life; many ways of thinking about and living our lives

Nearly every day, even many times a day, we are enticed to accept one or more of these philosophies, at least for the moment.

Bumper stickers and advertising sometimes capture them in shortened form.

Each one is in fact a way of thinking about and living life.

- “He who has the most toys wins” or as Jesus describe this counterfeit philosophy: “life consists of the abundance of possessions”;
- “A good loser is still a loser” or the applause of men is more valuable than the approval of God;
- “You only go around once, grab all the gusto you can” or satisfaction is found in the pursuit of the sensual - getting “high”, sexual arousal, physical thrills, etc;
- “Better Red than dead” or hardship, suffering and especially death must be avoided at any cost;
- “Carpe Diem” or the present is more important than the future;
- “Whatever” or there’s no rhyme or reason to life so just chill out.

I say these are all counterfeits.

But how can we tell?

What keeps us from succumbing, even momentarily, to these philosophical fantasies?

The real thing!

How many times a week do we find ourselves flying high, convinced we have the world by the tail and self-sufficiently ready to take on the next challenge?

How many times a week do we find ourselves defeated, discouraged and convinced we are on our own with little hope for the future?

What's the antidote to our temptation to draw these false conclusions from life's situations?

The real thing.

The real thing best reveals a counterfeit.

The truth best reveals a lie.

Reality best reveals fiction.

Today I continue in our long-interrupted series of messages from the book of Joshua.

The people called Israel, under the leadership of Moses, had been miraculously freed from slavery in Egypt.

But their subsequent rebellion against God meant that they would be without a country for 40 years.

Then as the book of Joshua opens, we find those people under the new leadership of Joshua, ready to finally enter the territory promised to them by God.

The problem was that there were other **people already in that land**; people with well-fortified cities and well-equipped armies.

But again with God's miraculous intervention, Israel invaded that territory and began to defeat the enemy.

Up to this point in our study of Joshua we have seen

- the crossing of the flood-swelled Jordan River on dry ground;
- the collapse of the impregnable city walls of Jericho with only a shout;
- and then the initial defeat of Israel and eventual triumph over the city of Ai.

That brings us to our text for today.

But before we read it, I want you to see more specifically what had happened to Israel that makes this text so meaningful to them and to us.

I spoke earlier of those times in our lives when we are so successful that we are flying high, self-sufficiently ready to take on the world. Israel had been there.

Following the highly successful and resounding defeat of the much more powerful city of Jericho, the army of Israel was ready to go up against the smaller city of Ai.

In Joshua 7:3 I think there is more than a hint of self-sufficiency when the reconnaissance team returned from secretly surveying the city of Ai and said, "Not all (of our army) will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there."

Many years earlier Moses had warned the people of the temptation to the philosophy of self-sufficiency:

Deuteronomy 8:12-14,17

"When you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God... You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me."

That tendency to self-sufficiency and pride is not reserved to great success but to any success.

Give us any measure of success and we easily think of ourselves as the cause; our wit and our ability has brought this about.

And with more cleverness and hard work we can keep the success going.

This is a way of thinking about and living life that greatly tempts us when things are going well.

Well God gave the army of Israel a "reality-check."

The little enemy army of Ai soundly defeated them.

And when that happened the people turned to another way of thinking about and living life.

Joshua 7:6-7 "Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground ... And Joshua said, "Ah, Sovereign LORD, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan!"

"Oh, God how could you do this to us?
If only we would not have trusted you!
We really are on our own aren't we?
What's the use!"

Like Israel, we seem to run to the extremes of self-sufficiency or self-pity;

the extremes of pride or despair or the extremes of not needing God or blaming God.

And both are false views of life.

Both are fiction not reality.

Both are counterfeit ways of thinking.

So how do we know they are counterfeit?

By seeing the real thing!

And that's what God does in Joshua 8:30-35, he shows them the real thing.

Joshua 8:30-35

"Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the Israelites. He built it according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses--an altar of uncut stones, on which no iron tool had been used. On it they offered to the LORD burnt offerings and sacrificed fellowship offerings. There, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua copied on stones the Law of Moses, which he had written. All Israel, aliens and citizens alike, with their elders, officials and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the LORD, facing those who carried it--the priests, who were Levites. Half of the people stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had formerly commanded when he gave instructions to bless the people of Israel.

Afterward, Joshua read all the words of the law--the blessings and the curses--just as it is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them.”

Israel’s goal was to invade, conquer and settle in the land of Canaan. At this point in the process they had defeated the central armies and would next attack the northern armies.

But before continuing the invasion, God calls a “time-out”

And continuing the sports metaphor, God calls a “holy huddle”.

It is important to see what happens in that “huddle”.

And the point I’m going to make today is that every one of us needs these holy huddles often.

Apparently they stop the invasion and the entire people, over a million of them, travel from their camp at Gilgal by the Jordan River north to the city of Shechem which was situated between the mountains of Ebal and Gerazim.

I have a picture of the area for you and maybe if you think of the valley through which C-470 runs between the Hog Back and the west side of Green Mountain you may get a mental picture of what the elevations and space would have been like.

You can imagine that great number of people spread through the valley and up the sides of each mountain.

Many years earlier Moses had commanded that when they entered Canaan, the people were to go to those mountains and there be reminded of the Word of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 11:26-30 “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse-- the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known. When the LORD your God has brought you into the land you are entering to possess, you are to proclaim on Mount Gerizim the blessings, and on Mount Ebal the curses.”

And in our text, Joshua 8:30-35, the people do what had been commanded.

But notice specifically what they do.

What are the two main activities of the experience?

Notice the first in verses 30-31,

Joshua 8:30-31 “Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the Israelites. He built it according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses--an altar of uncut stones, on which no iron tool had been used. On it they offered to the LORD burnt offerings and sacrificed fellowship offerings.”

They built an altar and made sacrifices of two kinds: burnt offerings and fellowship offerings.

But notice the second thing they do in verses 32 and 34.

Joshua 8:32, 34 “There, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua copied on stones the law of Moses, which he had written... Afterward, Joshua read all the words of the law--the blessings and the curses--just as it is written in the Book of the Law.”

They offered sacrifices and they read the Word of God.

Why those two things?

Because in the midst of life Israel needed to be re-anchored to reality.

I think it is reasonable to assume these people were living under great stress.

Given the political and military situation in our world today, we might have some sense of what Israel must have been experiencing.

Husbands, fathers and sons die in battle. Israel was in battle and some of their husbands, fathers and sons died.

The war was far from over – the temptations to the false philosophies of self-confidence or despair were real.

And so God stops them and anchors them to reality, to truth.

How?

Through Sacrifices and the Word!

What realities do the sacrifices anchor them to?

There were two kinds of sacrifices: burnt offering sacrifices and fellowship offering sacrifices.

The burnt offering was an animal sacrificed for the people.

It was completely consumed in the fire and it was the substitute for the people – the animal took the place of people, dying in punishment for their sins.

God had decreed that he would temporarily atone for the sins of his people in this way.

And so when they offered a burnt offering – their relationship with God was restored.

By it they were reminded of their need for God and God's provision for their need.

By God's grace they were not consumed.

The fellowship offering (sometimes called a "peace" offering) was offered by those who were at peace with God, to express gratitude and obligation to God, and fellowship with him." (New Bible Dictionary)

These offerings were eaten by the people in a celebration of their relationship to God and each other.

If they believed what God had said about these sacrifices, then they also believed that when they offered them sincerely, God forgave their sins and brought them into a loving relationship with himself.

Offering those sacrifices provided and reminded them that they belonged to God by his grace.

By those sacrifices their faith was strengthened – God was there and he was their God.

On this side of the cross, historically, we don't offer sacrifices as Israel did; we celebrate the ultimate and final sacrifice of Jesus, God's Son.

We come together to be reminded that we belong to God by his grace.

- Our worship is a reminder and sometimes even a reenactment of the sacrifice that gives us a relationship with the sovereign God of life and eternity.
- We meet on the first day of the week – resurrection day – the resurrection of Jesus that proved the efficacy of his life and death for us.
- We celebrate communion, the symbols of his sacrifice on our behalf.
- We read, speak and sing of the good news of salvation by grace through faith.

By worship our lives are re-anchored to the truth that God is really there and that we belong to him by his grace.

After victory and the temptation to self-sufficiency, Israel needed a reminder that its relationship to God was by grace and that by grace, not their ability, they belonged to God.

After sin and defeat and the temptation to despair, Israel needed a reminder that its relationship to God was by grace – and that by grace they belonged to God.

The worship of God is essential to the anchoring of our souls, to the reorienting to reality that we need so often.

Worship shapes who we are.

Peter Leithart wrote, "It is a fundamental truth of Scripture that we become like whatever or whomever we worship. When Israel worshipped the gods of the nations, she became like those nations – bloodthirsty, oppressive, full of deceit and violence (cf. Jeremiah 7). Romans 1 confirms this principle... The same dynamic is at work today: Muslims worship Allah, a power (more) than a person and their politics reflects this commitment. Western humanists worship man,

with the result that every degrading whim of the human heart is honored and exalted and disseminated through the organs of mass media... After describing idols as figures that have organs of sense but no sense, the Psalmist writes, ‘Those who make them will become like them...’ (Peter Leithart in “Transforming Worship,” Foundations 38 (Spring 1997): 27)

Conversely when we have a steady reminder of who God is in his greatness and his grace, we move toward him and become more like him.

That is why our worship planning starts with what is it about God on which we will center our attention on Sunday; what has God revealed about himself in his Word that we will reflect on and celebrate.

The Scripture informs our worship so worship doesn’t get hollow and meaningless – “I love you, I love you, I love you – with no thought as to why I love God or what it is about God that I honor.

The best hymns, songs, and choruses are those that remind us of something God has told us about his person and work.

The Psalms almost always connect a response to a reality – they connect worship to truth about God.

We are very intentional about the songs we select in worship.

We don’t just come to worship – we come to worship GOD – to be anchored again in the truth of who he is and what he has done and who we are by his grace.

But secondly, not only did Israel make sacrifice but it says they listened to the reading of God’s Word.

And listen they did.

Men, women and children stood and listened to the entire reading of God’s word.

If worship anchors our souls then the Word directs our actions.

The people stood and listened so that they might know to do what God commanded.

We are people of the King, serving the King's purposes, under the King's authority, obeying the King's commands, receiving the King's blessing or the King's discipline.

Worship without obedience is not worship.

As someone years ago wrote, "No, Lord" is an oxymoron.

Today we are so fearful of legalism that we tend to downplay obedience.

The Bible doesn't have that fear.

Legalism is the belief that our conduct earns our relationship with God whereas the Bible clearly indicates that because we have a relationship with God by grace we have an obligation to obey.

Grace and obedience are not contradictory but complementary.

But remember to always get the horse before the cart:

Grace first and then obedience.

Obedience is anchored in grace!

We celebrate who God is and what he has done and then we renew our knowledge of his will in his Word and our commitment to follow him.

There is reason why our reflections on God's grace in our worship usually precede instruction from the Word and sermon.

Knowing the grace of God (reviewed and celebrated in worship) enables us to hear and respond to the will of God (reviewed in the reading and preaching of the Word).

God knew that his people needed a steady diet of the Word – that would guide them past the seductive and false ways of thinking about and living life.

Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 6:6-9, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as

symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”

Jesus said in Matthew 4:4 “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

There is always the great temptation to separate our everyday lives from our spiritual lives as if the two have little relationship.

There is, too easily, a disconnect between Sunday and Monday.

God wanted his people to see the integration of the two.

He wanted to anchor their souls;

He wanted them to see that their safety, blessing and future were in God’s Grace and God’s Word celebrated and lived.

I titled the sermon today “Worship and Word in a Window Washer’s Life – An Everyday Relationship with God.”

I picked a “window washer” because I wanted to select an occupation that has no easily identifiable spirituality attached to it.

It might be assumed that worship and Word apply easily to being a pastor or missionary.

So I selected an occupation where the connection might not be so obvious to show how relevant it is to everyone and every aspect of life.

I’ve asked Tom Bayless, not a window-washer but a long-time employee of the telecommunications industry and recently self-employed, to speak to of the role of Worship and the Word in everyday life.

Tom Bayless spoke of a specific situation in his life when his practice of reading the Bible and praying each morning and evening anchored his soul. Among his comments about the value of worship and Word in his everyday life, he commented that it through these that “I remember who I am.”

Worship and the Word – they anchor us in the reality of grace and righteousness.