



Text: Joshua 8:30-35¹
Series: Facing Life with Courage
Title: Part 7 – Renewed by Renewal
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Every now and then, we feel the need to touch base with our roots. We need to “get back to basics” in our lives. We need to remind ourselves of what is really important in life.

Fathers Day is a chance for fathers to stop and remind themselves of the importance of caring for our families and it also gives children an opportunity to reflect on the role their fathers have had, or that they wish they had had, in their lives. Mothers Day, Thanksgiving Day, weddings, funerals, anniversaries, and milestone birthdays – all of these special moments are a kind of invitation to take stock of our lives and consider where we’ve come from and where we want to go from here. Sometimes, they give us the opportunity to reaffirm the direction of our lives; at other times, they challenge us to take hold of new, more fulfilling directions.

What we’re about to encounter in God’s Word this morning is a moment in Israel’s history when they returned to their roots. There are several of these moments in the Book of Joshua, but the one we’re about to read is perhaps the most central and important of them all. Back in chapter 5, before the people marched on the city of Jericho, there was a time of renewal near the town of Gilgal. In chapter 24, at the end of the Book of Joshua, there’s one final, grand ceremony of renewal after the conquest of the land was complete.

It’s important to notice the timing of these ceremonies of renewal. **The first renewal** in chapter 5 comes at the **beginning** of the conquest. **The final renewal** ceremony in chapter 24 comes at the **end** of the conquest. But the renewal that we’re about to read comes **after a time of failure and trouble**. Last week we looked at the problem that Israel had encountered at the city of Ai and the defeat they had experienced in battle because of the presence of sin in the camp of Israel. The ceremony of renewal we’re about to encounter was one that was created by God to refresh and renew the spirit of his people after a time of failure and to get them moving in the right direction again.

As I read this short portion of the Book of Joshua, I want you to notice the number of times it tells us that what they were doing was something that God had told them to do. The passage won’t say “the Bible says that such and such

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be done” but what it will say is that “Moses, God’s servant, had written or commanded this or that” to be done. Also, listen for references to what the writer calls “the Law” or “the law of Moses.” God inspired Moses to write the Law portions of the Bible. Whenever you hear references to the Law or to the writings of Moses you’re hearing a reference to the first five books of the Bible, Genesis through Deuteronomy. Listen for these references as I read Joshua, chapter 8, verses 30 to 35.

“At that time Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the people of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, “an altar of uncut stones, upon which no man has wielded an iron tool.” And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD and sacrificed peace offerings. And there, in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. And all Israel, sojourner as well as native born, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded at the first, to bless the people of Israel. And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them.”
Joshua 8:30-35

I don’t know how many you noticed but I counted about seven references to what Moses had commanded or to what was written in the Book of the Law. In other words, the writer of this passage wants us to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God had commanded that this ceremony of renewal be conducted on the slopes of Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim.

You can find the commands that are referred to here beginning in **chapter 27 of the Book of Deuteronomy**. God wanted his people to be spiritually renewed and refreshed. He knew they would need to touch base with their spiritual roots and so by His Spirit God moved Moses to carefully describe this ceremony of renewal long before it was needed by the people of Israel and then Joshua carefully followed the directives that Moses had written. What compassion! What care! What foresight by our God! He knows us so well! As David wrote in Psalm 103...

“As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.” Psalm 103:13-14



The event was carefully stage managed. Joshua led the people of Israel to gather on two small mountains in central Canaan. Half of the people gathered on Mount Ebal with the other half facing them on the slopes of the adjacent Mount Gerizim. The location formed a natural amphitheatre which enabled the people to see and hear everything that was said and done. God had inspired Moses to identify this spot specifically because it would serve His purposes to a tee. As they worshipped together, almost face to face, God's people were renewed.

There were two important aspects of this ceremony of renewal that occurred here.

First, there were sacrifices offered on an altar that Joshua built for the purpose on the top of Mount Ebal. These offerings were a declaration of...

Relationship with God Reaffirmed Through Sacrifice

“And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD and sacrificed peace offerings.” Joshua 8:31

The two offerings made here were foundational to the relationship of the people of Israel to God and the “burnt offering” was the most foundational sacrifice of the entire Old Testament system of worship. God had commanded that a perfect animal be offered for sacrifice...

“If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD. He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.” Leviticus 1:3-4

By laying his hand on the head of his sacrifice, whether it was a bull from the herd, a sheep or a goat or even two pigeons from the flock, the worshipper was symbolically transferring the guilt of his sin onto that animal. When that animal was sacrificed, the blood of that animal would “make atonement for him.” The death of that animal would be accepted by God as a substitute for the death of the sinner. Through that act of substitution, the worshipper would be freed from the blockage in their relationship with God created by their sin and they would be accepted in God's sight. I want you to understand that...

The Burnt Offering Declared Acceptance with God

Wondering if we're going to be accepted always makes us feel vulnerable and a little uncomfortable. Some time ago, I applied to a theological seminary at which I really wanted to study. The professors at that school are some of the best in North America. Their literature said that they accepted students who didn't have all the common prerequisites for the program I wanted. They called it



“equivalency.” I didn’t have the degree that they usually want, so I was hoping for acceptance by equivalency.

I sent in my transcripts. I filled out the application and paid my fee. I wrote an essay on why I wanted to study there. And then I waited for the reply. I hoped they might recommend a course or two that would fill out my profile. But instead, they simply said, “No.” They told me to re-apply when I had the usual degree. They didn’t say anything about “equivalency.” It was confusing, it was disappointing and it hurt a bit! I thought I might have met the requirements, but I didn’t.

Knowing what the requirements are for acceptance is important to us. Being rejected hurts. And not knowing why hurts even more. You might have had that experience of rejection in your job or among your friends or with your family or by your spouse – you’ve been rejected and you don’t know why.

God wants us to know exactly how we can be accepted by Him. And He wants to assure us that we will “be accepted” if we come to Him in His way. This is **the principle of acceptance** by God:

The Lord accepts the worshiper who draws near to Him on the basis of substitutionary sacrifice

So, what is our substitute? Or better yet, **Who** is our substitute? We don’t bring the blood of bulls or goats to gain acceptance with God. Instead, God himself has provided the sacrifice for our acceptance in...

**“the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”
1 Peter 1:19**

Our acceptance with God is based upon Jesus death for us. He was the perfect Son of God. He was the perfect sacrifice. His perfect righteousness is the foundation for our acceptance before God. When we accept him as our Saviour and Lord, we are in essence putting our hand to his head and claiming him as our substitute.

This morning, I invite you to put your hand on Jesus. **For some of you**, this will be a first time connection with Jesus. As you claim Jesus Christ as your sacrifice for you sins you will be accepted by God for the first time in your life. **For many of you**, this will be a renewal of a long standing relationship. For you, putting your hand to Jesus will simply refresh your grasp of the truth that when you put your faith in Jesus, you were immediately accepted into God’s “forever family.”

The second sacrifice offered on Mount Ebal points to the great truth that our acceptance by God leads to fellowship with God. It isn’t that God merely tolerates our presence in his family because we believe in Jesus. He longs to



fellowship with us. The second sacrifice that was offered under Joshua's leadership, the "**peace offering**," was a beautiful picture of God's longing for close personal fellowship with his people.

The peace offering was also an animal sacrifice. Just like the burnt offering, the worshipper would place their hand on the animal's head. The animal would be killed, but unlike the burnt offering where everything was consumed by fire on the altar, in the peace offering only part of the animal would be burned on the altar. The rest of the animal would be cooked and eaten by the worshippers. The Law said...

“And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten on the day of his offering. He shall not leave any of it until the morning.” Leviticus 7:15

The worshipper and his family were to eat the meat in the presence of God. I don't mean to be corny but what is being pictured here is a kind of BBQ with God. While part of the animal was being consumed on the altar in fire, the rest of the animal was being consumed by the family that had offered it. Please understand that...

The Peace Offering Pictured Fellowship with God

The word translated as "peace" is the Hebrew word, shalom. Bible translators struggle to find an English equivalent for it. Some use "**peace**," others use "**fellowship**," (NIV) and others translate it as "**well-being**." (NRSV) A "shalom" relationship with God is all of these things.

Shalom is being right with God, being right with His people and being right with His world. It's similar to the sense of satisfaction that comes after a great meal – and that's why a great meal is a central part of this sacrifice.

There is something about eating good food that makes us feel good. I'm sure there are medical explanations that account for why food makes us feel that way. I'm sure there are psychological and sociological reasons for why eating with others makes us feel good. All I know is that a great meal makes me feel good!

Friday night the members of the ministerial association got together for a meal at a Bed & Breakfast just outside of town. We arrived and were immediately engulfed by the aroma rising from the BBQ. Inside, we were treated to some great summer salads and to top everything off, we consumed mountainous cinnamon buns. The food was great and we spent almost three hours just sitting and chatting around the table. You see, the food led to fellowship. We experienced fellowship, well-being and peace. We experienced shalom.



God wants us to experience fellowship, well-being and peace in our relationship with him. One Bible scholar suggests that the whole purpose of the Old Testament system of sacrifice was God's desire to lead his people to experience joy and gladness in His presence. Joy and gladness in God's presence. That is shalom. And that's what you and I have because of Jesus' sacrifice for us. The Apostle Paul tells us...

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Romans 5:1-2

I want you to see that through sacrifice God made a way for his people to enjoy acceptance and fellowship with him. Here is the basic truth to which I invite you to return today...

We are accepted by God and have fellowship with Him because of our faith in what Jesus has done for us as our substitute sacrifice for sin

We're not accepted because of what we do. We're not invited into the heart of fellowship with God because of our goodness or our righteousness. We're invited to come because of Jesus and what he's done for us.

This is crucial for us to grasp. Often in our spiritual lives we begin with this truth but over time we tend to drift into thinking that our acceptance and our fellowship with God is based on our performance. We tend to ground our confidence in our righteousness, rather in Christ's righteousness. We tend to lean on our godliness rather than His holiness. I want you to notice that God structures this ceremony of renewal by beginning with sacrifices that affirm the relationship he has with his people and **only once that relationship has been reaffirmed does God move on to drawing their attention to obedience to his will.**

The **second** element in this ceremony of renewal now moves to address the issue of how people who are in relationship with God should live.

Obedience to God Was Reaffirmed Through His Word

Near the altar of sacrifice Joshua set up some stones and covered them with plaster. In the wet plaster he wrote out a sizable portion of the Old Testament Law. We don't know exactly how much he wrote. It might have included the Ten Commandments but I think it almost certainly included the portion of Deuteronomy that contains what are called "The Blessing and the Curse." And then, with the entire nation listening...

“he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law.” Joshua 8:34



It would have taken quite a long time to read the Book of the Law but this was God's Word for his people and they needed to know what God expected of them. As one Bible scholar put it: **“A ‘Moses for Dummies’ will not do; Israel needs to hear every word.”**² As Joshua, standing on the top of Mount Ebal, read the Book of the Law, God's Word washed down over the people gathered below.

Joshua read the whole of God's Law. He read the Ten Commandments, he read the laws regarding sacrifices, and he read the laws covering social relationships. He read everything! But the writer of Joshua draws special attention to the laws that he calls “the blessing and the curse.”

You'll find “the blessing and the curse” in the Book of Deuteronomy. With the people gathered on Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, Moses had commanded that the law be read and that the people respond to it. I'm just going to read a short portion “the blessing and the curse” to give you a flavour of what happened at this ceremony of renewal. Joshua would have read...

“Cursed be the man who makes a carved or cast metal image, an abomination to the LORD, a thing made by the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret.’ And all the people shall answer and say, ‘Amen.’ Cursed be anyone who dishonors his father or his mother.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’ ... Cursed be anyone who misleads a blind man on the road.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’ ... Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’” Deuteronomy 27:15-16, 18, 26

Again and again, the people added their “Amen” to what Joshua read. Then Joshua read them “the blessing” portion of God's law. Again, this is just a small portion of what he read.

“And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, ... Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.” Deuteronomy 28:1-6

After reading all the blessings for obedience and all the curses for disobedience, Joshua laid this challenge before the people...

² Robert Hubbard, The NIV Application Commentary: Joshua, Zondervan, 2009, p. 259



“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.” Deuteronomy 30:19-20

He invited them to choose. God’s desire was to bless his people as they obeyed him. He didn’t want to curse them or blight their lives because of their disobedience. He wanted them to choose life! He wanted them to love him, to obey him, to hold fast to him, so that their lives would be rich with his provision and care.

Jesus wants to pour blessing into our lives, too. He said...

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful...Blessed are the pure in heart...Blessed are the peacemakers... Blessed are those who...Blessed are you when....” Matthew 5:3-11

Blessing is what God wants to pour into our lives. And as we express our love for him by obeying what he says, his blessing pours down upon us as the Word of God poured down upon the people gathered that day on Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim.

These renewal moments are important in the life of God’s people. In fact, I believe that God knows that we need regular times of returning to our spiritual roots, regular times of renewal and recommitment to help us to stay on course in our relationship with him. Thankfully, God doesn’t expect us to go to Mt Ebal and Gerizim for renewal. He’s provided us with two New Testament ceremonies that give us wonderful opportunities for spiritual renewal on a regular basis right here in Olds, in fact, right here in this room.

Every month we take a loaf of bread and break it. We take a jug of grape juice and we pour it out. And we do it, the Apostle Paul tells us, **“in remembrance”** (1 Cor 11:24, 25) of what Jesus did for us in his death on the cross. Remembrance is the key word and remembrance is intended to renew in us a love for and a commitment to the Lord who died for us.

As we break the bread together we’re invited to “examine”(1 Cor 11:28) ourselves to see how things stand between us and the Lord. It’s an opportunity to “clean house” and “set things in order” in our lives as the Holy Spirit brings issues to our minds that need to be confessed. As the Spirit brings them to mind



and as we confess them to the Lord, we experience his forgiveness and we are renewed and refreshed.

The second New Testament opportunity for renewal is one that we're going to witness in a few moments here this morning. Although every believer in Jesus is invited to participate in the Breaking of Bread again and again, the testimony of believers baptism is one in which we actively participate only once in our spiritual lives. You might ask then, **how can it be a service of renewal for those who have already been baptized?**

My answer would be: **Remembrance**. When we participate in the Lord's Table, we are called to remember what Christ did for us on the cross. When we observe the testimony of faith given by other believers in baptism, we are also given an opportunity to remember. We remember the day of our own baptism. We remember the moment we realized our need of a Saviour from sin and we called on Jesus to save us. We remember the commitment we made to live for him.

Some people were throwing the believers in Rome off track with God by telling them that the greatness of God's grace for sinners meant that they didn't need to take sin seriously. In fact, some were saying that their disobedience would actually give God the opportunity to pour out his grace on them more freely. Paul was shocked and he wrote to the Romans...

“Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. Romans 6:1-4

Paul's answer to this false teaching was to call these people to remember their baptism. He invites them to remember that their baptism was a call to live a new life for Jesus Christ. He invites them to renewal.

This morning I invite you to be in two places at once. I invite you to be here, listening to and rejoicing with these people who are declaring their faith in and allegiance to Jesus this morning. But I also invite you in your minds and hearts to return to the day when you made the same declaration. I invite you to remember and to be renewed and refreshed in your relationship with Jesus Christ, your Saviour and Lord. **Today I invite you to choose life!**

- **Baptism of Believers**
- **Song of Commission:** O Great God
- **Benediction**