

Joshua 8:30–35

Discussion Guide

Passage Summary

After the sin of Achan, Israel's defeat at Ai, and then God's gracious restoration and victory, Joshua does something that might initially seem surprising. Rather than immediately pressing farther into the Promised Land, Israel stops to worship. They gather at Mount Ebal, build an altar, offer sacrifices, and hear the words of God's covenant read aloud. But this location is significant. Long before Joshua and Israel stood there, God had brought Abraham into this same land and promised, "To your offspring I will give this land" (Genesis 12:7). Generations had passed, but God had not forgotten his promise. Now Abraham's descendants stood in the land God had promised.

Remembering God's Faithfulness

Israel's worship begins with remembering. They can look backward and see that God has done exactly what he said he would do. Their presence in the land is itself testimony to the faithfulness of God. Christian worship continues to be an act of remembering. Each Lord's Day, God's people step out of the ordinary rhythms and anxieties of life and gather again around the promises of God. We remember who God is, what he has done, and who we are because of his grace.

Even the movement of Christian worship rehearses the gospel. **God calls us** into his presence. **We confess** our sins. **We hear the assurance of his pardon** in Christ. **God speaks** through his Word. And finally, **he sends us** back into the world with his blessing. Week after week, worship reminds forgetful people that our lives rest not upon our faithfulness to God, but upon his faithfulness to us.

Hearing & Obeying God's Word

Joshua then reads God's Word to the people. The passage repeatedly emphasizes the comprehensiveness of the gathering: all Israel is there. Verse 35 specifically includes women, children, and the sojourners living among them. No one is meant to stand outside the hearing of God's Word. God is forming a people around his Word.

This helps us understand why the Christian life was never intended to be lived alone. God gathers us into a community where we hear his Word together and learn to obey it together. We encourage one another, bear one another's burdens, forgive one another, pray for one another, serve one another, and continually point one another back to Christ.

But obedience must be understood in its proper order. God's people do not obey in order to make God love them. Grace comes first. Relationship comes first. God's faithfulness comes first. Obedience is the response of people who have already been loved and claimed by him. We do not obey to earn God's favor. We obey because his grace is transforming our hearts.

Gospel-Rich Worship

At the center of Israel's worship stands an altar. Before Israel hears the blessings and curses of God's covenant, sacrifices are offered (v. 31). Sinful people cannot simply stroll casually into the presence of a holy God. Sin requires atonement. Something must be done about our guilt. Those sacrifices ultimately point beyond themselves to Jesus. Christ lived the life we could not live and offered himself as the once-for-all sacrifice for sin. Because of him, those who trust in Christ are forgiven, reconciled to God, united to Christ, and able to enjoy all the benefits that belong to him. This changes the very nature of our worship.

In Luke 18, the Pharisee stands before God confident in his own righteousness while looking down upon others. The tax collector, however, can barely lift his eyes toward heaven. He simply cries, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" Jesus says it is this man who goes home justified. Likewise, in Luke 7, the woman who knows the depth of her forgiveness responds with extraordinary love toward Jesus. As Jesus explains, the one who has been forgiven much loves much. The gospel therefore produces something mere religion never can: people who are simultaneously humbled by their sin and overwhelmed by grace.

The more clearly we see our need for Christ, the more precious Christ becomes. And the more precious Christ becomes, the more our worship, obedience, and love for others begin to flow not from obligation, fear, or self-righteousness—but from gratitude and joy.

Discussion & Reflection

- 1. Israel pauses in the middle of the conquest to remember what God has done. Why do you think remembering God's faithfulness is so important to the life of faith?** What happens to us spiritually when we become more conscious of our present circumstances than of God's past faithfulness?
- 2. Imagine Abraham standing in this place hearing God's promise in Genesis 12, and generations later Israel standing there seeing its fulfillment. What does that teach us about God's timing and faithfulness?** Is there an area of your life where you find it difficult to trust God because you cannot yet see what he is doing?

3. Every week Christian worship rehearses the gospel: God calls us, we confess, we hear his pardon, receive his Word, and are sent with his blessing. How might understanding worship this way change the way you approach Sunday morning?

What would be different if you came expecting God to remind you of his grace rather than simply thinking about what you were supposed to "get out of" the service?

4. Joshua 8 repeatedly emphasizes that *all* the people were gathered to hear God's Word. What does this reveal about God's desire for his people?

Who are the people in your life that God may be calling you to invite more deeply into Christian community or to hear the good news of Christ?

5. God's Word was given to Israel as a community, not simply to isolated individuals. Where are you currently experiencing the Christian life alongside other believers? Who knows you well enough to encourage you, challenge you, pray for you, carry burdens with you, and point you back to Christ?

6. There is an enormous difference between saying, "I obey so that God will love me" and "I obey because God has loved me." Which mindset tends to characterize your relationship with God? Where are you tempted to measure God's acceptance of you by your spiritual performance?

7. Consider the Pharisee and tax collector in Luke 18. What are some subtle ways we can begin trusting our own spiritual résumé while becoming contemptuous of people whose sins look different from ours? Who are the people you are most tempted to look down upon, and what might that reveal about your understanding of grace?

8. Why do you think recognizing the seriousness of our own sin actually helps us love other sinners more graciously? How might a deeper awareness of God's mercy toward you change the way you respond to someone's weakness, failure, or sin this week?

9. Jesus says of the woman in Luke 7 that the one who has been forgiven much loves much. What is the relationship between experiencing grace and loving Christ? Has the gospel ever begun to feel ordinary or familiar to you? What might help you recover a sense of wonder at what Christ has actually done for you?

10. At the center of Israel's gathering was a sacrifice; at the center of ours is Christ, the once-for-all sacrifice for sin. What would it look like for the finished work of Jesus to become more central to the way you worship, obey, work, parent, relate to others, or respond to your own failures this week?

Closing Prayer

- **Remember God's faithfulness.** Thank God for specific ways he has kept his promises, provided for you, sustained you, forgiven you, and remained faithful even when your own faith has been weak.

- **Ask God to make worship more than routine.** Pray that each Lord's Day would become an opportunity to remember the gospel again—to hear God's call, confess honestly, receive his grace, listen to his Word, and be sent into the world with his blessing.
- **Pray for hearts shaped by God's Word.** Ask the Holy Spirit not merely to increase what you know, but to use Scripture to reshape your desires, priorities, relationships, and obedience.
- **Pray for deeper Christian community.** Ask God to make you willing to know and be known by other believers—to practice the "one anothers" of Scripture and help others follow Jesus.
- **Confess self-righteousness.** Ask God to reveal where you resemble the Pharisee in Luke 18: trusting your own goodness, comparing yourself with others, or becoming contemptuous toward people whose failures are more visible than yours.
- **Thank Jesus for being the sacrifice you needed.** Praise him that your standing before God does not depend upon your performance, but upon his perfect righteousness, sacrificial death, and finished work.
- **Ask God to make grace beautiful again.** Pray that a deeper awareness of your sin would never lead to despair, but instead produce deeper wonder at Christ's mercy—so that, having been forgiven much, you might love much.

Close by asking God to make you a people who remember his faithfulness, receive his Word, rest in Christ's finished work, and carry his grace into the world.