



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

The Strange Joy of Worship

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Joshua 8:30-35

Clint Pressley

³⁰ At that time Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal, ³¹ 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. ³² 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. ³³ 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. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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.

(Pastor prays)

Last weekend, this weekend, and probably next weekend, three weekends in a row, you'll see a monumental shift to so many families; many of whom are in our church. So many families took their children off to college this weekend. I've seen the pictures of dorm rooms decorated in ways that I would never have dreamed about. Cool dorm rooms decorated up with pictures. Moms and dads shedding tears because what's happened is an irreversible change. Things will never be the same. And there's something else even more monumental because this very morning all across the United states on college campuses there are young Christian men and

women getting dressed and going to church. To the untrained eye, when you see these little pockets of young men and women going to a place of worship, you know that it is completely counterculture.

It looks like what you did today. You rode into a place to gather with a group of people that have something in common with you although you might have everything else not in common. You got up on a Sunday when it would have been a whole lot easier not to. You came today because there's something in you that tells you this gathering, the gathering of God's people, is important. That's the danger that we felt when COVID hit and we didn't know what it was and how we should respond. The church is closed and you might remember all of the spiritual and emotional fallout of not being connected with the people you're called to be connected to. There's an impulse in us to gather together. Even if we can't do it here, if we somehow are prevented or you're traveling, there's an impulse in the Christian psyche that says I should be there. It's always been like that from the very beginning. It's always been that we stop what we're doing and worship. That's exactly what's happened in Joshua Chapter 8.

Let's take a few moments to catch up to where we are here in Joshua Chapter 8. You can just flip the pages in your Bible, back three or four pages, and start at the beginning Joshua Chapter 1. There God tells Joshua that Moses, my servant, is dead. And now Joshua is the leader, he takes the helm, and as he does he trusted God. He sent the two spies into Jericho. There we meet Rahab. How in the world this woman of ill repute is in the lineage of Jesus. We see the grace of God that saves sinners right there in Rahab. She houses the spies who give a report to Joshua and he leads the people. We get to Chapter 3 and they know they're going to take Jericho. They have crossed the Jordan River in this miraculous turn events. God stops the water and all those people come across the Jordan river on dry ground. They get on the other side and they stack up those stones, 12 of them, to say this is something God did. And afterwards they realize as they look into the promised land, that they have not had the Passover. God does something there in Chapter 4 and then in Chapter 5 God renews the covenant. They had the Passover to remember how on that night before the Exodus, that the Angel of death came through the camp and passed over every house whose post had blood across it. This is reminding us that it is the blood of Jesus that saves us. After the Passover they marched into Jericho; they get their orders and what a strange thing to do in Chapter 6 as they go around the city. God miraculously makes the walls fall down. It is a wonderful victory, except one thing;

there is sin. Joshua doesn't yet know about what Achan has done so he thinks they have momentum so now he moves into Ai. And so he does what he always does, he sends spies to check out the land and they say it's really not that impressive. They advise him to just send about 3000 men. They didn't ask God. They didn't pray about it. They didn't think it through and they didn't know that Israel was stunned because of her sin. And then in Chapter 7 Israel is defeated. This is not how this is supposed to happen. Joshua falls on his face and is weeping. And like any good leader who has to go into a crises and it's so big, it feels so overwhelming, Joshua just ask God, Why? God speaks to Joshua and says, there's sin in there, Joshua. Joshua gets the prescription from God as to how to solve the problem which is a reminder that sin is a really big issue. In Chapter 7, Achan is brought out and God's wrath falls on him and all associated with him to purge Israel of sin.

They are ready now. In Chapter 8 is the victory in Ai. You have this detailed account of ambush and defeat and the full army. They win this wonderful victory. God gives them the plunder and it really seems like things are going so well. You make it to the end of the victory and you expect to see Joshua keep moving forward. But that is not what the writer tells us in verse 30, at that time, You see, they knew what we need to know that...

God's People Know Their Need for Worship

As God's people, we know our need for worship. And if you are a son or daughter of God, bought by the blood of Jesus, that's something that's ingrained in you. So here's what I want to do. I want to frame this passage this morning with the idea of worship. I want to look at it through the lens of worship and see if we can somehow learn just a couple of things about worship from this passage. Here's the first thing.

Worship is essential.

For God's people, bought by the blood of Jesus, God's son, given a life for God's purpose, one of those things that we cannot do without is corporate gathering of worship. In fact, you can take it from this passage in verse 30. You see that it is of the highest priority. You'll notice that they are winning. Don't you like it when you have some momentum, if you have ever been on a

team when things are going well and you just keep hitting home runs or just keep scoring touchdowns. Or you've been a part of a company where there's momentum. Or even on a night with children when things are going well for a while, you wanted to keep going in that direction. They have momentum but God says, pause. Even as well as things are going, even as important as your journey is, even as this battle unfolds, even as the promised to take the promised land has yet to be fulfilled, we've got to stop and worship. It's a strange time to insert worship. I wonder what is it in your life, what is the one thing that you will not miss? Is it worship? What we find in this frame here in the picture of God's people is that worship as being essential is the highest priority.

But not only that. Do you know what worship does? Worship is a reminder that there is a God and you are not him. That's what you see right here. Notice what the text says in verse 30. At that time, Joshua built an altar to the LORD. That's the capital LORD. That's the Lord who is the God of Israel. What you find there is this picture of this person God, Yahweh. In the Old Testament he has revealed himself as a personal God, Yahweh. That's where the name Joshua comes from. Joshua means Yahweh saves. That name Joshua becomes a shadow and the pointer and the type of the better Joshua. Jesus. Who lived perfectly, died on the cross for sinners. God raised him from the dead and any sinners that believes can know God personally. There is this understanding that God is personal but not only personal. God is specific to a people. You see that, in the text, that is the Lord who is the God of Israel. Now as Christians, we believe that God created everything and everybody, that he is the one true God. That he loves everybody. We do believe that God loves everyone but he loves his people with a different kind of love. He loves his people with the covenant love found in Jesus. He loves his people with the same love that he loves his son Jesus. So not only is this God personal as He revealed to us in Jesus; this God is specific. He takes a certain group of people and he shines his grace on that group of people, those who are in Christ. With that in mind we celebrate and worship on a Sunday. And that Sunday reminds us that regardless of what's going on in our week we pause to remember. This good God is personal and he's chosen us specifically in Jesus.

But you know that worship can oftentimes feel inconvenient. You know when something is essential, and worship is essential, you don't mind being inconvenienced. Let me show you where I get that. You'll notice that they are winning. And verse 30 tells us, at that time, Joshua built an altar to the Lord the God of Israel. And, he built it on Mt. Ebal. So here's a little

geography lesson. Mt. Ebal is not in Ai. Mt. Ebal is about 25 or 30 miles away. Most experts think that Israel was made up with around conservatively 600,000 people. Some people say even as many as a million. So you're gonna try and herd 600,000 people, 25 miles all the way over to Ebal just so they can worship because Moses said to do so back in Deuteronomy. What you find is that worship is for God's people and it's always been inconvenient. I mean even with all of our modern conveniences at Hickory Grove and all of the great provision that God is giving us, and we're so thankful for that, this building is pushed up onto the corner of Harris Blvd and Hickory Grove Road. If you don't get here at just the right time, you will feel like you have run a 5K marathon to get up to the building and if you happen to throw a little rain into the mix, it is really inconvenient. And not only that, we put the time to worship on the Lord's day in the morning. I mean Sunday morning is still one of those times even in the United States it still kind of protected where there's really not a whole lot going on Sunday morning. And here, where we put our worship services makes it so that it genuinely can be inconvenient. And you might live 20 to 30 miles away so it may take 45 minutes to get to the place where you worship. It can be inconvenient. If worship is essential and it is of the highest priority, isn't it worth whatever inconvenience you may face on that Sunday? Truthfully, Sunday would be a really good time to sleep in, great time to sleep in and drink coffee and sit there and relax in the morning. You could go and search the Internet. If I were to do that I would be looking at cars and looking at what their prices are, and saying that the market is so high you can't buy a truck right now. And the classic cars, this kind of thing could be going on in my mind as I enjoyed the morning. And some of you are able to say, look, I work six days and I've only got one day that I just would like to have to myself.

Now if that's the prevailing thought, what happens is, you now have said that you are God and not God. You see people understand that there is a God and you are not him. The inconvenience may mean that there are some extra hurdles but I'm going there.

Worship is also an act of obedience. Isn't that what verses 30-31 say? ³⁰*At that time Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal,* ³¹*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, Just as it is written back in Deuteronomy 27. That's all this is is commentary from Deuteronomy 27. And it's just Joshua actually being obedient to the word of God. For Christians, gathering together with the*

body of Christ with other believers on the Lord's day, worship is an actual act of obedience. Isn't that what the writer said in Hebrews 10:24. Do not forsake the assembly.

Not only that, worship reminds us of this great victory that God is giving us. Look where they built that altar. Joshua built an altar to the Lord of Israel and he built it on Mt. Ebal. To understand that you have to go back to Deuteronomy 27. You have the two mountains; Mt. Gerizim is where the blessings will be read and Mt. Ebal is where the curses are. Do you see that they built the altar on the mount of curse? That shows our God's victory over the curse. Draw a straight line over to the New Testament. Go over to the resurrection. Why do we worship on Sunday? Because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead on a Sunday. And it is that day, that act, not just the cross but the resurrection that tells us that we have been given victory over death, hell, sin, and the grave. Worship reminds us of our victory. So we come in on Sunday morning, being beaten up by the week, it's been terrible and COVID all around. Look at the news and see the collapse in Afghanistan. And what we need to do is come in here together and sing these songs, hear these prayers and open God's word and be reminded there's victory in Jesus. There is victory in what Christ has done for us. Put an altar right there on the curse mountain and we say God has given us victory.

If worship is essential, then it must be Christ centered.

Worship is Christ Centered

It's right there in verse 31. ³¹ *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, look at the offerings, there are two of them, burnt offering and peace offerings. What you have here are three pictures. Joshua is fulfilling the law of God. Joshua is doing what he's been told to do by Moses; he fulfilled the law of Moses. He becomes a type that points to the better and true Joshua, Jesus, who will fulfill the law in a way that we can't. It's not only that he died on the cross for our sins, not only that he was raised from the dead but he lived perfectly and that righteousness, when you believe in Jesus, that righteousness is put on you. Look at this sacrifice and there you'll find in verse 31 this sacrifice is called a burnt offering. So I traced it back to Leviticus and there in Chapter 3 you find that the offering of the blood shed is for atonement. The burnt offering becomes a shadow. Hebrews 10 says that it is a shadow and it has to be done over and over again, it is a picture of the one-time

sacrifice of Jesus on the cross in the place of sinners and that writer says in Hebrews 10:12 that when Christ had offered a once and for all sacrifice for sin that he sat down at the right hand of God, because it is finished. This reminds us that our worship must not be we centered, it is not centered on our needs, it is not designed to make us feel better. It is designed to glory in the cross of Jesus, to stand there under the forgiveness of Jesus, to celebrate the goodness of God found in Jesus. But there's another sacrifice, there is the burnt offering but also the peace offering or fellowship offering. So what does that mean in Leviticus? It teaches us that the fellowship offering is a free will offering. It is this voluntary act of saying, I love God. I want my life to honor God. I want to give myself freely to God. Here is this offering that is nothing more than this binding of fellowship that reminds us that we are his and he is ours. This is a demonstration of being in right relationship to God, right relationship. Worship shows that we have this need for renewing grace, to meet with God and to meet with God's people; to recenter on his word, to hear it spoken into our ears, to feel it in song, to breathe it in and exhale prayers. That is why you hear us preach the gospel every Sunday. It's not because it's a tent revival. Every Sunday we are preaching the gospel so that some sinner will be saved. We do hope that but it's God's children that need to be reminded of the gospel. There at the gospel of Jesus, at the cross is the grace that not only saves me, it sustains me, it gives me strength to go on. I feel the love of God because of the grace of the gospel found in the cross. That needs to be heard every single Sunday. Worship must be Christ centered.

What else do we know about worship? Here's a third thing.

Worship is true to God's word

You probably saw it in verses 30-35. What you have there is nothing more than a living out of what Moses was told in Deuteronomy 27. We can pick up on the phrase in verse 31, as it is written. It has become a sort of catch phrase here at Hickory Grove. As we go through the passage you'll see how the Torah, which is the law, takes prominence. You will see in verse 31, just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the people of Israel. You get down to verse 32, *he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written*. So you go back to Deuteronomy where they plastered the stones so that they were smooth and he wrote on them. We don't know what he wrote, the first five books of the Bible, the 10 commandments, the blessings or the curse? Whatever he did, that is what becomes

preeminent. Worship is not driven by him or an agenda or the events of the world. Worship is not dictated by what's going on in society. Worship is dependent on the word of God. That's why a preacher opens the Bible here to start worship. It's why our songs are sung to God and about God. At our church, the Bible is opened and a preacher is just going to walk through what the passage says.

Thank God we have his word. Thank God that he gave his word to guide us. Thank God we have his word to correct us. Thank God. How do you grow as a disciple? You get more of this Biblical information inside of you. Thank God we have his word to heal our broken hearts, to convict us of sin. To come in hungry and have your soul nourished by the word of God. To strengthen the hands that have gotten weak because of the world we live in; to embolden us.

Yesterday I got something that they talked a little bit about some of the Christians that are now in Afghanistan. I mentioned it in my prayer. There are Christians that have been threatened by the Taliban. They have been told, we know who you are and where you meet. And if you meet, we will destroy you. There are Christians who are having to make a decision, are they going to do what Christians do on the Lord's day? And this is what the Bible does, it emboldens them to be able to withstand whatever is coming their way. We have the Bible that settles us in a world that is upside down. I can go to God's word and read it and have my heart straight and settled. And this word shows us our need for Jesus. The footprints of Jesus are on every page of the Bible. Every page of the Bible points to our need for Jesus.

Let me give you one more thing that the Bible informs us about our view of worship.

Worship strengthens God's people and glorifies God

Two things are happening here. It's you being strengthened by the music and by the singing of the Psalms and the spiritual songs; by the word of God and the Spirit of God. It's using that worship to glorify the son of God. That's going on and all the while as you are being strengthened by worship, God is being glorified. We get reminded in verse 30 of God's sovereignty. You see they built an altar on mount Ebal to the Lord, the God of Israel, the one who is in charge. It is good to be reminded that our God is sovereign.

There are times when we question it though. We get in the middle of something and we start questioning, why is this happening to me. I had that happen to me Friday. I was out working in the yard. I took a nice hot shower but you step out into the yard and you start sweating again. I took another shower but it was a cold shower. I determined that my hot water heater is out. I notice that there was water coming out from under my house but we have a sump pump and it's been raining a couple days ago so maybe it's just pumping. I didn't think anything about it and go to the ball game. After the game I go home and as I'm coming down the road, I looked up my neighbor's driveway and there's water coming down. I thought to myself, wonder what's going on over there? I pull up in the driveway and that's when it occurs to me, you know what, there may be an issue with my water heater. I've seen a couple of signs so I went and opened underneath the house and as I opened the door I can hear something like Niagara Falls. I go turn the water off at the hot water heater so I can have water, it just won't be hot, but couldn't get the handle to turn. SO I had to turn off all the water. So I'm at home, Connie is in Mississippi. I'm by myself. I have no food and no water. Y'all didn't know the kind of danger I was in did you? And I'm thinking, why is this going on? I mean that's just a little small thing and I start questioning. I thankful for good, smart plumbers who know what to do came and fixed it so everybody's in good shape now. But I started thinking, it's good that after the weekend you can come and sit and sing and pray and hear and be reminded that God is in control. Worship reminds us also that our God is not silent. I mean over and over again you hear right in the phrase, as it is written. As it is written. In other words, our God has shown us what his promises are, what his precepts are, what his purpose is. You don't have to wonder, what is God's will for my life? God's will for your life is to be more like Jesus. Read the book. You find out that our God is not silent. Our God is a God of mercy. What a beautiful passage to be reminded our God is merciful. Do you see that reminder? Our God is just, and the judge, but that, in Jesus, he shows mercy to his people. He shows forgiveness. It is good to be reminded as a Christian that that's the world we live in, a world of grace. And when you are in Christ, God has forgiven you in Jesus.

You know what worship reminds us of? When we worship, we are strengthened because of diversity. Look at all the people in verse 33. There are sojourners, the native-born or elders, officers and judges, Levitical priest. Dropdown to verse 35, at the end. You've got the whole assembly. You have all of the women and there you have the little ones. You have the sojourners that lived among them. You have a reminder that is not some monolithic. Here is

this aggregate, this is a group of different people. And they have one thing and only one thing in common. That is God. We are reminded here in worship that God is here among us. Isn't that what God said to Joshua, I'll be with you. The ark of God was there in the middle of the people. Remember when they crossed the Jordan and the ark went out in front of Them. And Joshua said, make sure you stay about 2000 cubits back, 1000 yards. They couldn't even see the ark. It would be the symbol of God's presence and would go on before them. But it was so holy they couldn't get too close.

And yet something happened here in Chapter 8:32 -33. They are between Mt. Ebal and Mount Gerizim. They are about 1 mile apart at their peaks but you come down the slopes, there where the slopes meet is about 150 yards and 600,000 people gathered around the ark. They are being reminded that God is with them. You know what worship shows us? We gather on Sunday morning to be reminded that our God is with us. This worship is essential. This worship is centered on Jesus. This worship comes from God's word. This worship strengthens your heart and glorifies your God. This worship is found and it begins at the cross of Jesus.

Now this morning I want to ask you a couple of questions for reflection. Bow your heads for a moment and in your mind and heart, just answer the questions to yourself. Here's the first question I'd like to put before you. For you, does worship feel essential. Here's another question. What excuses have you used previously, or said another way, has anger or frustration with God or with someone else; maybe you would say I've just been frustrated with God; has that kept you from coming? Why would he do this? Has that kept you from coming to worship? Are you a spectator or do you participate. Do you check your phone or watch or are you worshipping? What attitude or what action do you need to repent. Maybe you need to repent of that this morning.

(Pastor prays)