



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Joshua 8: 1-34

Lesson 8

Fall 2020

"From The Ashes"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Seth. And good morning. Good to see all of you here. We are in the Book of Joshua, and we are in chapter 8. It's a lengthy chapter, verses 1 through 35. I'm not going to read the entire chapter, because much of it I will read as we go through the sermon. But I'm going to read verses 1 through 9, and then I'll end with verse 30.

But first some background. If you were here last week, you know in chapter 7, Israel fought its second battle in the land of Canaan against this very small, insignificant city of Ai. —And they lost. 36 men were killed. Joshua learned that someone had taken things from Jericho that were under the ban—that were dedicated to the LORD. And that was forbidden. And so there was 'sin in the camp'. And Israel would never have victory again until they corrected that crime—until they dealt with the sin. And so, through a process of drawing lots, the guilty man was discovered, Achan was discovered, and he was punished. He was stoned. Justice was done. Things were corrected. Now chapter 8,

¹ Now the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear or be dismayed. Take all the people of war with you and arise, go up to Ai; see, I have given into your hand the King of Ai, his people, his city, and his land. ² You shall do to Ai and its king just as you did to Jericho and its king; you shall take only its spoil and its cattle as plunder for yourself. Set an ambush for the city behind it."

³ So Joshua rose with all the people of war to go up to Ai; and Joshua chose 30,000 men, valiant warriors, and sent them out at night. ⁴ He commanded them, saying, "See, you are going to ambush the city from behind it. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready. ⁵ Then I and all the people who are with me will approach the city. And when they come out to meet us at the first, we will flee before them. ⁶ They will come out after us until we have drawn them away from the city, for they will say, '*They are fleeing before us as at the first.*' So we will flee before them. ⁷ And you shall rise from *your* ambush and take possession of the city, for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand. ⁸ Then it will be when you have seized the city, that you shall set the city on fire. You shall do *it* according to the word of the LORD. See, I have commanded you." ⁹ So Joshua sent them away, and they went to the place of ambush and remained between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai; but Joshua spent that night among the people.

Joshua 8: 1-9

Well, the battle occurred as planned. The city was captured and burned. The army of Ai was trapped and defeated. After that, the nation went north to the town of Shechem, and we read in verse 30, "Then Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, in Mount Ebal,"

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of studying it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for this time together. And we thank You for Your blessings that have brought us together, and for the hearts that long to be with Your people in fellowship, and doing what we're doing this morning, reading Your Word, and then spending time considering the meaning of the text. And so LORD, as we do that, we look to You to bless. This is food for the soul, spiritual food. This is how we grow and we mature. We study Your Word. We consider it deeply, what it means and how it applies

to us. And so LORD, we pray that You would enable us to do that. And we can only do that through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. So may He guide us and help us in our thinking, our understanding of the things that we read, (much of which is very obvious), but how it applies to us and what it says about You. This is what we need to know. And I pray that You would build us up in the faith, and through our time together, increase our confidence in You, and our desire to follow You faithfully, because that is how we prosper spiritually, through our obedience to You. So bless us spiritually.

We pray for our material needs, as well. LORD, we remember the sick; we ask Your healing mercies upon them. And comfort those that are grieving: We pray that You would wipe every tear from their eye, and give them the comfort that comes with the assurance that their loved one is with You—and that really, all is well.

Bless those who have businesses in our church, Father. We pray that You would, through this difficult time, this difficult economic time, we pray that You would protect those businesses, and enable them to prosper. And we pray for all of the men and women here who have jobs that may be at some risk due to this pandemic. I pray that You would preserve them and bless them and provide for them.

LORD, these are difficult times we live in, and they are challenging times. But we pray that You would strengthen us because we know we have a firm foundation with You, planted in Christ. We know that all is well with You as our sovereign God. You're seated on Your throne. And Father, we are thankful that our hope is not here—our hope is in heaven. And nothing can shake that. And we thank You, Father that we have that hope because of Your Son. We thank You for what He's done for us. We thank You for the life You have given us in Him. And we pray that as we study this morning we would see Him, and we would glorify Him in all that we do. We pray these things in His name. Amen.

A few weeks ago I mentioned Winston Churchill. I read something about him recently that is helpful to know, since some consider him to be the greatest leader of the 20th century. One night in 1940, when he learned that he would be Prime Minister,

he wrote, "I felt as if I were walking with destiny, and all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial." His past life that prepared him included some major defeats—such as his responsibility for the disaster at Gallipoli in WWI. His wife said, "After that, I thought he would die of grief."

This sounds like Joshua after the disaster at Ai: 'Joshua tore his clothes; he prostrated himself on the ground before the ark until the evening, and cried out, "Alas O Lord God, why?"' (Josh 7:6-7).

It may be true that, 'Victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan.' Still, we all have to own defeat sometimes. And the fact is, we can learn from our defeats. Great leaders have. Joshua did. When he learned Achan violated the ban on the treasures in Jericho, he dealt with that sin, then went forward to fight again. That's the lesson of Joshua 8. Joshua and Israel learned from their defeat. —And they never took sin lightly again.

It's a lesson for us. And we need to learn that lesson. The apostle John warns "...of the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life." (1Jn 2:6). As long as we are in the world, we'll feel the pull of the world toward worldliness. We are at war continually, with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Their influence is subtle but strong and constant. And we won't always win the battles. We stumble and fall. So what do we do? John tells us in 1 John chapter 1 verse 9, "If we confess our sins, He's faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Confessing to the LORD is the response. It is the right response. In fact, John was saying that that is one of the evidences of being born again. We confess our sins regularly. When we fail we repent, then go forward in our walk with the LORD, and learn from it. That's what Joshua and Israel did after Achan. They confessed the sin, they dealt with it, then they resumed their war. And from the ashes of defeat they went up to victory.

But that march to victory began with a Word from the LORD, a Word of encouragement, of reassurance. That's how chapter 8 begins. "Now the LORD said to

Joshua, 'Do not fear or be dismayed. Take all the people of war with you and arise, go up to Ai; see, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land.' " That was the encouragement Joshua needed. The words, "do not fear or be dismayed," recall the assurance that God gave him back in chapter 1, "Be strong and courageous. Do not tremble or be dismayed." That statement reassured Joshua that the relationship with the LORD was restored to its previous condition, and that all was well.

Well, that's necessary, because we will only limp along, at best, in the life of faith if we lack assurance. That can be lost when we sin, when we experience the LORD's discipline and have a wounded conscious. But when there is repentance, there is restoration. Not to salvation. Believers cannot lose their salvation. But they can lose their assurance. And so when that happens, people begin to doubt that they are saved.

Again, it's hard to go forward in the walk of faith when a person doubts if he or she is of the faith. Assurance is a necessary part of the Christian life, a necessary aspect of the Christian life if we're going to grow and progress. And it's based on God's promises. "No one will snatch them out of My hand." (Jn 10:28). "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you." (Heb 13:5). We recover from doubt by recalling the great promises that God has given.

John Bunyan illustrated this in *Pilgrim's Progress* soon after Christian came to the cross and was off on the journey to the Celestial City. He stopped to rest at a place that's described as a 'pleasant arbor on a hill'. The shaded place was built there for weary pilgrims who needed rest. So Christian took his rest. But he did more than that, he fell asleep. A scroll was given to him at his conversion, and it fell out. It was the roll of the assurance of his life, of his eternal life. Well, when he resumed his journey, he was warned along the way of danger ahead. 'There are lions ahead'. It terrified him, so he reached for the scroll to gain courage, and it was gone. He had to retrace his steps to find it. And only then could he go forward. When he did, he scolded himself for foolishly falling asleep when he should have been walking, "How far I might have been on my way by this time," he said. Rather than making progress he had to regress.

Christians do that. They get distracted. They take it easy. They aren't attentive, and as a result drift spiritually, and then lose assurance of salvation and become fearful and inactive.

The solution is to do what Christian did, and that is find the promises of God. That is the sure ground of the assurance of salvation. What has God said? John 3:16, "Whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." And that's from the God "who cannot lie". (Tit 1:2). Behavior, life, and love gives support; they are essential to that as well to assurance. But it is God's Word—His fixed and certain Word—His inerrant Word that is the basis of our assurance. We can examine ourselves, (and we need to do that; there's a proper place for that), but we can find so much fault within ourselves. But we can't find anything varying, anything unstable, uncertain about the Word of God. It is the firm foundation and the promises of God give us the assurance we need.

Now that's the point that Bunyan was illustrating in that scene in *Pilgrim's Progress*. And that's what Joshua had here, the Word of God—the promise of God. It was the assurance that the LORD gave him and the people of Israel—and that settled it—"I've given you this city." And then He sent Joshua back into the battle

The strategy for Ai was different from other battles. This involved ambush. The plan of attack is given in verses 3 through 9, which we read. It involved two groups. The first group was made up of 30,000 men, valiant warriors, who would be sent out at night and hide behind the city to the west of the city, the west side of it. The second group was the main army, led by Joshua. Now this was, at least initially, a kind of diversionary force. They would come up early the next morning and approach the city from the north, which would be to the front of the city, in order to draw the army out of the city. When the Canaanite soldiers came out, the first group was to seize the city and set it on fire. Then the forces of Joshua would stop their retreat and turn and engage the army of Ai. At that time, this first group, the 30,000, would join the battle and attack the army of Ai from behind, closing the trap and sealing the fate of the Canaanites.

It was a very conventional strategy. And we might wonder why the LORD chose this over the miraculous method that He used at Jericho, (It worked well there). Calvin suggested it was so the people would not keep looking for miracles, and would recognize that even in the natural occurrences of life, God is just as active—His power is the same. I think that is a good explanation. God doesn't always explain the reasons that He does things. He doesn't do things the same with everyone and in every situation; and we might wonder, "Why"? He doesn't explain that. But I think Calvin gives a good explanation.

Christ changed water into wine. First miracle. John chapter 2. God is just as much involved in the natural process of viticulture, of culturing grapes and turning them into wine, as He was in that miracle. And we need to understand that. He is never uninvolved in the events of the world; or in our lives personally. We need to always be looking to Him for guidance, for strength, for help, and looking to Him and thanking Him for the outcome of whatever comes to be.

So here He has chosen the natural over the supernatural for conquest, which involved a lot of people, some 30,000 soldiers, just for the ambush. 30,000 to capture a city of 12,000. Why such a large army for such a small city? One suggestion is to keep them from boasting. If Israel had defeated Ai with a small number, well they might have attributed that to themselves. They might have attributed that to their valor, their skill. Maybe that's the case, and there's reason to think so, because you'll remember, in chapter 7 when the spies had gone out to look at the city, returned, they recommended that a small force be sent. 'Don't send all of the army. Just a few, two or three thousand. This is a small city. Insignificant'. Their self-confidence was high. So high they didn't feel the need of more than just a few troops.

Now God commands Joshua to take "all the people of war". Now this was the opposite approach, perhaps to teach them an important lesson. To teach them that victory could not be achieved by self-confidence. It would not come by their strength or by their skill, but by God alone. When they did it their way, they lost. Only by following God's lead could they win. But they must follow Him. That is certainly true, whether

that's the lesson that we're to draw from here, whether that was the reason for this strategy, we can't say. But we can certainly say that that is a true principle that we need to follow: Follow Him; lean upon Him; look to Him for our wisdom.

Well, He had promised them victory. He had already given them the city. He'd given them its king, its people, its land, it was all in their hands. And victory was now a foregone conclusion, because this is what God had said, this is what He had promised. And that was great assurance, in and of itself, to trust Him, and to go forward confidently in battle. They had the assurance that God had given them that this would be theirs. The victory was theirs.

One of the great encouragements to continuing on in the faith, to perseverance is the assurance that the saints, believers, will persevere to the end. Victory has been promised to us. The victory has already been won. That was one of the last statement that the LORD gave to His disciples before He was arrested and taken to trial and to the cross. He said in John 16, verse 33, at the end of the upper room discourse, "Take courage. I have overcome the world." Now that gives incentive to strive for the goal, "I've overcome the world."

And now Israel did that early the next morning, 'strive for the goal', 'go for the victory'. According to verses 10 through 13, the main army marched to Ai, led by Joshua. And the next day they positioned themselves for the battle. In verses 14 through 29 the battle is described. The plan worked as it intended, as laid out. The men of Ai hurried and rose up early in the morning, and they went out to meet Israel in battle. When Israel pretended to be defeated and fell back in a kind of a mock retreat, the men of Ai became confident of victory. They went after them. Verse 17 says, "So not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who had not gone out after Israel. And they left the city unguarded and pursued Israel.

Then, at God's command, Joshua stretched out his javelin toward Ai, for God said, "I will give it into your hand." That was the signal for those behind the city to enter it and set it on fire. But it was more than that. According to verse 28, Joshua kept the javelin raised all through the whole battle, just as Moses kept his staff raised during the

battle with Amalek in Exodus 17. You remember how he held his hands up, his staff up. And as long as the staff was held up, Israel prevailed against the Amalekites. But when his arms became tired and he let the staff down, the Amalekites prevailed. So two men, Aaron and Hur, were there to hold up his arms, and they held them up all through the battle and they prevailed.

And I'm sure that the army would have taken that into their consideration. They would have made the connection. As they were fighting these men of Ai, they could see that javelin raised. And they recalled that event the generation before, and it was an encouragement to them, because it reminded them, assured them, that the LORD was with them, and they would have victory. —That the promise He had given to them would be fulfilled. It was His victory.

So we read in verse 20, "When the men of Ai turned back and looked, behold, the smoke of the city ascended to the sky, and they had no place to flee this way or that, for the people who had been fleeing to the wilderness turned against the pursuers." The 30,000 that captured the city then joined the battle. Joshua and his forces moved against the men of Ai. This other force, the 30,000 came, trapping the soldiers of Ai between the army of Israel, where the Canaanites were defeated and destroyed. Israel's army then returned to the city, slew its inhabitants, took the cattle and the spoils of victory, hung the king of Ai on a tree, and then razed the city to the ground.

So, after a major setback, the nation regrouped, reconsecrated itself, and rose from the ashes of defeat to accomplish a decisive victory over the enemy. Verse 29 ends, 'The pile of stones of this city stands to this day.' It was another monument for Israel's remembrance of the wages of sin and the judgment of God.

Now many would call that 'rough justice', meaning severe and unfair. But again, this has to be considered in context. This was not a common practice. This was unique to the Canaanites—destroying the entire population. It was consistent with what the LORD told Abraham centuries earlier in Genesis 15, verse 16, "The iniquity of the Amorite, (which at that time), was not yet complete" —was now complete.

God had been patient with them for centuries, and their sin had only increased. And so justice came. It was swift and complete. It was not unfair. God cannot be unjust. As Abraham said, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?", (Gen18.28). Yes! He always does, He always will. He must. He's the LORD God. People have a problem with God's justice. Not because God judges people unfairly, but because people judge themselves unfairly—and much too generously.

The question of the medieval theologian Anselm of Canterbury applies to us. He asked, "Have you not yet considered of what a grievous weight sin is?" And the answer to that is, "No!" People have not considered that. People don't realize how truly sinful sin is, and how guilty we all are. What a weight, a heavy weight sin is. Anselm's point was—this is the reason God became man. This is the reason that Jesus Christ, God's Son, took on human nature. Sin is so bad that only the death of the Son of God could remove it. Only the death of Christ could make atonement.

Over the centuries, Canaan had become a land of gross immorality. And an unspeakable cruelty where pagan altars were stained with the blood of their own children. And finally God said, "Enough." God's justice is impartial. It is only for the guilty. It fell on Achan, an Israelite, just as it fell on the King of Ai, a Canaanite.

Well following the victory at Ai, Joshua did something unexpected. Instead of moving quickly to the next battle, Joshua interrupted the war to take Israel on a pilgrimage north to Shechem. It's a reminder that we can never be too busy for worship. That the tasks we are engaged in are never more important than the time that we give to honoring the LORD and spend in spiritual refreshment. In fact, that is how we protect ourselves from worldliness and the encroachments of the world and the flesh and the devil in our lives. This is how we remind ourselves of who we are and how dependent we are on the LORD. It's through worship.

So now, in the midst of the campaign to conquer Canaan, Israel breaks from battle to obey the instruction Moses gave earlier in Deuteronomy chapter 27—to go to Shechem and reaffirm the covenant.

Shechem is located about 20 miles north of Ai, between two mountains. Mount Ebal, the highest of the two stands to the northeast, Mount Gerezim to the southwest, the valley in between them. The site is significant in Israel's history because, among other things, Jacob dug a well there. Joseph was buried there. And the LORD Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman there. In John chapter 4, the town is named Sychar; but it's Shechem. It was also, significantly, at this place where Abraham built his first altar to the LORD after leaving Ur and entering Canaan. And before he did, this is where the LORD spoke to him and told him that He would give the land to his descendants. And so Abraham built an altar there at Shechem, the first one built in Canaan. And it's probably for that reason that Moses chose Shechem as the place for this ceremony. As well as the fact that it's located in the central part of Canaan, which is a symbolic place for the whole of the land.

And so, some 600 years after Abraham built his first altar in Canaan, Joshua and the nation marched 20 miles north along the tops of the hills, in complete safety, to build an altar there. Verse 30 states that the altar was built on top of Mount Ebal. And following Moses' instructions, it was built of uncut stones, "on which no man had wielded an iron tool..." (vs31).

It was an altar that did not have any of the works of man on it. According to Exodus chapter 20, in verse 25, after the LORD's given the Ten Commandments, He speaks of an altar. And He speaks of how using a tool to make it nice in appearance, using a human tool on it would "profane" the altar. So the stones were left in pristine condition, signifying that the altar was pure. Then they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings.

Verse 32 states, "He," (Joshua), "wrote there on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written, in the presence of the sons of Israel." The stones referred to were large stones that, according to Moses, were to be whitewashed and inscribed with the law, (I assume it's the Ten Commandments that are written there). The symbols of the altar and the Law gave a message to both Israel and to Canaan, to the Israelites and the Canaanites, that the land was the LORD's. This was like planting a flag in the

middle of the land, claiming it. In fact they weren't set up after the fact but before the fact, that is before the land was conquered. The conquest has just begun and they're already setting up this altar, this flag so to speak, to make the statement that they posses it. God promised it, and they were certain it was theirs—and it was.

I think it's a little bit like those soldiers on Iwo Jima in the Second World War who, in the middle of the battle, raised the American flag on Mount Suribachi, to defiantly signify that victory was certain. But Israel's confidence was not in themselves. Israel's confidence was not in the power of its army, but in the power of God, and faith in His promises. He'd said the land was theirs, and they believed it, and they took it.

Faith that led to repentance after defeat and resumption of the mission is seen here. After that terrible defeat at Ai, they reconstituted their relationship with the LORD. They learned from that defeat and they go forward. Not only to conquer Ai, but then to make this great declaration of their intention and their belief, there at Shechem.

Well their 'flag' was an altar. Half the tribes stood on Mount Gerezim, the mountain to the south, and half on Mount Ebal to the north. The ark of the covenant was in the valley between the mountains, surrounded by priests. And then the Levites read the Law loudly. The details of this are recorded in Deuteronomy, chapters 27 and 28. As the Levites read the curses for breaking the law, the people on Mount Ebal said "Amen". And as they read the blessings for keeping the Law, the tribes on Mount Gerezim said, "Amen". The geography helped. The two mountains and the valley had been described as a natural amphitheater in an area large enough for the nation.

All of this was an important object lesson for Israel, indicating what would happen to them in the land, depending on their obedience to the Law—a reminder of how important obedience was. Obedience was represented by Mount Gerezim, and the blessings that would come from it. Disobedience was represented on Mt. Ebal, and the consequences of that. Two mountains, two choices, two ways of life, and two different ends.

The nation had already been given an illustration of this in their experiences in Canaan. The obedience resulted in victory at Jericho, while disobedience resulted in

defeat at Ai. Those two events are their lessons. And their lessons must have been in their thoughts as this whole ceremony was going on, as these people recited the blessings and the curses—especially the curses. They had learned from their failure.

Ebal was a severe mountain, like Mount Sinai, and a reminder to them of the broken Law. But on that mountain was the solution. It wasn't on Mount Gerezim, it was on Mount Ebal, and that was the altar. And it's significant that before the Law was written and recited there at Shechem, before it was written on that altar, the altar had already been prepared, the altar had already been built, as if to say that the LORD had already made provision for sin. The Law was not that provision. The Law is not that solution. It could not and cannot remove sin. Paul explained the Law's function in Romans, chapter 5, in verse 20. "The Law came in that the transgression might increase." So the Law was given to reveal God's righteousness and expose man's sin; to show man his failure to meet God's perfect standard.

Israel had a long history of failing to meet the standard. Fortunately, Israel had more than the Law. It also had the altar, as the way to remove sin and approach God. And that altar on Mount Ebal looked forward to the ultimate solution, the cross of Christ. You see that pictured here in the pristine condition of the altar. It was made of rough, uncut stones, never touched by human tools. It had no marks of human workmanship.

And so it is with our LORD. The cross was not attractive, as that altar was not attractive. But the cross, and the work of the cross, the work of Christ was pure. His work was His work alone. No man added a work to the LORD's work of salvation on the cross. We had no part in our salvation. We were rescued, pure and simple. It was His work alone, because only that sacrifice, that sacrifice alone, could atone for sin and remove from us the curse of the law and the guilt of sin.

Paul wrote of both the Law and the cross in Galatians 3. To the man who wants to earn his salvation by good works, by Law keeping, he wrote in verse 10, "...as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse." Seeking to be justified by works brings a

curse. And then he wrote in verse 13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.' "

Well He took the curse as our substitute when He was hung on a tree, the cross. That solution and salvation were represented here by what was on top of Mount Ebal, on top of the mountain of curses, the altar, which looked forward to Calvary, where Christ became a curse for us. Because of what He did for us there at the cross, when we stumble and fall and sin, we can get up. We can get back in the race. We can resume the fight because He has already atoned for all our sins. Now that is both liberating and motivating. It's liberating because the believer in Jesus Christ is saved at the moment of faith, and saved forever; all because of what Christ has done. He paid for all our sins, and we lay hold of that, and it becomes ours through faith.

We don't need to strive to gain God's acceptance, or His approval. We have that at the moment of faith, and we have it forever, because Christ has done it all. Salvation is complete in Him, and absolutely sufficient. And because it is, He'll never cast us off. We're still sinners. We're weak and we still fail. But the LORD reassures us that His love is constant and His grace, which is unconditional, empowers us and restores us. Now that is motivating.

Grace never encourages sin or sloth or indifference toward righteousness. Anyone who understands grace as a pretext for sin is either ignorant or lost; no Christian at all. When we understand grace, which is God's unconditional love for the unworthy, when we understand that, we are made grateful to Him. And gratitude galvanizes a desire to obey and please the LORD. —Not dishonor Him. And when we sin, He's made provision for that, it is first discipline ... not to destroy but to correct. And when it occurs, there's confession and repentance, and then rejoining the fight—and victory.

Now we also need to help one another in all of that, in that race of faith, in that battle, spiritual battle that we fight. Paul told the Galatians, in Galatians 6:1, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness..." And then he adds, "...each one looking to yourself so that you too

will not be tempted." A good word of caution because sin is alluring. It is strong. It draws us. Achan was an example of that. Sin's contagious. It's easy to get caught up in it. So, 'restore the individual', Paul is saying, 'but do so very cautiously'. But we're to help one another in all of this.

Now that's the Christian life. It's not lived singly, its not lived on one's own. We are a body, and we help one another. And because of the war casualties, we need to be helping one another. But we deal with it with the help of others to confess, to repent, and rededicate ourselves to the fight, and go forward in that battle with confidence.

That's God's will. It was for Israel. It recovered from failure. It learned from its failure and resumed its mission to win a great victory. And then out of gratitude, worshiped the LORD, and in so doing make a declaration of its confidence in the LORD's promises. I think that's the pattern for us, how we're to live.

But it's all based on the sacrifice of Christ, what He did for us on the cross. The altar at Calvary, where His blood was shed as a sacrifice for us—when He became a curse for us. As I said, we appropriate that sacrifice and the forgiveness that it obtained, through faith. That's how we lay hold of it.

So I ask you, have you done that? Have you believed? Have you put your trust in Jesus Christ alone, and His sacrifice? If not, come to Him. Believe in Him. Join yourself to Him. You can never be separated from Him when you come to Him—even when you stumble and fall. In fact, He will help you to stand and continue to fight the good fight to the end. And we will, as His children, persevere to the end and enter the great glory that is to come. May God help you to do that.

Let's bow in a word of prayer, and I'll give thanks for the bread and the wine that we are about to celebrate.

Father, we do thank You for this time together, this opportunity to study together. We take a passage of ancient history, but one that shows Your providence,

Your guidance, Your enablement of Your people. And we can take the principles from that and apply them to our lives. We're in a battle, too. It's invisible. We don't see it. We don't really feel it so much, but it's ongoing and it's subtle and Father, we need Your strength, supernatural strength.

And we need to be men and women that study Your Word, learn the principles of the Scriptures that educate us on who You are, what You've done, what You're going to do, and the promises You've given us. We need to know these things and learn these things, and continue to study them and grow as we do. Father, we thank You for your power that enables us to stand—and regathers us when we fall.

So LORD, we thank You for that, and we thank You for this opportunity to worship, because that, too, is critical to our growth. We so need to remind ourselves weekly of what You have done for us; of the gift of grace, and the gift of Your Son, and His sacrifice for us.

And so LORD, I pray that You would bless us now, as we turn our attention to this Supper, in which we remember Your Son, and remember the love of You that sent Him into the world for us. We pray that You would strengthen us and sanctify us and bless us as we do this. We look to You to bless now. And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)