

Sermon #1,025: Joshua 8:30-35; St. Matthew 5:1-3a
5-30-13 (PELS Closing Service/Graduation), Bethany-Princeton MN

TEACHING THE GOSPEL TO CHILDREN

Heavenly Dove, Spirit Divine, fill our hearts with the love of Your Word, and through it create in us the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Endow all parents with wisdom to rear their children in the fear of God, and bless all our Christian schools, that these folds for Jesus' lambs may prosper and multiply in our land. Amen. (*F. Kuegele, prayer on Psalm 78:1-24, Reading the Psalms With Luther, p. 186*)

The Text, Joshua 8:30-35; St. Matthew 5:1-3a. ³⁰ Now Joshua built an altar to the LORD God of Israel in Mount Ebal, ³¹ as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: "an altar of whole stones over 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 children of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. ³³ Then all Israel, with their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger as well as he who was born among them. Half of them were in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the children of Israel. ³⁴ And afterward he [Joshua] read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. ³⁵ There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.

¹ And seeing the multitudes, He [Jesus] went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. ² Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying, ³ "Blessed ..." Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word, the word of the cross, is truth. Amen.

In the name of Jesus, by whom the curse is removed and blessedness bestowed:

"Joshua read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings."

How much did he read? Every word: **"There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read."** To whom did he read it? To everyone -- but look who is singled out as being present: **"the little ones."**

This spectacular scene helps us to see what is going on in our school. We need to see this. We need to see something spectacular. It is easy for us to think too little of it. Parents have so little time, the kids are rushed off to school, teachers wish their lessons plans were more thoroughly done, children have to be prodded to do their work, teachers and parents don't have as much patience as they want, children get tired, there are so many details to keep track of that often you only notice what's lacking. That is so easy to do with a school: dwell on what is lacking. Especially because classrooms deal in making judgments in grades and behavior, by necessity it can only run by way of law, things being done or not done, how much is done right and how much is done wrong, so it's easy to dwell on what's lacking in you and only think of what you could or should do better. Nothing feels great or spectacular. Perhaps you forget what it's all about.

These two mountain scenes tell you what it's all about.

What was Jesus doing when **"He went up on a mountain"**? The scene in Joshua 8 tells you. Joshua and the children of Israel were following through on a commitment that they had made previously. Moses said when they came into the Promised Land of Canaan they must do this. So it was time to go to the valley of Shechem which sat between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. It was time to build an altar without using iron tools, which would take some time. It was time to pick out unblemished animals and make sacrifices for their sins, which would all take time. It was time for Joshua to copy down the divinely inspired Word of God, the written law of Moses; how long did that take? It was time for the 2 million people all to be gathered, half on one mountain and half on the other, to listen to Joshua's reading of every verse. This was no 1-hour church service.

They could not skip this. They could not get on with so-called more important things, like making battle plans or designing the houses they would

build and the gardens they would plant. It did not matter that they were surrounded by enemy peoples. They were not losing precious time. This was the precious time. It was not time to excuse the children or entertain them.

It singles out “**the little ones**” and “**the women**” who watched over them. They were there, among those who were gathered on the mountain, to listen to Joshua’s reading of the written Word of God. They could hear him clearly; God chose this location and situated it perfectly so all could hear every single word.

This is written for your encouragement. Children and young people, it is important to God that you are gathered together to hear His Word, as you do each school day. Parents, it is important to God that you simply bring your children where they may hear His Word clearly. Teachers, no matter how well you think you do it, what is important to God is just that His Word be spoken by you so these children can hear it; He will bless it. To God this school is just as glorious as the valley of Shechem between the two mountains; it’s where these children and little ones are brought to hear God’s Word clearly.

But then these mountain scenes also show us the substance of the teaching. What Joshua read is divided into two categories: “**the blessings and cursings.**”

What are the “cursings?” – The message of the Law, what the Ten Commandments say to a sinner: that your sins condemn you, not only to feel bad and have people upset with you whether they be your teachers, your parents, or your friends, but that your sins separate you from God and condemn you to hell. This is what Joshua read to all the people, even “**the little ones.**” We don’t hide this message because it might make children feel bad. You must hear the Law in order to know that you need a Savior.

Hearing the cursings is important for the sake of hearing the “blessings.” This is the Gospel. It is the message that even though your sins condemn you,

you have a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came because you are a sinner and have the curse lying upon you; He came, the Bible says, “to be sin for us” (2Co 5:21), to actually “become a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). He came to take away the curse that lies upon you as a sinner so that God can only speak the blessing to you and pronounce you perfectly righteous, clean, holy and innocent, and that there is nothing lacking in you or anything you’ve done.

This is why Jesus does what He does in the Sermon on the Mount. He goes up on the mountain and He does not speak blessings and cursings but only blessings, for He had become everyone’s sin and was taking away all the curse of sin. He opened His mouth and said only: “**Blesséd are ...**” you! In other words: “You are forgiven. You are righteous, holy, for My sake.”

This is what our school is about: teaching the Gospel, this Gospel, to little ones and children. This is why our children gather at His Word all to hear Him, for Him to impart Himself to them, to open their ears and heart, to work all good within them. It happens by the power of His Word: that they hear His teachings sweet and holy, and actually are holy and blesséd for His sake, by faith in Him.

It is truly spectacular and glorious. Amen!