

## Introduction

Many of you know that I grew up effectively an orphan. I have two memories of my father, and neither are happy. The last time I saw him I was just three years old. Several years ago my wife gave me a DNA test kit as a gift and I thoroughly enjoyed learning my ethnic roots. As part of my research I happened upon my father’s obituary. I had no idea he died in 2014.

In the obituary the children of his first wife were mentioned. I knew of them growing up, but I had never met them. My sister and I were not mentioned at all, which makes sense given how little he chose to interact with us—which is to say, not at all. There was another name, a daughter he had. I had no idea he married after leaving my mother and had a daughter. I found someone with her name on Facebook and began to scroll through her account. I didn’t see anything that would link her to my father, until I saw a picture of her as a little girl—with a man who looked strangely familiar.

It was strange seeing this picture as I had just learned of his death. I realized he left me absolutely nothing—not even his *hairline*. I know I don’t share a hairline with him and I know he was not a faithful man and I don’t share that with him, either. I’m committed to my children, committed to loving them and remaining in their lives, so that’s another difference. I have no idea what we have in common! A few years ago, through the connections I now have with my “new” sister, I was able to go to a family reunion for the first time with his side of the family and though I asked his sister and nieces and nephews and his other children who actually knew him what he was like, the only response I got was from his niece—my cousin. When I asked her what he was like she paused and then said with a sigh, “He was loyal to his friends.”

I’m sure there are some characteristics we share but they will remain unknown to me. I can see lots of similarities with my children, however. Whether it’s their sense of humor or their curiosity or their love of hot sauce, in different ways each of my children shares characteristics with me. Sometimes, though, those characteristics are not positive. One of the gut punches of parenting is seeing your child exhibit your “favorite” sin. *Oof*. When you see it in your child you recognize it for what it is.

We often don’t see our own sin as clearly as we see it in others, and when our sin becomes visible to us, it can be overwhelming. Here’s the encouragement for us this morning: whether you grew up in similar circumstances that I did, and I know some of you did, or at times you yourself have not been the sort of parent you should have been, God’s love and care for his people is evident in our text, despite those who demonstrate the very opposite of what our God is like. So while we will see examples of bad parenting and incredible family dysfunction, God is the sort who can rectify and transform people so that the cycle is broken. We’re in Judges 9.

Jdgs 9:1 Now Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to his mother’s

relatives and said to them and to the whole clan of his mother's family, <sup>2</sup> "Say in the ears of all the leaders of Shechem, 'Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal rule over you, or that one rule over you?' Remember also that I am your bone and your flesh."

<sup>3</sup> And his mother's relatives spoke all these words on his behalf in the ears of all the leaders of Shechem, and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother." <sup>4</sup> And they gave him seventy pieces of silver out of the house of Baal-berith with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, who followed him. <sup>5</sup> And he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, for he hid himself. <sup>6</sup> And all the leaders of Shechem came together, and all Beth-millo, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar at Shechem.

<sup>7</sup> When it was told to Jotham, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim and cried aloud and said to them, "Listen to me, you leaders of Shechem, that God may listen to you. <sup>8</sup> The trees once went out to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us.' <sup>9</sup> But the olive tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my abundance, by which gods and men are honored, and go hold sway over the trees?' <sup>10</sup> And the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come and reign over us.' <sup>11</sup> But the fig tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit and go hold sway over the trees?' <sup>12</sup> And the trees said to the vine, 'You come and reign over us.' <sup>13</sup> But the vine said to them, 'Shall I leave my wine that cheers God and men and go hold sway over the trees?' <sup>14</sup> Then all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come and reign over us.' <sup>15</sup> And the bramble said to the trees, 'If in good faith you are anointing me king over you, then come and take refuge in my shade, but if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon.'

<sup>16</sup> "Now therefore, if you acted in good faith and integrity when you made Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house and have done to him as his deeds deserved— <sup>17</sup> for my father fought for you and risked his life and delivered you from the hand of Midian, <sup>18</sup> and you have risen up against my father's house this day and have killed his sons, seventy men on one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his female servant, king over the leaders of Shechem, because he is your relative—<sup>19</sup> if you then have acted in good faith and integrity with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. <sup>20</sup> But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and devour the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the leaders of Shechem and from Beth-millo and devour Abimelech." <sup>21</sup> And Jotham ran away and fled and went to Beer and lived there, because of Abimelech his brother.

Judges 9:1–21

## False Dichotomy

God called a man named Gideon to be a judge for Israel. The people began to call him Jerubbaal. Remember what the role of a judge was. It wasn't about deciding legal cases but about imposing justice. On a practical level this meant freeing Israel from an oppressor. It also meant the judge had a prophetic role. A judge would call the people to faithfully worship YHWH God of Israel. This is part of the reason why we read over and over that the land had peace under the judge but after the judge died the people worshiped idols again. The judge imposed justice during his time as judge. He brought about what was good and right. Well, he was supposed to.

To ensure Israel wouldn't think they rescued themselves, God sent the massive army of the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East in a panic and they killed almost 90% of their own army in that panic. God did this with just 300 men to show he is Israel's true Rescuer.

Gideon, however, continued to chase the two kings who escaped, traveling over a hundred miles on foot in pursuit. He finally caught them and killed them, and chose to kill some of his fellow Israelites and beat and humiliate several others for their show of disrespect to him—"the least in his father's house". Thus the one who was supposed to rescue them from oppression became their oppressor.

As we've seen, Gideon was a mixed bag. When they offered to make him king, he refused, claiming that only God would be their king. But then he took a king's spoil after the war with Midian. He married multiple wives, as kings in the Ancient Near East would often do. We further saw that he made a golden ephod with which to show off his profound wealth—even though he was not, technically, a *king*. He just acted like one.

This ephod brought further oppression on the people of Israel for the text says they all whored after it. They coveted this golden ephod. It was an incredible luxury and sign of wealth. It was a declaration of power, for it was made from the gold earrings of the defeated enemy.

Judges 8 tells us Gideon, the not-king, had multiple wives and they gave him 70 sons. Throughout history more daughters have been born so Gideon easily has 70 daughters to go along with his 70 sons. How many wives does it take to give a man more than 140 children? As if that weren't enough, chapter 8 verse 31 tells us Gideon also had a concubine from Shechem. She almost certainly was not a worshiper of YHWH, and Gideon would not commit to her enough to marry her. This further means any children she gave him would have second-class status. They would not inherit from Dad.

This woman has a son and Gideon names him Abimelech. As Will pointed out the name means "my father is king". His father is the one who claimed only the Lord would be king, yet he names his son after himself! If Abimelech means "my father is king" and Gideon is his father, his name means "Gideon is king". And why not? He's been acting like a king with all his wealth from a king's portion of the spoils of war and by having multiple wives. Of course he names his son Abimelech!

Imagine Abimelech's life, though. Dad isn't around much. How could he be? He has over 140 "legitimate" children to care for, doesn't he? Abimelech is always a second-class member of the family, though with that many "first-class" siblings, I'm not sure what benefits first-class gets over the rest. We all know how siblings can function. There is no doubt his dozens

of brothers let him know his true status multiple times. Surely Abimelech feels marginalized and forgotten and cast off and resentful. *He wants what is his.*

Abimelech approaches his mom's side of the family in Shechem and gives them two options: they can be ruled by Gideon's 70 sons—who have no connection to them—or they can be ruled by one of their own, namely, Abimelech. This is a false dichotomy. It is a false choice. These are not the only options! Gideon told the people of Israel he would not be king and his sons would not be king and his grandsons would not be king so the choice isn't between them being king and Abimelech being king, for Gideon said none of them would be. Further, there is no indication that any of the 70 brothers aspire to be king.

Where would Abimelech get this idea? Remember, he feels desperate. Marginalized. Overlooked. Insulted. Dismissed. He sees danger and insult everywhere. *Everyone* looks down on him on account of being the son of a concubine and not a “true” son. By giving the people of Shechem a false dichotomy, he gives them a sense of fear as well, causing them to choose what appears to be the lesser of two evils—but the lesser of two evils is still evil.

### **Worthless and Reckless**

Abimelech's mother's relatives spoke to the leaders of Shechem and they agreed with the assessment that it would be better to be ruled by Abimelech than Gideon's 70 sons—which was never going to happen. In verse 4 we're told they gave Abimelech 70 pieces of silver out of the house of Baal-berith. Baal-Berith was a version of Baal unique to the city of Shechem.

The city shows its devotion to Baal-berith by having a worship center in the city devoted to this god. It's clear they view their embrace of Abimelech as religious devotion to Baal-berith because they take money from his treasury to give to Abimelech. They give him 70 pieces of silver. He used this money to hire “worthless and reckless fellows”.

The word “worthless” has the idea of being empty. Unprincipled. They have little—if anything—to offer, on account of their being reckless. Though they contributed little to society, they walked around with swagger. They were boastful and insolent. They were *punks*. In order for them to follow him, Abimelech had to pay them. Notice the amount he was given: 70 pieces of silver. How many brothers were the people of Shechem rejecting, choosing instead to have Abimelech rule over them? Seventy. One piece of silver per life they would take.

We don't deal in pieces of silver so we have no real concept of relative value. In that day a male slave could be purchased for 50 pieces of silver. They were given 70 pieces—less than the value of one and half slaves—to kill 70 sons of Gideon. Abimelech took them to his father's house at Ophrah.

Remember this house. This was where Gideon was threshing wheat in the winepress—back when he thought of himself as least in his father's house. Then God kindly and lovingly built him up and strengthened him, that he might become the leader and the judge Israel needed. By the time God had given victory over the Midianites, while Gideon rejected the title as king, he certainly chose to act the part. He took a king's portion of the spoil of war. He took the purple robes and other jewelry signifying their rank as kings. He married multiple wives, as kings do. He named his son, “My dad is king”.

Gideon, though he claimed to be the least in his father's house, is now the most powerful and the wealthiest son in his father's house. It is likely that when chapter 8 verse 29 says

he went and lived in his own house, it is on the estate that had been his father's property. It was his father's altar to Baal that Gideon destroyed, causing the men of his clan to want to kill him. It had been a major worship site for the region and they were deprived of their idolatry. For a time. Then Gideon made the golden ephod and we read that all Israel whored after it and worshiped it.

When the text says Abimelech and his worthless and reckless fellows went to Gideon's house in Ophrah, it means they went to his estate. Why would Abimelech want to go there? We read in verse 5 that he and his worthless and reckless "army" killed his brothers "on one stone". The idea of "on one stone" is that of a methodical and brutal execution of each brother, in turn. One by one they placed a brother on this stone and murdered him. I cannot imagine the brutality and the amount of blood spilled that day, nor can I fathom the hatred and rage that would lead to this brutal army to kill in this way.

They don't meet them in battle. The brothers no doubt saw Abimelech show up and wondered, "Why is he here? And who are these bums with him?" They quickly found out and were overpowered immediately and would have been unable to put up a fight. It is likely they are all there at that time for a specific reason. One scholar suggested this was the occasion of Gideon's funeral. This is why they are all there, paying their respect to their father.

What is Abimelech's real goal? What else was there in Gideon's house? As the son of a mere concubine and not a wife, Abimelech would have no inheritance, but if he could get rid of all those who were legitimate heirs, he'd be the only one left! And what is there in Gideon's house that he might want? A golden ephod, perhaps? Regardless of his true motivation, we see Abimelech doing what his father did, which is grasp for what God has not given him. He takes it by force, by brutally murdering his family.

In this he is following in his father's footsteps. When the Lord chose to use Gideon to defeat the Midianites, Gideon used the opportunity to get personal revenge by pursuing the two kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, almost all the way back to their homes in order to kill them. Some time before they had killed his brothers so he took sought revenge. Abimelech is seeking revenge, only his revenge is against his lot in life, that of being the son of a concubine, and rather than avenge the deaths of his brothers, he causes the deaths of his brothers. In this he's also like the men he hired: worthless and reckless.

## **God's Blessings**

One brother escaped, however. With all the bodies and all the blood it would be easy to lose track of them all. The youngest son Jotham was able to hide from all the carnage. He alone escaped the murderous grasp of Abimelech.

After he murdered his brothers, the men of Shechem declared him king. They believed the false choice he had presented them: be ruled by me or be ruled by them. The latter wasn't an option. Gideon made it clear neither he nor his sons and grandsons would be king. Abimelech presented a false choice and they chose him.

Jotham, Gideon's youngest son, found out about it and approached the city of Shechem. Shechem was in the valley at the base of Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. He approached the city from Mount Gerizim and remained at the top. You might recall this is the place where Moses instructed Joshua to renew the covenant after Israel entered the promised land.

The tribes were divided into two groups, with six on one mountain and six on the other. The peaks are about a mile apart. What is remarkable about this formation is it forms a natural amphitheater. In 1879, long before the area was built up with many more buildings as it is today, John William McGarvey visited the area and had two men climb Mount Gerizim and another climb Mount Ebal. He stood in the valley and read aloud the very same blessings and curses that Joshua read, and the men could hear him and respond. The only trouble was the man on Mount Ebal, while he could *hear* him speaking, couldn't make out the words. On that particular mount there were terraces built into the mountainside that acted as acoustic dampeners.

In Jotham's day, there was nothing to block sound so as he stood on Mount Gerizim, the men in the city off to the side of the valley in between the mountains could hear him speak. He tells them a fable. Before he does, however, notice again what he says.

Jdgs 9:7 When it was told to Jotham, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim and cried aloud and said to them, "Listen to me, you leaders of Shechem, that God may listen to you."

Judges 9:7

Pay close attention to his claim: in order for God to listen to them, they must listen first to Jotham. That sounds odd, doesn't it? He's not a priest. He's not a ruler of any kind. He is the surviving son who has witnessed the murder of his 69 brothers. He's essentially a nobody, having lost everything to Abimelech. Jotham, however, is speaking prophetically.

Peter tells us that prophets are those who "spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). Jotham is speaking prophetically here. The Spirit of God is moving him to address the sin of the men of Shechem. To reject his words is to reject the words of the Spirit of God. If they want God to hear them, they must first hear God.

This is how it works, isn't it? If we want God to hear us, we must first listen to him. God is not some magic genie at our disposal, just sitting around waiting for us to call on him for something. Again, think of the imagery of where Jotham is. He's on Mount Gerizim, opposite Mount Ebal.

Joshua was instructed to build an altar on Mount Ebal. As Joshua read the blessings and curses of the covenant, each side would respond. Here's an example from Deuteronomy 27.

Deut 27:15 "'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.'"

Deuteronomy 27:15

When each curse was pronounced, the people would respond by saying, "Amen"—"it is so" or "so be it" or "truly" or "surely"! Israel was to acknowledge the curse for disobedience. When the blessings for covenant faithfulness were pronounced, there was no response of "Amen". It was a simple statement of fact. They did not need to acknowledge the blessings of the covenant because the entire point of the covenant was to bless God's people, not curse them. Cursing was limited to blatant disobedience.

This is why the altar was built on Mount Ebal—the mount of curses! Israel was to associate sacrifice with their sin. Their sin produced the need for sacrifice. Obedience to God—*faith*—would always result in blessing because faith is what God desires most from his people. Notice again there is no sacrifice needed for blessings. The altar was there for the curses. Think of what God himself said in Hosea 6.

Hos 6:6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.  
Hosea 6:6

Here God is speaking of Israel's love for him and his preference for a heart of love—*faith*—and not external, rote obedience. The reason God doesn't desire sacrifice is God doesn't want their sin! He wants their righteousness, and this is only available through faith. One could offer all the required sacrifices and perform all the necessary rituals and actually keep the Ten Commandments, yet break everyone one of them by not loving the Lord. They were never about a change in behavior, but a change in heart. God desires love and faith, not external rituals.

## **Fable**

Having framed what he's about to say, Jotham tells them the fable. Remember a fable is a fictional story that often uses animals or plants or even inanimate objects to teach a moral lesson. He addresses the leaders of the city. He says the trees once wanted a king so they said to an olive tree, "Reign over us". The olive tree scoffed and said it was perfectly happy producing olives that others enjoy. Why would the olive tree give that up to be king over the trees?

The trees approached a fig tree and asked the fig tree to reign over them. The fig tree also scoffed and pointed out it produces delicious fruit for others. Why would it give up what God has given it to do just to reign over some trees? Next was a grapevine. The vine understood that the wine produced by its grapes brings joy to others. Why should it give up bringing joy to others just to rule over some trees?

Finally, the trees approach the bramble. Olive trees and fig trees are, of course, *trees*. A grapevine isn't a tree—and neither is a bramble. Bramble is essentially worthless. It's an invasive species. Scholars believe Jotham is referring to buck thorn. It is a tangled and thorny bush. Its bark and roots produce a chemical that leeches into the soil and prevents other plants from germinating. Once buck thorn has started growing in an area it's only a matter of time before it's growing in bare soil void of other plants.

It also leafs much earlier in the growing season and its leaves prevent other plants from getting sufficient sunlight, further preventing them from growing, again, resulting in buck thorn growing all by itself. It is a difficult bush to get rid of as it grows new shoots very fast. You can prune it all the way down to its roots and it will quickly grow back.

The leaves of bramble are delicious to earthworms. These worms eat the fallen leaves very quickly, leaving the soil around the bramble quite bare. Soil builds up with decaying plant matter, whether branches or leaves, and these feed all sorts of fungi and insects. Because the

leaves are eaten so quickly by earthworms and because the bramble leaves the area around it completely devoid of other plant life, it offers nothing.

It gets worse. Like olive trees and fig trees and grapevines, it produces a fruit. The fruit is very bitter and purgative. If you eat the berries you will quickly void your bowels. If you eat too many of its berries, you will quickly void your life as they are toxic to humans. The trees, essentially, are asking for their own destruction by asking the bramble to rule over them. Unlike olives and figs and grapes, bramble does not offer flourishing to others. It exists only for itself. It will take over and destroy all other plants.

In this fable, the men of Shechem are the trees who foolishly ask for the bramble to be their king. Look again what the fable says of the bramble's response:

Jdgs 9:15 And the bramble said to the trees, 'If in good faith you are anointing me king over you, then come and take refuge in my shade, but if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon.'

Judges 9:15

Remember that the shade of bramble harms other plants. Do you see what the bramble says? "Hey, if you really want me to be king, cool! I accept! But if you don't, *I will kill you.*" When the bramble says, "Let fire come out...and devour the cedars of Lebanon", think of what fire does to trees. He really is saying, "I will be your king and if you don't like it, I will kill you."

Jotham then applies his fable. In verse 16 he says if—*if*—they acted in good faith and integrity in making Abimelech king, and if—*if*—they have dealt honorably with Jerubbaal, and if—*if*—they have done to Gideon what his deeds for them deserve, and if—*if*—they have acted in good faith in and integrity, great. Rejoice in Abimelech and let Abimelech rejoice in you. He inserted another caveat. He added a reminder of all that Gideon had done for them in rescuing them from years of oppression at the hand of the Midianites. If their actions in murdering his brothers and making Abimelech king were the right response to Gideon and all he did for them, then great.

Remember that he's speaking prophetically. If they have not acted in good faith—and they have not—then let fire come out of Abimelech and devour them and let fire come out of them and devour Abimelech. In other words, they deserve each other. Jotham then fled the area for he knew Abimelech would try to kill him as well.

## Application

When we come to a text like this it would be absolutely normal to approach it like a fable. It contains a fable, after all. Every instinct in us is to read the text and look for the moral application. We see lots of moral applications, don't we? We've all heard the expression, "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree". We see this in Gideon's life. While he started out faithfully by destroying his own father's altar of Baal, he ends up setting up his own false worship with the golden ephod. Gideon ends up just like his father Joash. Then we see Abimelech. He, too, is just like his dad, pursuing personal agendas, seeking revenge, grasping for what he has not been given.



The good news for those of us who have had less than stellar parents is *our parents*, while they do have a tremendous impact on us, do not actually control how we live. In Christ we can break the cycles of neglect and abuse, the cycles of sin and brokenness. My children will never experience the loneliness of wondering why Dad never comes around. Some day after I'm gone and some extended family member who didn't know me asks one of my children what I was like, they won't have to pause and sigh and try to come up with something positive to say. The Lord has broken that cycle. He did it in my life and he can do it in yours.

We can also approach this text by seeing the importance of choosing good leaders. While Gideon started out in humility—remember, he claimed he was least in his father's house—he ended up thinking a great deal of himself, acting like a king while rejecting the title. Abimelech never feigns humility. He approaches leadership as a means of personal gain, of getting what is rightfully his—even if he has to brutally murder his own family to get it.

As Will shared last week, we can see in this text the importance of not grasping for more than we've been given. We need that message! Abimelech's greed and lust for power resulted in incredible suffering. Not only did he kill 70 men in a barbaric act of brutality, surely there were suddenly wives without husbands and children without fathers, along with the suffering their loss would no doubt bring. They would have lost lands and homes. Surely the worthless men weren't there just for the relatively tiny amount of silver they received. They would have looted Gideon's estate, taking animals and stores of grain, etc. Greed is a terrible evil. Paul wrote that the love of money—greed—is the root of all kinds of evil.

The truth is we need good parents and we need to strive to be good parents, but good parents aren't going to save us. We need good leaders, godly men and women in positions of authority and responsibility who will lead with wisdom, who will not seek their own good but the flourishing of others, but good leaders aren't going to save us. Yes, we need positive examples—role models—followers of Jesus who model for us what it means to be faithful, what it means to be men and women of integrity, but godly examples aren't going to save us.

We need churches that care about their communities and seek to love their neighbors. We need businesses that are productive and ethical and bring about flourishing in the lives of their employees and customers, rather than focus exclusively on profit. We need health care systems that are concerned about preventive health and wellness and not just putting band-aids on systemic issues. We need justice systems that are not skewed against certain demographics with unfair and inconsistent sentencing and that focus on genuine rehabilitation and restoration. We need government officials who do not seek their own enrichment and power but seek what is in the best interest of those they represent.

We miss the point of the book of Judges when we reduce the characters to models to emulate—or to reject. Yes, we should be bold like Deborah. We should be faithful like Othniel. We should be humble like Gideon and we should not be proud like Gideon. The judges were not given as moral exemplars, but as shadows pointing to the King.

In some of them, people like Deborah and Othniel, we see glimpses of what the coming King will be like. Bold, fearless, faithful. In some of them we see why the coming King must come, for God's people desperately need a rescuer who will rescue them from themselves. Some judges, like Gideon at the end of his life and many of the rest of the judges in the book, are deeply flawed and are at best shadows of what the true King is like.

What we need is a Father who will lead us and protect us and provide for us—and discipline us. What we need is a Brother who will encourage us and strengthen us and walk with us. What we need is the Spirit who will change us and transform us and empower us to live for him.

In Jotham's fable, the trees desired a king to reign over them. We saw the story of Gideon began with a tree. The angel of the Lord appeared under one when he spoke to Gideon the first time. He later instructed Gideon to cut down a tree—his father's Asherah pole, which was carved out of a living tree. Though the trees—the men of Shechem—desired another tree to reign over them, what they got was a mere bramble—a useless and life-draining tangled and thorny bush.

The truth is you and I are not trees. We are bramble. We need a tree to rule over us, a tree that gives life, that causes flourishing, that provides the shade and protection and nourishment we need. Hear the gospel this morning: we have such a tree. As the song says, "I needed a Savior, and you found a cross to call your tree; only in God's Son is my sin undone. Hallelujah, Jesus. I needed forgiveness; you looked at the blood and saw my sin. There on Calvary love has ransomed me. Hallelujah, Jesus."

When Jotham spoke prophetically from Mount Gerizim—the mount of blessing—he did so for a reason. Remember he started his prophetic words by declaring they must heed the word of God. They must listen to God, that God might hear them. Blessing is God's desire. In order to offer blessing, God crosses over to Mount Ebal, the mount of cursing, and embraces the altar that was built there, only he offered himself as the sacrifice that takes away the sins of his people. In the words of the apostle Paul,

Gal 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for  
us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—  
Galatians 3:13

Whatever your sins, whatever your shortcomings, however your brokenness manifests itself, whatever struggles and addictions and problems you face, hear the gospel: the Lord Jesus offered himself as the sacrifice that takes away our sin. His sacrifice reconciles us to God and frees us from the curse. Our response to this is faith. We must trust him and follow him.