

DEUTERONOMY 34 ACCORDING TO THE WORD OF THE LORD

Our text ends saying, "There has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel" (v's 10-12).

Yet, I ask, 'If Moses was such a great prophet, then why did God say that He has let Moses see the Promised Land with his own eyes, but He would not let him go over there?'. After all that Moses had done why deprive him of the Promised Land? I'll answer that question, address how that affects us in taking the Word of God seriously, and then I'll show that there was hope for Moses, and there's hope for us.

The answers to our question about Moses' situation of being banned from the Promised Land after being such a great prophet is found in the book of Numbers, chapters 11 through 27. That's a lot to cover, so sit back and relax as I tell you the story. And I mean relax not in the sense of going to get a cup of coffee, but rather relax as in don't get upset as you hear what you're about to hear. Also, I'm going to work backwards from chapter 27 as I tell you this story.

In chapter twenty-seven "the Lord said to Moses, "Go up into this mountain of Abarim and see the land that I have given to the people of Israel. When you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was, because you rebelled against My Word in the wilderness of Zin when the congregation quarreled, failing to uphold Me as holy at the waters before their eyes.'" (Numbers 27:12-14).

So, for starters we have to be blunt that this is about the Word of God, and Moses not upholding the Word of God before a quarrelling congregation. These people didn't live according to the Word of God, and Moses finally gave in and didn't follow God's Word. So, God said to him that he may not enter the Promised Land.

The Word of God isn't always pleasant to hear, or live according to. There are times when pastors don't want to live according to God's Word, let alone tell their congregation God's Word, because they know the people in the congregation won't like hearing it, and they may even rebel against their pastor. Yet, no matter how much you may not like to hear God's Word, what we hear today shows you that God places a heavy burden upon me to tell you God's Word, whether you like it or not.

So, what was Moses' fault? Where did he fail God? Did he build golden calves to worship like his brother Aaron did? In chapter twenty God had told Moses to "take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle." And Moses took the staff from before the Lord, as He commanded him. Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock" (Numbers 20:8-11).

Moses didn't speak to the rock as God had told him to do, but rather he hit the rock. That was Moses' great sin, the sin that forbade him from entering the Promised Land. However, the sin was not between speaking and hitting a rock, but rather in obeying God's Word. God said speak, and Moses should've just spoke. Yet, did you notice that even though Moses failed God, God was still faithful and He provided the people with water. That's the type of God we have. Despite our sins, God still takes care of us. Yet, we have to ask what drove Moses to do this, this act of disobeying God's Word. For that we now turn to chapter eleven.

In chapter eleven we hear about the burden Moses is living under as he speaks with God. "Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favour in Your sight, that You lay the burden of all this people on me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,' to the land that You swore to give their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. If You will treat me like this, kill me at once" (11:11-17).

Moses was pushed to his breaking point by his congregation, and he wanted to die. He asked God to kill him. God didn't do that, and as problem after problem was laid upon Moses, Moses finally broke down and took out his anger on a rock nine chapters later. He disobeyed God's Word, and God told him that he wouldn't be entering the Promised Land, and that was final.

This is the burden that all pastors face. They want to please God, but they also want to please their congregation. They want to follow God's Word, but due to pressures from their congregation they may choose to act in inappropriate ways such as Moses' act of anger. They may even compromise God's Word. The congregation may be happy when their pastor compromises God's Word, and bends to their will, but God isn't happy.

God said to another prophet, “Whenever you hear a word from My mouth, you shall give them warning from Me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul” (Ezekiel 33:7-9).

At times you may not like what you hear from me, or what I do, however, I say and do those things trying to follow God’s Word. I don’t want you to die in your sin, or have your blood required at my hand. I desire that all of our souls are delivered through Jesus’ shed blood on the cross to our Heavenly Father.

What happened to Moses, after being denied entrance to the Promised Land? Moses entered a far better Promised Land. He was welcomed into heaven. The writer of the book of Hebrews included Moses (11:23-29) on his list of believers throughout the Old Testament. The author says that “these all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar. ... But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city” (11:13, 16).

So, Moses, the servant of the Lord died, not entering the earthly Promised Land, but rather the heavenly Promised Land. He wasn’t the perfect servant for God’s people, but thanks to the Perfect Servant, Christ Jesus, he was allowed entrance into the Heavenly Promised Land. You see him in heaven in that heavenly vision on the Mount of Transfiguration.

That’s the only hope that any of us have, as individuals, as a congregation, as pastors – the hope of the Perfect Servant Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant. ... Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28).

This is what it all comes down to for us, Jesus dying on the cross as the ransom for our sins, as congregation, and as pastor. Jesus rising from the dead to win for us entrance into the heavenly Promised Land that’s exceedingly joyful beyond our imaginations. In heaven all sinful divisions, thoughts and actions of living contrary to God’s Word are gone. People joyfully obey God and live according to His commandments. Life isn’t seen as a burden where people plead with God to take their lives. The messed-up lives of the people of Israel and our messed-up lives are cleaned up. For now, we struggle with it, and live in God’s forgiveness and compassion towards one another. And, by God’s grace we have hope that in the life to come all of what we struggle with now will be gone because of God’s great mercy. Amen.