**Moses completes his service**

Text: Deuteronomy 33-34

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**Scriptures:** Deuteronomy 33:1-5; 34:1-12; Hebrews 3:1-6; Matthew 28:16-20

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 211, 503, 116, 439, 23

**Series:** Deuteronomy (#19 of 19)

**Theme:** Moses blesses each of the tribes of Israel separately, climbs up Mount Nebo and views the Promised Land before he dies, is buried and is mourned for and honoured by Israel.

**Proposition:** Brothers and sisters, Moses completed his mission on this earth as Christ would later fulfil His so that we could enter Paradise with Him, so honour Him.

**Introduction**

Do you know when and where your life on this earth will end? If we are in relatively good health most of us do not really know even approximately the answers to these questions. There is a blessing in not knowing some details of your own future.

For Moses, even though ‘*his eye was undimmed and his vigour unabated*’ (34:7), he knew that the people of Israel would be led into the Promised Land not by him but by Joshua, his successor. He also knew that he would not cross the Jordan river into the land because the Lord had told him so (31:2). The Lord had commanded him to go up Mount Nebo and to die there (32:50). Moses knew when and where his life on this earth would end. He was unusual in this way and in many others, as we’ll see in this sermon.

Today we come to the end of our series through the book of Deuteronomy. We have covered much ‘ground’ in this Old Testament book which records the last sermon, or series of messages, which Moses preached to Israel. His theme was to explain the Law of God to this second generation of Israelites who were about to enter the Promised Land. Now in the chapter 33 of Deuteronomy we read of the parting blessings of Moses on the different tribes which made up the nation of Israel. In chapter 34 we read of the death of Moses and the inspired words which were written to summarise the life and service of this ‘*servant of the Lord*’ (34:5).

The last chapter of Deuteronomy was clearly not written by Moses himself. It was likely added by the author of the book of Joshua. The end of the book of Deuteronomy marks the completion of the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). This collection of Scripture is referred to as the ‘Torah’ – a Hebrew word meaning ‘instruction’, ‘teaching’, or ‘law’. It is also called the ‘Pentateuch’ – a Greek word referring to the ‘five books’. Whilst we don’t know for certain who wrote the first five books of the Bible, they are traditionally though to have been composed by Moses. The original audience for these books was the Israelites outside of the Promised Land. The ‘Torah’ reveals the authority, power, majesty, love, grace and faithfulness of the covenant God of Israel.

For us today we wait, not for entrance into the land of Canaan, but for the time when this age will come to an end and all who are in Christ will dwell in the New Heavens and New Earth. For each one of us, brothers and sisters, no matter how young or old we are, the day will come when our service on this earth is completed. Like Moses, we will (each of us who is in Christ) be ‘*gathered to our people*’ (32:50)– the church universal ‘*from every tribe and language and people and nation*’ (Rev 5:9).

Let’s look at what the Lord says in the last two chapters of Deuteronomy, under three headings:

1. The parting blessings of Moses
2. The death and burial of Moses
3. The epitaph of Moses and Christ
4. **The parting blessings of Moses (33)**

In many ways Moses had been like a Father to the people of Israel. **Just as** Jacob had previously called his twelve sons together to prophesy to them before he died (Gen 49) **so now** Moses gives the tribes of Israel descended from these sons a parting blessing. He begins with the Lord’s presence on Mount Sinai (v2) and speaks of himself in the third person saying, ‘*when Moses commanded us a law, as a possession for the assembly of Jacob*’ (v4). Moses uses the poetic name of ‘Jeshurun’ for the people of Israel before giving individual blessings to each of the twelve tribes.

* For **Reuben**, there is the promise of continuity, but not of large numbers (v6).
* For **Judah**, the future warrior role of the kings in the line of David is hinted at (v11).
* For **Levi**, as their past dedication to the Lord is remembered, their future spiritual service is revealed. They were to be responsible for the Thummim and Urim (v8), the means by which the Lord’s revelation was received in some circumstances. They were to teach Israel the law of God (v10a). They were also responsible for Israel’s congregational worship together (v10b).
* For **Benjamin**, the blessing reflects their military prowess.
* For **Joseph**, a longer blessing is given, which is not surprising given their prominent role in the early history of Israel. Two key areas are covered: material prosperity from the produce of the land and their military might in comparison to other nations. The two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, into which the tribe of Joseph was already beginning to divide are mentioned separately (v17).
* For **Zebulun**, there is a call to rejoice as they go forth
* For **Issachar**, the call to rejoice is ‘in your tents’
* For **Gad**, the blessing reflects their occupation of the land to the east of the river Jordan
* For **Dan**, the blessing describes this tribe as a “lion’s cub” – the metaphor implying a timid character of youthfulness but with the potential for greater strength and confidence later
* For **Naphtali**, there is a general blessing of the Lord’s favour.
* For **Asher**, they would be the most blessed of all the tribes.

If you study the parting blessings of Moses on the tribes, you’ll notice that only 11 of the 12 are included. Can you spot which one is not there? The missing one is ‘Simeon’. We know that Jacob, as part of his prophesy over Simeon and Levi, pronounced a curse on them for their cruel and treacherous destruction of the Shechemites (Gen 34:24-30). Simeon’s anger was evil because it was marked by fierceness and barbarity. Because of this Simeon and Levi received this prophesy from their father Jacob “*I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel*” (Gen 49:7). The tribe of Simeon was the smallest and weakest of all the tribes at the close of their time in the wilderness, as noted in the second census of Moses: 22,200 men (Numbers 26:14). Because of its small size, Simeon was forced to share the territory of Judah, a larger and more powerful tribe (Josh 19:1-9) and they were not specifically mentioned in the parting blessings of Moses.

So what can we learn from these last blessings of Moses?

* The Lord was faithful to bring **all** twelve tribes into the Promised Land. They all had a future there. The Lord loved all His people (33:3).
* The twelve tribes were **not all the same**. Some suffered the consequences for their past actions, others received blessings for their faithful service.
* They **all had every reason to rejoice** in their Lord who promised them abundant blessings if they would trust Him. “*Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help, and the sword of your triumph!*” (33:29).

For us, we can be confident that not one of God’s elect will be lost – all will enter into the New Earth to be with Him. Jesus said “*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand*” (John 10:28-29). Like the twelve tribes of Israel, we are not all the same. We may experience consequences resulting from the past actions of our parents, grandparents and perhaps our brothers and sisters in Christ. We may also, like Moses, painfully reap the results of what we have sown in our own lives (Gal 6:7).

Yet all of us have every reason to rejoice in the Lord today. Brothers and sisters, we are **not yet** what we will one day be in Christ (1 Cor 13:12). There is still trial, turmoil, tribulation and trouble ahead for us in this life, yet the prophetic words of the parting blessing of Moses apply to us in Christ: “*So Israel lived in safety, Jacob lived alone, in a land of grain and wine, whose heavens drop down dew*” (33:28). ‘Alone’ here doesn’t mean individual isolation it means apart from any enemies in the presence of their Lord. The parting blessing of the Risen Christ to His disciples before He ascended from this earth similarly speaks of the comfort of His presence now in this life: “*And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*." (Matt 28:20).

Moses gave the tribes of Israel his parting blessing before he left the plains of Moab for the last time, which brings us to our second point:

1. **The death and burial of Moses (34:1-9)**

The last chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, unlike the rest of the book does not record the preaching of Moses to God’s people, but focusses on his death and burial. Moses died on a high place in the land of Moab across the valley from the city of Jericho on the other side of the Jordan river. Mount Nebo is the highest peak in a range to the north east of the Dead Sea. ‘Pisgah’ literally means ‘summit’. So the first verse of chapter 34 could be translated ‘Then Moses ascended from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, top of the summit’. Moses was ‘alone’, that is apart from all the people of Israel he had led up to this time. Yet he was not actually alone, highly significantly, the Lord was with him.

It was the Lord who showed him all the Promised Land that could be seen from the vantage point of Pisgah. Then the Lord spoke these last words to Moses: "*This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to your offspring.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there*." (v4). This really is ‘bitter-sweet’. Both pleasant and painful. Moses was able to see with his own eyes the land of promise. He knew that the Lord had been faithful in bringing His people all the way here on the very border of that land. From His parting blessings we know that Moses had every confidence that the Lord would bring His people into their land. He had said to Joshua in the presence of all Israel: "*Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it*” (31:7).

Yet, as we have already seen in chapter 3 (23-27) and chapter 31 (2), the Lord would not allow Moses to enter the Promised Land, despite his servant’s pleading. The Lord had said to him back at Meribah where there was no water for the congregation: "*Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water*” (Num 20:8). Moses had been a faithful and patient servant of the Lord, one who is described in Scripture as being ‘*very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth*’ (Num 12:3). Moses was a very humble, gentle, long-suffering and peaceful man. Yet in an outburst of frustration, anger, violence and pride; in disobedience to the Lord’s clear command, Moses said to the Israelites: "*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.* " (Num 20:10b-11).

At the end of his life, Moses was like his ancestors Abraham and Sarah who “*died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar*” (Heb 11:13). Moses got very close, but he did not go into the land. He died there on the mountain, alone with the Lord. The Scripture implies that God Himself buried Moses in ‘*the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor*’. The exact location of the gravesite is unknown (34:6).

However, the land of Moab is not the place where we see revealed the last appearance of Moses in Scripture. Can you remember where he is seen again? He is seen again on another mountain where Jesus was ‘transfigured’ (Matt 17:1-7). There the face of Christ shone like the sun; recalling the shinning face of Moses when He came down from Mount Sinai having met the Lord there (Ex 34:29). Jesus spoke with Moses (representing the law) and Elijah (representing the prophets).

Gospel writer Luke records that Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus about his ‘departure’ (Luke 9:31); this word, in Greek is ‘exodus’. The transfiguration reveals that Moses lives beyond his grave. The ‘departure’ of Jesus from this earth at the cross, and his subsequent burial and resurrection, reveal that Christ lives beyond his grave. In fact, it is because Moses trusted in the promises of God as yet unfulfilled in his lifetime, that he is saved in Christ by faith alone (Heb 11:24-28).

You and I do not know when and where our lives will end on this earth. We live with uncertainty about this and many other things – especially during a Covid outbreak! However, you and I can have certainty about what will happen after we die. That certainty is found in Christ Jesus by faith alone. The kind of faith that Moses had. “*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*” (Rom 10:9).

Believe in your heart that Jesus is your Risen Lord and Saviour. This saving faith enables people like you and me to face death with confidence and assurance, knowing that the ‘sting’ has been removed (1 Cor 15:55). Then death is no longer the enemy it once was, it becomes the entrance into the eternal Promised Land. Moses never got to Canaan, but we can be confident that He will be with all God’s people in Paradise. He was a man who lived a remarkable life on this earth and who points us forward to the perfect man who lived an even more extraordinary life on this earth, as we’ll see in our last point:

1. **The epitaph of Moses (34:10-12)**

Many of us are familiar with the work of the late RC Sproul. He was an influential Presbyterian theologian who founded Ligonier Ministries. He helped influence the resurgence of Calvinism amongst conservative Protestants through his many writings, video messages and audio sermons. RC Sproul died on 14th December 2017 aged 78. Asked once what he wanted written on his tombstone, Rev. Sproul quipped: “*I told you I was sick*.” That would be a humorous epitaph, but one which would not do justice to the work of the Lord through the ministry of RC Sproul over his lifetime. An epitaph is “*a phrase or form of words written in memory of a person who has died, especially as an inscription on a tombstone*”.

Moses had no gravestone, but inspired words were set down in Scripture to summarise his life. The name Moses means ‘drawn from the water’ as he was when Pharaoh’s daughter found him in a basket on the bank of the river (Ex 2:5). He lived for 40 years as an Egyptian prince (Acts 7:23), educated in the Egyptian court as a young noble ‘*mighty in words and deeds*’ (Acts 7:22). Then he saw the burdens of the Hebrews and killed an Egyptian who was beating one of his people (Ex 2:11). He fled to the land of Midian and returned to Egypt at 80 years of age (Ex 7:7). The last third of his life had been spent leading the Israelites through the wilderness and finally bringing them to the border of the Promised Land.

The Lord knew Moses ‘face to face’ (34:10). This is a figure of speech (an anthropomorphism) which conveys the truth that Moses had an intimate, very close, relationship with the Lord. He is described as being unlike any prophet since in Israel. Moses was exceptional. There had been nobody like him before (and there would not be until Christ came). He was known ‘*for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt*’ (34:11).

Like Moses, Christ has no tombstone with an epitaph, instead for Jesus we have the Words of Scripture which testify to the Son of God who, like Moses was ‘*the servant of the Lord*’ (34:5), but He was more than that. The writer to the Hebrews reveals that whereas Moses was a servant in the household of God, Jesus is faithful over God’s house as a son (Heb 3:1-6). Christ is more exceptional than Moses. His name Jesus reveals His mission on this earth ‘*he will save his people from their sins*’ (Matt 1:21).

Jesus lived the first 30 years of his life in and around the small settlement of Nazareth. Whilst his upbringing was in very ordinary circumstances, yet He ‘*increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man*’ (Luke 2:52). He is the last prophet, the Son, “*whom God the Father appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power*” (Heb 1.2-3). On this earth He was ‘*a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him*’ (Acts 2:22).

His mightiest work was willingly laying down His life by subjecting Himself to death on a cross, taking upon Himself all the sins of all of God’s people and bearing the fearful righteous wrath of God as He was made to be sin. The greatest sign is the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the ‘firstfruits’ of all who will be raised to new bodily life in Him (1 Cor 15:20). Perhaps the greatest wonder is that Jesus would be willing to do this for people like you and me. In the words of the hymn by Charles Wesley:

*And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour’s blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain—*

*For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be, that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

I don’t think that any of us have served the Lord as faithfully as Moses did over so many years of difficulty and struggle. Yet not even Moses was found worthy enough to be able to enter the Promised Land of Canaan. He needed a greater prophet, a mightier servant of the Lord to be able to gain access to the fulfilment of God’s promises. Moses needed Christ and so do you and I! The wonderfully good news, brothers and sisters, is that Jesus is ours by faith.

We see more than Moses did. We know more of God’s revelation than he did. Our Bibles have 66 books, not just 5! Yet like Moses, brothers and sisters, one day we will die in faith, unless the Lord returns first. We will die *not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar.* The promised land of the New Earth awaits us, fellow believer.

Like Moses up on Pisgah, even though we might be by ourselves at times, we are not alone! The Lord said to Joshua, the successor of Moses “*Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you*” (Josh 1:5). So it is for us too brothers and sisters (Heb 13:5).

Moses completed his mission on this earth as Christ would later fulfil His so that we could enter Paradise with Him, so honour Jesus in your life today and into the future as you follow him in love, faith, hope and thankfulness. AMEN.