

Moses is one of the best-known characters of the Bible. His life can be divided into three 40-year periods. In the first 40 years, he is born during the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt. Because the number Israelites was growing so fast, the Pharaoh fears that they will become a threat to their national security, and orders that all boy babies be killed immediately after birth. To save her son's life, Moses' mother places him in a basket and puts it in the Nile River. As his big sister watches, Pharaoh's daughter discovers the basket and adopts Moses and raises him as a prince of Egypt. Things go well for Moses until he sees an Egyptian beating an Israelite and kills the Egyptian. Moses flees for his life and goes into the wilderness where he marries the daughter of Jethro the priest.

There he settles down for the second 40-year period of his life as a shepherd tending his father-in-law's sheep. Then one day, he meets the Lord in a burning bush. God has a plan for him; he is to go back to Egypt, where he is wanted for murder, and tell Pharaoh to let's God's chosen people, the Israelites go. God wants Moses to lead the Israelites to freedom and to the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Moses begins his third 40-year period and goes back to Egypt. When Pharaoh refuses to let the Israelites go, God sends 10 plagues with the final, decisive one being the death of the firstborn son of each Egyptian family.

As Moses leads the Israelites across the wilderness to the Promised Land, he realizes that this is not going to be easy. The Israelites are the ultimate complainers and whiners; first they are thirsty, then they are hungry, and finally, they are constantly wishing that they were back in Egypt making bricks as slaves.

At Mount Sinai, Moses goes up to the mountaintop to receive the Ten Commandments. God realizes that this new nation would need some guidance to live by. Moses is gone for 40 days and the Israelites become impatient and make a golden calf as an idol to worship instead of the Lord God. Of course, this makes God angry and He tells Moses that He is going to destroy all of them, but Moses intercedes on their behalf and God spares them.

When the Israelites finally arrive at the Promised Land, Moses send 12 spies to recon the area before they begin their conquest. When the spies return, they report that the land is fruitful; however, they also reported that the people are as big as giants and that the cities are heavily fortified. However, Joshua and Caleb disagree with the other spies and encourage the people to trust in the Lord and do as He had commanded, take possession of the land. But the Israelites rebel against the Lord and again the Lord wants to destroy the whole lot of them. However, Moses again pleads with God and He spares them. But this time, God says that because of their disobedience, they would be destined to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until all of that generation die, except for Joshua and Caleb. They would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land.

We now come to the final chapter in the life of Moses, his death and eulogy which are recorded in the thirty-fourth chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy. Moses goes up on top of Mount Pisgah and gazes at the Promised Land in verses 4-12.

Read Deuteronomy 34:4-12

While no one knows exactly where Moses is buried, have you ever wondered what inscription God would have placed on his tombstone. You can tell a lot about what people thought about the deceased from the inscriptions on their tombstones. Here are a few examples:

1. I told you I was sick!
2. I was hoping for a pyramid.
3. Beneath this stone lies Dr. John Bigelow, an atheist, all dressed up with no place to go.
4. On a golfer's tombstone: At last, a hole in one.
5. Beneath this stone, lies Arabella Young, who on the twenty-first of May began to hold her tongue.
6. Finally on a pastor's grave: Go tell the Church that I'm dead, but they need shed no tears; for though I'm dead, I'm no more dead than they have been for years.

Well, let's get back to our text. Now this is not as exciting as the story of Moses' birth. There is no floating basket in the Nile River, no big sister or Egyptian Princess. Yet there is something extremely powerful about this story. It is the story of a great man of God spending his final hours with his Lord.

If you are the type of person who likes movies or books with a happy ending, then this story may not appeal to you at first. It may seem like a tragedy that Moses dies without entering the Promised Land. After 40 years of leading and putting up with the Israelites through the trials of the wilderness, God only allows Moses to see the Promised Land, but not enter it.

Earlier tradition attributes God's decision to Moses' lack of faith when God brought forth water out of a rock for the complaining Israelites. As expected, when crossing the desert, there were times when there was no water, and as usual the Israelites were griping to Moses for bringing them into the desert to die. Moses goes to the Lord, and God tells him to take his staff and gather the people and speak to the rock in their presence and water will flow from the rock. Moses goes and as one commentary noted all the accumulated anger and frustration of listening to the constant whining of the Israelites comes out and instead of speaking to the rock as God had commanded, Moses whacks the rock twice with his staff. While the water came out as God promised, God told Moses that because he did not trust in Him enough to honor Him in front of the Israelites, Moses would not be able to lead the people into the Promised Land.

Yet the tone of this story is not a disappointment or tragedy. Verses 10-12 celebrate the life of Moses as one of the great witnesses of the biblical story. God worked wondrous things through Moses. There is no need to weep for Moses. Not many are given the opportunity to live life so fully. Quality, not quantity, makes for perfection in living. As they say in baseball and football,

it's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game. And Moses played the game as well as any. Moses needs no grave or tomb for the faithful to gather to preserve his memory; his work is engraved in history forever. He left quite a legacy.

The greatness of Moses lies not just in his noble character or his astounding human achievements. He, not Abraham or Jacob, took a group of self-willed, stiff-necked people, loosely knit together by religion and blood, and welded them into a nation. With a love for his people which burned like a consuming fire, he was willing to do anything for them. His enthusiasm, his humility, his keen judgment, his complete dedication to God inspired the people to deeds they never would have deemed possible. God used Moses as He used no one else up to the time of Jesus.

Now let's take a few moments and step into Moses' sandals and ponder a few questions about our lives. Moses had obeyed God, walked with Him, and for the last 40 years put up with the constant whining of the Israelites. He had been headed for the Promised Land for over 40 years. But now he is standing on a mountaintop gazing on his life long destination, and realizing that he would never be able to set foot into it or enjoy the rewards of his labors.

How often in our lives do we fail to reach the Promised Land of our hopes and dreams? We journey through life and often wind up short of the full measure of our hopes and plans. We, like Moses, often end up looking toward the Promised Land and never entering it. But the story of Moses' death suggests that this experience is not a tragedy but a natural part of human experience. Let's face it, we will never achieve all of our dreams. We often leave the completion of our hopes and dreams to those who come after us – our children, our friends, our community of faith, and in Moses' case Joshua. We may sow the seeds, but someone else waters them, and another reaps the harvest.

While we set our sights on goals for ourselves and for the sake of God's kingdom, we should realize that these worthy goals do not depend solely on ourselves. We are part of families, communities, and congregations. We inherit the visions of those who went before us, and we pass on our unfinished visions to those who come after us. We do not live toward our dreams in isolation but as part of a great cloud of believers. If we fail to reach the goal, there's always a Joshua nearby to pick up where we left off.

Another question to consider is how often do we fail to see the Promised Land right there in front of us? How often do we look through the eyes of the secular world and let the biases of life, negative people, bad news, the minor problems of everyday life blind us to the beauty of God all around us? How often do we fail to see the opportunities that God is providing for us?

You may have heard the story about the Atlanta soda fountain where the nerve tonic syrup was mistakenly mixed with carbonated water instead of plain water. The result was the drink now known as Coca-Cola. Among the people who came to Asa Chandler's drugstore to enjoy the new taste was a businessman named B.N. Thomas. Thomas felt that there was a future in bottling the drink for home consumption, but Chandler thought it was a futile idea. So,

Chandler sold Thomas the rights to Coca-Cola by the bottle for a grand total of one dollar! Chandler gave away a multimillion-dollar industry because he could not see its future. How many opportunities does God provide us each day that we fail to recognize because our vision is so limited?

Moses saw the beauty of the Promised Land because he was with God and saw through God's eyes. We need to spend time alone with God daily – to be in constant communion with Him so that we too can see our Promised Land through His eyes.

The third question to consider is if we knew that we were not going to enter the Promised Land because we had not trusted God or obeyed Him, would we continue to walk in faith and do His will? Or would we give up and stop giving it our best?

On opening day of the 1954 baseball season, the Milwaukee Braves visited the Cincinnati Reds. Two rookies made their major league debut in that game. The Reds won 9-8 as Jim Greengrass hit four doubles in his first big-league game. A sensational debut for a young player with a made-for-baseball name. However, the rookie starting in left field for the Braves went 0 for five. Not a good start for the career of one Hank Aaron, who would go on to break Babe Ruth's homerun record. He didn't give up!

The answers to the previous questions lie in Moses and how he lived his life. He didn't give up. He kept walking in faith. He died with the assurance that his trust in God's loving providence was not unfounded. Although we cannot see the outcome of God's plan in our lifetime, we can be sure that God's mission for us will come to fulfillment. If we open ourselves to God's leading, we, like Moses, can glimpse the land promised us – God's kingdom among us. The key is to continue to walk in faith each day and allow God to use us as instruments in building His kingdom.

Even though we, like Moses, have made and will make mistakes and at times show a lack of faith, we too can enter this land of promise – the land of eternal joy and fellowship with our Lord if we follow the path of the witnesses and servants like Moses who have gone before us, and crossed a bridge called grace – a bridge where the toll of forgiveness has already been paid by the life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Look at your life. Are you on the path marked by this cloud of witnesses? Do you see the promise ahead? Do you have a sense of God's presence and guidance in your life?

We have been provided a glimpse of the Promised Land through the teachings of Jesus Christ and God's grace. He has shown us the way. This morning, we honor the memory of those saints who like Moses have shown us the way, walked with the Lord leaving us a legacy of faith and service to the Lord. Will we follow them? All we need to do is walk in faith. Amen