

Place: Lurgan Baptist 2:3:2014

MOSES, THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

Reading: Deuteronomy 34:1-12

20. THE END IN SIGHT

I wonder is there anyone here who is interested in looking at tombstones or gravestones. Sometimes when I am visiting Banbridge Cemetery and having a look at my final resting place I take time to read the epitaphs on the gravestones. Have you ever done that ? It makes interesting reading. On a windswept hill in an English countryside church yard there stands a grey slate tombstone. The quaint stone bears an epitaph not easily seen unless you stoop over and look closely. The faint etchings read,

**Beneath this stone, a lump of clay
Lies Arabella Young,
Who on the twenty four of May
Began to hold her tongue**

A lonely widow evidently composed this epitaph in a Vermont cemetery.

**Sacred to the memory of my husband John Barnes
Who died January 3rd 1803
His comely young widow aged 23, has
Many qualifications of a good wife
And yearns to be comforted**

On a tombstone in England someone saw this inscription,

***Sir John Strange
Here lies an honest lawyer
And that is Strange***

I mean when you die, what would you like people to remember about you ? If it was left to others to compose the inscription on your tombstone what would they write ? What words would you like to appear on your tombstone ? My these are tough questions to answer, because they force us to reflect seriously on our lives and deal honestly with our goals and priorities. You see, when you walk among the gravestones and read the epitaphs you begin to feel part of this scene which unfolded on Mount Pisgah, up there where Moses died. My ***can you imagine the feelings that Moses must have had ?*** The work, for which at the beginning, and many a time since, he had felt himself unable, had been brought to a successful consummation. The people were ready to pass over. The land that had been the goal of his labours, and the content of all his dreams lay just there, on the other side of the river.

At the time of a past offence, Moses had been warned that neither he nor Aaron, would be permitted to bring the assembly into the land which God had given them. *That word of the Lord came back to him now as he stood so near to the Promised Land.* He could not bear the thought of not crossing over to the land with the triumphant people. Disappointed, but obedient, Moses encouraged Joshua, said farewell to his people, and then climbed

Mount Nebo, unto the top of Pisgah. There with his raiment flowing in the winds, stood the man who had reached the great age of one hundred and twenty, but whose eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. *Can you see old Moses ?* His undimmed eye sweeps the magnificent panorama which unfolds itself before him, the end was in sight, his ministry was over. “ *So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab.* ”

*And no man knows that sepulchre
For no man saw it ere
Twas the angel of God upturned the sod
And laid the dead man there*

You see, as far as Moses labour was concerned the end was in sight, as far as Moses life was concerned the end was in sight, as far as Moses Lord was concerned the end was in sight. I want you to stand as it were with me on the top of Pisgah this and bid farewell to what the French historian Joseph Renan called “ *this colossus among figures of humanity.* ” Notice,

(1) THE LAND THAT MOSES SEES

You see, although God’s government kept Moses out of Canaan, God’s grace conducted him to Pisgah’s top, where in the Lord’s company he was permitted to view the land. Three names are used in reference to the place from which Moses viewed the Promised Land, Pisgah, Nebo and Abarim. (29:49) This may seem confusing but the different names refer to different parts of the same general location. Pisgah probably refers to a ridge that

extended from Mount Nebo which was part of the Abarim mountain range, which lies east of the Dead Sea. Do you know many 120 year old men who can climb a mountain which reaches to a height of 4,500 feet ? Do you know how high Slieve Donard is ? Its 2790 feet. Yet here is Moses, almost a century and a quarter old, climbing to the summit of a 4,500 foot high peak to see the land that he could not enter. You see,

(a) PROMISE HAS GIVEN WAY TO REALITY:

Do you remember 40 years previous when God confronted Moses at the burning bush ? God said, “ *I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large unto a land flowing with milk and honey.* ” (3:8) Why this was the same promise that God gave to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and now the Lord was fulfilling His promise, for God keeps His word. (a) And then,

(b) FAITH HAS GIVEN WAY TO SIGHT:

We are told in the day of his death Moses went up. For the believer today, death is like that, it is a departing to be with Christ which is far better. *For Moses also, that was the day when faith gave way to sight.* “ *And the Lord showed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea. And the south and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm tress unto Zoar.* ” (34:1-2) The Lord must have given Moses a special

ability to see and caused the sky to be clear that day so Moses could view the land. Can you imagine Moses mumbling to himself, “ *My look at that. Beautiful ! Beautiful ! O Lord look at that. What a land.* ” My for forty years Moses had seen the land, but only by the eye of faith, and through a glass darkly, now he saw it as it really was. Is this not what happens the believer at death ? Why in just the same way, the Christian finds that in death the veil is lifted and he is face to face with Christ his Saviour.

*Only faintly now I see Him
With the darkling veil between
But a blessed day is coming
When His glory shall be seen*

(2) THE LORD THAT MOSES SERVES

For did you notice that time and again we find this phrase in this closing chapter ? “ *The Lord.* ” (34:1, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11,) My Moses accomplished so much because his heart was fixed on the Lord. His soul’s secret abiding place was the Lord. To Moses God was his home, his help and his stay. My can you visualise the scene ? Moses is about to take leave of His people (34:6) the people are about to take leave of the desert. What lies ahead ? Well, there was a new land they had to enter, there were new enemies they had to face, new obstacles they had to surmount, there were new dangers they had to recognise, there were new problems they had to solve, and there were new trails they had to conquer. Who was sufficient for these things ? (2 Cor 2:16) God was. And what

portraiture of the Lord Moses leaves the nation with. For here in these chapters he speaks about,

(a) A God who goes *BEFORE* us:

Look if you will at (31:, 6) Now remember these were the closing words of Moses, and last words are always invested with a special significance. Here he reminds them of a God who goes before them. Does that not remind you of the 23rd Psalm ? “ *He leadeth me beside the still waters, He restoreth my soul, He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness.* ” Do you recall what is said of the Divine Shepherd in John’s gospel ? “ *He calleth his own sheep by name and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep he goeth before them.* ” (Jn 10:3-4) In other words, the shepherd is always in the lead, for while in the west they drive the sheep, in the east, they lead the sheep. I love that story of the visitor to Palestine some years ago, who on noticing a shepherd driving his flock, said to him, “ *but I thought shepherds here always lead their flock.* ” To which the man replied, “ *bless you, I am not a shepherd, I am a butcher.* ” My the Lord is always ahead, out of front, preparing the way, meeting the emergency, guiding the flock. How thankful we ought to be for the preparatory ministry of our Lord. “ *The Lord He it is that doth go before thee.* ”

(b) A God who walks *BESIDE* us:

“ *And the Lord, He it is that doth go before thee, He will be with thee.* ” (31:8) Does God’s presence not mean everything to the believer ? Indeed, Moses can go so far

as to say, “ *If Thy presence go not with me carry us not up hence.* ” (33:18) While Joshua, was encouraged with the assurance, “ *As I was with Moses so I will be with thee.* ” (1:5) And since that is true, we may ready to face anything, to go anywhere, to pay any cost. My are you living in the shadow of some great disappointment ? Some physical handicap, some business problem, or some personal dilemma. Well, the Lord is with you. Indeed, “ *He hath said I will never leave thee, not forsake thee.* ” (Heb 13:6)

*I fear not foe with thee at hand to bless
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness
Where is death's sting, where grave thy victory
I triumph still if Thou abide with me*

(c) A God who is BENEATH us:

For Moses in his farewell address says, “ *the eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms.* ” (33:27) My are you afraid to rest where the universe rests ? Are not your Father's arms a sufficient pillow for you ? My those everlasting arms that brought us out of bondage, are able to bear us up in the trials of life. ***Do you see, that God surrounds us, His people on all sides ?*** Where is God ? *He is Above us,* “ *for there is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help,* ” (33:26) Where is God ? *He is Around us,* for “ *the eternal God is thy refuge,* ” (33:27) Where is God ? *He is Before us,* for “ *He shall thrust out the enemy from before thee.* ” (33:27) Where is God ? *He is Beneath us,* “ *And underneath are the everlasting arms.* ” (33:27)

And my “ *this God is our God for ever and ever, He will be our guide even unto death.* ” (Ps 48:14) (1) (2)

(3) THE LIFE THAT MOSES SURRENDERS

You see, Moses died. Hero or not all of us come to that moment when we leave the body behind and move on to another realm. When I think of Moses death, I notice that he dies,

(a) AT GOD'S WILL:

It says “ *So Moses died according to the word of the Lord.* ” (34:5) Moffat renders this, “ *The Eternal ordered it.* ” Everything ended for the old man exactly as God had arranged it. My Moses did not die because he was old and decrepit. Although he was 120 years of age “ *his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated.* ” (34:7) Moses had to die at this time because he had disobeyed the Lord and as a result God had said that he would not enter the land of Canaan. (Num 20:1-13) But the fact that Moses had sinned did not sever his relationship with the Lord or negate the Lord's tender care for him. You see, not only our lives but our deaths are ordered by the Lord. Job speaking of humanity says, “ *seeing his days are determined, the numbers of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass.* ” (Job 14:5) You see, the death of Moses was all according to plan, God's plan.

My is the same not true of us ? Why are we filled with fear when we board a plane ? Why are we filled with

apprehension when we get on a cruise ship ? Why are we nervous when we begin a long trip in the car ? Are we not immortal until our life's work is done ? Is there anything such thing as “ *chance*,” in the life of a believer ? No illness, no accident, can take us out of the will of God. My are our “ *times*,” not in His hand ? Does our Father not watch over us tenderly not only in life but in death ?

(b) UNDER GOD'S WISDOM:

Did you notice (34:6) ? Think of it. Moses had the Almighty God for his undertaker and the mighty angels for his pallbearers. My Moses is the only person in the Bible whom God personally buried. Did you know that ? *God buried Moses in a place that, to this day, is undiscovered, undisclosed, and undetected.* The exact site is only known to God Himself. Why did he do that ? *Because that grave would have become a second Mecca.* They would still be beating a path up Nebo to this day, building shrines, selling popcorn and peanuts, offering all sorts of rides, maybe running a tram up there with big banners, announcing, “ *Moses burial place.*” “ *No way,*” says God. “ *Put him in that grave seal it over and conceal it so they'll never know where it is.*”

Did you know that Moses body sparked a contention in the spirit world ? Jude says, “ *Yet Michael the archangel when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses.*” (Jude 9) Apparently the devil had his own plans for Moses body but God said, “ *No. His body is mine just as much as his soul, and I am burying the corpse where no one will ever find it. End of story.*”

(c) IN GOD'S WORK:

Did you know that Moses died on his 120th birthday ? (31:2 32:48) But more importantly he died in the saddle, doing the work of the Lord. His last days were filled with leading Israel to the east of Jordan, copying down the law in writing and giving it to the Levites for safe keeping (31:24-26) writing a new song (31:19,22, 30 32:1-47) and then pronouncing the blessing on the tribes. (33:1) No wonder Moses is not called the leader of Israel or the deliverer of Israel or the law giver of Israel he is merely called “ *the servant of the Lord.*” My how do you want to die ? Do you want to die serving the Lord ? Do you want to die with as few regrets as possible ? Well, the fewness of your regrets will be in direct proportion to the faithfulness of your service. (1) (2) (3) but notice,

(4) THE LEADER THAT MOSES SEPERATES

I mean its no fun to step into the shoes of a legend. How do you replace a great man of God ? What do you do when it comes time to choose a successor for an effective leader ? You see, all great leaders must eventually be replaced. And while their departures make take us by surprise they never take God by surprise. My when a man of God dies, nothing of God dies. When a man of God fades from the scene, nothing of God fades. God buries His workmen but His work goes on unhindered by any change of personnel. The Lord, always his Joshuas waiting in the wings. Now who was Joshua ? Well, he was

(a) A MAN WITH A SOVEREIGN CALL:

Do you recall what happened in the last year of Moses life ? Joshua was appointed to succeed Moses as Israel's leader. Look if you will at (Num 27:18-23) Think about what Moses might have said. He might very well have pulled a short list out of his back pocket and said, " *If you don't mind, Lord I'd like to bounce a few names off You and see what you think.* " You see, strong leaders tend to wrestle with the desire to appoint their own successors, usually someone very much like himself. Yet it is often God's plan to appoint a different kind of man to bring a whole new dimension to the work. Moses was wise to see that danger and he said, " *Lord, let him be your appointment. I have no suggestions. You make the man known to us and we'll appoint him.* " You see, Moses knew that Israel's leader must be a man singled out by God Himself. My we cannot thrust ourselves into the work of God. " *No man taketh this honour unto himself but he is that called of God.* " (Heb 5:4)

Are you contemplating Christian service ? Make sure you are called of God. Are you thinking about pastoral ministry ? Make sure you are called of God. Are you considering child evangelism ? Make sure you are called of God. Don't think because you have lost your job, you'll have a go at Christian service. Don't think because you're tired of secular work you'll have a go at the Lord's work. Don't think because you are bone lazy, you'll join the ranks of the Lord's servants. Alan Redpath said " *A man assured of the call of God is invincible.* " Are you called of God to do what you're doing ? (a)

(b) A MAN WITH A SHEPHERDS HEART:

Do you see what Moses asks for ? (Num 27:16-17) In other words, " *Lord we need a man who knows people, who will minister to people, and will know how to guide people.* " " *Lord, please don't send us a sterile scholar, don't pick some slick type CEO. Send us someone who will take care of the flock.* " Now you might be able to name many teachers of the Word, perhaps some superb preachers but how many true, caring, servant hearted shepherds can you name ? Is this not what pastors are to be ? Is this not what elders are to be ? Men with shepherd's hearts, men who will genuinely care for the flock. Is this not what Moses was praying for ? " *And the Lord said unto Moses, take thee Joshua* " (Num 27:18) Do you not love that ? I mean the Lord was not sitting in heaven wondering who would take Moses place. God did not need to do an internet search. God did not need to set up a pulpit committee.

God didn't need to run one preacher against another and say, " *Choose between these five men the majority vote wins.* " My have you any idea what churches get up when they set about calling a pastor ? You would not believe half of the things. The Lord simply says, " *Take Joshua, I've been training Him for years. He's got what it takes.* "

Now do you see the principle ? When God removes, He replaces. When God reaches down and plucks one flower, He natures another one. When He pulls up one plant, He has another ready to bloom. The Lord never runs out of qualified replacements. And if you're God's Joshua, you don't need to worry that you'll be forgotten for our God is

the God of every detail. Now do you see something else here ? (1) (2) (3) (4)

(5) THE LEGACY THAT MOSES SECURES

Look at what was handed down from God to Moses. What an epitaph. (34:10-12) That's some obituary is it not ? My when your life is done what is God going to write over it ? Will He write over it, what He wrote over the life of Antipas ? “ *My faithful martyr or witness.* ” (Rev 2:13) Will God write about you what He wrote about Simeon ? He was “ *just and devout.* ” (Lk 2:25) What He wrote about John Knox “ *he never feared the face of men.* ” My what will the Lord write ? What will you wish Him to write ? Death is rushing toward us, life is so quickly passing away. Time runs short. What will you have the Lord write about you ? Did you notice that there are two things said about Moses as the curtain falls on his life. The first is,

(a) HIS WALK WITH GOD:

1. This eulogy speaks of His Superiority:

“ *And there arose not a prophet since in Israel,* ” one of the scholars says “ *one of the greatest men who ever lived, perhaps all things taken together, the greatest next to Christ.* ” (J. Orr) 1.

2. This eulogy speaks of His Intimacy:

“ *Whom the Lord knew face to face,* ” (34:10) Joshua would stand before Eleazar the priest to receive guidance from God (Num 27:21) but with Moses it “ *was face to face.* ” His contact, his conversation, his communion with God was close. To Moses Jehovah was a living bright reality. Is that what the Lord is to you ? (a)

(b) HIS WORK FOR GOD:

For do you see (34:11-12) ? My has our series on Moses not been a study of tremendous accomplishments in the service of God ? D. Davis says, “ *Leaving out of view our Lord Jesus Christ, there is no man who has left so deeply the impress of his character upon the world as the Jewish legislator the history of the Western world have been different from what it is, if Moses had found an early grave among the rushes of the Nile.* ” In the movie “ *Gladiator,* ” Caesar was about to turn his kingdom over to a man named Maximus. In that powerful moment the emperor looked into the eyes of Maximus and said, “ *I am dying Maximus. When a man sees his end he wants to know there was a purpose to his life.* ” Then, he asked a most penetrating question, “ *How will the world speak of my name in years to come ?* ”

Reading the epitaphs on the tombstones is very interesting isn't it ? We read what God had to say about Moses, but, I wonder, what will God have to say about you, or about me ?

