

Sermon Draft

Text: Deuteronomy 34:1–12

Sermon: “God’s Promises”

Our text is not only the end of Deuteronomy but also the end of Moses’ life. *“And 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”* (Deuteronomy 34:10–11).

Someday we, too, will have to die. So, we will let Moses be an example for us.

I’ve heard that at the moment of death our entire life will flash before our eyes. Imagine that with Moses. Here he is in a basket, floating in the Nile River. Now he’s rescued by Pharaoh’s daughter, but he grows up in his own home. For forty years, he lives as a prince in Egypt, but then he goes to protect an Israelite, and he murders an Egyptian. He buries the man in the desert, but the deed is known, and he flees and goes into hiding.

For forty more years, he is in the wilderness. He is a shepherd for the flocks of Jethro, marries Jethro's daughter Zipporah, and starts a family. And then, age 80, Moses sees an unforgettable sight: a bush burning without consuming the leaves or branches. And there in the midst of the bush is the Angel of the Lord, who speaks to Moses the divine name and sends him as a prophet to rescue his people.

More scenes of Moses' life would pass before us, one after another. The appearances before Pharaoh, "Let my people go." The staff turning into a snake, the Nile turning to blood, the ten plagues, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, and the hardening of the people's lives.

Then the instructions for the Passover, the lamb's blood on the door, the mourning of the Egyptian firstborn, and the flight in the night. And then, how could you forget, the exodus of all the people that comes to a dead end. Mountains on the left and the right, the Red Sea in front, and the armies of Pharaoh behind. But Moses puts his staff into the sea and the people cross on dry ground, and then Pharaoh and his armies are consumed in the sea.

How they rejoiced and praised God for that deliverance! And we're only getting started!

The Lord brings them back to the mountain where Moses had seen the burning bush, but now the entire mountain is on fire, and the Lord speaks from this cloud and fire the Ten Commandments and summons Moses up onto the mountain to stand before the throne of God and in the council of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For forty days and nights, Moses fasts and receives the instructions of building the dwelling of God on earth, the tabernacle where God would meet with man. Moses comes down off the mountain with two tablets, written by the finger of God himself!

There's the golden calf, the intercession of Moses that restrained the wrath of God, the snakes and the bronze serpent that saved the people, the construction of the tabernacle, the anointing of Aaron and his sons to serve as priests, the fire of God that consumed the sacrifice, and the glory of God that filled the temple.

Moses asked to see the face of God, and God put him in the crack of the rock and caused his glory to pass before him, saying, ***“I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy”*** (Exodus 33:19). Moses would wear a veil because his face was shining and because that light would fade.

Moses sent twelve spies into the Promised Land. Two came back with a report of faithful exuberance. Ten came back with fear, and the people listened to the ten, so that the Lord gave them forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Forty years of trouble. Forty years of temptation. Forty years of manna. Forty years of protection. Forty years that Moses used to publish Genesis and his other four books. But also forty years of funerals.

None of the men who came out of Egypt would go into the Promised Land, only their children. In some way, the forty years of wandering in the wilderness was a forty year funeral procession, and now we come to the end, to the edge of the Jordan River, and there is only one left to die:

Moses, 120 years old, but his eyes, the text tells us, were “undimmed, and his vigor unabated” (v 7).

Other than Jesus and King David, we know more about Moses than any other character in the Scriptures. His life was stunning. They could make movies about it! This life of Moses is a picture of Law and Gospel.

Moses, after all, is the Lawgiver, the man chosen by God to bring the Ten Commandments down from the darkness on the mountain. Moses’ preaching had in it the thundering of God, his holiness and wrath over sin.

But Moses is not all Law. Moses fashions the bronze serpent on the pole to save the people, a picture of Jesus lifted up on the cross. Moses builds the tabernacle and puts in place the sacrifices, with the blood of bulls and goats sanctifying the people so that God could come and meet with them and bless them.

It's through Moses that God rescues the people, claims them as his own, sanctifies them, brings them to the edge of the Promised Land, gives them the liturgy and the divine services, the priesthood, the ark of the covenant with the Mercy Seat, the Torah, and the promise that another would come, a Prophet like Moses from among the people.

Now imagine Moses as a 120-year-old man, still full of life, standing on Mount Nebo across the Jordan, at the end of his life, and it is none of these things that flash before his eyes. Instead, the Lord puts before him the land of promise. Lord intends for Moses to die as he lived, with faith and with hope.

Moses could look back on his life and see in a thousand different ways how the Lord had blessed him and kept him, but now Moses is on the edge of death, and the Lord has him see not the things that are behind him but the thing ahead. Moses, there on the top of Mount Nebo, looks across and sees the mountains of Judah. There is Bethlehem, the village where Jesus will be born.

There, flowing below him, is the Jordan River where Jesus will be baptized and John will preach “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). There is the wilderness of Judea where the devil will tempt Jesus for forty days and nights. To the north is Galilee where Jesus will teach, preach, and call his disciples, where he will announce the coming of God’s kingdom, the Christian Church. Even further north is the mountain where Moses will stand with Jesus and Elijah and the three apostles to talk with Jesus about his own exodus.

And there in the hills directly in front of Moses is Jerusalem, the city of peace, the city of the great King, where Jesus will suffer and die, lifted up on the cross, taking God’s wrath in our place, in Moses’ place, in the place of all sinners. And there, too, is the grave that will be empty. There is the Mount of Olives where Jesus will ascend to the Father’s right hand to rule and reign over all things for the sake of his Church.

Yes, Moses, the best is yet to come. Because even this is not the end. This same Jesus will return as he left, hands in blessing for his people, and then there will be the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting for all those who look for his coming.

Remember, Moses here is our example, an example of faith and hope. Moses doesn't die looking backward, looking to the victory over Pharaoh, the triumph in the sea, the glory of the mountain. No, Moses is our example as he dies looking to the promises God has set before him.

We are the same. The Lord took us and drew us out of the waters in our Baptism. He rescued us with the blood of his Lamb. He called us to love our neighbor and give thanks to him with our lives. The Lord has brought all of us through this life of joys and sorrows according to his mercy and kindness.

But when we come to the end, to our last hour, the Lord points our eyes to his unwavering promises, to Jesus, who was crucified and raised for us, who now intercedes for us at the Father's throne, and who will soon return for us so that where he is, we will be also.

The best is yet to come; the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting await; eternal life is a ripe promise. And when our time comes and we stand on the edge of life and death, the Lord's promises will carry us forward to the joy that knows no end, and we will at last see the Lord Jesus face-to-face.

Amen