

The Choice of a New Generation | Deuteronomy

The Death of Moses and the Birth of Jesus

Deuteronomy 34..1-12

12.24.17PM

Now Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan,² and all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah as far as the western sea,³ and the Negev and the plain in the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar.⁴ Then the Lord said to him, "This is the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there."⁵ So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord.⁶ And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor; but no man knows his burial place to this day.⁷ Although Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died, his eye was not dim, nor his vigor abated.⁸ So the sons of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses came to an end.

⁹ *Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses.¹⁰ Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face,¹¹ for all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land,¹² and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.*

You may WONDER... especially if you're a visitor ...you may wonder WHY we would read THIS passage on Christmas Eve.... So let me explain in two ways: continuity and contrast.

By continuity I mean that for the LAST FOUR YEARS we have used the Fall sermons to walk with Moses – four autumns in a row, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy – and with the end of this last book (5th book of the Bible) we come to the end of Moses and I felt like we should give him a proper good-bye... for the sake of continuity... NOT TO MENTION the continuity of the whole Bible – it's one continuous story from Genesis – Revelation.

And THEN for the sake of contrast... I THINK we fail to appreciate Christmas (not the gifts and family and parties etc but the MEANING) we only GET it if we see it in contrast...

In other words...we talk about the birth of Jesus as light coming into the world and we think, "Oh! That's nice!"

And we read, “A Savior is born...” and we think – “Aw! That’s so sweet...” but until we ask the question: A Savior to save us from WHAT? And a light to show us WHAT?...Until we get the contrast, then Jesus Christ’s birth is only... sentimental...and it won’t stagger our imagination and it won’t seize you like it should...

The death of Moses and the birth of Jesus are two contrasting events...one is a symbol of hope frustrated and the other of hope fulfilled...two emblems – the death of Moses is the epitome of disappointment and the birth of Jesus stands for the opposite of disappointment. That’s what I want to discuss tonight – Disappointment and Its Opposite.

You know the Christmas season with all the festivities and celebration is NOT happy for some people... The season may remind some people of bad family dynamics...or loneliness ...and there’s a spike in suicides... BUT IT TURNS OUT THAT THE SPIKE comes NOT in November or December but in January... ‘You get it? People don’t die of isolation – they die of disappointment...when it’s OVER and they feel let down...

Everyone faces disappointment in their lives to some degree... may be a very LOW level (“I’m sorry ma’am, the chef said we’re OUT of the eggplant...”) OR a very profound sense that, “I never saw my life going like this... thought I’d be married... or be further in my career... thought my kids would be doing better...”

Many people face total and existential disappointment as they may end up old and happy having all the trappings/symbols of success and happiness...but still don’t know the meaning of it all – what is the PURPOSE of my life? Like the philosopher Ernest Becker wrote... many people end up wondering, “(Am i just) ...a miserable animal whose body decays, who will die, who will pass into dust and oblivion, disappear forever not only in this world but in all the possible dimensions of the universe, whose life serves no conceivable purpose, who may as well not have been born (?)...” (The Denial of Death, 1973)

Moses’ life is almost a case study in disappointment. The people he came to rescue from slavery in Egypt were ALWAYS suspicious of him...complaining about him...accusing him... Others were jealous...

And HE HIMSELF ...living with this people...who doubted the goodness of God...they thought the God of Abraham was like the gods of the Egyptians and they were conditioned to think that the gods could be bribed and controlled...and Moses eventually gave in to that evil/superstitious way of thinking about God and (Numbers 20) therefore God said, “YOU will not accompany the people in the Promised Land..”

And...you know... no matter how many times I see a sad movie... I always hope the next time I watch it, it’ll have a happy ending...but here we are...at the END OF MOSES...and what God said – God really meant... Moses will NOT go in... hope frustrated.

God gives old Moses a preview...but Moses...after putting up with these Israelites all these years...and getting them right to the goal-line...Moses will NOT “break the plane” – “I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over” ... He gets to see the land and where the different tribes will settle... but HE WON'T GO IN... He's buried in an unknown location...outside the Land...What a disappointment!

Moses... is ...of course... a hero of the Bible... He was the mediator who gave the people the Law... He was a humble man... a man who knew God and was allowed to gaze into mysteries...AND he did NOT have an easy life... in the end...disappointment.

Moses is sort of the Patron Saint of Disappointment and HIS work was to give us the Law... and the Law, the commandments of God are also meant to disappoint us...The Commandments show us how we all fall short of God's requirements... Moses work was (in a way) to make us disappointed with ourselves and with one another... The NT calls his work “the Ministry of Condemnation” and “the Ministry of Death” (2 Cor 4) – Moses is the great diagnostician of the whole Bible – he shows us that we all fall short... we are ALL a big ...disappointment.

Moses screams to us all... “If you think that YOUR life is good enough... if you think you've been obedient enough...responsible enough...loving enough... and that God OWES you anything... THEN #1 – you haven't read the requirements I brought down from the Mountain and #2 – You will die OUTSIDE thĒ Promised Land...and you will be eternally disappointed...

Well...that's all I have for tonight folks! Thanks for coming...!

Listen... it's important to let Moses do his work in you... in fact... IT IS ESSENTIAL TO SPIRITUAL LIFE AND HEALTH... that you feel disappointed with yourself...with life...with the condition of the world...

But IN CONTRAST to disappointment - Christmas is about HOPE... not hope frustrated (as in Moses) but HOPE REALIZED ... The Apostle John saw the contrast when he wrote these famous words: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth...For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.”

Jesus Christ came into the world... to make physical the very Mind that made the universe... He came to fulfill the Law of Moses...“God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law (of Moses), so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Galatians 4.4-5).

Not only did Jesus Christ live obedient to all the Law of Moses... He lived the fully human life that NO ONE else had ever lived... He fulfilled the Law of Moses FOR ME – and by faith I have

switched records with Him – Jesus Christ took my condemnation and GAVE ME HIS RECORD OF OBEDIENCE... He reversed the disappointment of Moses... declares me a son!

In His birth...His perfect life...His atoning death...His triumphant resurrection Jesus Christ satisfied the divine requirements that Moses gave us...and He is offering that to YOU...tonight. Again, John's Gospel: "To all who received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, that is to all those who believe in His name..."

If you will face your disappointment...your failings... your sin... and simply see Jesus Christ for who He is, this Christmas can be very special for you and you can live... IN A HOPE THAT WILL NOT BE ULTIMATELY DISAPPOINTED... You can say with the Russian Christian author Dostoyevsky:

"I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage... that in the world's finale, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, for all the blood that they've shed; that it will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened."

Moses...life was an emblem of disappointment...but He himself was not disappointed... He died in faith... He died with a glimpse of the Promised Land ...He died looking forward to the One who would bring about a New Exodus ... (You may know) he appeared later in the Bible for ONE ENCORE appearance (Luke 9.31-32) and there Moses got to see the One who would bring about the New Exodus...that would not disappoint...but would instead make everything right.

In the end, the Patron Saint of Disappointment was NOT disappointed... I hope you will follow His lead... I hope you will find TRUE SATISFACTION (THAT'S the opposite of disappointment) in Jesus Christ.