

Deuteronomy 34

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0:00] We on? Hello? Check, one, two, three. We're going to continue our sermon series in Deuteronomy this morning. We're going to look at chapter 34. So if you could turn to page 177 in the Pew Bible.

Deuteronomy chapter 34. That's a text for our sermon this morning. If you're not familiar with the Bible, if you just open it up, the first book is Genesis.

Keep going, and eventually you'll hit Deuteronomy. It's just the fifth book in. We're going to look at the very last chapter of Deuteronomy 34, page 177 in the Pew Bible. As you turn there, let me pray for us as we come to hear God's Word read. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for this morning. God, thank you for such a beautiful day that you've given us. Lord, we thank you most of all for the gift of your Son, who is the Word, come to us. And we thank you for the Word written, Lord, wherein we can hear your voice speak to us once again. So God, would you open our hearts and our minds to receive what you are saying to us this morning through this chapter of your Word. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Deuteronomy chapter 34. Let me read this for us.

When 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, all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the Negev and the plain, that is the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. And the Lord said to him, this is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, I will give it to your offspring. I've let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there. So Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord.

[1:58] And he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth Peor. But no one knows the place of his burial to this day. Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed and his vigor unabated. And the people of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab 30 days. Then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended. And Joshua, the son of Nun, was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses. 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 to Pharaoh and all his servants and all his land. And for all the mighty power and the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

Well, here we are at the end of August. And the end of another summer, right? Which means the end of our summer sermon series on Deuteronomy.

So it's fitting that the end of our series would take us to the end of the book, chapter 34, which as it turns out isn't just the end of Deuteronomy, but the end of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, the five books of Moses. And as we've just read, this chapter isn't just how the Pentateuch ends, but how the life of Moses ends. So the summer and the series and the book and the Pentateuch and the life of Moses, that's a lot of endings for one Sunday, is it not? But you know, for many of us, this Sunday is the beginning. Perhaps this is your first Sunday in New Haven, your first week at college, your first time to Trinity. Maybe this is even your first time to church. It's a beginning for you. The beginning of a new season, a new stage of life, the beginning of a new journey.

And that tension that we feel on a Sunday like this with its endings and with its beginnings is a tension that runs right through our passage too, if you've caught it. After all, who are we in this story? Are we Moses climbing the mountain to reach our end? Or are we Joshua taking the reins and just beginning?

Perhaps you can relate to Moses. You're ascending the hill of life, getting closer with each step to the time when your life will come to a close. And with each step up the hill, you're getting a better

and broader view of the bittersweet reality of life. Imagine Moses seeing the entirety of the promised land from the top of that mountain. The Lord showed him all the land, we're told.

[5 : 04] He begins by looking north toward Gilead and Dan, and then he moves, as it were, in a great circle to take in the entire land. He moves down from Naphtali to Ephraim to Manasseh, and he comes to Judah and the sea coast beyond, and finally the Negev to the south. And at last, he circles around to the great valley right before him, stretching from Jericho all the way to Zoar. After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, this must have been a stunning sight, a land that we're told over and over again is a land flowing with milk and honey. It must have been a sight for sore eyes to see a land like that after wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. But then to hear the Lord say, this is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, I will give it to your offspring.

You see, Moses stood on the brink of God's promise, nearly fulfilled. That great unconditional oath that the Lord made to Abraham to multiply his offspring into a great nation, to be their God, and to give them the land, and most importantly, to bless all the nations through them.

Here Moses was, seeing the very land God had promised so many years ago. This is the place Moses that spent 40 years trying to reach, and now he could see it. And he knew that God would do with this sight. He knew that God would do what God had promised. He would take his people into the land, and ultimately, the world would be blessed.

As God's plan through Israel for the world would one day be fulfilled. The fall reversed. The nations redeemed. The world renewed. And God glorified as all in all.

Must have been quite a sight for Moses. But you know, standing on that mountain, it must have been a bit bittersweet. You see, God allowed Moses to see the land with his eyes, but Moses was not allowed to cross over and enter in. The Lord refused Moses that privilege.

[7 : 44] You might remember that Moses has mentioned this fact a number of times in Deuteronomy. In chapter 3, we saw that Moses pleaded with God to let him enter the land, but God refused his request.

We're told why in chapter 32 of Deuteronomy, the Lord says, because you broke faith with me in the midst of the people of Israel at the waters of Meribah, because you did not treat me as holy in the midst of the people of Israel.

We're told the full story of the waters of Meribah in Numbers chapter 20. You can read that maybe sometime this week. In the wilderness, the people are grumbling against the Lord and against Moses, and they're complaining for water. So God commands Moses, speak to this rock, and water's going to come forth for the Israelites. And instead, Moses takes his staff and strikes it, not once, but twice. And water does come out of the rock, a testament to God's grace. But God says to Moses, because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel. Therefore, you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them. Sounds a bit petty at first, doesn't it?

But in reality, it was a serious offense. Moses' act of disobedience was a public defaming of God's holiness. And for that, God tells Moses that he would not be the one to lead Israel into the land.

So now, as Moses stands on Mount Nebo with this commanding view of the promised land, it must have been a bit bittersweet to see the land, to get a foretaste of it, to know that God will keep his promise, but also to know that he won't go in. He won't experience the fullness of what he'd worked and waited and longed for.

[9 : 37] Now, this episode in Moses' life, I think, suggests two things to us this morning. The first is a question. And the question is this, whose plan am I longing to see fulfilled in my life? Mine or God's? Look at Moses here, 120 years old. And what is he doing? He's just longing to get a glimpse of God's kingdom promises unfolding before him. When I reach the end of my days, will I find myself longing for just one more glimpse of the progress and future of God's kingdom?

Or will I be so consumed with building my own kingdom and reaching my own goals that God's plan for the world takes a back seat? In other words, friends, are we willing to put the progress of God's kingdom at the center of our priorities? Are we willing to let that be the determining factor when it comes to what profession we pursue and what person you marry and what part of the world that you live in and what you do with your free time, even how you spend your retirement?

My wife, Beth, pointed out to me as we were discussing this passage that nearly all of Moses' important work that he did for the Lord happened in his retirement years. Actually, after that, God found him in the wilderness when he was 80 and said, good news, bad news, Moses. You're going to live for 40 more years, but you're going to be my servant, and I'm going to do something great

through you.

And that should be a great encouragement to those of us who are nearing that season of life. God might have your greatest work for him yet to come. But for all of us, this should be a challenge to rethink the working wisdom around us that says you work hard and you save a lot of money, and then you check out at age 60 to sit on a beach somewhere.

What a waste. Oh, to be like Moses, with our spiritual eyes undimmed and our spiritual vigor unabated, even to the very end of our days, and to be hungry for just one more glimpse of what God's going to do to move his kingdom forward.

[12:10] So how about it, friends? Students? Young professionals?

Parents? Empty nesters? Retirees? We're all here this morning. Wouldn't you rather spend your life for the kingdom of God than your own petty dreams?

You see, God wants to give you a richer and a bigger dream than any you could conceive. A vision of his glory resounding through the world.

Satisfying hearts. Changing lives. Renewing whole communities. That vision of God captured Moses and it drove his whole life.

Let it be the same for us. Now, that's the first thing I think this episode suggests for us. The second that this episode in the life of Moses speaks to is the inevitable disappointments that we will face when we ascend that hill and look out.

[13:22] You know, Moses saw the land but couldn't go in. And we too will see the opportunities that we missed and the mistakes that we've made and even the sins that we've committed.

How will we face them? For those who place their trust in Christ, our sins are forgiven. And this is the deepest comfort of all.

But in our passage, we actually see two more comforts. The first is God's promise in verse 4 to know that God's redemptive plan is moving forward in spite of our successes and failures.

To know that God will sovereignly accomplish his mission for the world. And that helps us to know that though we may not have always played the right move or always said the right thing, God's will cannot be thwarted.

Friend, I wonder if you're riddled with regrets this morning. Do you believe that God is big enough and powerful enough to use even our failures to accomplish his plan?

[14:42] Of course, that's no excuse to be complacent or disobedient, but it's a fact of the God who's revealed himself in Scripture. He keeps his promises and will do so in spite of our shortcomings.

That's the first comfort in this passage. The second is found in verse 9. You see, though Moses will not enter the land, Joshua will.

Following God's command, Moses had commissioned Joshua to be his successor. Deuteronomy 31, if you go back and read that, contains the account of the actual formal commissioning before the people and, more importantly, before God.

But, you know, when you read the life of Moses and the rest of the Pentateuch, you see that Joshua was almost always there at Moses' side, praying with him, fighting alongside him, and in Deuteronomy 32, even singing with him.

You know you're close to someone when you do a duet before the whole nation of Israel. Read 32. Seems like that's what's going on. You see, Moses had been investing in Joshua and training him and relying on him for years before this day when Moses ascended the mountain to meet his end.

[16:03] So, you see, Moses can be sure that the, and the people can be sure that they're in good hands, that the leadership they need is in place to move forward even after Moses, their great leader, is gone.

That must have been a comfort to Moses to know that though he wouldn't go in, Joshua was ready to take his place and go forward. And that can be a great comfort for us as well, you see.

Where has God placed you in his kingdom work? Think about it this morning. And ask yourself, are you investing in the ones who will take your place?

Many of us are young here this morning, but the years go by quickly, friends. When our race is won, we will, when our race is run, we will want to have done our best to make sure that there are godly men and women who will carry on the work after us.

Are you praying for that? Are you praying for them? Are you seeking to identify them and equip them? Think about it in your own situation. Students, most of you will be at school here for four

years, and then you will be gone.

[17 : 13] Who's going to lead your campus fellowship when you're gone? Who's going to carry on the work of Christ on campus after you leave? Are you going to work with your campus directors to train up that incoming class to be leaders when you move on?

Parents, you know, the reality is you might not live to see your great-grandchildren. Lord knows you won't probably live to see your great-great-grandchildren.

So are you pointing your kids right now to Christ and showing them how to follow the Lord so that they too can lead your family in the ways of righteousness and godliness when you're gone?

Even in your workplace, are you one of the few Christians there? Are you praying that God will send another believer who can continue the work of God's kingdom among your co-workers and in your fields if the Lord were to move you to another city or to another firm or to another country?

You see, Moses could look to Joshua and take comfort that even though he wouldn't enter the land, the work would go forward. So maybe you resonate with Moses this morning, coming to his end.

[18 : 37] Maybe that's what grabs your attention as you read this passage, and there's wisdom there for all of us. But on the other hand, maybe you don't feel a whole lot like Moses. Maybe you feel a bit more like Joshua in the prime of your life, ready to make a beginning, ready to take on the mission that God has for you, ready to charge forth trusting that God will be with you.

But of course, Joshua wasn't always brimming with confidence, was he? Back in chapter 31 of Deuteronomy, God tells Joshua over and over and over, be strong and courageous.

I will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed. And again, in Joshua chapter 1, the Lord has the same message for him. Be strong and courageous. Don't be frightened. Don't be dismayed.

The Lord your God is with you. Now, friends, God wouldn't keep telling Joshua that over and over and over again unless he needed to hear it, right? He was frightened and he was dismayed.

And he was anxious at the responsibility about to be placed on his soldiers. And he was worried whether he could actually do what God was asking him to do.

[19 : 54] Is that you today? Maybe it's not facing death like Moses that you're worried about. Maybe it's facing life. Facing your new beginning like Joshua.

Maybe you're asking, do I have what it takes? Do I have what it takes to be a godly parent and raise my kids to know and love the Lord?

Do I have what it takes to impact my campus for Christ and make him my life? Do I have what it takes to enter my field and display the character of Christ?

To enter the world of medicine or law or business or the arts and to be salt and light and project a vision of human flourishing that only the gospel can produce? Do you have what it takes?

Well, the answer is that in ourselves, we don't have what it takes. We don't have what it takes out of our own resources.

[21 : 01] But you see, in the Lord, we do. And you see, that brings us to the third character in this story.

Because you see, at the end of the day, we're not really Moses in this story, and we're not really Joshua. At the end of this chapter, we're all put in the place of the people.

Verses 10 through 12 are both a word of praise for Moses, but also a word of longing from the inspired editor of the book. There's been none like him, we're told.

None like him in all the signs and wonders Moses performed, yes, but more importantly, none like him in his intimate relationship with God. The phrase face-to-face is a Hebrew idiom.

It's an expression, and it means the intimacy of friendship. In Exodus 33, 11, we're told the Lord used to speak to Moses face-to-face as a man speaks with a friend.

[22 : 07] And now Deuteronomy 34 tells us there's not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face-to-face.

We don't know precisely when these words were written. They presuppose that some time has passed since the death of Moses. Perhaps it's someone writing from the perspective of actually living in the land, having experienced the fulfillment of God's promise to settle them there.

And here they were, God's people, in God's land, under God's rule, but still that longing, that longing for another prophet, that is, for one who would bring the words of God to the people of God, for one who would usher in a more intimate knowledge and relationship with him.

You know, it was Moses himself who spoke of this promise in Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy 18, if you turn there and look at verse 15 of that chapter, Moses says, the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you.

To him you should listen. And of course, God raised up a number of prophets in Israel's history. And many of them were similar to Moses in many, many ways.

[23 : 37] But none of them could say that they were truly like Moses. None whom the Lord knew face to face as a man speaks with a friend.

And of course, the people longed for God to send such a one. And don't you long for it too?

That God would send someone who knew him so intimately that just to be near that person would be to catch something of God himself. To hear God's words spoken with such clarity and insight that your heart would burn with a love of God, with a passion for God.

That God would send someone as we stand like Joshua at the beginning of our life, fearful and anxious, who could guide us through the complexities of the world that we live in.

That God would send someone as we stand like Moses at the end of our days, pensive and fighting regrets, who could assure us that God is in loving control of our living and our dying and all the moments in between.

[24 : 54] It wasn't just the people of Deuteronomy who longed for a prophet like Moses. It's a very heart cry of our humanity, is it not? It was just the people of Deuteronomy who longed for a prophet like Moses.

And even more, to be known by him.

Look at verse 10 closely. It wasn't just that Moses knew the Lord, but that the Lord knew him. that's why we were created after all to know God and to love him and more to be known by him face to face as a man speaks with a friend if we're true with ourselves that's your heart's deepest longing and it is mine and you see Deuteronomy 34 isn't the end of this story see the good news is this friends that the prophet like Moses has come and our longing can finally be fulfilled and this one who's come isn't just like Moses but he surpasses Moses John's prologue puts it like this no one has ever seen God but the only God who's at the father's side the only begotten son he has made him known

Jesus Christ knew the father intimately from all eternity face to face and he has come to make him known John is telling us that Jesus is the new and the better Moses read the gospel of John you'll see it there at every turn Moses gave the people manna in the wilderness Jesus fed the people and said I'm the bread of life and Moses lifted up the bronze serpent to heal the people and Jesus said I'll be lifted up and I'll give you eternal life Moses led the great exodus out of Egypt but on the mount of transfiguration there is Jesus in all of his glory with Moses and Elijah and what are they speaking of?

they're speaking of the exodus that Jesus will bring about the greater liberation from sin and death through his death on the cross you see Moses spoke the words of God but Jesus is the very word of God and the word became flesh we're told and dwelt among us and we've seen his glory glory as the only son of the father full of grace and truth and with the one greater than Moses comes a new covenant a new relationship greater than the old John continues for the law was given through Moses grace and truth came through Jesus Christ and that's not to downplay Moses Hebrews 3 that Matt read for us when we started tells us that Moses was faithful over all God's house as a servant but Jesus is faithful over God's house as a son Moses is worthy of glory he was God's servant but how much more worthy is Jesus

[28 : 16] God's own son come to us friends you see at the end of the day Moses disobeyed God and died and he needed a successor Joshua to bring the people home but how much greater is Jesus who perfectly obeyed God and so rose from the grave needing no one to be his successor and you see his obedience is not just sufficient to free his own life from the grave but it's sufficient to free all of those who will trust in him so you see we can all know God face to face again John tells us in the gospel to those who did receive him who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God you see friends because Christ has come we can be known not just as friends but as daughters and as sons in Christ you're not just his servant but his child you know him but more importantly you are known by him we were longing for a prophet and God gave us his own son no other religion knows such a thing and because the son of God came friends

God can truly know you he took on flesh to know you and he went to the cross to know you and the risen Lord stands right now beckoning you to come and to be known and the application is this if

you know that he knows you then whether you're at the beginning or the end you have what your heart needs you see if you know that he knows you then you'll have real comfort to face your end no matter what disappointments you may face and if you know that he knows you then you have the courage to face your beginning no matter what challenges may come the question before us this morning is do you know him or are you like the writer of Deuteronomy 34 still longing and looking for the one to come he has come friends so come and be known would you pray with me Lord as we lift up our hearts in prayer to you this morning Lord we acknowledge that we come from many different places this morning God some of us feeling very near to you and some of us feeling very far God some of us enjoying the fact that we are your children and known by you and walking in daily fellowship with you and others God feeling estranged and separated Lord I pray for those who are feeling far off that you would reveal your son to them God grant them true repentance and faith Jesus would you speak to them right now from your heavenly throne and beckon them to come and trust to you to call out to you the living Lord and so be known Lord and for those of us for whom these truths are real and active and vibrant God would you light them more and more in our hearts would we be turning to Christ at every turn of our lives beginning and end and every spot in between so to hear your words and to know your will and to walk with you Lord we pray all this in Christ's name Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen