

## Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Some have suggested that part of the punishment which will be inflicted upon those who perish is that, although the saints in heaven will not be aware of those who are in hell, or even that there is a place called hell, those in hell will be able to see the unending joy and bliss of those who are in heaven. Kind of like a one-way mirror. In Jesus' parable, the Rich Man could see Lazarus in heaven, and his suffering was intensified by seeing how Lazarus was being comforted. We will leave these things to God and not concern ourselves with them. And the fact that I mention it at all is because it looks to us as though Moses is treated this way on top of Mt. Nebo.

The man is 120 years old. The last forty years of his life he has served the Lord by leading a bunch of wayward sheep--the Children of Israel--through the wilderness to the Promised Land of Canaan. The journey began with Moses opposing Pharaoh to his face in Egypt. He threatened him with plagues, and they came, ten in all. He led the people of God through the Red Sea, Pharaoh's army being destroyed in the process. He climbed Mt. Sinai and brought God's Commandments down for them and for us. Through him, God brought water out of a rock on numerous occasions. He prayed for food, and God provided manna for the people. And throughout these forty years Moses endured complaints, hostility, and rebellion. He was scorned and mocked. He reached his breaking point many times.

But now as Moses stands on top of Mt. Nebo, after four decades of struggles, the view is breathtaking. Before him lies the Promised Land. They've made it! They've arrived. The valleys and hills, the farmlands and forests spread out before his eyes, and his eyes are surely filled with tears...like a marathon runner about to take his final step to cross the finish line. And then God says, *"This is the land that I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there."*

And we ask, "Why not?" If anyone deserved to enter the Promised Land, it was Moses. Yet, of all the people in that vast company, Moses is the only one who will not enter. "Why not?" we ask. Because of his act of disobedience. Back up some years and many miles and we see Moses praying to the Lord on behalf of the people. There was no water and the people were thirsty. God commanded Moses to speak to a rock, but Moses disobeyed. He struck the rock with his staff instead, as he had years earlier, and water did come out, but God told him that because he disobeyed by striking the rock and not speaking to it, he would not enter the Promised Land. Really? Yes, really!

We would do well to pay attention to this, for our sinful hearts reject it completely. We weigh in the balance all the great and wonderful things Moses did for God, just as we weigh our own. And we have a hard time swallowing the truth that one act of disobedience, compared to all the great acts he did, kept Moses out of the Promised Land. Because we are not as great as Moses...not even close. And we can count up many acts of disobedience that we have done. But if one sinful act kept Moses out, what chance do we have?

We may cry, "Foul!" and say God is unfair, but even we know better. A man who robs only one bank in his entire life is pronounced guilty and put in jail. The husband who cheats on his wife just once is an adulterer and may ruin his marriage. The Christian who willfully despises preaching and God's Word even for one Sunday says, "No!" to Jesus and puts his faith in jeopardy. How dare we make light of our sins! How dare we compare ourselves to others! How dare we think that our good outweighs our bad! No one is able to enter the Promised Land; not Moses, not us, not anyone.

And yet he is there in the Promised Land. We see Moses, with Elijah, standing on the Mt. of Transfiguration with Jesus as Peter, James, and John look on. Moses, it says, and Elijah are there in glory--the glory reserved for the saints of God in heaven. So he did make it! His body died on Mt. Nebo, but Moses did make it into the Promised Land. How? Look again at the Transfiguration Gospel. He was standing in glory "with Jesus." That's how he got in. He got in with Jesus. Without Jesus, no one gets in. No one deserves to enter the Promised Land, and so no one will enter unless they come in with Jesus.

That's why Moses could not lead the people of God anymore. He led them for forty years. He led them to the brink of the Promised Land. But he could not lead them in. No one gets in apart from Jesus. And so our text tells us that after Moses died, Joshua took over. Joshua is the one God chose to replace Moses. Joshua is the one who led the Children of Israel into the Promised Land. Friends, Joshua is a Hebrew name. In the Greek language the name Joshua becomes the name Jesus. Joshua in Greek is Jesus. This is no coincidence. It had to be Joshua. No Paul, or Tim, or Steve, or Bill, or Randall could do it. The only man who could lead God's people in was the man with the name of Joshua.

Friends, Moses died on Mt. Nebo, but because Jesus died on Mt. Calvary, He is your Joshua who leads you into the Promised Land. Your bad far outweighs your good, as does mine. But Jesus tips the scales for you. His good He did for you. He took your bad, all of it, and He suffered and died. Every act of disobedience against your spouse, against your children, against your parents, against your neighbor, against your God is forgiven. This forgiveness is placed into the water of your baptism. This forgiveness is given with Jesus' body and blood in the Sacrament. This forgiveness is declared to you in the words of Absolution. Hearing and believing the words of this sermon, God is doing for you what His words declare--forgiving your sins for the sake of Jesus. This is how you enter the Promised Land. You enter with Jesus. You enter with His holy blood cleansing your sins. You enter with His name, and no other, on your lips.

According to the Law, Moses' sin kept him out of the Promised Land. But he was a repentant sinner; a sinner who looked not to all the great acts he did, but to the Savior who was coming. From the top of Mt. Nebo Moses could see the place, the hill, where Jesus would one day be stood up on a cross. That's why Moses could die in peace. That's why he could shed tears of joy looking out over the Promised Land. He would enter that land. He would enter with Jesus.

I do not know where you are at in your life. Some of you may still be wandering at some point in your forty years. Some of you may be climbing your Mt. Nebo. Some of you may already be at the top looking out. For you, death may be a few heartbeats away. It's not important where we are in the journey, but it is important that we realize our Mt. Nebo is coming, maybe sooner than we think. Do not fear. Your Joshua is here. He is the One God has chosen to lead you into the Promised Land. Do not despair over the sins in your past. Do not worry about all your acts of disobedience. Live in repentance, in sorrow over your sins, because your Joshua, Jesus Christ, is here with forgiveness for you. As He carried Moses into the Promised Land, as He led His people in--all the saints who await the glory that will be theirs--so He will lead you in as well. Stay close to Him. Listen to His words. Receive His Sacrament often. Come to hear His Passion Story through Lent. Through all these things you become, like Moses, one who enters the Promised Land with Jesus. Amen.