

THE SONG OF MOSES

Deuteronomy 31:1-34:12

Key Verses: 32:46,47

... he said to them, "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess."

There is a saying, "All is well that ends well." The end of a person's life is important. In his early life, Solomon impressed many people with his wisdom and humility. Even God was impressed. But his ending wasn't so good. Today's passage tells us how the life of Moses ended. Moses was a great leader. His life of humble faith and obedience was beautiful. And his ending was even more beautiful. He blessed and encouraged Israel to follow the one true God. He also gave them stern warnings against idolatry. Most of all, he reminded them how the Lord God is faithful. May the Lord grant us his words as we study this passage!

I. ENCOURAGEMENTS AND WARNINGS (31:1-30)

Moses had led the Israelites through the wilderness for 40 years. Now they were about to enter the Promised Land. God already helped them to defeat two strong enemies, Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites. Moses himself was not allowed to cross the Jordan. No doubt he was disappointed. He wanted to see the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey. But he knew that his people needed a new leader, as he was 120 years old. Standing before his people in Moab, Moses delivered an impassioned message of encouragements and warnings. He said in verse 6: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." Moses knew that conquering Canaan would be humanly impossible for the Israel who had no trained army. So he pounded on them that they should trust in God the Almighty. He also summoned their new leader Joshua and said, "Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance. The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (7-8).

"The Lord will go with you." "The Lord will be with you." There is no better assuring promise than this. Life is uncertain. It is scary sometimes. This is true not only for those who graduate from college, but those who try to live by faith in this unbelieving world. We worry about how our children will fair with their lives. We worry about our health. We worry about M. Pauline Hwang's driving everyday given her life-threatening accident earlier. No amount of insurance policies can protect us. But we have a promise from God. The Lord will be with us. "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him,

graciously give us all things? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Ro 8:31-37).

Moses encouraged his people not to be afraid because the Lord would be with them. That was not all. Moses wrote down the law and gave it to the Levitical priests, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel (9). Then he commanded them: “At the end of every seven years, ..., you shall read this law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law” (11-12).

Why did Moses write down the law of God and tell his people to read it publicly? Why did he tell them to follow carefully all the words of the law? It was because Moses was deeply concerned that once in the Promised Land, they would abandon their faith in God. In fact, this was the concern the Lord God had for them. The Lord said to Moses: “You are going to rest with your ancestors, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them. And in that day I will become angry with them and forsake them; I will hide my face from them, and they will be destroyed. Many disasters and calamities will come on them, and in that day they will ask, ‘Have not these disasters come on us because our God is not with us?’ And I will certainly hide my face in that day because of all their wickedness in turning to other gods” (16-18).

God would punish his people for their spiritual prostitution in the Promised Land. Many disasters and calamities would come on them. God would send “wasting famine against them, consuming pestilence and deadly plague” (32:24). It would be horrible. But I think the most severe punishment of God would be something else. God said, “I will hide my face from them.” He said this three times (17-18; 32:20). You may ask, “What’s so terrible about that?” It is the most severe punishment because it means that your relationship with God is broken. When Adam and Even sinned, the first thing they did was to hide from God. Their relationship with God was broken. During the Passion Week, our Lord Jesus endured unspeakable suffering and humiliation. They spit on him; they beat him; they hammered huge nails through his hands and feet. But all the while, Jesus did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth (Isa 53:7). But at the moment he was separated from God because of our sins placed on his shoulders, he cried out in a loud voice: “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) (Mk 15:34) This was the most painful moment for our Lord.

Do you feel that God’s face is hidden from you? Or are you hiding from God? Is your personal relationship with him not what it should be? Then you should feel the pain that our Lord Jesus felt on the cross. Do not be satisfied just because you attend church every week and do some service for the Lord. Yes, we should live a Christian life doing some basic things such as Bible study, prayer, worship, and caring for one another.

But if you do not have a genuine personal relationship with God, they do not mean much. Do you remember what Jesus said after he told us to make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many people will try to enter heaven and will not be able to? (Lk 13:24). Some people will stand outside the door and ask God to open it, saying, "We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets." But he will reply, "I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!" (Lk 13:27) The kingdom of God is open to only those who repent their sins and have a genuine relationship with our Lord Jesus.

What did God tell Moses to do to help the Israelites? He told Moses to write a song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it (19). It was a song about Israel's spiritual prostitution in the Promised Land and the consequences. Why did God tell Moses to write a song to teach them? Let me ask you, how did you learn the alphabet when you were little? By singing the ABC song? We can learn and remember things by singing a song. God really wanted his people to learn and remember his words by singing a song.

So Moses wrote down the entire law in a book, the words of God from beginning to end. He gave the book to the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and said: "Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant" (24-26). He told the people, "I know that after my death you are sure to become utterly corrupt and to turn from the way I have commanded you. In days to come, disaster will fall on you because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord and arouse his anger by what your hands have made" (29). Then Moses recited the words of the song he wrote from beginning to end in the hearing of the whole assembly of Israel. It was a long song (43 verses). But the 120 year old servant of God recited it word for word. Let us think about the content of the song.

II. THE SONG OF MOSES (32:1-47)

Moses wrote three songs in his life--one after the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 15), one in Psalm 90, and the song in this passage. The purpose of this song was to remind his people of God's faithfulness and to warn their future spiritual prostitution in the Promised Land. The song had both a prophetic purpose (about Israel's idolatry in Canaan) and a didactic purpose to teach them the faithfulness of God and the consequences of sin. When many calamities came on them because of their idolatry in the Promised Land, this song would testify against them (31:19,21).

Moses begins the song with a call to listen, as he praises the greatness and faithfulness of God. "Listen, you heavens, and I will speak; hear, you earth, the words of my mouth.... I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh, praise the greatness of our God!" (1,3) Then he quickly rebukes his people for their spiritual prostitution: "Is this the way you repay the Lord, you foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?" (6) Then Moses reminds his people how God led them faithfully out of their slavery in Egypt, through their wanderings in the wilderness, and finally to the Promised Land (7-14). Among all the nations of the earth, he chose them to

belong to him. He shielded them in the desert and there he gave them "eagle-wings" training (Ex 19:4), so that they might overcome their earth-bound slave mentality and learn to soar like eagles (11). He called them "Jeshurun," his pet name for Israel, which means "the upright one." He loved them as the apple of his eye (10).

Unfortunately, once they were in the land flowing with milk and honey, his people would forget the Lord and turn to foreign gods, provoking God's wrath and judgment upon them (15-31). God would use the Gentiles as tools to punish his people to repent. God's punishment is redemptive. Then he would punish the Gentiles more severely, because they would become arrogant, not knowing that God was using them as his instruments in punishing his people for his purpose. Above all, God would show his compassion on his people (32-42). Moses ends the song with a joyful note in verse 43: "Rejoice, you nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people." This is a promise that God would restore them as he would make atonement for his land and people. This is a significant promise, because the atonement for God's people is none other than the sacrifice of God's own Son, Jesus Christ (Col 1:20). We learn that our God punishes his own people so that they will repent and be healed. God wounds so that he may heal; he puts to death so that he may bring to life (39).

A major theme of the song is God's faithfulness. He is called "the Rock" five times in the song (4,15,18,30,31). Moses sang in verses 3-4: "I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he." He rebuked his people in verse 15: "Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; filled with food, they became heavy and sleek. They abandoned the God who made them and rejected the Rock their Savior." Our God is the Rock of salvation. He is always there for us. He is faithful. But after entering the Promised Land, the Israelites abandoned the Rock. They turned their hearts to worthless idols who were not dependable at all. Moses rebuked them in verses 30-31: "How could one man chase a thousand, or two put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock had sold them, unless the Lord had given them up? For their rock is not like our Rock, as even our enemies concede." It is foolish to turn to idols of this world, because the rocks of this world are not like our Rock. A man named Millard Fuller (1935-2009) became a self-made millionaire by age 29. He was a successful lawyer and businessman. His joy in life was to count his money at the end of each day. He was so much into money that he neglected his wife and family. One day, his wife Linda declared that she could no longer remain married to a man who was addicted to money. Faced with a crisis in family, Fuller came to his senses and decided to use his money for the poor and dedicate his life to the Lord. He and his family went to Congo as missionaries for five years. There they started a movement to build houses for the poor. This became a well-known movement today—it is called the Habitat for Humanity. By 2013, the organization built more than 800,000 houses around the world. Money had been Fuller's idol. But his life was changed when he met the true Rock. Thank God for being our Rock. Even as God's people are unfaithful, trusting idol gods, God remains their steadfast, unchanging source of salvation.

III. THE DEATH OF MOSES (32:48-34:12)

After Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel along with Joshua, he said to the people “Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess” (46-47). God’s words are no joke. God’s words are not just idle words for us. They are our life! Those who know God personally respect deeply the words of God. In fact, they see the face of God by coming to his words and obey them. They bear fruit of the Spirit by accepting God’s words and repenting their sins very practically. On the other hand, to those who do not really know God, his words are not much more than what they read on newspapers or hear on TV. They hear the words of God but bear no fruit in their lives. The word of God for them is like a seed sown on a rocky field, because of their casual attitude. Let us pray earnestly that each of us may take to our hearts the words of God we hear. They are not just idle words for us. They are our life!

On that day, God told Moses to go up to Mount Lebo in Moab to see the Promised Land from a distance, because he would not enter land himself (50-52). Moses' task was finished. It was time for him to go God. But he had one last thing to do—to bless his people. In Deuteronomy 33, Moses shared his vision in God who loved his people and who had escorted them through the desert with his angels. His shepherd's love was poured out in his blessings; he prayed for them, mentioning specific strength of each tribe. (Simeon is missing as his tribe became part of Judah's. He especially remembered how the Levites had defended God's honor at Sinai, even standing against their own loved ones (Ex 32)). In verses 26-29, he reminds them that belonging to God is the only real security in this world or the next. There is no one like God and no people like his people.

Moses died on Mount Nebo after looking over the Promised Land (34:1-5). The people grieved for Moses, for he was their shepherd and they loved him. But his death was not sad. He never became a weak, senile old man. Even though he was 120 years old, his eyes were not weak, nor was his strength gone. When he died, the Lord himself buried him. It was an unmarked grave, perhaps because God didn't want his people to make it a monument for tourists, as people often do today for much lessor people in history. Moses left behind him Joshua, a shepherd whom he had trained and whom God had appointed to take care of God's flock. Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses (9).

Moses performed many awesome deeds and showed the mighty power of God through his life. But the greatest thing about him was that the Lord knew him face to face (10). He had a personal relationship with God. He knew the heart of God and obeyed the word of God to the end. May the Lord raise up many servants among us who know the heart of God!