

Read Deuteronomy 34:1-12.

A couple weeks ago, we looked at the story of Moses as a baby, and now we've jumped straight to his death, which may seem a bit strange.

But when I was thinking about the character of Moses, and all the ways that God used him and spoke through him, not to mention the fact that he's one of the few Old Testament characters that gets mentioned multiple times in the New Testament, he's got quite a legacy.

And there's no greater place to look for the impact of one's legacy than at their death. When it's all been said and done, what mattered most to Moses? What was his life defined by? What do people remember?

In what ways—throughout his life—did he point to the future Messiah?

And that's not to say that Moses was perfect. In fact, Scripture makes it very clear to us that Moses was far from it—just in case we fall into any illusions that Moses was some kind of sinless, angelic figure who can be put on the same pedestal as Jesus Himself.

That was actually the temptation of the early disciples, of course, so see Jesus as the prophet that Moses said would come after him. Moses has come back. Our deliverer has come. He'll lead us into the 'promised land' again. He'll win the kingdom back for us.

And so God, I think, was very intentionally about inspiring the biblical writers to make it very clear that Moses was far from perfect.

We know this from the situation early in Exodus of Moses killing an Egyptian. But even more so, twice near the end of the Book of Deuteronomy we are told that Moses is not allowed to enter into the promised land. That's a big deal.

Imagine being the person through whom God speaks to Pharaoh, who God uses to lead a whole people out of their life of slavery, who God uses to defy the laws of nature and part the Red Sea, who God uses over and over and over to speak to His people, to mediate between God and the people, to keep pointing the people back to the holiness of God.

And then to be told, after one mistake, that you can't even enter the land that you've spent decades of your life leading this ornery people towards, under very stressful conditions? That you're not actually allowed—even for one minute—to enjoy the reward that God promised to your ancestors and used *you* to help the people to attain?

Doesn't seem fair, does it?

But you have to notice, not once does Moses complain about it. Not once does he grumble towards God and say to Him, “How dare you?” Not once does he list before God all the good things that he did and the ways he was obedient to God to kind of defend himself.

Not once. Yes, there are these beautiful words written about him in the last few verses. No prophet has ever arisen like Moses. The Lord knew him face-to-face. The Lord sent him to do signs and wonders in Egypt. *“No one has ever shown the mighty power of performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.”*

Those are beautiful things to have written as an epitaph on your gravestone. But when you read words like that, you have to pause and think for a moment. Wait, *God* did all those things.

Moses was the stumbling, mumbling, fearful shepherd who didn’t *want* to go to Pharaoh in the first place. God had to use Aaron instead. Moses came before God *numerous* times complaining about how the people of Israel were too difficult to manage.

Moses—just like anyone—had to learn to trust in *God’s* mighty power and awesome deeds before he could confidently submit *to* them. He was filled with the spirit of wisdom because *God gave it to him*. God chose to *allow* Moses to speak with him ‘face-to-face’, in other words, in God’s actual presence.

And Moses would leave the meeting tent glowing—literally glowing. But not because God was applauding *Moses* for his efforts but because God had *chosen* Moses to be the one person in Israel who could relay the holiness of God to the rest of the people.

They *had* to learn that this God was *holy*. And Moses was God’s gateway for communicating this.

What, then, is Moses’ footprint? The impression that he left behind? The legacy? Not that *he* accomplished anything, but that *God* accomplished much *through* him.

Which must mean, then, that Moses possessed a lot of what Jesus speaks about in Matthew 5, in his famous sermon on the mount, the eight beatitudes that explain what it looks like when the Kingdom of God breaks through us.

When Moses would leave from having been in God’s presence, that holy glow was the glow of God’s glory, God’s reign, His holiness and majesty, breaking through.

Only then was Moses was prepared to be a sign to the Israelites that God’s Kingdom, God’s authority and power were the key to their flourishing. Not by returning to Egypt, not by subsuming with any of the other major world powers.

God Himself was their King, the only king that they ever needed. That had been the message all along. And Moses stewarded that reality by sitting in the presence of God and allowing the impact of that presence to break through Him and define his leadership and lifestyle.

Which is why, when Moses places his hands on Joshua, Joshua is then filled with the spirit of wisdom and the people respect him and listen to him. Because Joshua is now mediating that same presence to the people. The role of stewarding God's holiness has been passed down.

And so what makes Moses such a captivating figure in the Old Testament, and why the people of Israel kept looking back to Moses as a primary source of wisdom, is because he submitted himself so sincerely and so humbly and so devotedly to the direction and council of God, and to the reign and rulership of God, that God's presence just gushed out of him.

Earlier on, in Numbers 12, there's a short sidenote comment written in brackets about Moses' character, and it says that *"he was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth."*

Maybe not so humble if Moses himself wrote it, but the assumption is that someone else included it in. We don't actually know for certain who wrote the book of Numbers.

Regardless, the fact that this is noted in Scripture points to the core of Moses' 'success' as a vessel for God's holiness.

Humility. It's why the Beatitudes begin by saying that the poor in spirit will inherit the kingdom of heaven. Those who demonstrate a poverty of spirit, a neediness before God, a humility before God, are those through whom God wants to demonstrate his holiness and build His Kingdom.

In other words, *you cannot demonstrate God's holiness, His presence, His Kingdom realities, His very character,* unless you possess a character of humility.

That humility is exactly why Moses never grumbled or complained to the Lord about the decision He made to bar Moses from entering into the land of Canaan. Half of his life—at least—had been spent working towards this moment. Fighting for the people. Living under stressful conditions and managing a very stubborn group of people.

But at the end of his life, to actually attain what he had worked so hard for, to taste the food and live the happy life, to actually step foot into the promised land wasn't what mattered most to Moses. The fact that he doesn't argue with God proves this.

Because for Moses, a life of living in God's presence, a life of obedience to God's plans, a life of witnessing God's power and glory, was enough. He didn't need to experience anything more. God Himself had been enough.

And I wonder, for us today, if we can say the same thing? What is the footprint that we would want to leave behind? Do we want to see the list of accomplishments and accolades written out for everyone to see?

Or maybe there's a specific characteristic or quality that you most want people to remember you by? Your generosity? Your kindness? Your welcoming spirit?

I wonder if it's ever occurred to us that maybe—as Christians—that perhaps we should hope to be known for being vessels for God's holiness? Not a morally perfect life, but one where people saw the Kingdom of God in us? That we were a part of God's chosen priesthood—descendants of our great Uncle Moses—and mediated his holiness to the people around us?

Because I'll tell you right now, God's not looking for more Messiahs. He's looking for people *through whom* He can show the world who His chosen Messiah is.

And the way to do that isn't through coercion or mistaking power and control for God's love. It's not through getting it right all the time or proving that we have it all right. It's not what Moses tried to do once and got in trouble for: taking matters into his own hands and doing God's work for Him.

That last one is probably the most tempting for us. Look at the text in Numbers 20. This is when Moses starts to get this whole being-a-vessel thing wrong.

"The LORD said to Moses, 'Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.'"

Seems simple enough. But what does Moses do? He leaves from being in the Lord's presence and takes the staff, just as the Lord commanded. So far so good.

But then he chastises the people. It's a totally different approach. *"Listen, you rebels,"* he says. *"Must we bring you water out of this rock?"* And then rather than speaking to the rock, Moses raises his arm and strikes the rock twice with his staff.

That's not what the Lord asked him to do. And it may seem like a minor difference to us, but Moses' actions here are completely antithetical to what his role was in the life of that community. He was called to mediate God's presence and whatever God desired to communicate in that moment, not do his own thing.

And so Moses is accused of not *trusting* God. And because he didn't trust God's plan, he minimized God's holiness in front of the entire Israelite population. He misrepresented Him. Moses did not trust that what God told him to do was enough.

Clearly Moses was under a lot of stress. So it's a good word of caution for us, then—that under stress is often where things go wrong and we fail to truly hear God's will and character.

Because it seems that in his frustration, Moses felt that God's holiness needed to look a certain way. To have a certain kind of impact. And it was his job to relay that.

But in doing so, Moses' words and action had the *opposite* effect. He *minimized* God's holiness rather than upholding it.

God wanted Moses to show His power with a simple word. But Moses wanted to use the old tried-and-tested method which had worked before to fix the problem.

Again, Moses was far from perfect. Like every single one of us, he's a messy individual. A mixed bag, of sorts. He was the chosen leader of Israel, but he also failed miserably.

And yet, the emphasis here at the end of Deuteronomy, at the end of Moses' life, isn't what he did wrong. Yes, we're reminded that Moses can't enter the land; but then directly after, what's actually the most profound moment in this whole text?

The Lord himself buries Moses.

Think about that. It was always the family members who would bury the dead. They would take the body, grieve over it, cover it with oil and spices, wrap it carefully, and place it in a specially marked grave or burial site so that they could visit that special site again later.

God—assumedly—does this for Moses. And so Moses' life here is not defined by what he *wasn't* able to do, or what he did wrong.

It's acknowledged that he didn't get it all right. But Moses' life is defined by the intimacy that He had with God. It was a life so deep that *God himself* ushers Moses into much greater land of promise and rest—the place where Moses spent his life tasting but never fully experiencing.

What Moses desired most, what he should be known for most, is that he hungered and thirsted—not for the milk and honey of the perfect homeland—but for the presence of His God.

His whole life was defined by this. In good times and bad, in successful times and in failure—his whole life was defined, not by what *he* did, but by what God did through him.

Is this the footprint that you seek to have? The Beatitude impact? And I'm not asking that flippantly—I really want you think about it. Because we are so driven by other pursuits and standards of success, I'm not sure that we even know sometimes what hungering for God looks like.

Last weekend, Danny and I packed up our van with the boys for a quick 24-hour trip to Rock Ridge Canyon, a Young Life facility, nestled in the mountains in Princeton. Regent College was having their yearly retreat, and since Danny's on staff, we decided last minute that it would be fun to go.

While we were there, we ended up having an inspiring conversation with a young couple whose two little boys are almost the exact same ages as our two sons. Our two youngest sons look incredibly similar, so we were taking photos of the two together and got to talking.

Turns out that this couple grew up as Jehovah's witnesses, and only recently had they converted to Christianity. The husband, Brad, had formerly been an elder in the JW church, but over time had begun to see inconsistencies with what Scripture taught and what the institution was teaching.

He explained to Danny and I that he felt like the Spirit was more-and-more giving him insight into the truth of Jesus, and soon he felt pulled—or yanked, really—to seek out a Christian church.

And unbelievably, his wife, Kelly, was perhaps a few weeks or months behind, but God was doing the same work in her. And neither of them had any connections to Christianity. They were staunch JW's. They're the kind of people who got married because they believed they could do ministry together. Just very devoted individuals.

But with everything to lose. Both sides of their families are devoted JW's, and most of them are no longer in communication with them, which is of course quite heartbreaking.

But as Kelly reminded me, "Jesus said that we might need to leave our mother and father and our families for him."

They are now completely devoted to Christ. Yet they would never say that any of it was a cause of their own doing. It was entirely the work of the Spirit. They discovered within themselves a kind of neediness before God, a hunger, a thirsting for something more.

The institution that they grew up in wasn't enough; it was incomplete; it was lacking.

What they discovered is that it is only by Christ within us—the presence of God that Moses experienced face-to-face within us, the very Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead and lives within us—only in Him can we steward the holiness of God in a world that is aching for God.

A world that, day by day it seems, is falling deeper into anxiety and despair—particularly among young people—because the government's answers to the world's problems are not enough. The cultural gods of humanism, individualism, and consumerism are not enough.

And I know that for years now, people have been saying that the church in the West is dying—and there's good reason for that, especially when you look at what God has been doing over the last couple decades in the global south.

But what we as the church here in Canada are presented with *now* is an opportunity—in the midst of the despair and anxiety—to seek and hunger after the presence of God *as our answer to the world's problems*.

To see Jesus and the holiness of His Kingdom—the glory of His Kingdom and the impact of His Kingdom—as the answer to our problems.

What would it look like to embrace the humility of Moses—or even better, the humility of Christ—and hunger for God's presence so much that the Kingdom just gushes out of you?

Is Jesus the answer? Because the difference, of course, is that Jesus is the *greater* Moses. He is everything that Moses could not be. He perfectly submitted Himself to the will of God because He is the very presence of God Himself.

That's the difference. *That's* what Brad and Kelly came to discover. That Jesus *is* the promised land. Our place of rest. Our home out of slavery.

We don't need to accomplish or achieve or create a promised land. We don't need to see the fruit of our efforts or the outcome of our labours written down or spread across the news for all to see.

All we need is the glory and holiness and presence of Jesus Christ.

Do we trust Him? Is this what matters most to us?

Can He be our legacy?