



Ruled by a Gracious God: Seeing God in Life and Death (Deuteronomy 34: 10-12)

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INTRODUCTION:

Over the last hundred years, our culture has experienced a profound change in the way information is communicated. Newspapers have given way to the television. Printed books and magazines have given way to YouTube and TikTok. Reading information has been replaced by watching information. Verbal communication has given way to visual communication.

That cultural shift presents a big challenge to Christians because our faith is Word-centered. Our Creator and Redeemer has not given us a video series. He's given us a book. Can visual media be a tremendous blessing, both for society at large and the advance of God's kingdom? Absolutely. But we must remember in an age of scrolling that we are not a people of the video screen. We are a people of the book. When you teach someone how to read Scripture you are equipping them to see God.

Wait, don't you mean you are equipping them to know God? Don't books help us to *know* things, while videos allow us to *see* things? That's true in part. But consider this. The great aim of Scripture is not to fill your head with a bunch of spiritual facts. God breathed out a book that through reading and meditating on his Word so that you might see God and behold God and be captivated by God in all his glory and beauty.

From beginning to end, the Bible is a book designed to help you see. Psalms 19:8, "The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." Psalms 119:130, "The unfolding of your words gives light." What kind of light does God's Word help us to see? 2 Corinthians 4:6, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Hebrews 12:1-2, "Therefore...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith..." It's what the Christian life is all about!

For 16 months, the Holy Spirit has been so kind to use the book of Deuteronomy to help us see. What have we seen? That our Triune God is full of grace! The Old Testament law isn't a bunch of random rules. It's a covenant document capturing God's heart for relationship with his people and what it looks like to enjoy relationship with him. Not one verse is legalistic. Not once does the Lord tell Israel to earn his love or favor through



her obedience. He graciously initiates. He graciously redeems. He rescues her from her enemies and says, “Now trust and obey me for your good and my glory.”

Deuteronomy is all about God’s authority over his people in the context of covenant relationship with his people. Hence the series title: Ruled by a Gracious God! Daniel Block’s summary is spot on: “The gospel according to Moses has been rich in grace: the gift of salvation, free and undeserved; the gift of covenant, personal and intimate; the gift of revelation, profound and unparalleled; the gift of providence, patient and loving; and the gift of a home, over the Jordan about to be delivered into their hands.”

Friend, what you choose to set before the eye of your mind is the most important choice you will make this week. Deuteronomy serves us by directing our gaze to our exceedingly gracious God. And as this precious book ends and the human author, Moses, fades from view, that is exactly what the Divine Author keeps right on doing. He urges and enables us to see what we desperately need to see.

1) SEE THE HAND OF GOD IN THE SORROW OF SIN

Verse 1 begins with an extraordinary expression of humility on Moses’ part. A little background from Deuteronomy 32:49-52 helps us recognize the magnitude of the moment. “The LORD spoke to Moses, ‘Go up this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo...And die on the mountain which you go up...because you broke faith with me in the midst of the people of Israel at the waters of Meribah-kadesh...and because you did not treat me as holy in the midst of the people of Israel. For you shall see the land before you, but you shall not go there, into the land that I am giving to the people of Israel.’”

Is Moses’ relationship with God built on grace? Yes. So why then does he still experience consequences for sin in his life? Because consequences for sin are not the opposite of grace. They are a precious expression of grace. Proverbs 3:11-12, “My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”

Experiencing the consequences of sin – whether it’s a broken relationship, a lost privilege, a financial penalty, or even time in jail – is an expression of the Lord’s gracious discipline in our lives. He’s lovingly getting your attention, friend. He’s saying, “I love you



too much to let you continue to march down this path thinking it's the path of life when in reality it leads to death."

Learning to part ways with sin hurts. It certainly did in Moses' life. He had spent the last 40 years of his life guiding Israel toward this very place. To have to die east of the Jordan, to not set foot in the land at all, must have been incredibly painful. Imagine God told you, "Because of your sin, I want you to climb this mountain and die." What would you do? I would be sorely tempted to book a one-way ticket to not-Nineveh and join the prophet Jonah. I'm not going anywhere near Mt. Nebo! Yet that's exactly what Moses did. He humbly embraced the Lord's discipline in his life even to the point of death.

Friend, how do you respond when you experience life-altering consequences of sin in your life? Do you fight? Do you "Despise" the Lord or answer the human authorities he has established with a "Weary" sigh of self-pity? Or do you humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, knowing that God's good and sovereign plan for your life will not fail to come to pass. Look at verse 5. "So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord." Did Moses sin shorten the length of his days on earth? Yes. But does that mean from the moment he disobeyed the consequences of sin began calling the shots in Moses' life? No. The Word of the Lord" remained sovereign. God's purposes for Moses' life continued to prevail!

But why should I be hopeful, Matthew, when I've made such a royal hash of things? Because where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. Look at the beginning of verse 5. Who died on Mt. Nebo? "Moses *the servant of the LORD* died there." In fact, he's described as much no less than forty times in the Old Testament! We tend to think there are two categories of Christians. There are the spotless servants of the Lord who never make big mistakes. And then there are the wash-ups who have sinned in all kinds of ways and are of no use in the kingdom of God. Friends, that's a lie! The entire book of Deuteronomy ends with Moses experiencing the painful consequences of sin. Yet he's still called "Moses the servant of the Lord." Why? Because his identity is grounded in grace no less than your own, Christian. 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? ...And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Did you notice that even as Moses is experiencing the consequences of his sin, the Lord doesn't stop caring for him? When he dies in verse 6, who buries him? The Lord does. He's granted the incredible dignity of being personally buried by God himself!



Remember, Moses didn't die because of old age. He died because of sin. Unless the Lord returns first, we too will die as a result of Adam's sin, our inherited guilt and corruption. But the next time you're tempted to assume that where the consequences of sin abound, God is not in control, you're disqualified from serving him, or he's no longer interested in drawing near to care for you, remember Moses. See the Word of God bringing the Father's discipline to pass. See the way even spectacular sin did not revoke his identity as a "Servant of the Lord." See God personally burying him, drawing near in his death no less than his life. See the hand of God in the sorrow of sin.

2) SEE THE GLORY OF HEAVEN THROUGH THE EYE OF FAITH

The divine Word that limits the measure of our days on earth is the same divine Word that holds forth the promise of eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth. Look back at verse 2. Moses obeys the Lord by climbing Nebo, literally walking to his death. But when he arrives, what does the Lord do? "And the LORD showed him all the land." From Dan in the north to the Negev in the south, from Jericho in the east toward the Mediterranean in the west, he gave Moses a visual tour of the place he had prepared for his people.

Verse 4, "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.'" Did seeing it bring Moses joy? Undoubtedly. But it was a joy alongside sorrow. "I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there."

East of Eden, being involved in God's redemptive work, as Moses was, has always brought joy and sorrow. There's joy in beholding the goodness and faithfulness of God as we join in the work he's doing all around us – introducing people to Jesus and helping one another follow him. There's also deep sorrow as we come face to face with the consequences of sin – in our own lives and those we love. Moses knew both all too well. The joys make the sorrows more bitter, and the sorrows make the joys all the sweeter. There's a real sense in which our entire lives are spent on Mt. Nebo. We're not home yet, brothers and sisters. As it was with Moses, so it is with us. As the Lord graciously let Moses see Israel's home in Canaan from afar with his physical eyes, so too we see our eternal home in heaven with the eye of faith. Listen to what Hebrews says of the generations of saints who have gone before us.

Hebrews 11:13–16, "These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were



strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.”

Friend, do you long to be home? Do you long for a better country? Do you look around at this world as a follower of Jesus and feel like a stranger, a spiritual exile? That’s good because that’s what we are. This world is not our home. America is not our home. That’s not unpatriotic. That’s biblical. Frankly, if it feels like home, something’s wrong. You should be concerned. Because God created you for more than this. He created you for himself. John 14:1–3, “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

The Bible teaches us that this world is not all there is. Here troubles multiply, trouble without and trouble within. But there, in the new heavens and the new earth Jesus will bring to pass when he returns to judge the living and dead, there will be no more trouble. There will be no more sin. Your children won’t die from cancer. Your best friend won’t betray you. You won’t keep getting sucked down into the mire of depression. You won’t speak any more words you immediately regret. Best of all, we will get to be with Jesus, the lover of our souls! How do we know that’s true? How do we know that’s not just what we want to be true? Because the God who created the world by his infallible word has promised that day is coming by the same infallible word. The glory of heaven is not a figment of the imagination of man. It is the eternal plan of God for the people of God!

And though Scripture doesn’t answer every question we may have about what life in heaven will be like, God is not silent. He has let us glimpse from afar, like Moses, of what he has prepared for those who love him. That we might take heart right here, right now, in his faithfulness, his goodness and his precious promises.

Yesterday morning, my Bible reading plan for 2024 took me to Revelation 7. It’s one of the many places in Scripture where the Lord does for us what he did for Moses – he shows us our homeland from afar. Listen to these words, my friends. This is our hope. This is what God made us for. This is your future if you will turn from sin and cling to Jesus who lived and died to bring you home to God!



Revelation 7:15–17, “Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

2 Corinthians 4:16-18, “So we do not lose heart...For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

Why am I reading so much Scripture under this point? Because we need to see! And God has graciously given us his Word to help us see the glory of heaven through the eye of faith. Do you see it, my friend? By faith, do you see it even now? Do not wait until you’re on death’s door, so to speak, to gaze homeward. Look today. Look tomorrow. Look while you’re young. Look when it feels like your life in this world is going well. Look when you know it’s not.

Are your eyes open? Are you directing your gaze to where the Father is pointing? Are you following his arm as Moses did? Are you so preoccupied with all your troubles in this life and figuring out your next move, what you’re going to do about them, that the place God has prepared for you rarely crosses your mind? A Christian who rarely contemplates the glory to come is a Christian who has rejected the very soil in which preserving faith thrives.

The idea that you can be so heavenly minded that you are no earthly good is secular rubbish. It’s those who are the most heavenly minded who do the most earthly good because they perceive what is seen in light of what is unseen. They see what is transient in light of what is eternal. They see the fading pleasures of his world as nothing compared to the radiant glory of Christ. They see that suffering isn’t something to be avoided at all costs or evidence that God cannot be who he says he is. To the contrary, it’s the very means God uses to ready our souls to receive a treasure moth and rust cannot destroy and thieves cannot break in and steal.

You will not be spiritually ready for that day, friend, if you refuse to look to the things that are unseen! But how do I do that, Matthew? How do I look at something I can’t



see? It's not a contradiction. It's a paradox. When we respond to what God has told us about heaven with humble faith, taking God at his Word, the Spirit enables us to perceive from afar what we have yet to experience first-hand. What do we most need to see? That on that day, and from that day forward, "We will always be with the Lord.

3) SEE THE SAVIOR WHO IS BETTER THAN THE BEST OF MEN

Israel was right to weep in verse 8 when Moses died. When confronted with the sorrow of death, Jesus too wept bitterly. If you live long enough, friend, you too will experience the sorrow of losing many whom you love to the darkness of the grave no less than Israel lost Moses. But God didn't stop caring for Moses when he died. His appearance on the mount of transfiguration with Jesus in Luke 9 reminds us Moses made it safely home. Nor did God stop caring for his people Israel.

Notice the point of continuity in verse 9 as the mantle of leadership transitions to Joshua. What set Joshua apart? He was "Full of the spirit of wisdom." He received it from Moses, who first received it from God. Moses died, but the Holy Spirit hadn't gone anywhere. The covenant-making, covenant-keeping Lord who led, fed, protected, and cared for Israel through Moses wasn't about to stop!

Verses 9-10 reinforce a delightfully God-centered perspective on leadership in the church today. Notice the people didn't follow Joshua's lead because he was their type, or they were best friends. It wasn't because they liked what Joshua brought to the table. It was because they recognized the Spirit of God was at work in him and through him. He was the man God had appointed to lead them, no less than he appointed Moses. God's work in and through Joshua was the ultimate reason they submitted to Joshua.

Their view and response to spiritual authority wasn't man centered. It was God-centered. We need to have the same humility in our response to spiritual leaders today, especially in an anti-authoritarian age, which truth be told, is not really anti-authority. It's simply anti any authority other than me!

Deuteronomy 34:9 calls you down a better path. To the degree the spiritual leaders God has placed in your life are urging you to do "As the LORD had commanded Moses," to order your life in keeping with God's priorities and purposes, you should humbly and cheerfully follow them. Not because you trust them, but because you trust the Lord who is at work through them, sins and weaknesses included!



In every season of life, it's not ultimately a human leader we most need. Is a faithful pastor a gift from God? Yes. Moses certainly was. And he was more than a pastor! He was a "Prophet" (verse 10) who delivered the Word of God himself to his people. He knew the Lord "Face to face." He performed all kinds of miraculous "Signs and wonders" when he led Israel out of slavery in Egypt. Think of the ten plagues! He displayed God's power and glory through acts of "Mighty power" and "Great deeds of terror." Think parting the waters of the Red Sea! In the annals of the Old Testament, it doesn't get much better than Moses as far as human leaders are concerned.

But Moses himself knew Israel needed more than he could provide. Deuteronomy 18:15, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – it is to him you shall listen." Moses was the best of prophets. Yet, even he knew there was another prophet yet to come, one who could mediate between a holy God and sinful man, One who would speak God's Word on God's behalf.

Indeed, that is exactly what happened centuries later when the Word of God Moses imparted. The Word to which the rest of the Old Testament prophets bore witness. The Word in which the glory of the Eternal God is clearly and fully and decisively revealed for all to see, that Word, the Word, became flesh. Hebrews 3:5–6, "Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son."

When the editor of Deuteronomy wrote verse 10, God's people were still waiting. "And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses." Brothers and sisters, because of Jesus, the wait is over!

Did Moses enjoy an intimate relationship with God? Jesus knows him far better. John 10:15, "The Father knows me and I know the Father." Why? Because Jesus is God! John 10:30. Because "I and the Father are one." Did Moses triumph over Pharaoh and all his hosts? The "Mighty works and wonders and signs" Jesus performed (Acts 2:22) are far better. He triumphed over sin and Satan and death! Did Moses exalt God's power and authority in the sight of his people? What Jesus did is far better.

Philippians 2:8–11, "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."



We are so prone to place our hope and trust and confidence in what other people are doing or not doing. What my spouse is doing, what my boss is doing, what your friend or coach or parents are doing. Think of how many times Israel grumbled and complained to Moses when what she really needed to do was look to the Lord and trust in the Lord! If you find yourself frequently dissatisfied with the people around you, check your heart. There's a good chance you're looking to them to do for you what only Jesus can do for you.

We need to fix our eyes on the Savior who is better than the best of men. When you wake up tomorrow morning, there's one person you need to see through eyes of faith before you see anyone else. You need to see Jesus. If you like me struggle to do that, to see Jesus as glorious, stop by the book shop this morning and pick up John Piper's short book, "Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ." He does a fantastic job explaining specific passages of Scripture that highlight the beauty of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Friends, God gave us his Word to help us to see. It's what the Spirit has done week after week in our study of Deuteronomy. It is a gift of grace to see the hand of God in the sorrow of sin. It is a gift of grace to see the glory of heaven through the eye of faith. But the greatest gift of grace is to see the Savior who is better than the best of men.

Apart from him, we would have no hope in the sorrow of sin. Apart from him, we would have no assurance of reaching the glory of heaven. Apart from him, we would read a book like Deuteronomy and have every reason to conclude, "Lord, my feeble trust, my faltering obedience, falls so short of what you deserve. How can I ever know the joy of living as your people, in your place, under your rule?"

In his life and death, Jesus has done what Israel and Moses himself failed to do. He kept God's law perfectly. His trust was unwavering. His obedience was spotless. He did it all on your behalf, friend. He is the True Israel. And he invites you into a relationship with himself where you find life in being ruled by a gracious God. Don't try to do better or be better. Look to Jesus. Trust in Jesus. For he alone can bring you safely home.