

- What Was Denied Moses...

Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Hebrews 12:18-24

Sunday, October 29, 2023 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction: Frustration and fulfillment

I wept when I saw Jerusalem for the first time. What are some things that you have yearned to see for your whole life?

It takes roughly one hour to drive from Jericho to Jerusalem, and the drive is mostly uphill the whole way. As we came close to the crest of the mountain, the tour guide, per instructions, played "Jerusalem" on the sound system, so we got our first view of the city just as the song reached its chorus. Everyone was in tears. It was so ridiculously manipulative that the tour guide was embarrassed and asked me later why the song had such an effect on us. I replied that the song was nice, but what was important was our chance to see the city for the first time. Many of us had waited our whole lives to see Jerusalem in person. It was a moment to remember.

- Set the stage

Moses saw the promised land but was denied entry.

It would have been a very bittersweet moment to remember when Moses said farewell to the people of Israel and started climbing the mountain. Once he got to the top of the Pisgah mountain range, opposite of Jericho, God showed him the Promised Land, from north to south, and west all the way to the Mediterranean Sea, but Moses was not allowed to go there. He died in those mountains, and God buried him there in a grave that remains missing to this day. But the Promised Land that was denied Moses is but the earthly counterpart to Heaven, and that, I'm sure, was not denied to Moses.

In Christ we have already come to the final promised land (where we find Moses) It is that Heavenly Promised Land that Hebrews depicts with such beauty in chapter twelve, contrasting it with the scary experience of receiving the Law on Mt. Sinai. It is a city on a hill, with more angels that we could count, filled with the spirits of the just made perfect, to God the Judge of all and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks of better things than Abel. Abel was the first murder victim in the Bible, whose blood cried out to God for justice after he was killed by his brother, Cain. We are, according to Scripture, already there in a sense. It is so certain in Christ that it is counted as already done, and I think there is something even more than that, that somehow, we are already in contact with this Promised Land, we just can't see it yet. And the Mediator made all the difference. Moses was the Mediator of the Old Covenant, and as great as he is, he's still Moses. Here in Hebrews, we find that the difference here is that our Mediator is Christ, and with this we reach that hear of our sermon this morning.

- The difference is Jesus as Mediator

One who belongs in both realms.

The word here translated "mediator" is found in the New Testament six times; once in Galatians, in 1 Timothy and four times in Hebrews. Its root meaning is of someone who is in the middle, or who manages to bring together two sides, or two realms that otherwise would not come together. In Christian theology He is God, the Son, who is Creator and Judge, who (according to Matthew 28) has all authority in heaven and on earth, and yet has joined the human race. There is no perfect analogy for this. I once read of Peter the Great, emperor of all Russia, who spent several

years in England, without any pomp or entourage, but as a common laborer in the docks because he wanted to learn how to properly build a ship. But that is an imperfect example. This one may be a little better. " David Brooks writes in *The New York Times*: 'Rabbi Elliot Kukla once described a woman with a brain injury who would sometimes fall to the floor. People around her would rush to immediately get her back on her feet before she was quite ready. She told Kukla, "I think people rush to help me up because they are so uncomfortable with seeing an adult lying on the floor. But what I really need is for someone to get down on the ground with me." We all need someone to get down on the ground with us. This is what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.'"

- How this touches our vision: belonging

The application is that it touches our vision as a church valuing belonging as extremely important. The Promised Land, not the one denied to Moses, but the one offered to us in Christ, is eternal whereas everything else is temporary. In Christ we belong to a community that has a home promised to us by God. Some Christians face rejection and hostility and may feel that they belong nowhere else, but He has provided for us a place to belong together. It is worth everything.

Conclusion

The life of Moses has a bittersweet ending as he sees the earthly Promised Land from afar but is denied entry. But the Promised Land that is eternal, that was not denied him, and Christ provides that wonderful place now, making us always a people of belonging, even those who never felt that they belonged anywhere else.

Brooks, David. *The New York Times* Rabbi Elliot Kukla