

Message: The Final Shift
By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison
Deuteronomy 34
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We see the sorrow and grief of the Israelites after the greatest man in the Old Testament died. Moses lived to be 120 but still did not get to do everything he wanted. Ecclesiastes describes the inevitability of death. The limited revelation in the Old Testament makes me grateful for the opportunity to tell people that even when this life is over, it is NOT over. We are Easter people. Our earthbound exit is transformed into a heavenly entrance.

Eugene O’Kelly was the CEO of the huge accounting firm, KPMG. He had the world by the tail. In his book, “Chasing Daylight,” he wrote, *“I was blessed. I was told I had three months to live.”* What an odd statement. O’Kelly was 53 years old when diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. He described how he would face his final shift – death.

It’s painful to realize a person who is so important in our lives can be gone in a second. Yet, we ALL die. No one here gets out alive. I recently saw my life expectancy is 19 ½ years. I plan to beat that. However, the end is relatively near for all of us. We never know. James 4:14 is correct, *“Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.”* We all want to live long & healthy lives, but what happens beyond this life? Many prefer not to think about it. Let’s read about the tremendous gift God has given us – eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

APPLICATION: Look at how the Israelites remembered Moses. Consider how he handed off leadership to Joshua. We grieve when significant people leave us. We also know our day will come. If you knew you would die in three months, what would you do? How do you want to be remembered? Are you building that legacy today? The end of one thing means the start of something else. Let’s try to end well, remember well and be courageous in our new beginnings.

Intro: The 5th & final book of “The Pentateuch.” “Penta” = “five” in Greek. “Teuch” = “book” so this is referred to as “The Books of Moses.” No one knows who wrote the first 5 books. My assumption is Moses did not write Deuteronomy 34 ☺ (it describes his death and the 30 days of mourning).

This text breaks down into 2 distinct parts: Gratitude, memory (Moses) & Optimism, hope (Joshua). The twilight is setting on Moses, but the sun is rising for Joshua.

Since 11/12 verses are about Moses & this is Memorial Day weekend, we'll talk about Moses today.

Moses was NOT perfect. A murderer. A fugitive. He also lost his nerve & tried to shirk the call of God – but God wouldn't let him off the hook. He led the Israelites out of Egypt; received the moral, civil & ceremonial Law; instituted worship; developed the priesthood; led them to the verge of the Promised Land. Most think Moses was the greatest person in the Old Testament. And I love vs. 7 – not only was he 120 years old, but *His eye was undimmed, & his vigor unabated.*

Deuteronomy 34

Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, ² all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, ³ the Negeb, and the Plain, that is, the Valley of Jericho the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. 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.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there." ⁵ So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord, ⁶ and he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor; but no one knows the place of his burial to this day. ⁷ Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated. ⁸ And the people of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. Then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.

⁹ And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses. ¹⁰ And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, ¹¹ none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, ¹² and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

Moses enters wearing a mask.

"Excuse me...Wait a minute....I know you!" "Well, I do have quite a reputation..."

"Hey...that was really cool when you built the ark" ("Sorry, my son, that was Noah")

"Hey...that was really cool when you killed that giant" ("Sorry, my son, that was David")

"Hey...that was really cool when you got swallowed by that whale" ("Oy Veh! That was Jonah. You people sure don't know the Bible, do you? You really should...after all, I'm in it a lot.)

"Let me help." Moses removes his mask. *"Holy Moses!" "What's your name, anyway? Where am I?" "I'm Tom Harrison & these are Perceptions from Asbury UMC." "How long have you been here?" About 30 minutes. "No, I meant how long have you been doing this leadership thing in this great big, EMPTY room?"* I followed Bill Mason as senior pastor in 1993. *"BILL MASON? Are you kidding me? I went to seminary with Bill Mason. How old is he, anyway?" "He'll be 93 on June 5th. His eye is undimmed & his vigor unabated. "When I speak, everyone listens. When you speak...who listens? Where are all the people?"*

"What are you carrying, Moses? Those look like more commandments." (He's holding the 10 C tablets)

"Yes....this is the 11th commandment". "Did you see the Mel Brooks movie when you got the 15 Commandments?" (No response) "Oh well, what is the 11th Commandment?"

"Thou shalt Re-Open for worship on June 14th." "What a coincidence – that's the same conclusion that we reached on Thursday night. Masks? Social distancing? Limited choir/orchestra? Wash Hands?" "Yes, my son." "Why'd you come? Where are you going?" "I heard you poured concrete this morning for our new Student Ministry building and I wanted to go see it."

Interview Rod Sayler, an Asbury member. Last Sunday, his ADC, Faithbuilders, had a Zoom meeting. Rod dressed in his bathrobe & beard for fun as he did just now. I saw a picture of it. Rod has taught that class impersonating Abraham, Noah, Moses & some other Bible characters. He did an impersonation for a group when we went to Israel. He's very good. Creative.

Note 2 important things:

*Bible Characters. We know so little about them. Moses had a fascinating life but we know so little about him.

*ADC's. One of our best ways of creating community is in our ADC's. I've heard so many stories of people caring for one another during this time. ADC's are a consistent way for our people to engage in 3 things: Friendship, Service & Teaching. This is how Asbury can be small. Contact Kathy Owens or Pastor James Lambert if you'd like to know more.

Our story describes **grief**. The Israelites remembered and mourned for 30 days. 30 days of mourning gives the loss the weight it deserves. Imagine their pain and their loss after 40 years of his leadership. These Israelites would have been children when they left Egypt – only knowing Moses as leader and only a nomadic way of life. EVERYTHING was shifting for them.

John Wesley's claimed the early Methodists were known for their "good deaths." A physician who treated some Methodists told Charles Wesley, *"I never met such*

people as yours. None of them are afraid of death, but are calm, patient, and resigned to the last."

What did the early Methodists know that allowed them to die with such grace and assurance?

1.) Wesley **faced the reality of death**. We live in a death denying culture. Not only does death tend to be a taboo subject, but we isolate ourselves from the sick and dying. Most find it relatively easy to ignore our own mortality until it strikes close to home. Wesley, however, sought out the dying because he desired not only to help them in their final days, but he wanted to learn from those who were going through the process. He asked a lady in his address entitled, "A Word to an Unhappy Woman," *"Do you never think about death? Why not? Are you never to die? It is appointed for all to die. And what comes after?"* Contemplating the end of our earthly existence allows us time to examine our standing with God in a focused and honest way. To leave such matters until the very end of life unnecessarily burdens the dying process with uncertainty and anxiety.

2.) Wesley knew the secret to dying well was **living** well. Death/dying was an extension of life as we know it. It takes time/effort to learn & master a craft or hobby. To die well, we learn to master the Christian life now. A "good death" is an extension of a good life.

Memorial Day is tomorrow. It is a day our nation honors those who have died while serving our country in our military. However, today is a Memorial Day for Asbury in which we honor those who have been members of our congregation who have gone on to be with the Lord since we held this service a year ago.

"I Can Only Imagine" - Reading of Names

Heb 2:14-15 *Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*

Just as Moses delivered the Israelites from bondage, slavery & oppression to Pharaoh, so Jesus came to deliver us from bondage & slavery to the fear of death.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil – for thou art with me....and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." John 14:2-4

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? 3 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. Trust in Jesus Christ. He is our strong deliverer and our redeemer. You don't have to worry or be afraid.