Looking Ahead

## (Deuteronomy 34:1-12)

Welcome to all of you today. I am excited to share this message with you because I believe that God has a word for each one of you. This is one message with a thousand applications because everyone needs something to look forward to. Whether it is a special event that is planned, an anniversary, maybe a vacation only mankind can contemplate the future in our thoughts because we were created with eternity in our hearts. And so, it is helpful for us to have something on our calendar, something that we are looking forward to, and at this time of year we look forward to what the new year will bring.

And so, we look ahead with anticipation knowing that what we will be has not yet been made known. As the apostle Paul said,

“I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

And so, we look ahead, pressing on toward the goal, because who we are in the present is determined by our future and not our past. Therefore, we wait for it patiently because it is our hope for the future that transforms us in the present. In other words, much of what we do in the summer is determined by our expectation or hope for the fall. Our fight for survival today is motivated by our hope for the future. And so, forgetting what is behind, we strain toward what is ahead, because we know that the best is yet to come.

With that introduction, let’s turn to the Scriptures in Deuteronomy chapter 34 as the Lord takes Moses up on a high mountain. Verse one says,

“Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the Lord showed him the whole land — from Gilead to Dan, all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar” (Deuteronomy 34:1-3).

“Then the Lord said to him, "This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it" Deuteronomy 34:4).

In other words, the Lord said, “Do you see all of that? You could have led my people into it, you could have fought that battle and taken possession of the land, but because you stopped trusting me you will not cross over into it. I could have used you, but you didn’t trust me, and you didn’t honor me”

Now, could you even imagine being Moses in that situation? He’s up on top of the mountain, he can see what God wants to give him, but now he hears that it will never be a reality. I think I would personally rather not even know God promised it to me, then to hear people talk about it or see them walk in it when I can’t. But it’s like the parable of the rich man and Lazarus separated by a great chasm, because when you are done there isn’t anything you can do about it. And so, the Bible says in verse five,

“Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone” (Deuteronomy 34:5-7).

In other words, Moses died but there was still much more in him, he could still see well and he was strong. I think that is something to mourn over, that is sad to think that God buried him there in Moab because he had stopped looking ahead. But we must read this in the context of his failure to honor God in front of all the people, that he struck the rock in anger and frustration instead of speaking to it as God had commanded.

And so, Moses failed to enter the promised land, but to say that Moses died with more in him is a strong statement because he actually did a lot. In fact, listen to what the Bible says about Moses,

“No prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt — to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel” (Deuteronomy 34:10-12).

But now, God had called Moses up on the mountain, he was shown the promised land, but he would miss entering into it, miss some of the blessings here on earth even though he was walking in glory. In the same way, we should be careful to be the kind of people who can hold onto the blessings that God has given and the blessings that God wants to give so as not to forsake the blessings of the children of God because of a lack of faith or focus. In fact, Jesus warned us saying,

“Whoever loses his life for me will save it” (Luke 9:25).

And Moses had gone up on the mountain, the people have seen Moses go up on the mountain before, but he had always come back down. However, this time in Deuteronomy chapter 34, the people are waiting for Moses to come back down, and he didn’t come back down. Verse eight says,

“The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days” (Deuteronomy 34:8).

And many of us can relate because we’ve been there, we have found ourselves in that situation where we are forced to accept the fact that it’s not going to be like it was. Sometimes we try to make it like it was, we keep talking about how it was, we keep wishing it had gone differently, but there is a moment when we have to recognize that Moses isn’t coming back down this time.

And so, the Israelites grieved for Moses, but there was no end, no closure, because Moses’ body was missing. In other words, God had hidden the body, because the Bible says,

“To this day no one knows where his grave is” (Deuteronomy 34:6).

In other words, God wasn’t about to give them a chance to worship the body of Moses, worshiping at his tomb, and so to keep them from venerating that place, keeping them stuck in the past, stuck in what could’ve been, God kept his body. He allowed the Israelites to grieve for thirty days,

“Until the time of weeping and mourning was over” (Deuteronomy 34:8).

Because now things are going to be different. Moses is dead and some of the realities that they have come to embrace are going to change. We can understand how that can feel threatening because we tend to lean into a circumstantial type of faith. In other words, when we feel a certain way, when the forecast is right, then we will step out in faith, but that is not real faith. That is not walking by faith, that is a situational faith, and that is not the Spirit of God because he is a God who calls things that are not as though they were.

I am grateful that we serve an all knowing, all-powerful, ever-present God like that because even now he is writing our story, he is still working, still on the job, because he is the author and perfecter of our faith. I think that is shouting stuff right there, that is praiseworthy, because I know that I have tried to do some stuff where I have run out of motivation, run out of strength, but when I lifted my eyes to heaven he was working all along.

And so, right now, all things are in his hands, because in the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He is before all things and in him all things consist, he is managing and ordering all things, and even the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord” (Psalms 37:23). And so, we don’t need to worry about the past, worrying about the things of old, because God is doing a new thing. He said to Joshua,

"Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River…” (Joshua 1:2).

And so, the Lord established new leadership, a new ministry, a new enterprise, and the people of God just needed to keep walking in faith, keep following, keep looking ahead, trusting that God is enough, and right now so do we.

You know, we do a lot of self-examination and goal setting in the New Year and there may be some of you on this first weekend of the year who are still thinking about that New Year’s resolution. You don’t know how you’re going to do it, or when you’re going to do it, but you know you need the motivation. And so, I want to encourage you like the apostle Paul said to Timothy,

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

And I’ll be honest with you, week after week, it may be Monday, but I know that Wednesday is coming. Or it may be Thursday, but I know that Sunday is coming. And maybe some of you need that kind of motivation, that kind of pressure in your life, something that keeps you seeking God, something that keeps you looking ahead.

Moses was a hundred and twenty years old, and like many of us, there were projects that were unfinished, works that were undone, frontiers that were yet to be discovered. The Lord said to Moses,

“This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it" (Deuteronomy 34:4).

In other words, “I was going to give you every place where you set your foot, but because you don’t trust me enough to keep looking ahead, to keep moving forward, I can’t bring you into what you won’t believe me for.”

And so, even though there was more to be done, so much unfinished, he said, “Moses if you want out, if you want to be done, you just want to be finished, I’ll bring you home.” And so, in verse five it says,

“Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said” (Deuteronomy 34:5).

Meanwhile, the people of God are waiting and they are like, “He should be any moment, because he always comes back. I am sure he will come back down, he may be wearing a veil over his face, but he always comes back.” And so, they wait and they wait and they wait but he never comes back.

The Bible says, they grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days” (Deuteronomy 34:8).

Just imagine this for a moment, several millions of people in the wilderness, some of them morning, some of them weeping, and some of them searching for Moses. But now it’s been thirty days, they can’t find the body, they can’t find the grave, and even the archangel Michael doesn’t know where the body of Moses is (Jude 9). And so, no one can help, the angels can’t help, because there is only one helper, one that you need. That is the one of whom Moses declared,

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him” (Deuteronomy 18:15).

Jesus is the one that you need, your very present help in time of trouble, the one who will help you and uphold you with his righteous right hand. You need the author and perfecter of your faith because only he knows where you lost your hope, where you lost your faith, where you buried your dreams.

Verse nine says, “Now Joshua son of Nun 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” (Deuteronomy 34:9).

And so, Joshua told the people, “Moses is dead, he’s not coming back, it’s time to move on.” Certainly, the pain of loss would linger, but in order to leave Moab they needed to look ahead and move forward into the Promise of God. And so, they have to accept the fact that things won’t be the way they used to be, they had to stop living in yesterday, and stop dreaming about what could have been. It’s not that the mourning was over, but the morning was coming, and though,

“Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning” (Psalms 30:5).

Joshua knew that this wasn’t going to be easy, having the faith to move forward when you still have questions. Moving forward when you are not finished, when it doesn’t make sense, and the questions remain unanswered.

The feelings of loss remain, it wasn’t over, but they needed to keep looking ahead in the same way as we do. We may not have it all together, but we don’t need to have it all together, because,

“We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7, ESV).

And so, when it feels like you are finished, when you have lost your hope, and you don’t see a way, you need to fix your focus and keep looking ahead.

When you don’t see a way, God will make away, because there is more than what you see. And so, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen” (2 Corinthians 4:18). Because we are about to experience breakthrough, like Joshua coming out with the spirit of wisdom, moving forward in the anointing of God, we are about to advance, we’re looking ahead. And as the psalmist said,

“I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips” (Psalms 34:1).

And so, we are moving forward with the weapons of praise in our mouth, because the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God for the pulling down of strongholds.

Now, I don’t know what you’re going through, what you’re dealing with today, but I believe you’re standing on the threshold of a breakthrough. You may feel like you are going through something that can’t be fixed, something that can’t be healed, something that can’t be worked out, but I want to encourage you to let the praise of God be in your mouth and a double-edged sword in your hands because your breakthrough is coming (Psalms 149:6).

Keep looking ahead, because I believe God is going to get some glory out of this. He is going to show a generation of believers that he is the way, the truth, and the life. And so, you don’t have to have everything figured out before you begin to walk in faith, but you lift up your eyes, and you look ahead right now, and you make an appointment, you put it on the calendar, because he is already making a way in the desert. The Bible says,

“Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed…" (Isaiah 40:4-5).

You may be in a situation right now, you may have a sick child, a broken heart, or a weary soul. And maybe the cry of your heart is, “I need you right now Jesus.” I need you in this moment.”

You may be feeling like Moses went up on the mountain and he never came back. And the truth is that we read Deuteronomy chapter 34, that was the last chapter, the book is finished, but we’ve got to keep looking ahead, because there is more to the story. Listen to what the Lord said to Joshua next,

"Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them — to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses” (Joshua 1:2-3).

Some of you came to church today and your purpose is coming into focus right now. Moses is gone, but God is not done with you, there is still more to your story. The Lord said,

"Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed” (Hebrews 12:13).

And I am here today to declare a Joshua chapter one over your life, over your family, and over your ministry. We may have a missing Moses, but we have a living God in a living hope. He who is seated on the throne said,

“I am making everything new” (Revelation 21:5).

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