

## **“MOSES IS DEAD”**

We want to use as our text this morning Joshua 1:2: “Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them - the children of Israel.”

What do we read here? We read of a terrible calamity, for we learn that MOSES IS DEAD. Have you ever received bad news; news that made your heart sink?

We hear these words with a sinking of the heart: “Moses is dead.” Moses? We could have spared anyone better than him. Moses was worth any dozen men or any hundred men. He was worth any thousand men.

The soldiers of Napoleon used to call him “Old Two Hundred Thousand.” They said so because they regarded their leader, Napoleon as worth 200,000 ordinary men. And Moses was Israel’s Napoleon. He was their leader. He seemed the one man of all the vast multitudes that could not possibly be spared. And yet we read, “Moses is dead.”

Why? He was the man who began the great enterprise of emancipation, of delivering us from bondage and slavery. Moses, it was who had seen the burning bush in the wilderness. He, it was who had heard God’s call to deliver his people. He it was who had gone; a lone old man, to invade Egypt with only his staff in his hand and God in his heart. It was Moses who had fought with the hard-hearted king and had won, and had led forth Israel from slavery.

When they were upon the borders of the Red Sea and the Egyptians were behind them and the waters were before them, it was this same great man, Moses, who smote the waters. It was Moses who under God had made a path for their feet. It was Moses who had led them safely to the other side.

When they were parching with thirst in the wilderness it was Moses who had smitten the rock and had changed it into a gushing spring. When they had fought the enemy it was the uplifted hands of Moses that brought them victory.

Yes, Moses had been everything to them! When he was gone for 40 days they said, “Make us gods to go before us, for as for this Moses, we know not what is become of him.” And they meant by that that Moses had stood to them in the place of God. He had carried them upon his broad shoulders for almost half a century.

His passing from them was a loss so keen that to their childish minds it seemed like the loss of God Himself. But however reluctant we are to admit it, however bitter the loss, how seemingly disastrous the calamity, the fact remains—Moses is dead!

This great leader, this man we depended upon, this man we looked up to, this man we took our questions to, is dead! Now, facts are to be faced. We are not to shut our eyes to them. We are to look at them squarely and shape our conduct accordingly.

“Moses is dead.” He was our leader. He was the one to whom we looked to bring us into Canaan. He did not live to accomplish his task. Joshua 1:2 - “Moses is dead, now therefore” – says God. Now therefore what? What is to be the attitude of Joshua, Moses’ servant to this loss? What is to be the attitude of Israel?

But then there came this very stern command to Moses, “Get yourself up into the mountains and die.” Deuteronomy 32:48-50. And so Moses left the task unfinished. The last chapter of his book was never written. The last touch was never given to his

great masterpiece. His great heart failed, and his life went out just before he reached the goal. "Moses is dead." He died without reaching Canaan, the Promised Land. If he could not bring us into that land there is no use for anybody else to try!

There is no other man among us as great as "Moses." There is none other gifted with his patience, with his faith, with his daring, with his genius. "Moses" is dead; therefore let us quit. Let us give it all up. Let us turn back to Egypt.

This is the attitude we assume in the presence of the dead "Moses" of our lives so often. We meet one great defeat. We are wounded by one great sorrow. We sob by the coffin of one dead "Moses" and we say, "Life can never be worth while again. There can never be any hope for us any more.

They buried my grandfather, and stated that "only he was equipped to teach this Word of God. Only Pastor Ambrose Clark had all the light. He is now gone. No one can take his place; we will have to read his sermons. None alive today can compare with him, we cannot preach or teach."

Many said this very thing when my father died. Some sisters in the Church, very strong and faithful members during my father's ministry, when he died, their "Moses" was dead. They stated, "What will we do? To whom can we go with our problems, who can give us spiritual help?"

Their "Moses" was dead. Because of this loss they slowly drifted from Church attendance with us, and for many years now have not carried on any fellowship in the Church or with true believers in worship. They gave up their enthusiasm for the Church, and others followed.

They have stayed home and read sermons and played taped sermons of my late father, their "Moses." They have sat down and nursed their sorrow and broken hearts. Now, that is one way to treat our dead "Moses," but that is not the best way, and that is not God's way for us.

Those Israelites, when Moses was taken from them, they might have rebelled, and they had done so often in the past; they might have become morose and bitter. They might have blamed God for taking Moses from them, just as you sometimes blame God for the loss of some "Moses" that slips out of your life.

A lost sorrow is a pathetic something. For Moses to die in vain is tragic indeed, and yet it happens again and again. I knew personally a young woman who once was disappointed in a love affair. The young man she was keeping company dropped her for another, and it broke her heart; she went to pieces. From a lovely, happy, hardworking young lady, she turned into a morose, sour, lazy, bitter woman. For her "Moses" died and she became bitter and cynical, and at last she threw herself utterly away. She became a sorry sight indeed. But God's way is best. What is His call? What is His blessed invitation?

"Moses, my servant is dead; now THEREFORE RISE AND GO." v.2. Since this great earthly leader is gone, you will be all the more needed. Since Moses is dead, he can no longer carry on the work; your work is all the more necessary now! Let the vacancy that he left be an invitation to you to fill it. "Moses is dead," says the faint-hearted coward, "I will quit. We will never get anywhere without Moses." That is exactly what these sisters said after the death of my father, their "Moses."

“Moses is dead,” says the heroic Joshua, “I must take on new burdens. I must assume new responsibilities. I must fight much harder, because Moses is dead.” That was God’s plan then. It is God’s plan now. “Therefore rise and go.”

Go because God has to have some man to lead. There are many things that God can do without you and me. He can run the weather without us, as one has pointed out, though many of us do not think God can. We have to dabble in weather. We would run it if we could! Not being able to do that, we complain about the weather. But God can run the weather nicely without us. He does not need us there at all. Of course we need the weather ourselves as a topic of conversation, but we need not work at the job of making it.

God can manage the seasons and the suns and the stars without us. But there is one something He cannot do without us—He cannot save this world without us. And that is an undertaking that lies close to His heart.

When God wants to change water into wine, when He wants to bring about a reformation, when He wants to revive a dead religion, when He wants to change a moral graveyard into a parade ground for the King’s army—He must have men to do this. But while God works through men, we need to remember that no one man is essential to the success of His enterprise. God can take His workmen home to Heaven and still carry on His work. It is a good thing for us to face that fact again and again, for we are prone, all of us, to think that the coming of the Kingdom depends upon this or that individual.

We do not believe Canaan can ever be won without Moses. We fancy that he is to give it to us, when God keeps telling us that He Himself is the Giver. We believe the young prophets of Jericho that Elijah is the one necessary for the carrying on of God’s plans and purposes in the world.

We think what we need today is the good old preachers and the good old people of 50 years ago. Now, people were needed then, but they are not essential to God’s purpose in the world today. No man is essential. No man is expendable.

Sometimes we see this pitiful sight: A man is a member of the Church; he may even be an elder in the Church. Maybe in some way his feelings get hurt. Maybe he fancies that the preacher could be doing better. He finally decides to leave the Church, his position as an elder, and practically wreck the Church by quitting, and he takes others with him. This has happened. So he withdraws and is no longer seen in God’s house. What happens? Does the Church die? No, the Church does not die. The man himself dies. And in dying he helps his family to come to despise the Church that he himself once loved, and that he really loves today, in spite of his personal resentment against the preacher and his methods.

But I say, friend, if you find yourself wounded, don’t let it lead you into that supreme madness of quitting. Don’t become so possessed with a sense of your importance that you fancy the Church of God will be broken up because you go off and pout.

You and I, and a thousand others may quit this moment, and the Church of God will go on, and the redeemed will shout on, and we will discover that we are in no sense essential. Sure God blessed the Church with great leaders in the past. Thank Him for that, for God used them to enlighten us and teach and train us.

God needs men. God must have men. But no one man is essential. I believe that after the death of my father, those who were so loyal to my father, felt they must be disloyal to me. And so the word got about, "So-and-so is going to quit this Church." They felt that my father was the only one qualified to teach and preach, and they depended upon him totally for encouragement and in total faith. And they did not think I could possibly take his place. To them, "Moses" was dead.

No, neither you nor I is essential. God alone is essential. Mark you, I am not saying that we are not needed. God has nothing to throw away. You and I have nothing to throw away. However rich we may be in moral worth, we have not one single day or hour to squander. We have not one single ounce of moral energy to throw away. Not even the big things have anything to waste. This is a big world, but it has never wasted one single drop of water or one single grain of sand or one single weed or one single flower since the morning stars sang together.

That is a big sun that hangs up there in the sky, and when it set out to draw water this morning, it taxed the Seven Seas, the Amazon, the Mississippi and the Nile. But it was not too big a sun to drink from the cup of the rose, and it was not too dainty a sun to dip its golden rays into the stench of a mud hole or to wring out the dank rags of a poor beggar asleep in the fence corner.

Even Christ Himself when He fed the multitude, ordered that the fragments be gathered up in order that nothing might be lost. The Eternal God Himself has no single crust of bread, and certainly no single human soul to throw away.

But while we need to remember that we are needed, we need also to realize that no single man of us is absolutely essential to the carrying on of God's plan in the world. God, I say, alone is essential—and God abides. Joshua 1:1. Did you notice that word? God spoke even after the death of Moses. It is hard for us to believe that. It is easy for us to believe that God spoke to Moses, it is easy for us to believe that God made known His Will to the men of a far-off yesterday.

But what we need to realize is that God also speaks to men of TODAY. We need to realize that God did not lose His interest in humanity with the "home-going" of Moses. God spoke long ago after the death of Moses. And after the death of every "Moses," God still abides and still bends low to speak into the ear that is attentive to hear.

So God not only spoke to Moses, but He also spoke to dull, commonplace Joshua. He spoke to the man who had occupied no higher position than that of the servant of Moses. God spoke to a man who seemed good only at taking orders. And what did God encourage Joshua with? Joshua 1:5. "As I was with Moses, so will I be with you."

God told Joshua that He was as willing to work with Joshua as He was to work with Moses. God told him what He tells you and me, that just as God was with Moses and with Joshua and with Paul and Peter, so is He willing to be with us who fight our battles in the commonplace here and now.

Mark you, when God says, "As I was with Moses, so will I be with you," He does not mean that He is going to make Joshua into a second Moses! Had God needed a Moses just at this time, He would have kept the one He had. Joshua is not as big a man as Moses was. Joshua is not so mighty. He is not so mountain-like in his greatness. Joshua will never be Moses. He cannot be and does not need to be. But

God is willing to honor his individuality and make Joshua into the best possible Joshua, just as God stands willing to bring you and me to our highest and to our best.

And now because God still lives and because God still speaks and because God is willing to be to Joshua all that He was to Moses, Joshua may have the courage to go forward. But for the fact of the abiding presence and leadership of our Lord, any hope of future conquest and victory will, of course, be impossible.

But since God abides, eternally willing and eternally eager to be to us all that He has been to the mighty saints of the past—for this reason we should be ready to move forward when we hear God say “Moses, my servant is dead; now therefore rise and go over this Jordan.

And Joshua arose and went. And he conquered and he succeeded even where Moses had failed. Joshua was not as strong a man as Moses was. He was not at all like Moses. He did not try to be like Moses. Moses could do ten thousand things that Joshua could not do. But Joshua could do some things that Moses could not do. Joshua could do his own work in his own way as God gave him power, and that was enough. And in doing this, he won.

In doing this, Joshua entered into Canaan. In doing this Joshua made it possible for God to change loss into gain and calamity into benediction. So you see that God does not quit when one servant of His dies. God does not quit in the face of one failure or one defeat or one fall.

God invites us to go forward with Him. God invites us to mount on stepping stones of our dead “selves” to higher things. Through the lips of every dead “Moses” God summons us to a new departure and to new efforts to conquer “Canaan.”

There was once, centuries ago, a great event that took place when One came to this world who gave Himself unreservedly to the cause of building up the Kingdom of God. And He drew about Him a few choice men and women into whom He infused a spirit like His own.

But when that company was a mere handful, while the new enterprise that He launched was yet in its infancy, He Himself was killed! Remember that? The Son of God murdered by cruel men. He was dragged before Pilate, was condemned and crucified.

And that hour the sun grew dark and all nature shuddered at the agony of her expiring Savior. Everything seemed lost. But God spoke, “Christ my Son, is dead; rise and go.” And from that skull-shaped hill of loss and death, His followers went out to the conquest of the world.

The Church today is face-to-face with much that is discouraging. Many an enemy must be met and conquered before the Kingdom can be brought in. We face the fact that only a little more than one-third of the people even of this so-called Christian country belong to any Church or profess to be Christian.

We face the further fact that of those who do belong, a distressingly large number are Christian only in name. We are not the mighty force that we ought to be. We are not going forth conquering and to conquer as we ought to go. We are not “fair as the moon and bright as the sun and terrible as an army with banners.”

The enemy has made inroads, and our walls in many places have been broken down. What is to be your attitude as we face these facts? Maybe the Church, even our own, is a dead Church to a large extent. Maybe too many have a form of godliness without the power. What will you do?

Will you give up and quit? Or will you let the great need summon you to service? For the Church to fail at its high task is a calamity. Will you not allow the calamity of that failure to call to you and make you bestir yourself to a new effort to do and dare something for the sake of our Lord?

Maybe there has come to you an individual loss. Some loved one has slipped away from you. Let your very heartache be a call to a new endeavor. That is a beautiful story of David. David has a sick baby in his home. He fasts and prays that the life of the child may be spared, but his prayer is not heard. Then he learns that his child is dead, and that knowledge is a summons to him to arise.

And David does arise and go forward, for this is the fine word on his lips: "He cannot return to me, but I can go to him." And so David went forward. His "Moses" was dead. God can make it possible for us to change our pains into psalms, our losses into gains, our calamities into capital.

And then one day death will creep upon you from out of the dark. It will whisper to you and say, "Lie still and rest." And those who stand about your bed will say, "He is dead." But God will say, "Your body is dead. Now therefore rise and go."

And out into that land of Eternal progress, you will go to climb one Alpine height after another in the fellowship of Him who loved you and gave Himself for you.

So remember, that no failure need be final or fatal. Remember that no loss need be without remedy. Moses may die, but God lives on. And while we have hold on His Hand we have hold on life and victory and Eternal progress.

Therefore even though "Moses," God's servant is dead, arise and go over your "Jordan" where the best hopes of your life are waiting to be realized!

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We are always glad to give Scriptural advice and counsel to those who desire to write us about their problems, and to remember their requests for prayer in our services.

In addition, we publish sermons on other subjects, which take up in detail teaching on how to deal with God successfully and be delivered out of all our troubles. We will gladly send them to those who desire them for their own use or for others.

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