

Disappointment

October 29, 2017

Deuteronomy 34: 1-12

¹ 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 the whole 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 The LORD said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there."⁵ Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, at the LORD's command. ⁶ He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. ⁷ Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigor had not abated. ⁸ The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended. ⁹ Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the LORD had commanded Moses. ¹⁰ Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. ¹¹ He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, ¹² and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

Let us pray.



Today we conclude our series, “The Enemies of Gratitude”, with the topic of disappointment. It is an emotional experience we all have had many times in our lives. We have all had a long-scheduled appointment that was missed, a promise that was broken, a perceived expectation that has fallen short. Generally speaking, the greater the expectation or promise, the more disappointing it is when the promise is broken or the expectation falls short. To begin, a story that shares a woman’s experience with disappointment that came after a great effort on her part.

An old lady spent much of her summer setting and swinging in the old swing hanging on her front porch. Her husband had been dead several years and she had withdrawn from all but the closest family. Her lonely time grew and grew. One spring day, the old lady went out in the garage and dug the old roto-tiller out from under the rusty tub that covered the engine. Seems the old lady had found a big bag of seeds that was a vine that would bear bright red flowers. The old lady loved bright red things. She made a decision to get out of the swing and grow beautiful flowers to enjoy. With great excitement, she pulled real hard on the rope, and with great effort she finally got the old roto-tiller to run. There was a wall of concrete blocks between her and the neighbor’s driveway. The blocks were laid...a block and a space, then another block and a space all the way down the driveway. The wall went all the way to the garage.



With great effort the old lady plowed between the driveway and the wall. She blistered her hands, her back hurt, but the jarring roto-tiller finished the task. With feelings of accomplishment and pride, she got down on her knees and planted all the seeds in several rows along the wall. The rains came, the Lord blessed the little seeds and the sun shine warmed the ground. One day the little old lady saw the heads of the plant break forth, and the vines grew and grew ... until the vines completely covered the wall. The vines so grew that the wall could not be seen. She would set daily in the swing and watch the progress of the vine. This was a great joy to the old lady.



Beautiful vines ... but no flowers, zero, nada, nothing. "Where are all my bright red flowers?" she wondered. One day after much disappointment and great thought the lady decided, "I planted those vines for flowers, bright red flowers and there are none. I am going to cut those dumb empty vines down and burn them". She went down the drive way into the garage and got the rusty old hoe, sharpened the edge and started chopping the vines down. About the third vine was chopped down and she grinned ear to ear. The neighbor, pulling into his drive way, skidded to a halt and jumped out of his car and ran over to her.

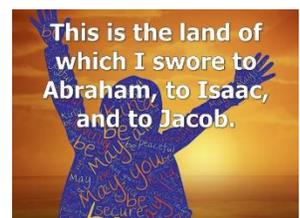
He said, "What on earth are you doing?? I know this is your property and that is your vine, and you can do as you chose. But, why are you cutting down this vine??" The old lady explained to the kind neighbor, "I planted this not for the vine but for the bright red flowers, and there are none. After all my sweat and blisters and watering, not one flower. I am cutting this down because there are

no red flowers and that is why I planted them!!!" Without one word, the neighbor took the feeble old lady by the hand and lead her to the other side of the wall. And on his side of the fence, there were over a million of the brightest red flowers you ever saw, between every block were many of the brilliant blossoms.



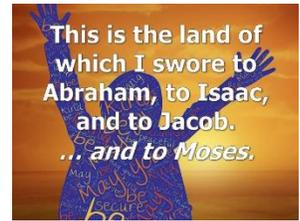
We all have stories that are similar. We put in a lot of effort towards some particular end and we hope to see our labors bear much fruit. We wait and wait and then we finally come to a place where we surrender to our disappointment. We work hard day after day, week after week, at the same job and when that promotion opens up, we hope and pray that we will get that job that we have longed for. But we do not get the promotion. We put in extra hours of practice, shooting jump shot after jump shot, but we never quite earn that playing time that we so covet. Disappointment is a common experience that we all share and it can come in many different forms.

In today's passage, Moses climbs the mountain one last time. God reminds him of the huge promise that Moses and all of the Israelites have been moving towards. They have wandered in the desert for forty years, each day one step closer to seeing the expectation met, one day closer to receiving their reward, one day closer to realizing the prize. On top of the mountain God blesses Moses with a vision, allowing him to "see" all of the Promised Land. God then reminds Moses, *"This is the*



land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob". This was THE promise that the people have carried in their hearts for hundreds and hundreds of years. It is a promise that has hung in their collective memory for almost forever. It is what gave them hope in the darkest of times.

And maybe, just maybe, as he looks back over his 120 years, maybe Moses thinks his name should be added to that list. If anyone deserved to go into the Promised Land, Moses was that guy. "*This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to*



Isaac, and to Jacob, ... and to Moses". Moses has been faithful – leading the people out of Egypt, leading them through the Red Sea, dealing with complaint after complaint, interceding for the people over and over. If anyone deserved to enter the Promised Land, it was Moses. Verses ten through twelve from our passage today bear testimony to this:

Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

Even at 120 years of age, Moses was in good health, his mind was sharp, he had his full strength. But there was that little misdemeanor at Meribah. The people had complained and complained and complained about the lack of water.

himself. Moses realizes that he has simply played a small part in God's bigger plan. This is a key lesson for us to remember when disappointment comes our way and we want to be angry or hurt or to sulk away. Moses could have been disappointed in God, thinking he deserved to enter the Promise Land, believing he should have a better fate than this. But he did not. Whatever comes our way, whether good or bad, we too must realize that it is all part of a bigger plan – one that we often cannot see or understand. Yes, we can feel disappointment, as surely Moses did, but we cannot dwell on it and we cannot allow it to become who we are. We must believe that God is at work and that His plan is greater and better than any plan we could have.

Even though it is true that Moses is part of God's bigger plan, a part of us sides with Moses and wants God to relent and to let His faithful servant Moses enter the Promised Land. In a way, it does not make sense. At times in our lives, the disappointment that we or those we know experience does not make much sense to us either. That young, energetic couple that would make such awesome parents just can't seem to ever have a child of their own. Those prayers for healing for that wonderful young man who does so much for the church that we lift up over and over seem to fall on deaf ears as the cancer takes its course. Sometimes our job is eliminated. Sometimes a sixteen year old boy dies in a tragic farming accident. Sometimes a sixteen year old girl suddenly passes away from an illness that we never saw coming. Sometimes disappointment is hard to understand. Sometimes it just does not make sense.

As I have shared about before, when I found out in February of 2016 that the church was eliminating my position at the church, I felt many emotions. Disappointment was just one of many. In those difficult first few days, my mind entertained many thoughts. I was disappointed that more people on the Leadership Team did not stand up to keep me at the church. I was disappointed that they were allowing some report from people far away in Ohio dictate what the church was going to do. I was disappointed that they felt a few part-time people could do a better job than I was doing. And lastly, I felt disappointed in myself. I began to play the "if only" game. "If only" I would have done this or that. "If only" I would not have done this or that. We have all been there.

I could have stayed in my disappointment. I could have allowed it to linger, even to fester. We all know people who choose to hold onto that disappointment, people who cannot get past it. God or the world or their spouse or whatever has given them a raw deal. They do not ever move past that point in their lives. Their disappointment comes to define them.

As Moses sat on that mountaintop and saw all that the people would soon inherit as a blessing from God, he could have dwelled on his disappointment. Yet as Moses sat there, alone with God, looking back over the story of his life, he did not feel disappointment, but gratitude for the role that God had allowed him to play. This is the second lesson for us in today's scripture. Moses chose to cling to the central claim of our faith: a grander story is being told. A plan bigger than we can comprehend is in motion. Like Moses, we too can rejoice in our small

role that we play in the bigger picture of God's unfolding story. Like Moses, we too can choose to trust into God's plan and to give our disappointment over to God, allowing Him to relace it with joy and anticipation over what God will do next in our lives.

We will all face disappointment. In spite of the disappointment we face along the way, we can rejoice that God has, is, and will contiuue to use each of us in the ongoing redemption of the world. We are each a part of God's bigger picture. For our role in the work of God in the world, we say thanks be to God. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) When has disappointment led to growth in your faith? How can this experience be something that helps another grow in their faith?
- 2) Are there any current disappointments that you are struggling with right now? Find some alone time and seek God's healing touch.
- 3) How can you be of service to another who is struggling with disappointment in their lives? What is your first step to offering help?