

**Disappointment**

JRR#7

October 29, 2023

**Deuteronomy 34:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, <sup>3</sup> the Negeb, and the Plain — that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees — as far as Zoar. <sup>4</sup> 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.” <sup>5</sup> Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, at the LORD’s command. <sup>6</sup> He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. <sup>7</sup> Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigor had not abated. <sup>8</sup> The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. <sup>11</sup> 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, <sup>12</sup> and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.



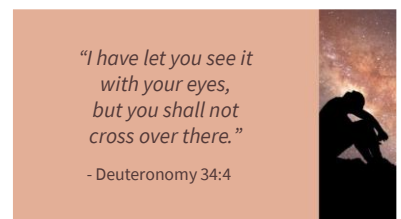
Today, as we wrap up our “Enemies of Gratitude” worship series, we turn to the topic of disappointment. This is something that we all deal with from time to time.

Turn with me to Deuteronomy 34, the last chapter in the Torah, the books of the Law and the books attributed to Moses. As we begin, we see that Moses leaves the plains of Moab and climbs up to the top of Pisgah, the high point overlooking the Promised Land. There the Lord showed him the whole land – Gad, Gilead, and Manasseh to the north;



Reuben, Simeon, and Judah to the south; Dan and Ephraim to the west; and Issachar, Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali to the north. And then God said to Moses, *“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.”*

Moses stands atop Pisgah and looks out over the land that has been on his mind and on the peoples’ minds ever since they left Egypt. This was the land that God had promised to the group of people who had left Egypt. In chapter 23, God told the Israelites that God’s angel would go before them, *“blotting out”* the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites so that Israel could take possession of the land. They have been here once before, in Numbers 13, when Moses sent the spies into the land. Some of the spies reported that the people were strong, and the cities fortified and large. Soon enough doubt and fear and worry crept in, preventing them from seeing what God had in store for them. They were all turned back then, sent to wander the desert until their hearts were ready to finally enter the Promised Land. And now, in Deuteronomy 34, they are once again on the brink of entering the land. And as Moses sits atop Pisgah, looking down upon this land that has been their focus for 40 years, he hears God say, *“I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.”* I cannot imagine what it would be like to hear these words if I was Moses. Can you?



More than any other Israelite, Moses has earned the right to cross the river and enter into the Promised Land. He has led this stubborn, stiff-necked people for 40 years. For 40 long years. Called at the burning bush, Moses has led the people out from under Pharaoh's fist and through the Red Sea. He has endured their whining and grumbling and complaining and quarreling. He has stood between God and this people, interceding again and again on their behalf. I think that it would be fair to say that without Moses, none of the Israelites would be standing there ready to enter the Promised Land. So I cannot imagine what it was like to stand there and see the land right there before him – and to know that he could not enter it.

Moses has known that he would never enter the Promised Land for a while now. Way back in Numbers 20, when the people once again quarreled with Moses because of a lack of water. God instructed him to command that water come forth from the rock. Instead, in anger, Moses struck the rock. Doing so, Moses failed to trust in God and thus failed to allow God's glory to be shown to Israel. In response, God said to Moses, *"Therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them."* Although Moses knew that he would not lead them into the land, imagine what it would have been like to stand there, close enough that you could almost touch it, to actually see the Promised Land, and to hear God remind you, *"you shall not cross over there."*

In your life, have you ever felt like you were right there, within touching distance of seeing that dream realized or of having that goal achieved, only to not have it happen? Ever had that happen when, like Moses, you felt like you had been following God's call, faithfully and obediently living into where it felt God was leading you?

Leading into September of 2014, I was the associate pastor at Rapid City First. Pastor Doug decided that we were going to read The Circle Maker by Mark Batterson in our small groups and were going to preach through the book on each Sunday



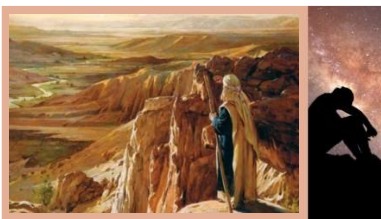
in September. The Circle Maker is about Batterson's church following the prayer practice of Honi, an Old Testament prophet, dreaming big and praying hard. Legend has it that during an extreme drought, Honi drew a circle on the ground with his staff and prayed to God for rain. He declared to God that he would not leave the circle until God brought rain – and not a light sprinkle, but a downpour that revealed God's love being poured out over Israel. In response to his faithful and ardent prayer, it rained and rained, pouring down God's blessing on the parched land.

The HOPE Center had opened a couple of year before and, even way back then, was starting to grow in numbers. As we were thinking about what we could circle in prayer, about what big, hairy, audacious prayer we could lift to God, the building on our block was vacated by the hospital. They built a new laundry facility up on the hospital grounds, allowing them to part ways with the building that used to be an Oldsmobile Cadillac dealer back in the day. As a church we started prayer walking that building. Before our leadership meeting, before other team meetings, before small groups we would walk around the property, praying for God to work a miracle. Every day when I got to work, rain or shine, hot or cold, whatever, I would walk around that building, running my hands along the bricks as I prayed for God to use that space to glorify God's name. We began to dream about what God could do with that building. Day after day, around and around that building, we would pray. It began to feel like God was at work, walking with us as we circled and prayed.

And then one day two men appeared at the church, wanting us to know that they had bought the building and were planning on opening a brewery. Needless to say, we were stunned. Disappointment fell heavily upon us. We had covered and covered and covered that building in prayer. We leaned into the belief that God could and would do an amazing thing in downtown Rapid City. To us, it made no sense. This is often a deeper truth of disappointment. Sometimes life, and even the life of faith, does not make much sense. Wonderful would-be parents are unable to conceive a child. Fervent prayers in the oncology room seem to fall on deaf ears. The one who lives life right and true, following God's will and ways finds himself or herself atop Pisgah, so close to what they desire but unable to touch or realize it. We have all been there. And will be again.



Because of this, we all have a general decision to make. You see, because we all find ourselves disappointed again and again, we could have a laundry list of complaints against God. It is no wonder many well-intentioned followers of Christ have their faith dashed against the rock of disappointment. It is hard to be grateful, to have an attitude of gratitude, when the thing that you want and need and desire and pray for does not come through or is taken away. So, in that moment, we have this choice to make. Moses made this choice.



Moses knew that his ministry would end just short of the intended destination. Even so, Moses spends his last breaths speaking words of encouragement and blessing over the people known as Israel. In chapter 30 Moses tells the people that God will bless them if they remain faithful to God, calling the people to *“love the Lord your God with all your*

*heart and with all of your soul... in order that you may live.*” And then, just before going up Pisgah, Moses delivers his final blessing to Israel. Working tribe by tribe by tribe, Moses offers beautiful words of blessing over the people of God. If you have some time this week, read chapter 33 of Deuteronomy.

With all of the disappointment in the world potentially right there before him, what allowed Moses to instead offer these words of blessing that can be found at the end of Deuteronomy? What allowed him to then go faithfully up the mountain to look upon that which he could never enter?

Moses realized that he was not taking this journey for himself. As Moses looked out over the Promised Land, he felt great comfort and a deep sense of gratitude because he knew that he had been part of something greater. Moses understood that he was simply playing a part in God’s unfolding story. As he stood looking out over the land, he knew in his heart that he had brought the people to this point. Through many highs and lows, through great challenges and amazing victories, God has used him to lead the people of God to the brink of their future home. Contentment and gratitude filled Moses as he stood there, looking out over the land that God’s people would soon possess. Coming down off the mountain, Moses, still healthy and fully in charge of his faculties, dies there in the land of Moab. He has played his part. He is at peace with God.

In our day of instant gratification and convenience, many of us have forgotten the discipline of disappointment. We can too easily blame God or others for that thing that didn’t happen or for that thing that failed to materialize, allowing our disappointment to become that enemy of gratitude.



When the gentlemen that were starting Haycamp Brewery left the church that day, we could have gone into a funk, thinking that God had let us down. Or we could choose to be thankful for the opportunity to draw so close to God in prayer, moving forward to begin to dream about the next “what if’s” that God might have in store for our church.

As I thought about Moses' situation this week, I realized that I see something similar often played out at funerals. Some people and families are grateful for the time they've had with their loved one. They laugh and they celebrate the life lived together. They often rejoice over the faith of the individual that has gone on to heaven. And I have also worked with other families or individuals that are disappointed or even upset that there wasn't more time. They are disappointed, mostly I think, because they believe that more time would have brought some meaning or purpose to that life or to their relationship. They are waiting for the “what if” to come instead of living out the “what if” that we experience when we step forward in faith and trust, living and loving well.

Now, in some cases, there is a realization that it is time, so to speak. Our loved one is hurting or suffering greatly. To pass on into glory is viewed as a blessing. This understanding is, of course, rooted in our faith. We will explore this idea in our next worship series. In our text this week, we see that Moses is 120. But we also read that *"his eyes were not weak, nor his strength gone."* He just climbed the mountain to see the land that he would never enter. Death is not near. Disappointment could've ruled the day for Moses. It didn't. The people lost the greatest prophet to ever live. They could've let disappointment rule the day. They did not. Yes, they grieved, but then they turned to Joshua, trusting in and dreaming of where God might be leading them.

We can look to the faith of Moses when disappointment threatens to bring us down or to negatively affect our relationship with God. Moses' faith was not best displayed in the power and might revealed as he stood before Pharaoh or when he parted the sea, but as he sat alone with God, looking out over the result of his faithful life, feeling not resentment but gratitude. Yes, life will bring us our share of disappointment. Yet each time may we choose to cling to the central claim of our faith: that a grander story is being worked out and told. With this claim in our heart, we can rejoice and give thanks for our part in this great story of God, in spite of the disappointments that we may experience along the way. May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. As you consider a recent disappointment, how would or could have the way you handled it have changed if you saw it as part of God's unfolding plan?
- 2) *Pray*. Who do you know that has allowed a disappointment to lessen or end their relationship with God? How can you circle them in prayer?
- 3) *Study*. Read Deuteronomy 33. Moses had such faith even as potential disappointment loomed. How can you hold onto such faith?