

Finish Well: A Disciple unto Death – *Deuteronomy 32:45-52*

Introduction – Imagine waking up this morning and hearing from the Lord, “Today, you are going to die.” This was Moses’ experience, recorded here in this passage. Each one of us will hear these words in one manner or another at the time appointed by God. The message this morning is not simply, “are you ready?” While important, the message for us today is, “with the prize set before you, are you set on a course to finish well?”

Your Heart on All the Words (vv44-47) – As Moses finishes, knowing full well his end is near, his focus remains on his appointed task. With Joshua alongside him as the one who will soon take over, Moses publicly urges individual, as well as corporate, responses to the timeless warning of the Song as well as the entire teaching of the law (vv44-46). The word must be personally received (“*Set your hearts,*” v46), faithfully passed on (“*command your children,*” v46), and “*carefully observed.*”

These were not idle, futile, or vain words that had been given to the people, nor are they for us. These words are your life and they will prolong your life. Having been on a long journey through Deuteronomy, it is worth considering – is your heart set on these words, and – is your heart regularly set and reset on these words?

Go Now – and Die (vv48-52) – Moses was one-hundred twenty years old (31:2), and the very same day that he obeys and gives this last address to Israel, God summons him to go up to Mount Nebo (vv48-49). He is told that he will die there, and “*be gathered to (his) people*” (v50). He would not take Israel into the land because of his trespass against Yahweh in the Wilderness of Zin “*because you did not hallow Me in the midst of the children of Israel*” (v51, Num 20:11-13, Psalm 106:32-33). Yet, in an act of promise and grace, Yahweh tells him that he will see the land of Promise from that mountain (v52). In fact, Moses did stand on another mountain, joined by Elijah in a conversation with Jesus (Luke 9:30-31). All three of these men had the unusual occurrence of being told in advance of when they would die.

Consider these three applications from this text:

Gathered to Your People at Death – This is strong medicine for believers approaching death as well as for those who love them and are left here. While our bodies return to the dust and see corruption, our souls, which neither die nor sleep, immediately return to God in heaven (Eccl 12:7). Since Christ has risen and ascended, this promise is even more clear and more pronounced, both in the promises that we will be with the Lord (Luke 23:43, 2 Cor 5:8, Phil 1:23) and that we will be with believers who have gone before us (Heb 12:23). This hope, and the greater hope of the resurrection of the body, is given to us to be of great comfort and encouragement to us now (1 John 3:1-3). This is part of what it means to have faith in Christ.

Disappointments at Death – Nevertheless, as years go by, as we approach our death, it is often true that there are consequences to our sin which God has deemed to manifest in our lives or in the lives of others around us. The stories of Gideon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, and Hezekiah, all warn us that men who have a track record of faithfulness can mar their record and cause horrible consequences to fall upon future generations. One commentator wrote, “*Happy are they who die with the promised inheritance in full view, and with clear assurance of eternal life. At the same time, let us remember to walk circumspectly, lest some false step we have taken be remembered against us on a deathbed and render that final scene less comfortable.*” - Christensen

Promises to Sustain Us at Death – God was kind to Moses and encouraged him by letting him see the land of the promised inheritance. Like Abraham, he was taken up to a place where he could see the land and promises were made which he would not see in his lifetime (Gen 13:14-17). Moses had been faithful (Heb 3:1-6, 11:23-29) and God gave him promises regarding his faithfulness as well. We also would do well to rest on those promises for us and for our children, for the church and for the world, in the day of our death. In that day, you will leave this world, but God will not, nor will His Word, nor will His Spirit, nor will His faithful work.

Finish Well – A good coach will tell his team to make sure they “leave it all on the field” and so does the Word of God tell us (Heb 12:1-2, 1 Cor 9:24), including “half-time” pep-talks (Phil 3:13-14). But, to continue with the analogy, the game does come to an end, and with it – victory. The apostle Paul teaches us that “*for me to live is Christ and to die is gain*” (Phil 1:21). This was not a death-wish from one who was ready to throw in the towel. Yet, constrained by the love of Christ, he longed for the day to be with Christ. This hope sanctified his life here and removed any fear of death, driving a desire to sacrifice all the more.

Moses finished well. Jesus finished well. Paul finished well. Climb the mountain of God’s promises, survey His glorious future plans, and finish well.