

“Great Servant; Great God; Great Savior”

Deuteronomy 34

October 6, 2013

Thomas A Kempis, writing in 1472 in his classic devotional “The Imitation of Christ” wrote, “*Happy is the man whom Truth by itself doeth teach...Our own judgment and feelings often deceive us and we discern but little of the truth.*” Oh, how we need to surrender our feelings and judgments to the Holy Spirit through the authority of His word so that our feelings and judgments will be saturated with divine truth.

“Oh Lord, open our hearts and our minds to the penetrating truth of the Holy Spirit as we listen to your Word. We surrender to You our own feelings and suspend our own judgments in order to receive Yours. Oh, make our hearts porous to absorb divine truth, in Jesus name, Amen.”

The overarching truth that I want us to grasp this morning is that...

True greatness is determined by one’s nearness to God in humble worship.

This morning we are going to look at Deuteronomy 34 through 3 distinct lenses:

GREAT SERVANT

It’s impossible to read Deut. 34 and not get the sense that Moses was a great leader. In vs. 5 Moses is called “*the servant of the Lord*” which is a term of great honor. He was God’s representative on this earth. Vss. 10-12 indicate how God’s power was manifested through him.

I never cease to be amazed by Moses’ leadership. What’s so impressive to me is not that God worked miracles through him, but how he faithfully, for decades, led a people that often made life miserable for him and yet repeatedly prayed for God to have mercy on them.

Vs. 10 highlights the key to Moses’ greatness: “*Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.*” Moses’ greatness was merely a reflection of the greatness of the God He served. It

was Moses’ nearness to God, or more precisely, God’s nearness to Moses that led to such greatness. Exodus 33:11 says, “*Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend.*” There was a relationship of intimate friendship between God and Moses. So intense was Moses’ nearness and intimate friendship with God, that when he returned from the presence of the Lord his face was radiant with the glory of the Lord (Ex. 34:34).

Ex. 33 goes on to describe Moses’ heart to know God (Ex. 33:13-18). More than anything else Moses wanted God’s presence; he wanted God’s favor; and all of this was driven by his passion to know God and to see His glory. And God was pleased to do it. Moses wasn’t allowed to actually see God’s face because no one can see his face and live, yet God placed Moses in the cleft of the rock and covered him with His hand so that when God passed by, Moses could catch a glimpse of His glory as God announced His name to Moses (Ex 34:6-8).

By definition, Moses was a worshiper. There are many people today who generally want to know God and who generally want to walk in the favor of His presence. Yet they miss the most essential ingredient necessary for the greatness of nearness to God—humility.

Num. 12:3—“*Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.*” This was the key to Moses’ unparalleled greatness—his unparalleled lowness.

Without humility Moses could not have successfully led a rebellious, critical, grumbling people and in their worst moments pleaded for God to have mercy on them—even when they were blaming Moses for the consequences of their own sin. In his humility, Moses was more concerned for God’s glory than for his own honor.

Without humility Moses could not have enjoyed such friendship with God because God *will not* be intimate with the proud. This is why the New Testament emphatically teaches that “*God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble*” (James 4:6; I Pet. 5:5). In fact, James 4 goes on to promise that if we humble ourselves in the presence of God, He will exalt us (James 4:10)

So Moses' greatness was merely a reflection of the greatness of God and His grace. And his ability to clearly reflect God's greatness was determined by his nearness to God which was absolutely dependent upon his humility before God; *because God loves the humble*.

Life Principle: In God's economy, greatness, which is defined by one's nearness to God, is measured by humility.

GREAT GOD

I want to draw out of this text for you, 7 reflections of the character of God:

1. **God is Faithful to His promise** (vs. 4a)

Vs. 4—*“This is the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants’”* Generations of faith now become sight for Moses as he sees before him the very land promised to Abraham and his descendants all the way back in Gen. 17. In spite of Israel's many failures, God has been true to deliver His promise.

2. **God is serious about His glory** (vs. 4c)

Vs. 4c— *I have let you see it...but you shall not go over there.”* God had restricted Moses from entering the Promised Land as discipline for striking the rock instead of speaking to the rock in Num. 20:11-12. The reason God responded so harshly to Moses' disobedience is that he failed to regard the Lord as holy in the presence of the people. Even though God loved Moses and took great delight in him, He would not fail to follow through on the consequences of His discipline because God is unrelenting in upholding the honor of His glory.

3. **God is gracious to His servant** (vs. 4b)

Vs. 4b—*“I have let you see it with your eyes...”* Even though Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land, God would graciously allow Moses to see from a distance the very fulfillment of God's promise that he had spent his life sacrificially leading God's people to.

4. **God is sovereign over life** (vs. 5, 7)

Moses did not die of old age or a lack of strength. He *“died...according to the word of the Lord.”* He died because God said it was his time. Moses' death was the result of God's sovereign wisdom and will, determining the number of his days.

5. **God is wise** (vs. 6)

While Deut. 34 doesn't tell us precisely why the Lord buried Moses in obscurity, it would be hard not to assume that God, knowing how prone the people's hearts were toward idolatry, was sparing them of the temptation to enshrine Moses' burial place. The most driving motivation in Moses' life was to see God glorified, and now God honored Moses' desire in his death by preserving His glory through obscuring Moses' body.

6. **God is provider** (vs. 9)

God did not leave His people without the human leadership they needed. God blessed them with Joshua, who would lead them with the same “spirit of wisdom” that Moses had demonstrated.

7. **God's nearness is the source of our greatness** (vs. 10-12).

We have already seen this insight through our first lens: Moses was outstanding because the Lord knew him face to face. Yet, Moses is not the ultimate illustration of this truth. No one could possibly be nearer to the Father than His Son, Jesus, who graced this earth with infinite greatness. Not only greatness displayed in miracle-working power, but the greatness of selfless sacrifice, serving and even dying for sinners so that God might be glorified in showering them with mercy.

GREAT SAVIOR (Hebrews 3:1-6)

The overarching theme of the book of Hebrews is the superiority of Christ. The author of Hebrews argues that He is superior over the prophets, angels, priesthood, sacrifices, and even has a superior covenant. In Hebrews 3:1-6, we see how Jesus is also superior to Moses, for whom the Jews had highest regard.

Let me remind you again that Moses was a one-of-a-kind prophet.

When vs. 2 speaks of Moses being faithful in all his house, it is pointing us back to Numbers 12:6-8 and the unparalleled uniqueness of Moses.

Num. 12:6-8—“Hear now my words: if there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak to him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses, for he is faithful in all my household; with him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the Lord.”

The intimacy of Moses’ relationship with the Lord exceeded all other prophets. But when the writer of Hebrews makes a comparison between Moses and Jesus, we discover that even though Moses is the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, Jesus is in a category infinitely superior to even Moses.

[Heb. 3:3-4] What these verses are saying is that even though Moses was outstanding, he was just a part of the household, a part of the people of God. But Jesus is the builder of the house, and the builder is God. So Moses is the greatest of the prophets, but Jesus is the God who speaks through the prophets. Moses is great but Jesus is greater because He is Moses’ Maker.

In vs. 5-6, the difference between Moses and Jesus is the difference between a servant and a son. “The difference between a servant and a son is that the son, by inheritance, owns the house, and is lord over the house, and provides for those in the house out of his wealth. But the servant doesn’t own anything in the house.”¹ So Moses is a great and faithful servant in the house of God worthy of honor, but Jesus “owns the house of God; He rules the house of God; and He provides for the house of God.”²

And according to vs. 6, this is the very house that we, too, are part of if we have come under the authority of the Son.

Big Picture: Let’s step back and pull these 3 lenses into focus...

¹ John Piper, 8-4-96 sermon on Hebrews 3:1-6. www.desiringgod.org.

² Ibid.

So Moses’ greatness (reflected in Deut. 34) was a reflection of the greatness of his God and a foreshadowing of the superior greatness of Christ.

- Moses’ greatness was the result of his nearness to God; Jesus’ greatness is a manifestation of His perfect oneness with the Father (John 1).
- Moses’ intimacy with God was rooted in extraordinary humility, yet certainly there is no greater humility than that of Jesus who humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross on behalf of sinners to do His Father’s will.

And it is through His cross, through His humble, sacrificial, servant-hearted death that *we* are offered a restored relationship of intimacy with God.

There is something in the human heart that longs for greatness. That something is a soul that was made to know the infinite almighty God of the universe. Yet sin has so distorted our senses that now we seek greatness in so many lesser things; like seeking greatness through music, sports, academics, business, money, popularity, fashion, being the life of the party; and when we can’t really achieve greatness in these ways, we fantasize or seek to live out our dreams for greatness through our children.

The problem is not so much with the pursuit of greatness. There is nothing inherently wrong with pursuing excellence. The problem is that we settle for so much less than what our souls were created for—intimate communion with the living God; the greatness of living in deep friendship with the God in whose image we have been created. And when we discover the true greatness of knowing God, loving God, and being loved by God, suddenly all these other things like music, sports, academics, and business become instruments of worship through which we can glorify God.

How is God speaking to you through His Word today?

I would suggest that we should come away today:

- Seeking God’s grace to grow in humility
- Seeking to know God intimately and to walk in the favor of His presence

Communion:

Bread: [I Cor. 15:3-4]

Cup: [2 Peter 1:2-4]