

The Life of Moses: I've Been to the Mountain Top

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Pastor, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on October 24, 1999:
Scripture Lessons: Deuteronomy 34:1-12.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Today I invite you to climb with Moses to the top of Mount Pisgah soaring over 2000 feet above the plains of Moab to the East of the Jordan River. Moses is 120 years old so most of us should be able to keep up with him. Once we're at the top he points out the features of the promised land, not as they are in the days of Moses, but as they will be after the conquest. He points with a long, bony finger off to the distant north, 150 miles away. "See the city of Dan." I strain my eyes but I can't see the city of Dan. It doesn't even exist yet. Moses points West. "Look at the ocean?" But I don't see the ocean. It's 75 miles in the distance, beyond the hills of Judea. I don't know if anyone with ordinary eyesight could see what Moses saw at the age of 120. But Moses saw with the eyes of faith.

Throughout the ages men and women have gone to the mountaintop and viewed the Promised Land from afar. Most never reach the Promised Land in this life but they see it and what they see determines the future.

As Christians, we need to take the arduous journey from the lowlands to the top of Mt. Pisgah and view the land that God has promised us. I think of an ancient Christian living in Asia Minor about 155 years after the birth of Christ. He recorded the martyrdom of Bishop Polycarp. Polycarp was the aged bishop of the Christian church in Smyrna, a city in what is now Turkey. Persecution broke out against the fledgling band of Christians. Polycarp was dragged before the Roman magistrate. "Curse Christ! Confess Caesar as Lord! And offer a little incense to Caesar as to a God!" Do that and you'll live. Polycarp would not do what the Roman authorities required. "For eighty and six years I have served Christ as Lord, and he has never done me any wrong. How can I now blaspheme my King who saved me?" They burned Bishop Polycarp at the stake. The unnamed Christian who recorded his martyrdom wrote these remarkable words at the conclusion of his report: "The blessed Polycarp was martyred in the proconsulship of Statius Quadratus, *in the everlasting reign of Jesus Christ.*" Not in the reign of

Antoninus Pius, the Roman emperor, but *in the everlasting reign of Jesus Christ*. He saw things from the mountain top. He saw with the eyes of faith "the everlasting reign of Jesus Christ."

As citizens of the United States, we need to climb to the mountaintop and see our nation, not as it is today, but as it might be and should be. On April 3, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee, Dr. Martin Luther King addressed 2000 people who came out in the rain to hear him speak. King was visiting Memphis to help the sanitary workers' union win better wages. A judge had just laid down an injunction forbidding them to exercise their first amendment rights through participation in a protest march. King looked out over the crowd of poor working people and said: "Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop, I won't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's Will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." Three days later, Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated. He never reached the Promised Land, but he'd been to the mountain top. He'd seen the United States, not as it is, but as it would become. A land where people are judged, not by the color of their skin, but by their character. Our nation needs leaders, like Moses, who will take us to the mountain top. Some people see things as they are and say, "Why?" Others see things as they should be and say, "Why not?" And as election day draws near ask yourself which candidates have gone to mountain top. Do they simply complain about how things are, or do they have a vision of where we need to go for our nation to live up to its highest aspirations of liberty and justice for all?

As individuals and as families, we need to go to the mountain top and take a good look at the Promised Land. Dale Galloway writes, "Tell me your vision and I will tell you your future." Deep down within all of us is a need to make our lives count. There's nothing like an all-consuming vision from the mountaintop where we catch a glimpse of God's future to give our

lives the meaning and purpose we long for. When I counsel young people preparing for marriage I invite them to climb to the top of Mt. Pisgah and view the Promised Land. I ask them to imagine what kind of marriage they want in 50 years. Their children, if they have any, are grown and on their own. How do they imagine their retirement years? What kind of marriage will they have? It's one of the most difficult questions to answer. They can see five years ahead in their marriage. But fifty years is too far. Some get irritated when I encourage them to look that far into the future. "I don't know. I don't have the slightest idea. I can't see that far ahead." So I ask them to think of a couple they know who've been married 50 years. What made their marriage successful? Interview them. How did they get through the hard times? How did they get through crises and tragedies in sickness and want and sorrow? For unless we take the long view - unless we can see the future we have little hope of reaching our desired destination. It's so important to get a view of things from the mountaintop.

- Jesus - 4 times
- 1) Sermon on Mt
- 2) Mt of TRANSFIGURATION
- 3) Mt of Oiling

Do you view everything from ground level? Do you have a worm's eye view of life? Do you view life from the arm chair in front of the t.v.? Do you view life merely from the level of your work-place - always with your eye on the bottom line. Are you so preoccupied with the things of the moment that you can't see more than a few days or weeks ahead? We need to climb higher. We need to take time to get away from the hub-bub of modern business. "The world is too much with us, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers." We need to climb the mountain and take a look at the Promised Land.

4) Calvary

Looking at the Peace Quilt in Hartford given in appreciation of Andrew & Dorothy Murray.

Nearly ten years ago, Dr. Andrew Murray was dying in a hospital. Andy was a great man. Like Moses, Andy was a man whose eyesight was unimpaired by cynicism. I visited him in his hospital room in West Chester. He was heavily sedated. Not everything he said made sense. But one thing he said made perfect sense. "The future belongs to Jesus Christ." Andy had been to the mountain top. He saw the Promised Land from afar. His life's work was to make the Kingdom of God a reality here on earth, but he never reached the Promised Land in this life. Andy was right. The future belongs to Jesus Christ. The future doesn't belong to drugs, or to war, or disaster, or to fate or to hate, or to cancer and death. The future belongs to

Jesus Christ. We can't see that as long as we live our lives down here where our vision is blocked and obstructed. We need to go to the mountain top.

We used to sing in Sunday School,

Climb, climb up sunshine mountain
Heavenly breezes blow:
Climb, climb up sunshine mountain,
Faces all aglow.
Turn, turn from sin and doubting,
Look to God on high;
Climb, climb up sunshine mountain,
You and I.

Come with me to the mountain top over the course of the next year. Look at the Promised Land. Look at Oxford with the eyes of faith. Look at our homes and relationships and institutions, not as there are, but as God wants them to be. God has a some great task for us to accomplish. Climb with me to the mountain top. It takes time. It takes energy. It takes effort. Catch a glimpse of the Promised Land. But we dare not stay on top of the mountain. We need to go from the land of vision, back down to the valley to make the future happen.

O Master, from the mountain side,
Make haste to heal these hearts of pain;
Among these restless throngs abide,
O tread the city's streets again.

Till sons of men shall learn Thy love,
and follow where Thy feet have trod;
Till glorious from Thy heaven above
Shall come the City of our God.