

Moses Prepared for His Death

"The Lord said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel. And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered."
– Numbers 27:12-13

Summary:

God's command that Moses prepare for death shows both the seriousness of sin and the tenderness of divine mercy. Although Moses was dearly loved, his disobedience kept him from entering Canaan. Yet God softened the sentence in three ways: Moses would first see the promised land, his death would bring him to God's people, and he would follow the same path Aaron had already taken. The prospect of heaven, reunion with departed believers, and the peaceful deaths of faithful friends can lessen the fear of dying. As earthly ties diminish and heavenly ties increase, believers may face death with courage and confidence in God's sustaining presence.

Outline:

1. **Sin has consequences for believers**
 - God loved Moses, yet his disobedience brought real and painful discipline.
2. **God tempered judgment with mercy**
 - The sentence remained, but God graciously surrounded it with consolations.
3. **Moses was allowed to see Canaan**
 - The promised land assured him of God's faithfulness and pointed toward a better heavenly country.
4. **Death would gather him to God's people**
 - He would join the faithful in heaven and enjoy the believer's great family reunion.
5. **The example of others encouraged him**
 - Aaron's peaceful death showed that God sustains his people and helps them face the same journey.

Text

Reflections on death can never be unseasonable while we live in a dying world and a dying church, and are conscious that we ourselves are dying creatures. It is said that God sees no iniquity in his people. Yet he has threatened to visit their transgressions with a rod. Some tell us that sin never harms a believer. Yet it injured David. It degraded Eli, and Moses was also severely chastised.

Moses was very dear to God and had strong grounds to plead his case. Yet because he rebelled against God's command in the desert of Zin, during the congregation's strife, he was barred from entering Canaan. Though he pleaded earnestly, he could not overturn the harsh sentence.

Yet even in judgment, God remembers mercy. Here, he orders Moses to die, but softens the order in three ways to help him accept it.

First, he must die—but before that, he shall go up and “see the land which the Lord hath given unto the children of Israel.” Some might think this would frustrate him and deepen his grief at the loss. But it was intended as a consolation, and Moses accepted it as a favour.

For this purpose, his natural sight remained unimpaired, and perhaps his range of vision even increased. His curiosity was therefore not only satisfied; he also saw with gladness and praise the goodness and truth of God's promise to his people. In type, he saw and welcomed the prospect of a better country—even a heavenly one—which he was about to enter. As Isaac Watts has said,

*“Oh! could we make our doubts remove,
These gloomy doubts that rise,
And view the Canaan that we love
With unbeckled eyes—*

*Could we but climb where Moses stood,
And view the landscape o'er;
Not Jordan's stream, nor death's cold flood
Should fright us from the shore.”*

And such desires are usually indulged. Those who have lived their entire lives in bondage through fear of death have often been especially favoured.

Secondly, he must die—but this will be “a gathering unto his people”: to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and the Israel of God. He valued them so highly on earth that he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

Some he had known were already gone, along with many he had never known; but he, too, would join them. Not in the same grave: he was buried alone, and no one knows the place of his burial to this day. He would join them in heaven—not bodily, but in soul, united with the spirits of just men made perfect. The believer looks forward to a family reunion.

Thirdly, he must die—but “only as Aaron his brother was gathered.” Are we better than those who have gone before us? Is there any reason we should be exempt from their lot? The earlier removal of the godly, especially our own relations, tends to make death more familiar. It comes close enough for us to see it. It enters our very homes.

Their departure also tends to lessen our forebodings and despondency. We have seen that God treated them better than they feared. He was with them in the valley; their end was peaceful. They were supported and comforted. We thank God and take courage. Why should it be any different for us?

It also loosens our attachment to life. We have fewer ties below and many more attractions above. Who has not felt the sentiment, “Let us also go away, that we may die with him?” Surely the bitterness of death is past.

*“I could renounce my all below,
If my Creator bid;
And run, if I were called to go,
And die as Moses did.”*

This sermon is taken from William Jay’s devotional, *Morning and Evening Exercises* (January 21, Morning), first published in 1854.