

“Investing in the View”

Deuteronomy 34

Stewardship Commitment Sunday

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There stood Moses. Staring. Staring for a good long while. Taking in the magnificent, long yearned for, incredibly hard-earned view. There it was, at last, before his eyes ... the Promised Land. Standing there, open-eyed and open-hearted, all visions of his earlier Egyptian life completely dissolved like solid ice on a summer sidewalk. The stand-off with the Pharaoh, even, paled in comparison to the excitement of this view from atop Mount Nebo, overlooking Jericho. And all sad soundings of cynical, sniping, griping Israelites on the exodus journey were shed from his head and heart as easily as a cat hair left on a soft pillow. He had arrived. Old Moses, of age one hundred and twenty-nine, yet still strong of sight and of mind and most of all, spirit, had arrived at the edge. This was the edge of every God-made promise in his people's entire history and of every yet to be revealed plan of God for their future.

What he saw from this high and holy vista was real and organic. It was not “pie-in-the-sky” ... it was pie-on-the-plate! It was a “good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey.” (Deut. 8:7-8).

Such a lush panorama of promise fulfillment! His heart was very glad. It was glad and grateful for God's intimate presence in his long life and for the abundant life he trusted would now be the inheritance of generations to come. His “ability to prevail with God in prayer, his unflinching courage and commitment, his mediation with God on Israel's behalf” (NIB Commentary) ... all was not to be forsaken.

As he stared, he prepared. He stared He prepared ... he was not *in* that wondrous Promised Land. He stared ... he prepared ... he would not enter into it. He stared... he prepared ... he knew it was his time ... to die. There would be no descent from the mountaintop (other than his legacy) to continue the Lord's work. Not this time.

He stared ... he prepared ... for this was not a time to be cowardly. It was not time to have a grievous attitude toward God. It was time to enjoy the view fully before him. *Of course* he could have argued that exclusion from the Promised Land because of the one time he performed a miracle and did not give God the glory (Numbers 20) was

terribly trivial and flat out unfair. But he had spent his adventurous life bravely, faithfully, boldly, seemingly foolishly trusting the God whom he *and only he* knew face to face. His faithful fortitude was such that he would do so unto his final breath.

The holy promise, for Old Moses, was fulfilled right there, in his leading the nation to the edge of their God-hewn future under the new leadership of Joshua. It was enough. All was good. He was ready to rest from the miraculous life of signs and wonders which he and God invested toward the view finally before him. And so the outcast baby in the basket, the privileged prince of Egypt, the loud liberator of injustice, the gut-checking wilderness guide of forty years, the ever-prayerful servant shepherd, entered his own promised rest right then and there overlooking the land of Canaan.

Friends, what does the Promised Land look like to you? Have you, through your life's travels and travails thus far, been investing in this view? Does Moses' faithful example of unshakeable spiritual fortitude inspire you?

Everywhere in the Bible that the Promised Land is mentioned, it is described as a place of agricultural abundance. It is a land of provision, of sustenance. It is a land *lived toward*, but ultimately *gifted from* the mysteriously deep yet revealed love of God.

For the ancient Israelites, it was first and foremost the fertile place to call their own after being liberated from slavery in Egypt and from wilderness wandering some forty years. Moses brought them to the edge of where it was about to be given to them through divinely sanctioned military conquests (spend some time reviewing the battle of Jericho if you need a refresher about what I mean). The Promised Land was to be their land, their home, their nation, in fulfillment of the covenant God had first made with Abraham (Gen. 12:1). It was to be the place to lay down roots for the sake of righteousness and the building up of God's dominion for generations to come.

Some Christians today may also believe a Promised Land is theirs by way of God-sanctioned military conquest. For better and for worse, history evidences this rather explicitly and so such believers are in good company. For other, perhaps most, Christians, however, the Promised Land is less controversially a phrase peacefully synonymous with heaven. It is the spiritual land being journeyed to in faith and by God's grace through all of life's triumphs and sorrows. Arrival there is often talked about in terms of "reward."

Whatever your personal picture of the Promised Land is, this morning I invite you to consider that the Promised Land is two things at once -- it is both a vision of hope for the future and a faith-producing present reality. We are living *towards it* while also living *in it*.

Two words will hopefully help you comprehend where I'm coming from. These are two words used to describe the Promised Land, words heard by Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:17). They are words with tremendously spiritual symbolic meaning, words teaching us what we are to consecrate every day. That is, these are words that instruct us in how we are to dedicate our time, our talents, and our tithes as we willingly and lovingly participate in the activity of God. As such, these two words are well worth keeping in view, well worth investing in. The words are *milk* and *honey*.

The first word describing the Promised Land is *milk*. I consider this word *symbolic of common kinship*.

Whole milk was a very common staple of the ancient, agricultural Israelite's diet. But it was more than just an every day drink. It had a sensuous quality about it. Being thicker than water and wine, it featured a pleasant taste that lingered on people's palettes. For this reason, it was offered to guests as a sure sign of good hospitality. People came together around milk.

Even more so, milk was symbolic of common kinship because the offering of milk in Israelite society also served as a reminder of the common human need for true and natural nourishment. Although it was milk from another mammal, it was nonetheless mother's milk, and therefore a reminder of the most basic need of every newborn human. It was, therefore, a symbolic common denominator among friends, family, strangers, even enemies. In New Testament times, this theme of commonly needed nourishment for human growth was carried over. 1 Peter 2:2, for example, makes milk a measure of spiritual health by saying that we are to be "like newborn infants," longing for "the pure spiritual milk, so that we may grow into salvation."

No less important, though I have less to say about, is the second word describing the Promised Land -- *honey*. Its sweetness also made it a symbol of pleasurable experience. But, unlike milk, it was considered a delicacy. It was given as a valuable gift. It was, therefore, a symbol of abundance and prosperity. It's preciousness as a gift took on spiritual meaning by prophetic spokesman of the Old and the New Testaments, who spoke in a way that compared their reception of divine revelations to that of eating honey. As such, I consider honey to be *symbolic of common grace* – of that which God freely provides to each of us that is a priceless, prophetic and pleasurable gift. We sing of Amazing Grace, for example, saying how "sweet" the sound.

The Promised Land, then, is one overflowing with *milk*, symbolic of anything and everything which reminds us to be richly hospitable to all because we all have common

need for nourishment and growth, physically and spiritually. And the Promised Land is one overflowing with *honey*, symbolic of the common, precious, holy-revealing grace God bestows upon the faithful.

In what ways do you, and do we as Fairmount Presbyterian Church, invest in this land of milk and honey, in this ministry of nourishing hospitality and God's amazing grace?

We've come through several weeks now and as many sermons with and about Moses. We've come to this place today to worship and to specially offer our stewardship pledges as well as welcome new members. We offer our investments of God-glorifying, heartfelt worship and of life-labored gifts, with the Promised Land in view. We do so trusting they will be used for the building up of God's dominion for generations to come and to answer the door of people's prayers in the name of Jesus. As your pastor, as your preacher who must "walk the talk," I pledge to continuously work with Session and the Deacons to help FPC be a land overflowing with milk and honey, to be a land of the Lord Jesus Christ where nourishing hospitality for the body and soul is unwaveringly offered and where we will steadfastly strive to be a vessel of God's dynamic grace. You and I, together, we'll take in the sacred view as it dawns upon us each day. Amen!