“Lessons from the Life and Death of Moses”

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Rev. Min J. Chung

(Sunday Lord’s Day Worship, November 11, 2015)

Introduction
-Psalm 90:0
-Psalm 90:10
-Psalm 90:12

Some people live in regret. I talk to a lot of older people, and especially as people get older, they live in regret. Some of you college students may even regret your lack of study in high school, or your decision to come to the University of Illinois. Some of you, as you are about to face an exam, may regret not studying. Some of you have relational regrets. While some people live in regret, Others live in the present, just purposeless and mindless. Some people live in the future, mindful of the future, but in worry and fear. As we look into the scripture, we need to think about the past, so we can learn from it. We need to be faithful in the present, as well as being mindful of the future in preparation, so we can maximally live for the glory of God rather than living in worry or fear.

That is a suggestion that Moses is giving in Psalm 90. Psalm 90 is a Psalm of Moses’ prayer, and in verse 10, it says, “the years of our lives are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty…” As you know Moses lived about 120 years, and he wrote this psalm when he was about seventy or eighty. Verse 12 says, “So teach us to number our days…” This does not mean to just count our age, but it teaches us to make sure we know where we are in the phase of our lives, so we can calculate and prepare for the next phase of life in order to live maximally to glorify God. By listening to Moses’ advice in Psalm 90, we are going to get some lessons from his life, and we are going to divide his life into three stages. We will receive practical lessons, so that as we examine ourselves, we can prepare for the next stage in our lives. We will also get four lessons from his death as we specifically talk about this passage in Deuteronomy 34:1-12.

[Pastor Min shows a picture comparing three basketball players (LeBron James, Kobe Bryant, Michael Jordan) to illustrate the three stages of Moses’ life.]

I. Lessons from the life of Moses
-Deuteronomy 34:10-12
-Deuteronomy 34:7

This is a passage that talks about Moses’ accomplishment. Deuteronomy 34:10-12 says, “And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses...” We can see his life accomplishments mentioned, but how did he get there? Deuteronomy 34:7 says, “Moses was 120 years old when he died” His life is divided nicely into 3 phases, 40 years each. The first phase is when Moses was in the palace as a prince of Egypt for 40 years. In the second phase, Moses is in the desert as a shepherd living in obscurity. The third phase is when Moses is in the wilderness leading 2 million Israelites for 40 years into freedom. In the first stage, Moses forms who he is. In the second stage, he gets better at what he will do. In the third stage, Moses accomplishes the best
thing he can accomplish. There are stages in our lives as well. We are in a journey. Different stages in our lives require different skill sets. God is orchestrating these stages to teach us, train us, and prepare us for the future, always wanting us to grow and use us for His glory. We will think about these three stages Moses goes through.

a. The first stage: Who I am [0-25]
   -Hebrews 11:23-25
   -Acts 7:20-22

First of all, the first stage – “Who I am”. A long portion of his life is mentioned in Hebrews 11 and Acts 7. In Hebrews 11, we can see the foundation of his faith. “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.” This shows the faith of the parents, which transferred to Moses as seen in verse 24, “By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter...” Even though Pharaoh’s daughter adopts Moses, he is raised by his Jewish mother, which instills faith in Moses. Verse 25 says, “choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.” We see the foundation of his faith through these verses.

In Acts 7:20-22, we also see a foundation of his education. He received the best education the world had to offer during that time. Verse 20 says, “At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God's sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house, and when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.” Moses was educated. He was good in words and smart in deeds. We can learn three things for this phase.

i. Dependence to independence

Moses was led from dependence to independence. Same thing to us in our lives, we are growing up to independence. As soon as a child is conceived, slowly they are going away. They start in the womb, go to the breast, hands, house, junior high school, high school, college, and end at marriage. That is what kids are doing and what happens to our children. During this time, children go from being dependent on their parents to independent in early adulthood. So what is parenting? We prepare them while they are under our influences, and we train them for the next stage of life.

ii. Foundation to formation

Formation of the foundation of life takes place. Their personality, philosophy, and beliefs are formed. This affects their choices, their behavior, and how they live. When that foundation is formed, that foundation forms the rest of who they are - all these things are affected by family, friends, the environment, experiences, and interpretations. These things form who they are, and it becomes a foundation of who they are, which affects their life.
Also, during this stage in life, they learn general skills of life. They learn what kind of husband or wife they should become, how they resolve conflicts, what kind of parents they will be, work ethic – these things are all learned by especially by parents. In this early age, relational skills, emotional intelligence, relational intelligence, time management – all these things are learned at this stage. During this stage, you also learn skills for everything in life – how you live and serve God.

iii. Independence to dependence

Also, another thing that takes place is independence to dependence. They move from a dependence on a human, parental structure to independence from them, but they also move from independence from God to deeper dependence on God. Their trust of parents transfers to their trust in God, their heavenly Father. So, this phase is what happens to Moses. Moses in Egypt has a foundation in faith and a foundation in education of Egypt as a prince. He knows his ethnic identity. He has a spiritual identity. He is still immature and underdeveloped. He is ‘raw’, which is why he needed 40 more years in the desert to develop his spiritual identity so that he could take care of the third stage of his life – the great work of redemption of leading the Israelites to the land of Canaan.

b. The second stage: What I do [25-45]
-Acts 7:23-28

To help this stage, parents are to make their children wise in the first stage (i.e. learning to say “Yes” or “No.”) Children need to know what is temporary and eternal so that they can know what to live for – ultimately, so that they know what to die for. Hopefully, as they get into their second stage, they will know what to do in life. In Acts 7:23-28, when Moses is 40 years old, the second stage is beginning. Verse 24 says, ""When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian."" Moses knew his ethnic identity as an Israelite. He knew of his calling. He knew what he was supposed to do. Verse 25, "He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand." Moses already knew his calling by this time, but he was not very good at it. He knew his calling was saving the Israelites. He was good at protecting and fighting, but that was not everything needed for leading the Israelites. He had to persuade them, shepherd them, talk to them, change their hearts, and lead them. Moses was good at fighting, but he was not good at persuading the Israelites, so the Israelites were not following him. These 40 years helped him become good at what he was not good at – shepherding skills. Moses spent shepherding sheep, so later on he would lead smellier sheep, the Israelites. Three things happen at this stage for Moses, which will happen in our lives during this stage.
i. We get to see what we cannot do – illusion

First of all, we will get to see what we cannot do. At this stage we get to see an illusion. When you ask children what they want to do when they grow up, many answers to become president. When they start to see that it is not a realistic option, they start to see that it is an illusion. At the young adult stage, this is what happens often. As they get older, dreams start to meet reality. “I am not great as I thought”. This is why many young adults go through what we call ‘quarter-life crisis’. They start to see the illusion of their life. What they need to do is to accept the responsibility that comes with gifts and abilities. They need to think, “There are some things that I cannot do, but there some things that I can do.”

ii. We get to see what we can do – illumination

Not only do we get to see what we cannot do, but also we get to see what we can do – illumination. Moses later on becomes a persuader and prophet who uses words, and by the time in Deuteronomy and Numbers, he leads people in the Word while shepherding them. At this stage as well, we get to see what we cannot do, but also what we can do. Then what happens? We see a new reality of life, and develop new dreams. Dreams shift and dreams change. Some people say that you are settling, but that is not the case. We are becoming realistic to how God made us.

iii. We get to see what we need to focus on – implementation

The third thing is that we get to see what we need to focus on. Now that we can see what we can do, we need to get better at it. Implementation takes place and improvement will take place. You know what to improve in your life, and you need to be good at these things you are going to use to serve others and God. You don’t just focus on who you are, which is what happens in the first stage, but at this stage you improve on what you can do – skills in life that you can use to serve others and God, or skills God can use through you. At this stage in your life, what you need to do is develop your capacity. Many single adults are at this stage. Many young adults think, “I want to have fun,” and when you get married, you are going to be destroyed. It is going to be tremendously tough for you because life just gets busier and harder. Not only does the amount of things you have to do increases, but so much skill is needed. You need to increase your capacity.

When you are single, you think, “I’m free, so I just want to have fun”, but it does not work like that. You need to have a mindset of preparation because things you are going to do in life are so important. You need to increase your capacity. You need to get better at the things you will use in the future: relational skills, marriage, raising skills, ministering to other people. When you do not get good at these things, you take away from other people. That is why being prepared for the next stage of life is very important.

Some young couples ask me, “Should I have children early or late?” My suggestion is have kids early because you are important later than now because you will be wiser later than now. Especially from a kingdom perspective, since you are going to grow spiritually and ministering to other people, that is my suggestion.
c. The third stage: What I leave [45-?]
- Acts 7:29-30
- Acts 7:34

The third stage is the ‘What I leave’ stage. Acts 9:29-30 says, “Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush.” This is the third stage of Moses life when he was 80 years old. This was when Moses was called to lead the Israelites. In verse 34 God comes to Moses and says, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.” We see the eyes of God seeing the afflictions of the His people. We see the ears of God hearing the suffering of his people. We see the feet of God, coming down to His people. We see the hands of God to deliver His people. The only problem is that God is Spirit, and people cannot see God coming down and helping, hearing, and seeing. So what does God do? He calls a person with a physical body. A person with eyes, ears, hands, and feet – Moses. God uses Moses as God will use us.

i. Faithfulness

First is faithfulness. At this time, you know what you’re supposed to do. You know what you can do. Now you need to be faithful. At this stage, you need to be faithful to the realm of your family, work, and local church involvement.

ii. Discipleship

Then you should focus on discipleship. Now that you are good at what you’re doing, and you are older. You help others to find their calling by directing and being an example using whatever you are good at. Things related to your family, serving in your church, or even in your occupation - in and through those things, minister to people.

iii. Legacy

As you accomplish the best works in your life in this stage because you have been doing this for a longer period of time, you leave your legacy – the effect of your faithfulness in the next generation.

When you think about these three phases of Moses, Jesus had a similar three phases like this. First 30 years – foundation as a carpenter. Next, for three years Jesus does – he accomplishes redemption. Then he ascends and rest of eternity, by the means of his Holy Spirit, he is seeing the legacy of his redemptive work throughout the rest of eternity. Are you tired of where you are and what you are doing? Sometimes in life you are going to be in places that seems useless for you to stay, and are going to be doing tasks that you think your labor will be in vain. But unless you are called to go somewhere else, or clearly called to do something else, you need to do your best in where you are and do your best in what you are doing because He is preparing you with the skills and character you need for the next place and calling. So, be faithful now in the present.
II. Lessons from the death of Moses
-Deuteronomy 34:7

We talked about the phases of life and the lessons from Moses’ life. Now, we are going to look at the death of Moses, especially looking at Deuteronomy 34.

a. The question of happiness – We will never be completely happy in this life
-Deuteronomy 34:4
-Deuteronomy 34:10

First of all, we will never be completely happy in this life. I don’t know whether this is encouraging or discouraging to you. Those of you who are asking if this is normal in life - yes. This is normal in life because to be happy, you need to get what you want. If you love God and serve God, He will give you what you want for some things. But, even the greatest servant of God didn’t get what he wanted at the end of his life. Deuteronomy 34:4 says, ‘And the Lord said to him, “This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, ‘I will give it to your offspring.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there.’” Moses was supposed to get to the Promised Land, but because of mistakes, he is not going to be able to get into the Promised Land. Was Moses a bad person? No. Look at Deuteronomy 34:10, “And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” Nothing guarantees that we will get everything that we want in life. Nothing. Even if you live an excellent life and are a great Christian, you will not get everything you want. Moses did not get the most important thing that he wanted in his life. He could not fulfill his goal. He could not fulfill his purpose. Life is filled with disappointments and discontentment. Even if you get everything that you want, you will never be completely happy as a Christian because we have two natures that are in opposition. If your sin nature is happy, your Spirit nature is groaning. If you are happy spiritually, there is always temptation sinfully. Unless we get to Heaven, we will never be completely happy as Christians. Even if we sin, the Bible tells us that if we seek anything else, you will eventually be unhappy. You will never lose Him because he will never lose you. Heaven is a place where we get everything we want because we will only have our Spirit nature. Infinite joy is coming for those who are in Jesus Christ.

b. The question of failures – God’s focus on us is now how we have failed how we have served
-Deuteronomy 34:5-7
-Deuteronomy 34:10
- Deuteronomy 18:18
-Acts 3:22

The second lesson is the question of failures. Some of you have failed. Some of you look bad and live in regret. Some of you think that your present life is a consequence of your failures that have happened in the past, but look. What counts is not how you look at it or how other people look at
it, but it is how God looks at you. This is what God’s focus is like. God’s focus on us is not how we have failed, but how we have served.

Moses failed. He disobeyed God and cannot even enter into the Promised Land. Yet, when the Bible talks about the evaluation of Moses’ life, he was a great and wonderful servant of God. Deuteronomy 34:5 says, “So Moses the servant of the Lord” Only very few people are given that title. In fact, when Moses dies, it is God Himself who buries Moses. Verse 6 says, “and he buried him.” In fact, he was the greatest of the prophets. Look at verse 10, “And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses.” When we look at his life, he seems like a failure because he can’t even finish his job of getting into the Promised Land, but in the Bible, it says that there was no one like Moses. In fact, God talks about a prophet like Moses that is coming in Deuteronomy 18:18, “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers.” Moses was such a good prophet that God is saying that the greatest prophet will be like Moses. In Acts 3:22 we see that that prophet is Jesus. “Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you.” Moses was called to serve despite all of his flaws. Why? Because of Jesus Christ. We are justified and forgiven in Jesus Christ. Therefore, we are not only forgiven, but he still helps us grow and continues to use us because God’s focus is not on how we have failed, but how we have served. That is why we need to keep on serving and repenting. We do not need to live a perfect life. Life is filled with successes and failures, and we need not feel that we are doomed by our failures. The past explains our present, but it does not need to determine our future. We are not doomed because of the presence of our failures, but because of the absence of God’s forgiveness. We are always forgiven in Jesus Christ. We are never doomed by our lack of perfection, but we are doomed because of our the lack of repentance.

How do we deal with our past failures? 4 Ls. Lean on the cross for our failures. Learn from our failures. Leave from our past, and do not think about it again if you do not need to. Love God and love people. That is how you deal with past failures in Jesus Christ. God sees what we have done well, not what we have failed in. People remember our greatest successes and failures, but God remembers our consistent faithfulness. We need to keep on serving. In the bible, faithfulness always trumps greatness. We are living in a culture where everyone wants to go higher, but no one wants to go deeper. How high we go is merely a reputation among people, but how deep we get is who we are in Jesus Christ. Many people cannot see what God has for them in their present season because they are so wrapped up in what they want in the future or regrets in the past, not with what God is doing in the present. Faithfulness always trumps over greatness or giftedness. Keep on being faithful. Keep on serving as you are forgiven.

c. The question of accomplishment and legacy – God will carry on redemptive history in every generation
-Deuteronomy 34:9
-Daniel 4:3
-Psalm 119:90
-Psalm 145:4

God will carry on redemptive history in every generation. If you care about the next generation and young children in our church, the younger people you are ministering to, God will use
somebody to carry on redemptive history in every generation. God will use somebody. If not us, someone else. If you say that you don’t want to be used by God, He will use someone else. It is your loss. You need to live for spiritual accomplishment and impact. We do this by God’s grace, God’s forgiveness, and God’s strength for His glory. This is true of every generation. Nothing you do in the Lord will be in vain. He will somehow use it in the big picture of what God is doing in his life. Deuteronomy 34:9 says, “And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom.” The spirit that was in Moses is going to be given by God to Joshua. It is not about Moses, but God empowering Moses as he empowers him.

What is God going to do? Daniel 4:3, “How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.” Don’t worry about your children as if they are doomed. They may look like they are doomed, but the Word of God says from generation to generation that God will continue his dominion. Why? Psalm 119:90, “Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast.” How does He exercise His faithfulness? Psalm 145:4, “One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.” Our job is to do what we can to expand God’s Kingdom, and we transfer what God has done for us; our testimonies, and what He has shown us in our lives to the next generation. God does this through the means of one generation to another generation as they give their testimonies, as they teach, and show what Jesus is like in their lives. Therefore, God will be faithful to all and every generation. God will use somebody in each generation. God uses the previous generation to teach the next generation for His redemptive history. The Bible says to disciple the ones you love. Leave a legacy as you are being faithful. Disciple others for the Kingdom of God. Don’t be stagnant. You must distinguish the difference between stagnant and faithfulness. Stagnant is the same thing as being consistent in half-heartedness. Faithfulness is a whole-hearted endeavor. We must not let our desire to live in comfort outweigh our desire to live for a cause. If we live for our happiness, it will lead to regret because we have lived for a cause smaller than ourselves. We must live for a purpose greater than ourselves that outweighs our lives. Live in participation of God’s redemptive work.

We have something to do in our lives. Whether you are in first, second, or third stage, God is preparing you, so you can maximally serve Him. In the world, old means bad; everyone wants to look young. However, in the Bible, if you say you look old, that is a compliment because old means wiser. Old means more testimonies embedded in their wrinkles. All of the white hairs are testimonies and stories of God’s faithfulness. You are much more useful when you are old. Old in the Bible means much more value for the kingdom of God, so don’t waste your age. Use it to give legacy to younger generations.

d. The question of purpose – Life and death is about Jesus: By His grace for His glory
-Deuteronomy 34:10

The fourth lesson here is that life and death is about Jesus. Deuteronomy 34:10, “And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.”
i. Our whole life is about Jesus – Deuteronomy 34:10

First of all, our whole life is about Jesus. Why was Moses such a great prophet? It was because he was pointing to Jesus. Through giving of the laws, describing what Jesus would be like, showing his character, the rest of the Exodus account, leading Israelites to Canaan, which pictures Jesus freeing us from sin. Moses’ life was about Jesus, and our lives are also about Jesus.

ii. Through our successes, we are to picture Jesus – The first rock
    -Exodus 17:6
    -1 Corinthians 10:4

Another thing is that through our successes, we are supposed to picture Jesus. In Exodus 17:6, according to 1 Corinthians 10:4, “and the rock was Christ…” In that success, it pictures the blessings in Jesus Christ. Just like God had to hit Christ, Moses had to hit the rock. As Jesus takes all of our sins, the water of grace and forgiveness comes out for us. We know that it pictures that because in verse 4 it says that Jesus is our spiritual rock. Through our successes, we are to picture Jesus.

iii. In our failures, we are to point to Jesus – The second rock
    -Deuteronomy 34:4
    -Numbers 20:8-12

Even in our failures, we are to point to Jesus. The first incident with the rock takes place 40 years before this passage in Numbers 20:8-12. The Israelites are complaining for water again, but this time the command is different. “Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle.” And Moses took the staff from before the Lord, as he commanded him.” God does not tell Moses to hit the rock this time, but speak to the rock to yield water. Moses instead hits the rock not only once, but twice. Moses’ anger was not the reason he could not enter into the Promised Land. Verses 11 says, “And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly.” So what is the identification of sin? I believe there are two sins pointed out in verse 12, “Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.” Moses disbelieved, and Moses somehow misrepresented God. Moses’ disbelief in God shows through hitting the rock once and another time. He doesn’t know if water will come out like the first situation.

The incredible thing about this is that water still comes out, even though Moses does these things in unbelief. God was gracious in giving water to make Moses a brilliant failure. In the eyes of people, Moses was successful, but in the eyes of God, he was a failure with his sin. One can be so successful and respectful before men, but can be a failure and a sinner in the eyes of God. Also, you can be a failure in front of men, but sometimes you can be successful and faithful in the eyes of God. Moses could not enter into the Promised Land to show that no one can enter into the Promised Land without faith in Jesus Christ. This time still uses Moses, but he had to be
used as an illustration of unbelief. This does not mean Moses was not allowed spiritually into heaven, but this shows that he had to be used as a visual illustration.

Another failure that Moses did was misrepresenting Christ. The first time, Moses was successful of representing Christ through hitting the rock, which represents God’s wrath coming on Christ because of our sin. As a result, the water of grace and forgiveness that pictures our benefits and blessings comes out. But the second time, because Christ died, the second time was the benefit of the salvation as Moses was supposed to speak to the rock. Christ could use his words to give us in our intimacy and relationship with him and the blessings through the word of God. Moses was supposed to picture the benefit of the salvation because Jesus Christ, once and for all, died for us on the cross. Now, Moses had to show that grace aspect and the blessing aspect of salvation, but he failed to see this. Whenever a consequence is very serious in the Bible, it is something about picturing the Gospel to show what happens to us apart from Christ. The consequence of our personal sin is not punishment, but His way of disciplining us and illustrating us to others, and using us in a different way. Sometimes, we can be used as a negative example. The consequence of our ministerial sin is not only a punishment for our sin, but a way He uses us differently for His glory. This does not mean we cannot be forgiven and used again by God because Moses was forgiven and used again by God, but often forgiveness does not always negate the consequence of sin. Through all these things, everything works together for good. It works for His glory and His people, so that everyone can see Christ is everything.

iv. We will make it to the end because of Jesus – Transfiguration

We see that we will make it to the end because of Jesus. In Luke 9, we see that Jesus shows Peter, James, and John a glimpse of what he will be like post-glory, post-crucifixion. “And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure,[a] which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” Just as Moses led the biological Israelites out of slavery, Jesus is going to lead the spiritual Israelites/the Church out of spiritual slavery of sin. He calls Moses and Elijah, and they land on the Promised Land. Moses finally gets into the Promised Land. Why? Moses made it to the Promised Land because of Jesus.

We are a bunch of failures, but we will finish our journey because of Jesus. We may stumble and fall in our path, but we will never fall off the path when we follow Jesus because our life and our death is all about Jesus. By His grace, we will finish, and for His glory, we will live to point to Him who came, who is with us, and who is coming.

Conclusion

[Pastor Min shows his Facebook friend requests and how people he doesn’t know often friend requests him. He goes through pictures to identify the person of the account.]

The Bible is like the Facebook of Jesus. There are so many people and faces in the Bible, but as we read through the entire 66 books of the Bible, we see the same picture; the common face of
Jesus. We get to learn and see what Jesus looks like. It is like that in our lives as well. We see a glimpse of angels in Isaiah 6, the angels are crying out because of the glory of Jesus. If we have the eyes to see, we will see Jesus in everything. Everything is about Jesus. This is a lesson the life and death of Moses gives. Let’s pray.