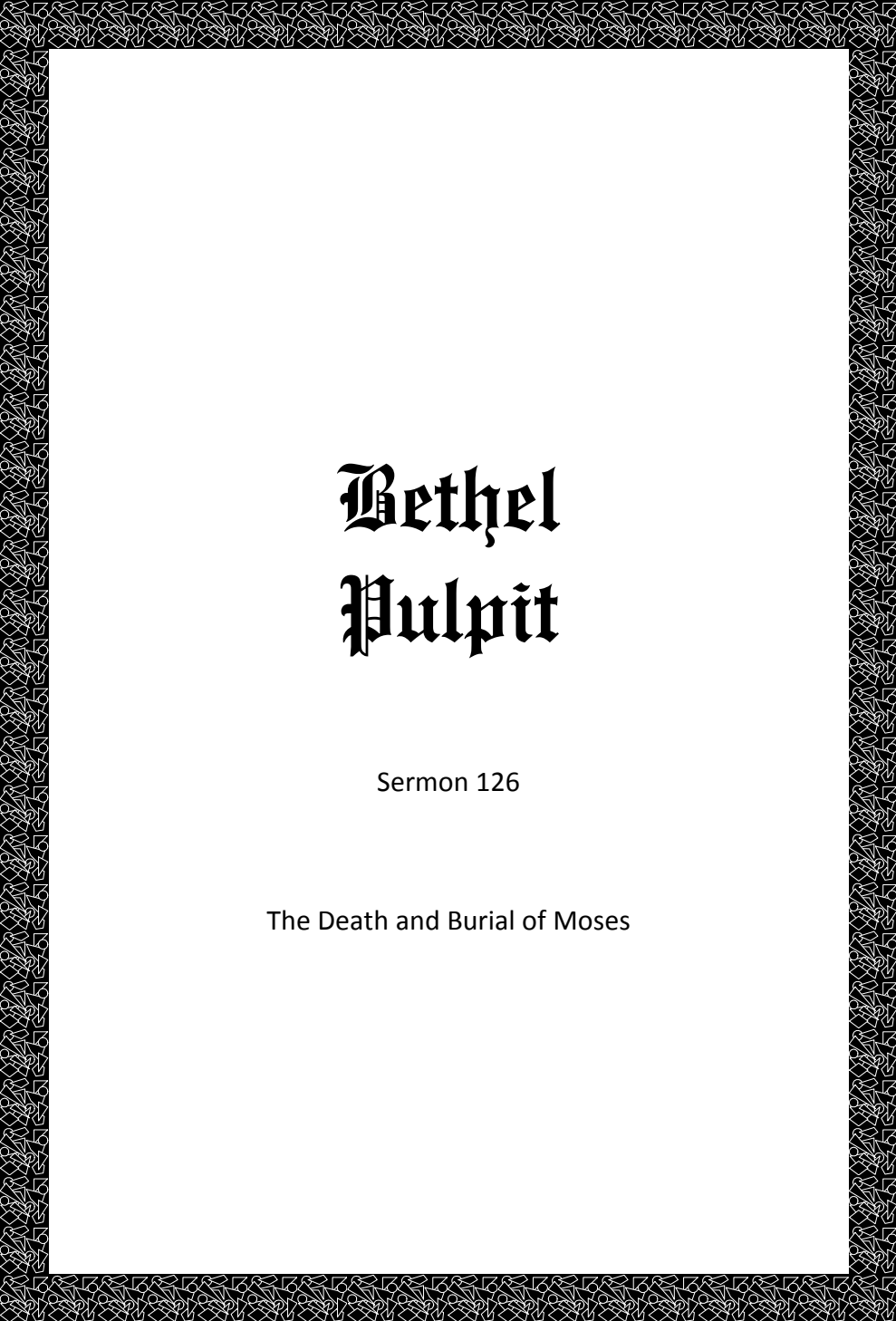




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 126

The Death and Burial of Moses

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 26th February, 1995**

Text: “*Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan*” (Joshua 1. 2).

The best of men, the most valuable of men, do not live for ever. O what a great and godly man Moses was! He is continually described as “the servant of the Lord.” What a blessing he was to Israel and what a great work he accomplished! But the time came when he died, when he went the way of all flesh. The wonderful mercy is this (I believe it is engraved on one of the tombs in Westminster Abbey): God buries His workmen, but He carries on His work. No-one is indispensable. God’s work was going on long before we arrived on this earth. God’s work will still be going on after we have been taken away from it.

God will always carry on His own work. When the Lord needs a man, that man will always be there, raised up and equipped and then used. So as Moses died, the Lord raised up Joshua. And it will ever be so right down to the end of time, a Joshua taking the place of a Moses. For no man is indispensable, not even the best of men, not even Moses. But what a solemn time this was in Israel. “Moses My servant is dead.” And it is a solemn time in the church of God today. We do miss these old, godly, gracious people who have been taken from the evil to come. “Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth”; and “the righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart.”

“Moses My servant is dead.” I want to try to speak to you this morning on the death and burial of Moses, in the two senses of it: first of all in the actual, literal sense of it, and then in the typical sense and the spiritual teaching there is in it. I have not read it for many years, but there was a sermon in the *Gospel Standard* (1952) by Mr. Harwood of Godmanchester, a most remarkable sermon on the death and burial of Moses. I think those of you who read it will not have forgotten it.

I. “Moses My servant is dead.” We read that one day the Lord spoke to Moses. He said, “Get thee up into this mountain ... and die in the mount whither thou goest up.” In other words, God came to Moses one day and

He told him to do something. He had often told Moses to do things, but on this occasion what He told Moses to do was this: He told him to die. “Get thee up into this mountain ... and die.” Moses was not surprised. It does not seem that he was unduly perturbed, for he was ready. Beloved friends, the vital point with you and me today is to be ready. “Be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”

“Moses My servant is dead.” And one day people will be saying that about you and me. But O to be ready! The Lord gives us many commands and we do not always obey them. Some of you in your heart of hearts know that, that you have not always obeyed the command God has given to you. But this is one command you and I *will* obey, when He says, Go up and die. When that day comes, all the skill of the best doctors and surgeons will not help. Just as there was an appointed day when we were born, so there is an appointed day when we must die. It is appointed, and that appointment cannot be broken. “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” We are not here for ever. Some of you here are old; you must die soon. There are many here who are young. Well, one day you must die, but it may be soon.

“Pause, my soul! and ask the question,
Art thou ready to meet God?
Am I made a real Christian,
Washed in the Redeemer’s blood?”

“The Lord spake unto Moses that selfsame day, saying, Get thee up into this mountain ... and die in the mount whither thou goest up.” Moses was ready; he was prepared. Now can you look on that day with the sweet assurance that you are ready? Let us be very, very clear: by nature none of us is ready; none of us is prepared to meet our Maker; not one of us is prepared to leave this world. God is holy. God is righteous. You and I are sinful, guilty. We have sinned against God. We are unworthy. We are condemned. We are unfit to die. The only way you and I can ever be ready is if the Lord in love and mercy *makes* us ready. We read of the wise virgins, “And they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.” Tell me, beloved friends, in your prayers do you ever have to pray that the Lord will make you ready? Do you ever have to pray that He will prepare you for your end? “O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!” To be prepared

for heaven is not anything we can do, any merit, any worthiness, any good works, any repentance. If we are to be ready, it must be in Christ and in Christ alone, completely washed in His precious, sin-atoning blood and completely covered in His glorious righteousness. There is no preparation apart from this. We must be born again, and if born again of the Holy Spirit, then we will perceive our unfitness, our unreadiness, and then led and taught by the same, glorious Spirit, we shall seek salvation in Christ and seek it only there.

Now again I affectionately ask you, if the Lord were to come to you today as He came to Moses here, and say to you, “Get thee up into this mountain ... and die,” could you receive that as joyful tidings? I remember a young person being told that she was dying, she could not live above three months. She thought about it, and she said, “Why should I be sad when I receive such a loving invitation?” Will you go to your last end like that? Do not take it for granted. May that day not come upon you and me unawares.

“Moses My servant is dead.” “The Lord spake unto Moses that selfsame day, saying, Get thee up into this mountain ... and die in the mount.” Moses had a good religion, a religion which God gave him, and the thing which stands out more than anything else in the religion of Moses is this (and I believe a few of you can come in here this morning): he had such clear views of the blessedness of the people of God as they stand “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.” And he wanted to be one of them. He wanted to be identified with them. That was Moses’ religion, and that was Ruth’s religion. “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” That was the Shunammite’s religion. “I dwell among mine own people.” Is it your religion? Have you the religion of Moses? You have been shown that God has a people. O what a blessed people they are in Christ, the only blessed people. O have you realised, unless I am found amongst them I can never go to heaven? And then the desire that you might be one of them, identified with them. “With them numbered may I be, now and to eternity.”

So it was with Moses right at the very beginning. Do not forget, he was a great man. He was a prince. He lived in a palace. He was the adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter. Look what he gave up. Have you ever given anything up for Jesus’ sake? “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the

people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the the reward.” This was Moses right at the beginning. He saw God’s people and he saw them as slaves and he saw them groaning beneath the whips of their cruel taskmasters. But he saw them as the excellent of the earth and he was willing to forsake a throne and a palace if only he might be found amongst them.

Have you a religion like that, the only thing that really matters to be found amongst the despised but eternally-loved people of God? Moses viewed it in the light of eternity. He saw what it would be in the great day. Moses knew that one day this would be written: Moses is dead. He knew that a palace and a throne and riches would mean nothing then, but he also knew that being one of the despised people of God would mean everything then. And it will. You have an eminent man in the world, and he dies. The papers are full of him, perhaps there is a great funeral, and his sun sets for ever. But, “thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.”

Moses never repented of the choice which he made by God-given faith, to be identified with the people of God. O didn’t he love them! Why, the very last word he spoke before he went up into the mountain to die was this: “Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord!” In his first beginnings he saw the blessedness of the people of God and wanted to be one of them, and as he came right to the end he had those clear, believing views of their blessedness in Christ and the sweet assurance that he was one of them. So he could die in peace. “Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.”

Now see a miracle: this aged man, one hundred and twenty years old, climbing unaided, alone, up the mountain and going up joyfully, that he might die in the mount. A child of God does not go down to die; he goes up to die. Every child of God dies in the mount, the mount of Christ’s finished work. It is going up to die. “Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah.” Sometimes you

ask people how they are getting on, and you often hear them answer something like this: sometimes up and sometimes down. Well, the last step with a child of God will be up. “Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah.”

In one sense naturally he died a disappointed man, because he was never allowed literally to enter the Promised Land because of the sin of disobedience. That one act of disobedience, that one rash act, literally it kept him out of the Promised Land. Of course, it did not keep him out of heaven. But I always like to think of this. Grace did abound over sin. You would have thought the close of Deuteronomy was the end, Moses dying the other side Jordan, buried the other side Jordan, never standing in the Promised Land. Well, the time came when he did, on the Mount of Transfiguration. On that occasion, along with Elijah, the feet of Moses did stand in the Promised Land. But it was a more blessed occasion than ever Moses would have known in the flesh, when the Lord revealed Himself in all His radiant glory.

But what a view this was from the top of Pisgah, this wonderful view Moses had of the whole of the Promised Land! Of course, it must have been more than natural sight. Though we are told his eye was not dim, no human eye could have seen “the land of Gilead, unto Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea, and the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar.” It was more than natural sight. You dear, aged souls especially, may there be times when by faith you ascend Pisgah and when the Lord shows you the goodly land, your everlasting inheritance, a place prepared for you. For,

“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.”

“Moses My servant is dead.” And the Lord buried Moses. In one sense the Lord buries all His people. He buries them all in the mount of Christ’s finished work. But there never was such a burial, there never was such a funeral. Many of you will know Mrs. C. F. Alexander’s famous poem on “The Burial of Moses.” There never was such a funeral as this. “He

buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.”

II. “Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan.” So much for the natural, the literal death of Moses. Let me to come to it typically and spiritually. Moses was the law-giver. It was by Moses the whole law of God was given on Mount Sinai. Moses was the representative of the law. Now the holy law of God can never bring a sinner to heaven, never bring a sinner into gospel liberty. Moses could not take Israel into the Promised Land. Joshua must take Israel into the Promised Land. Of course, Joshua means *the Saviour*. You will have noticed in the New Testament that many of the Old Testament names are given in a different form. For instance, Elijah is called Elias. So in the New Testament Joshua is called Jesus. It is the same name, the Saviour.

The teaching of this: “Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan.” The teaching is sweetly summarised in John 1. “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” In other words, beloved friends, the holy law of God, though it is righteous and good and true, can never save you. If you are to be saved, it must be through the Lord Jesus and through Him alone. “Moses My servant is dead.” The holy law God gave by Moses, the righteous law: do this and live, but do it not and thou shalt surely die; and, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” The law bids you honour your Maker, love Him above all things in thought, word and deed, remember His Sabbaths, set up no idols, love thy neighbour as thyself, honour parents, keep from stealing, from lying, from adultery, from evil thoughts, from covetousness. O how broad, exceeding broad is the commandment of the holy law given by Moses! It extends to every thought and every word as well as every deed.

The law of God as given by Moses can never save; it can only condemn. God never gave His holy law that sinners might be saved by obedience to it. The law is a wonderful revelation of the holiness and righteousness and sovereignty and justice of a thrice-holy God. The law was given that it might show us our need of a Saviour, how far short we come. Now Moses could never bring the people of God into the Promised Land. It must be Joshua. Moses must die and Moses must be buried and

then Joshua must come, whose name is Saviour, and sweetly lead them into the Promised Land.

“Moses My servant is dead.” You say, What does it mean to me practically? Well, it means this. If you and I are ever going to get to heaven, it cannot be by obedience to Moses’ law. It cannot be by satisfying God’s justice ourselves. It must be to be saved by the righteousness of another, even our heavenly Joshua, the Lord Jesus. *He* must bring us into the Promised Land. “Moses My servant is dead.” Now you have to find this: Moses must die and you must die to Moses. That is what the apostle means when he says, “Ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ.” By nature we are very much alive to the law. We must die to the law and the law must die to us. In a word it is this:

“Not the labour of my hands,
Can fulfil Thy law’s demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.”

“Moses My servant is dead.” We read a remarkable thing about Moses. He did not die because he was weak; he was not; he was strong; his eye was not dim; his natural force was not abated. The law has not lost any of its strength, any of its power to condemn, any of its power to keep sinners out of heaven. It is not because Moses was weak. It is not because the law is weak. “Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.” And the Lord buried Moses in a valley of the land of Moab. Moses must die and Moses must be buried. No-one was ever to know where the grave of Moses was. Someone said to me recently that the fault today with a lot of present-day preachers is that in spirit they are always trying to find where Moses is buried, to find Moses’ grave. It is not Moses; it is Christ.

We have a remarkable word. I wonder if you children have ever read this remarkable Scripture, if you have ever wondered just what it means. We are told there was a quarrel taking place between the archangel Michael and the devil (Jude 9). We are told they were quarrelling about the body of Moses. That is all we are told. This is one of the strangest, most mysterious verses in Scripture. I am not going to give you an

exposition of it this morning, but I believe the meaning is something like this. The Lord determined that it should never be known where the body of Moses was, but Satan would like people to find it. In a national sense the Jews would have made it a shrine of idolatry and worshipped Moses. That was one reason. But in a spiritual sense, Satan wants to drag up the body of Moses and take you up to Moses' grave. That is, to keep sending you back to the law. The archangel Michael contended with him. You read it when you go home in the short Epistle of Jude.

“Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.” “Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan.” Well, “The law was given by Moses.” It cannot save; it can only condemn. “But grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” The Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ fulfilled the law given by Moses. He went to the end of the law for righteousness. And then at Calvary He bore the curse of a broken law and He took the curse for ever away. “Believing, we rejoice to see the curse remove.”

“Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan.” In two or three ways. First of all, it is only the Lord Jesus who can bring a sinner to heaven. Moses cannot. The best of men cannot. The holy law of God cannot.

“The best obedience of my hands
Dares not appear before Thy throne;
But faith can answer Thy demands,
By pleading what my Lord has done.”

This is the gospel as I understand it. I would that you young people might be clearly taught the difference between grace and works, Christ and Moses, gospel and law. Nothing we can do can ever merit heaven, ever bring us to heaven at last, ever give us a place in heaven. The Lord Jesus Himself must do it all from first to last. He must save us and He must take us to heaven to be saved with an everlasting salvation. “Thou must save, and Thou alone.” Not Moses but Joshua. Not the law but Jesus.

“Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan.” Secondly, the law can never bring a sinner into the sweet liberty of the

gospel, into the sweet assurance of being a child of God. It is only the Lord Jesus who can ever bring you into the sweet liberty of the gospel. That is one of the simplest truths in Scripture, one of the clearest truths in the New Testament, one of the easiest truths to repeat, yet one of the hardest truths to learn. By nature we are always going back to Moses. We have this old, legal self. We cannot divorce ourselves from the covenant of works. We always want to be doing something or bringing something; if only I could come with a soft heart, or a good prayer, or a little repentance. O but to be completely divorced from Moses, to see Moses not only dead but buried, to be completely delivered from the slightest hope of salvation in anything the law can do, in anything you and I can do, and to go as a guilty sinner to Jesus' feet, willing to be saved by grace, willing that He might be our All in all. "Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan." I say it affectionately, I think quite a few of you are held in bondage because you are cleaving a little bit too much to Moses.

"Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan." Then the third thing, the crossing of Jordan. Literally Jordan had to be crossed and the children of Israel for forty years knew that one day Jordan would be crossed. I suppose they all thought how nice it would be to have this honoured leader, Moses, to take them across. No; Moses must die. It must be the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth going before them into Jordan. Often we speak of Jordan as representing death, death's cold, dark river. "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?". May the Lord seal that word home to someone here as He did on the one occasion when I preached here on it. We had someone cut down in conviction. "How wilt *thou* do in the swelling of Jordan?" You say, How can it be? How can I cross Jordan? What if I sink to rise no more? How can I come safely over Jordan to the Promised Land of peace? Well as you are brought away from Moses, from trusting in Moses, as you are brought to trust in Jesus, His finished work, His precious blood your hope, then you will find your heavenly Joshua taking you safely over Jordan into the Promised Land. It is this:

“In that dread moment, O to hide
Beneath His sheltering blood!
'Twill Jordan's icy waves divide,
And land my soul with God.”

“Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan.”