

Scripture Reading:

Acts 7: "17 "But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt 18 till another king arose who did not know Joseph. 19 This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live. 20 At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months. 21 But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. 22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds. 23 Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. 24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. 25 For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand. 26 And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?' 27 But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? 28 Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?' 29 Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons. 30 And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. 31 When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, 32 saying, 'I am the God of your fathers--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and dared not look. 33 'Then the Lord said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. 34 I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt." ' 35 This Moses whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36 He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, & in the Red Sea, & in the wilderness 40 years. 37 "This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.' 38 This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, 39 whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, 40 saying to Aaron, 'Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' 41 And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands."

"Who Are the True Disciples of Moses?"

Our journey through Luke's orderly account he prepared for his friend Theophilus has brought us to a great defense made by Stephen before the Sanhedrin. Before I address the question before us in the sermon title, I want to quickly see where we have been and where we are going in the next few weeks: We saw a problem in the Church bring forth seven men full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit to serve tables and solve the conflict.

Their faithful service and witness has brought Stephen before the council under false charges and last week we read his mighty defense in its entirety as a reminder that we must know our Bibles if we are going to give an answer for the faith when we are called upon to do so.

- Stephen was falsely accused of blaspheming God and Moses and of wanting to destroy the Temple.

This week we will look more closely at what Stephen had to say about Moses and how he confronted the history of rebellion in Israel. Next week is Ascension Sunday and it will be a very appropriate time to consider the proper Biblical view of the Temple and how Jesus is now seated at God's right hand in heaven! The following week I will be making a pastoral visit to our CREC church in Phoenix and Theron will be bringing you the Word. After that we will see how God once again uses the faithful service of His Saints and even the sin of man to advance His Kingdom when the great persecution breaks out in Jerusalem scattering the Saints, and the Gospel, to all of Judea and Samaria just as Jesus had commanded!

So this morning we will consider what Stephan had to say about Moses and the lessons it should teach us today... Stephen is making the case that Israel has been a rebellious people throughout their history. Nowhere do we see this more clearly than at the foot of Mt. Sinai where they build and altar in the very presence of God and saying they do not know what has become of "this Moses" who was their deliverer! Obviously they were not being the true disciples of Moses! Jesus and now Stephen have said the same about these Jewish leaders in the Sanhedrin who have put Stephen on trial.

Being true disciples of Moses means knowing who he was and what he accomplished: We will consider this now remembering that their story is there for our instruction! Let me begin with an easy question for the children... What person do you think is mentioned most in the Bible?

That's right, Jesus! And that is how it should be, but we must also remember that everything else in the Bible speaks of and points to Jesus as well:

- **Remember how Jesus confronted many of these same religious leaders, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; & these are they which testify of Me."**

A lesson we are learning in our journey through Acts is how important it is to be able to present Jesus and the gracious salvation He brings to His people from the Old Testament! So kids, if the Bible talks a lot about certain people, we should get to know them pretty well don't you think?

- **So, what person do you think is mentioned the most in the Bible after Jesus?**

Well, that was sort of a trick question ☺ Moses is a close third, but King David is mentioned even more and we will see Stephen refer to him next week.

The name Jesus is used over a thousand times in the Scriptures... David is next at 985 and Moses third with 783. To put this in perspective, Abraham is mentioned only 232 times & Adam gets only 30 references! So as we see with Stephen, we should know the story of Moses pretty well if we are going to be good students of the Scriptures. And this brings me to a question for the adults to consider:

- **What have we done in these modern times with the historic account and work of Moses?**

First and foremost in this age of Hollywood, we have often fictionalized the account! We must be sure that we don't know more about what the movies and even some Sunday school material have presented about Moses better than the actual history and interpretations given to us in the Bible!

Consider the account of Moses confronting the Egyptian who was fighting against one of the Israelites!

- **Was Moses wrong in what he was trying to do?**

Cecil B. DeMille' Ten Commandments and the more recent Prince of Egypt present an Egyptian Moses who did not really know who he was or what he was called to do.

When Stephen, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gives the proper interpretation of this event, Moses does know who he is and what God has planned for His people:

- **It is the men of Israel in their rebellion who are at fault, not Moses!**

Just as the people of God managed to make an eight day journey to the promised land a forty year trek through the wilderness, here they managed to extend their slavery by forty years because of their stubborn rebellion.

- **With almost eight hundred references to Moses in the Bible, we should have plenty of material to consider without looking to Hollywood!**

Listen to the reference to Moses in the great hall of faith in Hebrews and see how similar it is to what we heard Stephen present to the council: “23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command. 24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. 27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.”

Did Moses have his problems?

- **You bet he did, just like the rest of us who God wants to use in the advance of His Kingdom!**

This is why Moses was told to remove His sandals when he was in the presence of God! It reminds us of why we confess our sins when we approach our Holy God in worship each and every week!

The world has done all it can to fictionalize the account of Moses but he is such an important figure in history that his presence stubbornly persists and since he leads people to Jesus they believe he must be stopped at all costs. So, the next step is to demonize Moses, which is very common today.

This is done by attacking the various laws that God gave to His people through Moses and sadly this has been very successful in large part because the Church has stood silently by as these attacks were made. On the one hand they present a mean oppressive man of God who would suggest capital punishment for what the world considers minor offenses. At the same time they try to make fun of Moses by pointing to some of the more obscure laws like mixing fabrics in our cloths.

These objections are never brought up as points of discussion to better understand what God revealed to Moses...

- **They are brought up to discredit Moses and keep people from hearing what he was really teaching about Jesus!**

Rather than confront our critics with the Gospel, the Church has sadly responded to these attacks on God's Law by retreating into two great errors... Some have tried to defend the Law of God by returning to the legalism that Jesus and the Apostles condemned in the Jewish leaders of their day. Rather than seeing how Moses and the Law lead us to Jesus and the abundant life He came to give us, they have again made people slaves to the Law which is a heavy task-master indeed.

The other, much more prevalent response of our day is to simply ignore Moses and the Law. We are under Grace and not Law they declare, which is certainly true but Jesus and Paul make it clear that the gracious salvation that Jesus brings does not abolish the Law but fulfills or establishes the Law. They insist that we now live in the New Covenant Church age where we can now leave the dark ages of the Old Testament behind!

Obviously this is not the point that Stephen is making and as I pointed out earlier Jesus Himself declared that the Scriptures, ALL of the Scriptures testify about Him.

Jesus Himself gave a strong warning about how we are to hear Moses in John's Gospel... Jesus makes it very clear that we are not to fictionalize, demonize, legalize nor ignore Moses when He confronts the rebellious religious leaders who claimed to be followers of Moses:

John 5:40 "But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. **41** I do not receive honor from men. **42** But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. **43** I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. **44** How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God? **45** Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you--Moses, in whom you trust. **46** For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. **47** But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

- If we refuse to hear Moses we are refusing to hear Jesus

Jesus stressed this point again when He told the story of the rich man and Lazarus. When the rich man wanted Abraham to send someone back from the dead to warn his brothers of their impending peril, Abraham told him it would be a useless exercise saying, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' " [Luke 16:31]

- So what does it mean to hear Moses?
- First and foremost we must see that Moses prefigured the coming Jesus in many ways & ALWAYS pointed to way to Jesus.

Luke's orderly account tells us that Jesus has come to save His people from their sins, that the Spirit has come to establish and empower the Church and that the Kingdom of Jesus will fill the earth. Through the story of Moses God is presented as the great deliverer of His people, He then empowers them with His Law and sends them in to fill a land of milk and honey.

- This is recounted many, many times in many, many ways in the pages of Scripture in both the Old and New Testaments!

Time does not allow me to even list all of the symbolism we could discuss at length like the brass serpent that Moses puts on a pole or how Paul says that the water from the rock and manna picture the presence of Jesus in the Sacraments. Obviously, the most important teaching from Moses we must heed is the very point that Stephen declared to the gathered council:

- Moses spoke of the greater prophet who was to come:

In Deuteronomy 18: 15 we read the words that Stephen quoted:

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, **16** according to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.' **17** And the Lord said to me: 'What they have spoken is good. **18** I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him."

- That greater Prophet is of course Jesus and it is He who we must hear and obey!

So how should we hear Moses today?

- We must see and hear the greater Prophet, Jesus, whom he declared that God would send.

Moses knew that true life would come from God's Son and the salvation He would bring.

BUT Jesus would not abolish the teachings and work of Moses, He would establish it! Jesus declared that He came to bring life and life abundant! God's Law was given to Moses NOT to enslave them but to teach them how to live as truly free men!

To fully understand this we might want to take another journey through the Gospels as part of our longer readings we considered last week. As we do so, we can pay special attention to how Jesus interacts with Moses and the Law he was given on the mountain. Jesus said, if you love me keep my commandments [We should think which ones?] When asked what the greatest commandment was Jesus said it was to, Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength and then He said the second great command is like unto the first, love your neighbor as yourself.

Now a causal observer at many churches today could be forgiven for thinking these were new commands or laws that Jesus was giving to replace all that stuff in the Old Testament because we often do not take the Old Testament seriously!

➤ **But Jesus Himself said that on these two great commandments hang all the Law & the prophets!**

Just as Moses gave way to the greater Prophet Jesus who was to come, so the tablets of stone have given way to a gracious salvation where the laws of God are written on our hearts! People who have hearts of stone cannot hear no less keep the commands on the stone tablets. People who have been given hearts of flesh can hear, know and can live a life of abundance in accordance with the truth that God has written on their hearts!

Here at Church of the King we read the Law of God on a regular basis and sometimes even we overlook how Moses introduces the Ten Commandments each time! "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

God is our great redeemer: Jesus has come to save His people from their sins. We love God because He first loved us and we love God by keeping His commandments... Commandments that are summarized by Jesus as two great commands:

➤ **Loving the Lord our God with all of our heart soul mind and strength and our neighbors as ourselves**

Consider this as a good summary of a faithful Christian life where the Law of God is fulfilled:

Because God in His great love has delivered me from the debt and penalty of sin through the sacrifice of His own Son Jesus, I will worship Him alone and not look to other idols. As a result, I will honor His name, honor His day and honor the parents He has chosen for me. Then I will love my neighbor by not taking his life, his property or his wife and will deal honestly with him always respecting those things that are his.

God gives more detail in the Ten Commandments we read in the worship service and if we want to fully understand what they mean we will read, study and understand all of the case laws and explanations that are given by God to Moses in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy!

The bottom line is this: IF we want to be the true disciples of Moses, we will hear Him who came as the greater prophet and then follow the gracious laws that Moses was given!_Then and only then will we know and experience the abundant life that Jesus came to give!

Communion Meditation: Deuteronomy 5:1-6

And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them. 2 The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. 3 The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who are here today, all of us who are alive. 4 The Lord talked with you face to face on the mountain from the midst of the fire. 5 I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up the mountain. [God] said: 6 'I am Jehovah your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.'"