

# "Moses' Legacy: Make It Memorable"

Deuteronomy 31:9-13

A Sermon by Dr. Jim Davis

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He was born in a small village in Ethiopia on August 7th, 1932. It was the day of the Los Angeles Olympic Marathon. His father was a shepherd and he named his son Abebe because it meant "one who grows and blossoms."

As a young man seeking a better future for himself, Abebe walked barefoot from his village to Addis Abbaba, the capitol of Ethiopia. He enlisted in the Imperial Guard. And as part of his conditioning, he ran long distances regularly. By providence or coincidence, a foreign track coach hired to work with Ethiopia's runners saw Abebe run one day and identified him as uniquely gifted. For Abebe could run like a gazelle for mile after mile without appearing to tire.

Again by providence or coincidence Abebe became a member of the 1960 Ethiopian Olympic team at the last minute. It happened because of an injury to another runner who had been scheduled to race. So Abebe went to Rome.

Adidas, the shoe sponsor of the 1960 Olympics, was unaware of the last minute change and, as a result, did not have a pair of shoes left that fit Abebe correctly. So Abebe decided to run barefoot, the way he had run as a boy at home.

The race had its start and its finish at the Arch of Constantine, just outside the Colosseum. During the race Abebe passed several runners so that by the time he came to the last stage of the race, he was running stride for stride alongside the runner who was favored to win, a man from Morocco. They ran together until the last 500 meters. Then Abebe Bikila found his closing kick. He sprinted to the finish ahead of the Moroccan.

But just before he crossed the line, he did two things. He touched his hand against the word Ethiopia on the jersey he wore on his chest. Then he raised both his arms in the air. He won in a world record time.

After the race, when he was asked why he had run barefoot, and why he had touched his hand to his jersey at the finish line, Abebe replied, "I wanted the world to know how a man finishes a Marathon who belongs to the country of Ethiopia."

If anyone ever finished a Marathon in a way that is truly memorable, it was Abebe Bikila. And if anyone ever finished a marathon life in a way that is equally memorable, it was Moses, the man of God. For the Bible says that at the end of his life's race, Moses wanted everyone to know same thing Abebe wanted them to know at the end of the Olympic Marathon. Moses wanted the world to know how a man finishes his race through life if he belongs to the Lord.

So Moses, the Bible says, ran his race the same way Abebe did. He used a closing kick at the finish of his final sermon. We saw it last week. At the end of his sermon, Moses used all the strength he could put into his speech. He exhorted his people with passion and purpose. Choose blessing, he told them, not curse. Choose life, he told them, not death. Live your life in accordance with God's laws. Make His standards of right and wrong your standards. Choose life!

But then the Bible says, after a closing kick at the conclusion of his sermon, Moses did something else. As he was about to cross the finish line of his life's race, he spoke these words. "I am now a hundred and twenty years old," he said. And the Lord has told me, 'You shall not cross the Jordan.'"

Then, instead of touching a word stitched on a jersey, Moses did something even better. He touched some kind of a writing instrument to something on which he could write and he wrote words that he hoped his people would remember forever when they remembered his life. "And Moses," Scripture says, "wrote down the words of the law."

He did it to make the end of his race memorable. He wanted it to be one of his last acts before he crossed the finish line of his life. So Moses, wrote down the law. And the book of the law that Moses wrote, the law God spoke to him became the enduring legacy of Moses' life.

But let me switch gears now, and tell you about another book. It's not exactly like the book of the law. But like the book of the law that Moses' wrote in his own hand, this book too is usually hand-written. It's personal. And it's possessed by almost every golfer in the PGA.

Ever watched a professional golfer? Ever seen him or her reach in their pocket and pull out a little notebook. Ever seen him then it back in their pocket and then land a shot from two hundred yards out in a fairway within a few yards of the hole? Ever wonder how they do it?

Maybe you thought it was a special gift, some kind of incredible, internal GPS system. But if you've ever thought that, let me tell you, it isn't entirely true. Professional golfers don't have an internal GPS system. But they do have a yardage book.

A yardage book is a map of every hole on a golf course. It gives a golfer the exact distance from various landmarks on the course to the middle of the green. And players take that information, and add to it their own experience in the practice rounds. They make notes in those rounds in their personal edition of the yardage book, notes about what club to use and how far they're able to hit it given the conditions they're likely to be playing in.

Arnold Palmer and his caddy used to use a yardage book with little pictures in it. They drew pictures of trees, fairways, sand traps and other markers on all the courses they played and won tournament after tournament. Jack Nicklaus though was even better at using a yardage book. He made it even more complete and even more popular adding notes about greens and speeds and breaks. Jack's wins help make yardage books universally popular. And today, most PGA golfers swear by their yardage books.

Zach Johnson, who won the Colonial in 2010 told reporters after his win, "I feel naked out there without my yardage book. It's my golf bible."

So tell me? Do you have a yardage book? I don't mean a yardage book for golf. I mean a yardage book for life? Do you have a yardage book for that course? Because if you don't, I know where you can get one, a good one. I know the man who wrote it down in his own hand, who wanted to leave it to you as his personal legacy. He wanted you to have it so you could take it and personalize it and use it as your guidebook for life.

The man who wrote it was named Moses. And the distances he talks about in his yardage book are the distances between life as we usually live it and life as God wants us to live it. The distances that Moses describes in his yardage book are the distances between sin and righteousness, between blessing and curse. They're the distances between living an ordinary life and living a God life. And knowing those distances can make all the difference; all the difference between a life that leaves a legacy that's remembered long after it's finished and a life that just barely limps across the finish line.

So let me switch sports one more time. So far this morning we've talked about running, and we've talked about golf. But the story I want to tell you now is about tennis. Actually though, it's not as much a story about tennis as it is a story about life, and a story about a tennis player who learned how to make life truly memorable. And instead of telling you the story in my own words, I want to let another tennis player tell you the story.

In 2008 Andy Roddick was the top-ranked tennis player in the United States. But in that same year, he wrote a couple of paragraphs for *TIME* magazine about his friend, Andre Agassi. He wrote the paragraphs for an annual review of *TIME* magazine's 100 most influential people in the world. Listen to what he wrote.

He began with a quote from another tennis great, Arthur Ashe who once said, "From what we get, we can make a living; from what we give, though, we make a life."

"Arthur could well have been talking about Andre Agassi," Andy Roddick wrote. "We're all aware of his tennis accomplishments, the brilliance and flash of his career. It's impossible to forget his epic U.S. Open victories, and also—though he might want us to forget—the mullet hair cut and acid-washed jeans. But the greater challenge for any athlete is to have a positive impact away from the cameras. I've been privileged to witness Andre firsthand and see him do just that."

"When I was 17 years old, we were on a flight together. I was very nervous, but Andre was kind and encouraged me to ask him questions. When I asked about his biggest regret, I expected some answer related to our profession. Instead he said it was not starting his charitable foundation earlier. I was shocked that a person who has set such a high bar for athletic philanthropy still felt like he could do more. But that's Andre."

"There are most likely many kids at Andre Agassi Academy, a model K-12 charter school for disadvantaged children in Las Vegas, who have never watched a match of his. I promise you. Andre couldn't care less. He'd rather be viewed as a man who gives kids dreams and opportunities, than a man who gives crowds a winner with a crosscourt smash."

And while you may not know it, and Andy Roddick doesn't say it in the paragraphs he wrote for *TIME* magazine, Andre Agassi is a Christian. He's a member of the ICTA, the International Christian Tennis Association. He accepted Christ as His Lord and Savior in 1988. And although he was quiet about his faith in Christ during his playing days, it was his faith in God and in God's word, he says now, that made all the difference in his life.

Do you want to know how to make your life memorable? If you've ever asked yourself that question then listen to the answer. If you want to make your life memorable, then make your life missional!

Make your life memorable by making it missional!

I want to invite you this morning to start doing that. Don't just listen to this sermon. Use it. Use it to begin transforming your life. Go home this morning but spend a few minutes later today in private and in prayer. Tell God you heard Him speak to you. Tell him you heard His word to you.

Then choose life! Tell God you want your life's race to finish pointing to Him. Just like Abebe Bikila pointed to the word Ethiopia on his jersey. Tell God you want your life to point back to Him.

Choose life! Use Moses' yardage book. Measure your life by God's laws. Let God's laws show you the distance between the person you are and the person God wants you to be.

Choose life! Remember what you're really going to be remembered for. Make your life memorable by making it missional. Find a way to do that, to involve yourself in God's mission in your world.

Choose life! And you'll finish your life's race with joy and a sense of fulfillment and peace.

Let's pray ...