

"Moses' Legacy: Raise Your Hands!"

Deuteronomy 31:30-32:4

A Sermon by Dr. Jim Davis

First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood

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The article appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*. A guest writer Leonard Mlodinow from CalTech wrote a piece about statistics and sports. And to introduce the piece he told a story about baseball great Joe DiMaggio.

"It was the summer of 1945," he wrote, "World War II had ended. Former soldiers, including famous baseball stars, streamed back to America and American life. Yankee slugger Joe DiMaggio was trying to be a fan before formally rejoining his team. So one night he tried to sneak into a mezzanine seat with his four-year-old son, Joe, Jr. A person sitting near him noticed him, then another and another. Soon throughout the stadium people were chanting, 'Joe, Joe, Joe Dimaggio!'

DiMaggio glanced down to see if his son noticed the tribute. He did and he said so. In response to his father's glance little Joe said, "See, Dad. Everybody knows me!"

In his article in the *Journal* Mlodinow wrote, "We all interpret events according to our worldview. By the time we reach adulthood we've either gotten beyond the 'me-me-me' context of a 4-year-old boy, or gone into politics!" And while that's one conclusion you can draw out of the story there are others.

Steve Farish is pastor and a teacher, like me. And here's the conclusion he comes to. "Joe Jr." he says, "made an innocent child's mistake. He assumed all the glory at Yankee Stadium that summer afternoon belonged to him, not his father. Human beings, though, make a far less innocent mistake when we live as if our lives were all about us and our glory, rather than about our Heavenly Father and His glory."

Good conclusion. Powerful, painful, but right on target! That's why the Bible places such a high value not on pride but on praise! And that's why in Deuteronomy 32, as Moses approaches the finish line of his life, Scripture says he "recited the words" of a song "from beginning to end in the hearing of the whole assembly of Israel."

It's interesting. After his last sermon, Moses makes up a last song. But he doesn't sing it. He speaks it. And the Hebrew word that describes his speaking indicates Moses spoke the words of this song very carefully and intentionally in a certain order. He organized the

words in his mind. Then he spoke them out loud with his mouth. And he taught the words to Israel so they could memorize them. He taught them the words and then they were set to music.

Why? Why do it that way? Well it seems clear. It was done that way because the words of the song were more significant to Moses than the music. And so even though the music of Moses' song has long since been lost, the words have endured. Carefully chosen words, carefully organized and put in a particular order for a particular purpose. And that purpose is to teach us the value of praise.

"I will proclaim the name of the Lord." That's what Moses says he'll do. And as his song starts it does that and more. For in the space of just two verses Moses goes on to name and describe God in seven different ways.

He praises God's greatness. He names God "the Rock." He says God's works are perfect. He confesses God's ways are just. He names God as "a faithful God." He says God does no wrong. He calls God upright. Two names, five attributes, seven descriptions of God.

And in just two verses Moses teaches Israel the first verse of the song he hopes they'll sing when they remember his life and his legacy. And it's poignant. And it's powerful. For the first thing Moses wants Israel to remember about him is how he praised God. He wants them to learn the lyrics of this song to help them understand that whatever Moses was able to do in his life was only done with the help of a God who was at work in him, around him and through him.

And I wonder, would you say the same thing? If you wanted to compose a song to teach to your children and grandchildren, a song they could remember when they remembered you, would you think about God? Would you think about putting God at the beginning of the song?

Johann Sebastian Bach did. In fact above or beside the first line in many of his musical works Bach would often write initials. Sometimes he wrote three *I.N.J.* They stand for three Latin words *In Nomine Jesu* "In the name of Jesus." Sometimes he'd write two *J.J.* *Jesus Juva* "Help me Jesus." But always or nearly always, at the end of his works, Bach would add *S.D.G. Soli Deo Gloria* "Solely for the Glory of God."

You see, as a composer and even more as a Christian, Bach knew what deserved to be written on the first and last lines of each of his life's works. And the question is, do we?

You see what I suspect about many of us is this. We have a spiritual life, but most of the time we keep it in a box. When we come to worship on Sunday, when we pause to pray during the week, when we take time in the morning or the evening to have a daily reading from the Bible; then we open the box and let God out. We let Him be present to us. We turn our attention to him. But then we turn it away again, to something else; something we think we've got to get done, by ourselves. And we put God back in the box till we have time to be with Him again.

We give God a place in our lives. We don't treat Him any differently than anyone else. But listen friends. God isn't like anyone. He's like no-one else in our lives. And though we may think we can put God in a box, and take Him out when we want or need his company, the truth is we can do no such thing. For although we turn our attention away from Him, God never turns His attention away from us.

Jesus knew that. So throughout his life, when people least expected him to, he spoke to God, as though God was always with Him. And he was.

So though we may think we can put God away somewhere and walk away from him, the Bible says we can't. For it tells us there's no place we can ever be where God is not. There's no time in our lives, it tells us, where God is not present with us. When we belong to God, God is with us always and His hand is trying to guide even when we can't feel the touch.

And if that's true. And the Bible says it is, then here's the inescapable conclusion. Every time we do something great, it's really God's greatness that moves us to do it. It's God's greatness coming to expression through our lives. Every time we find the strength to be a rock for our own sake or for someone else, in reality it's because the Rock was under our feet. Every time we manage to do something perfectly, it's because a perfect God has inspired us to do it that way.

Every time we've been just, or faithful, every time we've turned away from wrong, or done something right; every time any of these things have happened in our lives and we've patted ourselves on the back, the truth is we ought to be doing more than that. We ought to be praising God. We ought to be thanking Him for His inspiration in our lives. We ought to be giving God the glory.

For you and I were made in the image of God. We were made in such a way that God's attributes can shine through our lives. And every time that happens, every time we see God's greatness, or strength, or perfection, or justice, or faithfulness, or holiness, or righteousness shining through us, we were meant to realize that our shining moment, in

truth, more than our moment. It's a moment when God is allowing His to shine through us.

For our lives, the Bible says were given to us by a God who wants to inspire us and empower us so that we can truly become who we were created to be. But we can never become that person by ourselves. The world says we can. The world says we have to. The world says the only one person can ultimately shape your life and determine your destiny. And that's you.

But it's not true. It's not. The truth is God wanted you to learn how to become more than just the person you can be by yourself. So God moved Moses to write a song for you more than three thousand years ago, a song that shares a secret. And the secret, my friends is this. When you or I take time to praise God for who He is, something happens inside us. As we take time to praise God for who He is, slowly reflexively we start to ask ourselves some questions. And the questions go something like this. "Are these same attributes showing up in my life? Does my Does my character look like God's character?"

And that's the purpose of praise. For you see praise isn't meant to inflate God's self-esteem. It's meant to deflate ours.

"We're an overconfident species." That's what writer David Brooks says. Right now in America most of us, he says are prone to a "magnification of our self." And to back up his claim, he cites an array of statistics. I can't share all of them with you this morning, but I do want to share a few. Listen.

- When pollsters ask people from around the world to rate themselves on different character traits, Americans almost always supply the most positive self-ratings.
- American high school students are among the world leaders in self-confidence about their abilities in math, but they perform poorly in global math tests.
- In 1950 the number of high school seniors who believed they were already "very important people" was 12%. Today that figure is above 80%.
- Compared to college students from 30 years ago, today's college students are twice as likely to say they're "easy to like."
- 94% of college professors say they possess above-average teaching skills.
- In 1960, a baseball player almost never celebrated his achievement after hitting a home run. Today it's routine.
- In 1960 there were virtually no autobiographical songs about a singer's greatness. Today those songs often top the charts.

"In short," Brooks says, "there's plenty of evidence to suggest that we've shifted in America from a culture that emphasized self-effacement to a culture that emphasizes self-expansion."

Could he be right? What do you think? But if you think he is, then I have good news for you this morning. There's a way back. There's a way back from back from narcissistic pride and pre-occupation with our own achievements. And Moses knows the way. And he's trying to lead us into it.

Moses is trying to tell us the truth this morning folks. And the truth is this. If you want your life to leave a legacy, a real legacy and not one you try to manufacture for it, then remember to take time for praise. Take time to praise God often in your life. Make his praise the first verse of your life's song.

Praise God for who He is and let who He is continually to re-shape who you are and who you want to be. And when you get close to the finish line of your life, lift your hands like Moses did and thank God for who helping you run your life's race and become at least in part the person you were always meant to be.

Let's pray ...