

Looking Out From Mount Nebo!



(a vista from Mount Nebo overlooking the Jordan valley)

**This Message preached by Pastor Fred L. Pattison
at
A Casa Family Reunion
Sunday, May 18th, 2003**

LOOKING OUT FROM MOUNT NEBO!

“Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the LORD showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the Negeb, and the Plain – that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees – as far as Zoar. The LORD said to him, ‘This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, I will give it to your descendants.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there. . . Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the LORD had commanded Moses.”

Deuteronomy 34:1-4, 9 NRSV

Those of you who know me and have sat under my preaching know that I seldom write out my messages but usually preach using notes. However, this is an exception because of what this occasion represents.

A number of years ago, while I was pastoring Casa de Cristo, I had the privilege of visiting to **the Middle East**. In fact, I went there on two separate occasions. On my first trip in 1988 I not only visited Israel but also went to Egypt and Jordan. While in **Jordan** one of our tour group stops was a visit to **Mount Nebo**. I shall never forget the sight before me when I got to the top of that mount. From this mountain one is able to view **the entire Jordan Valley** from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea, from the city of Jericho to the mountains in the distance that obscure Jerusalem from view. *What a sight this was to behold!*

It was upon this mountain that **Moses** was privileged to view **the Promised Land**. Before him was the land that God had long before given to **Abraham** and promised not only to him but to his descendants as well. I am one of those people who believes that the promise given by God to **Abraham and to his descendants through Isaac, the Jews, was unconditional hence remains in force today.**

“Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’ So he [Abram/Abraham] built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.” (Genesis 12:7)

“The LORD said to Abram. . . ‘Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. Rise up, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you. So Abram moved his tent, and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron; and there he built an altar to the LORD.” (Genesis 13:14-18)

God’s covenant promise was given to **Abraham**. Through his son **Isaac** have come **the children of Israel** while through his son illegitimate **Ishmael** have come **the Arabs**. **Both** are blessed by God. **Both** should be the **recipients of our love**. God has placed upon **my heart** a special love for **both** children of **Abraham and their descendants; Jews and Arabs**. Many **evangelical Christians**, in their love for the Jews and for Israel, fail to extend Christlike love to the Arabs, including the Palestinians. In spite of the biblical teaching that **the Jews are God’s specially Chosen People** the love of God is to be extended to all people; Jew and Gentile alike.

From Mt. Nebo Moses was able to view this land of promise. However, he was not permitted to enter the land because of his disobedience.

OUR CASA SOJOURN

One of my favorite personages of history is a former slave who was known as **Sojourner Truth**. She was truly a remarkable woman, a woman far ahead of her times. She is remembered especially for her famous: “*Ain’t I a Woman, too?*” message to a group of ministers who were both sexist and racist. Unfortunately **these evils** remain with us.

During our sojourn with Casa, God moved in many ways. Our experience and sojourn with **the Casa family** was a memorable one to say the least. It was during this sojourn that:

- many of us made it back to God returning to the Church;
- others of us were able to reconcile our faith in Christ and our sexual orientation;
- still others found Christ at Casa.

It was also while **on our Casa sojourn** that many of us entered into

a new and expanded dimension of praise and worship. Praise and worship that was not solely cerebral but encompassed the mind as well as our entire being: body, soul and spirit. **Davidic praise** became a reality to us. **Worshipping God in spirit and in truth** became more than a nice sounding biblical exhortation. It became reality to us. There were times in worship when it seemed as if we were at the very gates of heaven itself.

OUR CASA FAMILY EXPERIENCE

Like any human family we had our up's and down's. We had our family feuds. It's easy now to look back and see both our mistakes as well as our innumerable blessings. I think back at the fire-bombing of our original building. While standing there watching as the Phoenix firefighters battled the flames and the TV cameras focused their attention on the so-called "**gay church**" burning and my reaction as its pastor. This was '**big**' news in Phoenix. Remember, in those days we were the only 'gay' group totally in the open. We had no place to hide nor were we willing to return to the closet. This was back in **October 1977**.

I wondered, "**Why Lord?**" We had just remodeled that old building. I had been installed as pastor two weeks before, but now the sanctuary was in flames. The critics were many. Some of our own people never returned to the church after the fire. Fear gripped the hearts of many in our community. **Some homophobes, professed Christians at that**, declared that this was the work of God. **I'm not sure that I know that god or even want to know that god.** The fire bombing was the work of an arsonist, not GOD. **The God I serve is not an arsonist!** Thank God for the many changes that have taken place since those days.

The very next Sunday after the fire we met and began the service in an open field next to the burned-out sanctuary. GOD had opened a door for us to meet temporarily in the building of another group. We got into our vehicles and moved to that building. A few months later we rented an empty store in which we held our services until we broke ground and built our own building in central Phoenix.

GOD give me a spouse who possesses many talents. He, with some of you including our sister-in-Christ, **Clara**, took the bull by the horns and headed up a team of workers who erected our new sanctuary. As many of you know this was the very first church building ever built by a group of Christian gays and lesbians anywhere in the world. And what

a day that was when we finally entered into our new debt-free sanctuary giving our praise and worship to the LORD GOD OF HOSTS. We were like the children of Israel, led by Joshua, entering into the Promised Land.

While on Mount Nebo Moses and the Israelites could have looked back. . .but what would that have accomplished for them?

They could have looked back longing for "the onions" and "leeks" of Egypt. . .but somehow they had seemed to have forgotten the bondage and slavery they had been in. **Before them was a land flowing rich with milk and honey.** What a powerful lesson for us who have been freed from the bondage and slavery we were in before accepting our place in the Body of Christ as the full people of God. **God has no step-children!** I can readily relate to what the apostle Peter wrote,

"Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:10)

Mt. Nebo was exciting, but we dare not stay there. There was a brand new land and world before them. God had long before promised them the land for the occupying. Our Casa family experience was similar to what Moses and the Jews faced in many respects.

PRESSING ON

We've scattered far and wide. Some of us have entered new areas in our lives. **Joseph and I** are now retired living in the mountains of central Arizona in the great "metropolis" of Strawberry – a community of eight hundred people. . .and how we love it. GOD has been so good to both of us. These thirty years together have been and continue to be an exciting journey. Our love continues to deepen. We are partners, companions, friends and lovers. It is our desire to continue to glorify and serve God as a **Christian gay couple** during these our senior years.

Some of you continue to live in the Valley of the Sun. Others of you are living in other places. Some of you are in new relationships. Some have continued in Casa de Cristo, others of you are in other churches. Unfortunately, some of you are floundering on your spiritual journey.

Even though we are scattered, yet in many respects we continue to be a family of God; a special community of Christ's followers.

The apostle Paul offered a challenge to the Christians at Philippi that we may also take to heart. It is found in Philippians 3:10-14,

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus."

Our task and our goal as disciples of Christ is to press on. God continues to reign. God is still on the throne on high. God is in control. We, like the children of Israel, are on a journey.

Yes, Mt. Nebo was exciting but there was work to be done. There was a land to enter. We, too, have work that needs to be done. There is a vineyard that needs harvesting. There are men and women who still do not know that:

- God does love them in spite of and regardless of what some Christians may say;
- It is up to us to tear down the walls of homophobia that continue to exist in our families, in our churches, in our nation and in our world.
- There are multitudes of men and women who continue to be outside of the family of God -- GOD wants them in the family as full sons and daughters:

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'ABBA! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are chil-

dren of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him." (Romans 8:14-17)

- The world and especially our community needs to hear the simplicity of the Gospel proclaimed and lived. The Gospel of Romans 1:16 and John 3:16 is the Message that Christ died, was buried, rose from the grave, and evermore lives! The Message of God's grace is for all who believe by faith – Eph. 2:8 and 9,

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast."

THE CHALLENGE BEFORE US

The writer of the book of Hebrews wrote these words,

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Who are these witnesses who surround us? I think that they are not only the heroes of faith described in Hebrews 11 but also our loved ones who have gone on before us. Those who are now at the throne of God on High. The Ed DeLaGarza's, the Bill Schubert's, the Zelma Payne's, the Alice McCormack's and Florence Pattison's, the Mikael Parra's, the Scott Morgan's, the Jerri Ann Harvey's, and so many others too numerous to mention. Yes, they are there! We, too, will one day join them in the Church-Triumphant at the Throne of God.

Until then we've land to possess. Remember the twelve spies at the river? Only two of them brought back a good and positive report. The other ten brought back doom and gloom. They missed the mark because they did not press on. They had lost the focus and vision of God. I like

how the gospel song writer put it: *"Whose report will you believe? We shall believe the report of the Lord!"*

The challenge is before each of us. Our Casa experience failed if we stand still or go back to Egypt. The challenge today is to press on my brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us accomplish what we set out to do originally. *"We've a story to tell to the nations!"*

GOD is faithful. . . God's Spirit is calling, anointing, equipping.

Wherever God has placed you, allow God's Holy Spirit to use you:
Be bold, be firm in your faith, be equipped as a servant of God.

Let me close with the theme scripture of Olive Tree Ministries,

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

LORD GOD, grant that each of us may become an ambassador of reconciliation to a world and to a community that desperately needs to hear and know of your mercy, grace and never-ending love. Enable each of us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to press on and complete what was begun in days gone by. Amen.

Olive Tree Ministry

"Ambassadors of Reconciliation!"



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